

**B.A. III (English Literature Syllabus)****Paper –I: Fiction****Max Marks: 75****Duration: Three Hours**

The following novels are prescribed:

1. Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*
2. Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield*
3. E.M. Forster: *A Passage to India*
4. Salman Rushdie: *Haroun and the Sea of stories*

Pattern of Question Paper:

The question paper will be divided into five units. Unit I will have two questions on *Pride and Prejudice* out of which candidates will have to answer any one. Unit II will consist of two questions on *David Copperfield* and candidates will be required to answer any one. In Unit III there will be two questions on *A Passage to India* and candidates will be required to answer any one. Out of two questions on *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* in Unit IV, candidates will be required to answer one. Unit V will have eight short-answer questions, two on each novel, and candidates will have to answer any five, in about 60 words each. All units carry equal marks, 15 marks each.

**Jane Austen**  
***Pride and Prejudice***

**Chapter 1**

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

"My dear Mr. Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

"But it is," returned she; "for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it."

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

"Do you not want to know who has taken it?" cried his wife impatiently.

"*You* want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

"What is his name?"

"Bingley."

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

"How so? How can it affect them?"

"My dear Mr. Bennet," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

"Is that his design in settling here?"

"Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he *may* fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes."

"I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley may like you the best of the party."

"My dear, you flatter me. I certainly *have* had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty."

"In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of."

"But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood."

"It is more than I engage for, I assure you."

"But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for *us* to visit him if you do not."

"You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls; though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy."

"I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good-humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving *her* the preference."

"They have none of them much to recommend them," replied he; "they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters."

"Mr. Bennet, how *can* you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves."

"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least."

"Ah, you do not know what I suffer."

"But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood."

"It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them."

"Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all."

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make

his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

## Chapter 2

Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley. He had always intended to visit him, though to the last always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid she had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner. Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat, he suddenly addressed her with:

"I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy."

"We are not in a way to know *what* Mr. Bingley likes," said her mother resentfully, "since we are not to visit."

"But you forget, mamma," said Elizabeth, "that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long promised to introduce him."

"I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her."

"No more have I," said Mr. Bennet; "and I am glad to find that you do not depend on her serving you."

Mrs. Bennet deigned not to make any reply, but, unable to contain herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

"Don't keep coughing so, Kitty, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces."

"Kitty has no discretion in her coughs," said her father; "she times them ill."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Kitty fretfully. "When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?"

"To-morrow fortnight."

"Aye, so it is," cried her mother, "and Mrs. Long does not come back till the day before; so it will be impossible for her to introduce him, for she will not know him herself."

"Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and introduce Mr. Bingley to *her*."

"Impossible, Mr. Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted with him myself; how can you be so teasing?"

"I honour your circumspection. A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by the end of a fortnight. But if *we* do not venture somebody else will; and after all, Mrs. Long and her nieces must stand their chance; and, therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, I will take it on myself."

The girls stared at their father. Mrs. Bennet said only, "Nonsense, nonsense!"

"What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?" cried he. "Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you *there*. What say you, Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts."

Mary wished to say something sensible, but knew not how.

"While Mary is adjusting her ideas," he continued, "let us return to Mr. Bingley."

"I am sick of Mr. Bingley," cried his wife.

"I am sorry to hear *that*; but why did not you tell me that before? If I had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now."

The astonishment of the ladies was just what he wished; that of Mrs. Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest; though, when the first tumult of joy was over, she began to declare that it was what she had expected all the while.

"How good it was in you, my dear Mr. Bennet! But I knew I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! and it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a word about it till now."

"Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose," said Mr. Bennet; and, as he spoke, he left the room, fatigued with the raptures of his wife.

"What an excellent father you have, girls!" said she, when the door was shut. "I do not know how you will ever make him amends for his kindness; or me, either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintances every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything. Lydia, my love, though you *are* the youngest, I dare say Mr. Bingley will dance with you at the next ball."

"Oh!" said Lydia stoutly, "I am not afraid; for though I *am* the youngest, I'm the tallest."

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon he would return Mr. Bennet's visit, and determining when they should ask him to dinner.

## Chapter 3

Not all that Mrs. Bennet, however, with the assistance of her five daughters, could ask on the subject, was sufficient to draw from her husband any satisfactory description of Mr. Bingley. They attacked him in various ways—with barefaced questions, ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises; but he eluded the skill of them all, and they were at last obliged to accept the second-hand intelligence of their neighbour, Lady Lucas. Her report was highly favourable. Sir William had been delighted with him. He was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and, to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love; and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley's heart were entertained.

"If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield," said Mrs. Bennet to her husband, "and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for."

In a few days Mr. Bingley returned Mr. Bennet's visit, and sat about ten minutes with him in his library. He had entertained hopes of being admitted to a sight of the young ladies, of whose beauty he had heard much; but he saw only the father. The ladies were somewhat more fortunate, for they had the advantage of ascertaining from an upper window that he wore a blue coat, and rode a black horse.

An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched; and already had Mrs. Bennet planned the courses that were to do credit to her housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Mr. Bingley was obliged to be in town the following day, and, consequently, unable to accept the honour of their invitation, etc. Mrs. Bennet was quite disconcerted. She could not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that he might be always flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be. Lady Lucas quieted her fears a little by starting the idea of his being gone to London only to get a large party for the ball; and a report soon followed that Mr. Bingley was to bring twelve ladies and seven gentlemen with him to the assembly. The girls grieved over such a number of ladies, but were comforted the day before the ball by hearing, that instead of twelve he brought only six with him from London—his five sisters and a cousin. And when the party entered the assembly room it consisted of only five altogether—Mr. Bingley, his two sisters, the husband of the eldest, and another young man.

Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. His sisters were fine women, with an air of decided fashion. His brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst, merely looked the gentleman; but his friend Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud; to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend.

Mr. Bingley had soon made himself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself at Netherfield. Such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between him and his friend! Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again. Amongst the most violent against him was Mrs. Bennet, whose dislike of his general behaviour was sharpened into particular resentment by his having slighted one of her daughters.

Elizabeth Bennet had been obliged, by the scarcity of gentlemen, to sit down for two dances; and during part of that time, Mr. Darcy had been standing near enough for her to hear a conversation between him and Mr. Bingley, who came from the dance for a few minutes, to press his friend to join it.

"Come, Darcy," said he, "I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance."

"I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this it would be insupportable. Your sisters are engaged, and there is not another woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with."

"I would not be so fastidious as you are," cried Mr. Bingley, "for a kingdom! Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant girls in my life as I have this evening; and there are several of them you see uncommonly pretty."

"*You* are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room," said Mr. Darcy, looking at the eldest Miss Bennet.

"Oh! She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is one of her sisters sitting down just behind you, who is very pretty, and I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner to introduce you."

"Which do you mean?" and turning round he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men. You had better return to your partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time with me."

Mr. Bingley followed his advice. Mr. Darcy walked off; and Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings toward him. She told the story, however, with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous.

The evening altogether passed off pleasantly to the whole family. Mrs. Bennet had seen her eldest daughter much admired by the Netherfield party. Mr. Bingley had danced with her twice, and she had been distinguished by his sisters. Jane was as much gratified by this as her mother could be, though in a quieter way. Elizabeth felt Jane's pleasure. Mary had heard herself mentioned to Miss Bingley as the most accomplished girl in the neighbourhood; and Catherine and Lydia had been fortunate enough never to be without partners, which was all that they had yet learnt to care for at a ball. They returned, therefore, in good spirits to Longbourn, the village where they lived, and of which they were the principal inhabitants. They found Mr. Bennet still up. With a book he was regardless of time; and on the present occasion he had a good deal of curiosity as to the event of an evening which had raised such splendid expectations. He had rather hoped that his wife's views on the stranger would be disappointed; but he soon found out that he had a different story to hear.

"Oh! my dear Mr. Bennet," as she entered the room, "we have had a most delightful evening, a most excellent ball. I wish you had been there. Jane was so admired, nothing could be like it. Everybody said how well she looked; and Mr. Bingley thought her quite beautiful, and danced with her twice! Only think of *that*, my dear; he actually danced with her twice! and she was the only creature in the room that he asked a second time. First of all, he asked Miss Lucas. I was so vexed to see him stand up with her! But, however, he did not admire her at all; indeed, nobody can, you know; and he seemed quite struck with Jane as she was going down the dance. So he inquired who she was, and got introduced, and asked her for the two next. Then the two third he danced with Miss King, and the two fourth with Maria Lucas, and the two fifth with Jane again, and the two sixth with Lizzy, and the *Boulangier*—"

"If he had had any compassion for *me*," cried her husband impatiently, "he would not have danced half so much! For God's sake, say no more of his partners. Oh that he had sprained his ankle in the first dance!"



"Oh! my dear, I am quite delighted with him. He is so excessively handsome! And his sisters are charming women. I never in my life saw anything more elegant than their dresses. I dare say the lace upon Mrs. Hurst's gown—"

Here she was interrupted again. Mr. Bennet protested against any description of finery. She was therefore obliged to seek another branch of the subject, and related, with much bitterness of spirit and some exaggeration, the shocking rudeness of Mr. Darcy.

"But I can assure you," she added, "that Lizzy does not lose much by not suiting *his* fancy; for he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no enduring him! He walked here, and he walked there, fancying himself so very great! Not handsome enough to dance with! I wish you had been there, my dear, to have given him one of your set-downs. I quite detest the man."

## Chapter 4

When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before, expressed to her sister just how very much she admired him.

"He is just what a young man ought to be," said she, "sensible, good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners!—so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!"

"He is also handsome," replied Elizabeth, "which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby complete."

"I was very much flattered by his asking me to dance a second time. I did not expect such a compliment."

"Did not you? I did for you. But that is one great difference between us. Compliments always take *you* by surprise, and *me* never. What could be more natural than his asking you again? He could not help seeing that you were about five times as pretty as every other woman in the room. No thanks to his gallantry for that. Well, he certainly is very agreeable, and I give you leave to like him. You have liked many a stupider person."

"Dear Lizzy!"

"Oh! you are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in anybody. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in your life."

"I would not wish to be hasty in censuring anyone; but I always speak what I think."

"I know you do; and it is *that* which makes the wonder. With *your* good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough—one meets with it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of everybody's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone. And so you like this man's sisters, too, do you? Their manners are not equal to his."

"Certainly not—at first. But they are very pleasing women when you converse with them. Miss Bingley is to live with her brother, and keep his house; and I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbour in her."

Elizabeth listened in silence, but was not convinced; their behaviour at the assembly had not been calculated to please in general; and with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister, and with a judgement too unassailed by any attention to herself, she was very little disposed to approve them. They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of making themselves agreeable when they chose it, but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank, and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others. They were of a respectable family in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade.

Mr. Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly a hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it. Mr. Bingley intended it likewise, and sometimes made choice of his county; but as he was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of his temper, whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase.

His sisters were anxious for his having an estate of his own; but, though he was now only established as a tenant, Miss Bingley was by no means unwilling to preside at his table—nor was Mrs. Hurst, who had married a man of more fashion than fortune, less disposed to consider his house as her home when it suited her. Mr. Bingley had not been of age two years, when he was tempted by an accidental recommendation to look at Netherfield House. He did look at it, and into it for half-an-hour—was pleased with the situation and the principal rooms, satisfied with what the owner said in its praise, and took it immediately.

Between him and Darcy there was a very steady friendship, in spite of great opposition of character. Bingley was endeared to Darcy by the easiness, openness, and ductility of his temper, though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to his own,

and though with his own he never appeared dissatisfied. On the strength of Darcy's regard, Bingley had the firmest reliance, and of his judgement the highest opinion. In understanding, Darcy was the superior. Bingley was by no means deficient, but Darcy was clever. He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well-bred, were not inviting. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually giving offense.

The manner in which they spoke of the Meryton assembly was sufficiently characteristic. Bingley had never met with more pleasant people or prettier girls in his life; everybody had been most kind and attentive to him; there had been no formality, no stiffness; he had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and, as to Miss Bennet, he could not conceive an angel more beautiful. Darcy, on the contrary, had seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom he had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure. Miss Bennet he acknowledged to be pretty, but she smiled too much.

Mrs. Hurst and her sister allowed it to be so—but still they admired her and liked her, and pronounced her to be a sweet girl, and one whom they would not object to know more of. Miss Bennet was therefore established as a sweet girl, and their brother felt authorized by such commendation to think of her as he chose.

## Chapter 5

Within a short walk of Longbourn lived a family with whom the Bennets were particularly intimate. Sir William Lucas had been formerly in trade in Meryton, where he had made a tolerable fortune, and risen to the honour of knighthood by an address to the king during his mayoralty. The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly. It had given him a disgust to his business, and to his residence in a small market town; and, in quitting them both, he had removed with his family to a house about a mile from Meryton, denominated from that period Lucas Lodge, where he could think with pleasure of his own importance, and, unshackled by business, occupy himself solely in being civil to all the world. For, though elated by his rank, it did not render him supercilious; on the contrary, he was all attention to everybody. By nature inoffensive, friendly, and obliging, his presentation at St. James's had made him courteous.

Lady Lucas was a very good kind of woman, not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mrs. Bennet. They had several children. The eldest of them, a sensible, intelligent young woman, about twenty-seven, was Elizabeth's intimate friend.

That the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets should meet to talk over a ball was absolutely necessary; and the morning after the assembly brought the former to Longbourn to hear and to communicate.

"*You* began the evening well, Charlotte," said Mrs. Bennet with civil self-command to Miss Lucas. "*You* were Mr. Bingley's first choice."

"Yes; but he seemed to like his second better."

"Oh! you mean Jane, I suppose, because he danced with her twice. To be sure that *did* seem as if he admired her—indeed I rather believe he *did*—I heard something about it—but I hardly know what—something about Mr. Robinson."

"Perhaps you mean what I overheard between him and Mr. Robinson; did not I mention it to you? Mr. Robinson's asking him how he liked our Meryton assemblies, and whether he did not think there were a great many pretty women in the room, and *which* he thought the prettiest? and his answering immediately to the last question: 'Oh! the eldest Miss Bennet, beyond a doubt; there cannot be two opinions on that point.'"

"Upon my word! Well, that is very decided indeed—that does seem as if—but, however, it may all come to nothing, you know."

"My overhearings were more to the purpose than *yours*, Eliza," said Charlotte. "Mr. Darcy is not so well worth listening to as his friend, is he?—poor Eliza!—to be only just *tolerable*."

"I beg you would not put it into Lizzy's head to be vexed by his ill-treatment, for he is such a disagreeable man, that it would be quite a misfortune to be liked by him. Mrs. Long told me last night that he sat close to her for half-an-hour without once opening his lips."

"Are you quite sure, ma'am?—is not there a little mistake?" said Jane. "I certainly saw Mr. Darcy speaking to her."

"Aye—because she asked him at last how he liked Netherfield, and he could not help answering her; but she said he seemed quite angry at being spoke to."

"Miss Bingley told me," said Jane, "that he never speaks much, unless among his intimate acquaintances. With *them* he is remarkably agreeable."

"I do not believe a word of it, my dear. If he had been so very agreeable, he would have talked to Mrs. Long. But I can guess how it was; everybody says that he is eat up with pride, and I dare say he had heard somehow that Mrs. Long does not keep a carriage, and had come to the ball in a hack chaise."

"I do not mind his not talking to Mrs. Long," said Miss Lucas, "but I wish he had danced with Eliza."

"Another time, Lizzy," said her mother, "I would not dance with *him*, if I were you."

"I believe, ma'am, I may safely promise you *never* to dance with him."

"His pride," said Miss Lucas, "does not offend *me* so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a *right* to be proud."

"That is very true," replied Elizabeth, "and I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*."

"Pride," observed Mary, who piqued herself upon the solidity of her reflections, "is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed; that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us."

"If I were as rich as Mr. Darcy," cried a young Lucas, who came with his sisters, "I should not care how proud I was. I would keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine a day."

"Then you would drink a great deal more than you ought," said Mrs. Bennet; "and if I were to see you at it, I should take away your bottle directly."

The boy protested that she should not; she continued to declare that she would, and the argument ended only with the visit.

## Chapter 6

The ladies of Longbourn soon waited on those of Netherfield. The visit was soon returned in due form. Miss Bennet's pleasing manners grew on the goodwill of Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and though the mother was found to be intolerable, and the younger sisters not worth speaking to, a wish of being better acquainted with *them* was expressed towards the two eldest. By Jane, this attention was received with the greatest pleasure, but Elizabeth still saw superciliousness in their treatment of everybody, hardly excepting even her sister, and could not like them; though their kindness to Jane, such as it was, had a value as arising in all probability from the influence of their brother's admiration. It was generally evident whenever they met, that he *did* admire her and to *her* it was equally evident that Jane was yielding to the preference which she had begun to entertain for him from the first, and was in a way to be very much in love; but she considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered by the world in general, since Jane united, with great strength of feeling, a

composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner which would guard her from the suspicions of the impertinent. She mentioned this to her friend Miss Lucas.

"It may perhaps be pleasant," replied Charlotte, "to be able to impose on the public in such a case; but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment, that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all *begin* freely—a slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten a women had better show *more* affection than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on."

"But she does help him on, as much as her nature will allow. If I can perceive her regard for him, he must be a simpleton, indeed, not to discover it too."

"Remember, Eliza, that he does not know Jane's disposition as you do."

"But if a woman is partial to a man, and does not endeavour to conceal it, he must find it out."

"Perhaps he must, if he sees enough of her. But, though Bingley and Jane meet tolerably often, it is never for many hours together; and, as they always see each other in large mixed parties, it is impossible that every moment should be employed in conversing together. Jane should therefore make the most of every half-hour in which she can command his attention. When she is secure of him, there will be more leisure for falling in love as much as she chooses."

"Your plan is a good one," replied Elizabeth, "where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married, and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it. But these are not Jane's feelings; she is not acting by design. As yet, she cannot even be certain of the degree of her own regard nor of its reasonableness. She has known him only a fortnight. She danced four dances with him at Meryton; she saw him one morning at his own house, and has since dined with him in company four times. This is not quite enough to make her understand his character."

"Not as you represent it. Had she merely *dined* with him, she might only have discovered whether he had a good appetite; but you must remember that four evenings have also been spent together—and four evenings may do a great deal."

"Yes; these four evenings have enabled them to ascertain that they both like Vingt-un better than Commerce; but with respect to any other leading characteristic, I do not imagine that much has been unfolded."

"Well," said Charlotte, "I wish Jane success with all my heart; and if she were married to him to-morrow, I should think she had as good a chance of happiness as if she were to be studying his character for a twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is

entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other or ever so similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life."

"You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself."

Occupied in observing Mr. Bingley's attentions to her sister, Elizabeth was far from suspecting that she was herself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of his friend. Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she hardly had a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. Of this she was perfectly unaware; to her he was only the man who made himself agreeable nowhere, and who had not thought her handsome enough to dance with.

He began to wish to know more of her, and as a step towards conversing with her himself, attended to her conversation with others. His doing so drew her notice. It was at Sir William Lucas's, where a large party were assembled.

"What does Mr. Darcy mean," said she to Charlotte, "by listening to my conversation with Colonel Forster?"

"That is a question which Mr. Darcy only can answer."

"But if he does it any more I shall certainly let him know that I see what he is about. He has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him."

On his approaching them soon afterwards, though without seeming to have any intention of speaking, Miss Lucas defied her friend to mention such a subject to him; which immediately provoking Elizabeth to do it, she turned to him and said:

"Did you not think, Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?"

"With great energy; but it is always a subject which makes a lady energetic."

"You are severe on us."

"It will be *her* turn soon to be teased," said Miss Lucas. "I am going to open the instrument, Eliza, and you know what follows."

"You are a very strange creature by way of a friend!—always wanting me to play and sing before anybody and everybody! If my vanity had taken a musical turn, you would have been invaluable; but as it is, I would really rather not sit down before those who must be in the habit of hearing the very best performers." On Miss Lucas's persevering, however, she added, "Very well, if it must be so, it must." And gravely glancing at Mr. Darcy, "There is a fine old saying, which everybody here is of course familiar with: 'Keep your breath to cool your porridge'; and I shall keep mine to swell my song."

Her performance was pleasing, though by no means capital. After a song or two, and before she could reply to the entreaties of several that she would sing again, she was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by her sister Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached. Elizabeth, easy and unaffected, had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not playing half so well; and Mary, at the end of a long concerto, was glad to purchase praise and gratitude by Scotch and Irish airs, at the request of her younger sisters, who, with some of the Lucases, and two or three officers, joined eagerly in dancing at one end of the room.

Mr. Darcy stood near them in silent indignation at such a mode of passing the evening, to the exclusion of all conversation, and was too much engrossed by his thoughts to perceive that Sir William Lucas was his neighbour, till Sir William thus began:

"What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Darcy! There is nothing like dancing after all. I consider it as one of the first refinements of polished society."

"Certainly, sir; and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. Every savage can dance."

Sir William only smiled. "Your friend performs delightfully," he continued after a pause, on seeing Bingley join the group; "and I doubt not that you are an adept in the science yourself, Mr. Darcy."

"You saw me dance at Meryton, I believe, sir."

"Yes, indeed, and received no inconsiderable pleasure from the sight. Do you often dance at St. James's?"

"Never, sir."

"Do you not think it would be a proper compliment to the place?"

"It is a compliment which I never pay to any place if I can avoid it."

"You have a house in town, I conclude?"

Mr. Darcy bowed.



"I had once had some thought of fixing in town myself—for I am fond of superior society; but I did not feel quite certain that the air of London would agree with Lady Lucas."

He paused in hopes of an answer; but his companion was not disposed to make any; and Elizabeth at that instant moving towards them, he was struck with the action of doing a very gallant thing, and called out to her:

"My dear Miss Eliza, why are you not dancing? Mr. Darcy, you must allow me to present this young lady to you as a very desirable partner. You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure when so much beauty is before you." And, taking her hand, he would have given it to Mr. Darcy who, though extremely surprised, was not unwilling to receive it, when she instantly drew back, and said with some discomposure to Sir William:

"Indeed, sir, I have not the least intention of dancing. I entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg for a partner."

Mr. Darcy, with grave propriety, requested to be allowed the honour of her hand, but in vain. Elizabeth was determined; nor did Sir William at all shake her purpose by his attempt at persuasion.

"You excel so much in the dance, Miss Eliza, that it is cruel to deny me the happiness of seeing you; and though this gentleman dislikes the amusement in general, he can have no objection, I am sure, to oblige us for one half-hour."

"Mr. Darcy is all politeness," said Elizabeth, smiling.

"He is, indeed; but, considering the inducement, my dear Miss Eliza, we cannot wonder at his complaisance—for who would object to such a partner?"

Elizabeth looked archly, and turned away. Her resistance had not injured her with the gentleman, and he was thinking of her with some complacency, when thus accosted by Miss Bingley:

"I can guess the subject of your reverie."

"I should imagine not."

"You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner—in such society; and indeed I am quite of your opinion. I was never more annoyed! The insipidity, and yet the noise—the nothingness, and yet the self-importance of all those people! What would I give to hear your strictures on them!"

"Your conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you. My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow."

Miss Bingley immediately fixed her eyes on his face, and desired he would tell her what lady had the credit of inspiring such reflections. Mr. Darcy replied with great intrepidity:

"Miss Elizabeth Bennet."

"Miss Elizabeth Bennet!" repeated Miss Bingley. "I am all astonishment. How long has she been such a favourite?—and pray, when am I to wish you joy?"

"That is exactly the question which I expected you to ask. A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony, in a moment. I knew you would be wishing me joy."

"Nay, if you are serious about it, I shall consider the matter is absolutely settled. You will be having a charming mother-in-law, indeed; and, of course, she will always be at Pemberley with you."

He listened to her with perfect indifference while she chose to entertain herself in this manner; and as his composure convinced her that all was safe, her wit flowed long.

## Chapter 7

Mr. Bennet's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters, was entailed, in default of heirs male, on a distant relation; and their mother's fortune, though ample for her situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of his. Her father had been an attorney in Meryton, and had left her four thousand pounds.

She had a sister married to a Mr. Phillips, who had been a clerk to their father and succeeded him in the business, and a brother settled in London in a respectable line of trade.

The village of Longbourn was only one mile from Meryton; a most convenient distance for the young ladies, who were usually tempted thither three or four times a week, to pay their duty to their aunt and to a milliner's shop just over the way. The two youngest of the family, Catherine and Lydia, were particularly frequent in these attentions; their minds were more vacant than their sisters', and when nothing better offered, a walk to Meryton was necessary to amuse their morning hours and furnish conversation for the evening; and however bare of news the country in general might be, they always contrived to learn some from their aunt. At present, indeed, they were well supplied both with news and happiness by the recent arrival of a militia regiment in the neighbourhood; it was to remain the whole winter, and Meryton was the headquarters.

Their visits to Mrs. Phillips were now productive of the most interesting intelligence. Every day added something to their knowledge of the officers' names and connections. Their lodgings were not long a secret, and at length they began to know the officers themselves. Mr. Phillips visited them all, and this opened to his nieces a

store of felicity unknown before. They could talk of nothing but officers; and Mr. Bingley's large fortune, the mention of which gave animation to their mother, was worthless in their eyes when opposed to the regimentals of an ensign.

After listening one morning to their effusions on this subject, Mr. Bennet coolly observed:

"From all that I can collect by your manner of talking, you must be two of the silliest girls in the country. I have suspected it some time, but I am now convinced."

Catherine was disconcerted, and made no answer; but Lydia, with perfect indifference, continued to express her admiration of Captain Carter, and her hope of seeing him in the course of the day, as he was going the next morning to London.

"I am astonished, my dear," said Mrs. Bennet, "that you should be so ready to think your own children silly. If I wished to think slightly of anybody's children, it should not be of my own, however."

"If my children are silly, I must hope to be always sensible of it."

"Yes—but as it happens, they are all of them very clever."

"This is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not agree. I had hoped that our sentiments coincided in every particular, but I must so far differ from you as to think our two youngest daughters uncommonly foolish."

"My dear Mr. Bennet, you must not expect such girls to have the sense of their father and mother. When they get to our age, I dare say they will not think about officers any more than we do. I remember the time when I liked a red coat myself very well—and, indeed, so I do still at my heart; and if a smart young colonel, with five or six thousand a year, should want one of my girls I shall not say nay to him; and I thought Colonel Forster looked very becoming the other night at Sir William's in his regimentals."

"Mamma," cried Lydia, "my aunt says that Colonel Forster and Captain Carter do not go so often to Miss Watson's as they did when they first came; she sees them now very often standing in Clarke's library."

Mrs. Bennet was prevented replying by the entrance of the footman with a note for Miss Bennet; it came from Netherfield, and the servant waited for an answer. Mrs. Bennet's eyes sparkled with pleasure, and she was eagerly calling out, while her daughter read,

"Well, Jane, who is it from? What is it about? What does he say? Well, Jane, make haste and tell us; make haste, my love."

"It is from Miss Bingley," said Jane, and then read it aloud.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—

"If you are not so compassionate as to dine to-day with Louisa and me, we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest of our lives, for a whole day's tete-a-tete between two women can never end without a quarrel. Come as soon as you can on

receipt of this. My brother and the gentlemen are to dine with the officers.—Yours ever,

"CAROLINE BINGLEY"

"With the officers!" cried Lydia. "I wonder my aunt did not tell us of *that*."

"Dining out," said Mrs. Bennet, "that is very unlucky."

"Can I have the carriage?" said Jane.

"No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night."

"That would be a good scheme," said Elizabeth, "if you were sure that they would not offer to send her home."

"Oh! but the gentlemen will have Mr. Bingley's chaise to go to Meryton, and the Hursts have no horses to theirs."

"I had much rather go in the coach."

"But, my dear, your father cannot spare the horses, I am sure. They are wanted in the farm, Mr. Bennet, are they not?"

"They are wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get them."

"But if you have got them to-day," said Elizabeth, "my mother's purpose will be answered."

She did at last extort from her father an acknowledgment that the horses were engaged. Jane was therefore obliged to go on horseback, and her mother attended her to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. Her hopes were answered; Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard. Her sisters were uneasy for her, but her mother was delighted. The rain continued the whole evening without intermission; Jane certainly could not come back.

"This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!" said Mrs. Bennet more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all her own. Till the next morning, however, she was not aware of all the felicity of her contrivance. Breakfast was scarcely over when a servant from Netherfield brought the following note for Elizabeth:

"MY DEAREST LIZZY,—

"I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is to be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. My kind friends will not hear of my returning till I am better. They insist also on my seeing Mr. Jones—therefore do not be alarmed if you should hear of his having been to me—and, excepting a sore throat and headache, there is not much the matter with me.—Yours, etc."

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Bennet, when Elizabeth had read the note aloud, "if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness—if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders."

"Oh! I am not afraid of her dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well. I would go and see her if I could have the carriage."

Elizabeth, feeling really anxious, was determined to go to her, though the carriage was not to be had; and as she was no horsewoman, walking was her only alternative. She declared her resolution.

"How can you be so silly," cried her mother, "as to think of such a thing, in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there."

"I shall be very fit to see Jane—which is all I want."

"Is this a hint to me, Lizzy," said her father, "to send for the horses?"

"No, indeed, I do not wish to avoid the walk. The distance is nothing when one has a motive; only three miles. I shall be back by dinner."

"I admire the activity of your benevolence," observed Mary, "but every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and, in my opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is required."

"We will go as far as Meryton with you," said Catherine and Lydia. Elizabeth accepted their company, and the three young ladies set off together.

"If we make haste," said Lydia, as they walked along, "perhaps we may see something of Captain Carter before he goes."

In Meryton they parted; the two youngest repaired to the lodgings of one of the officers' wives, and Elizabeth continued her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise.

She was shown into the breakfast-parlour, where all but Jane were assembled, and where her appearance created a great deal of surprise. That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and Elizabeth was convinced that they held her in contempt for it. She was received, however, very politely by them; and in their brother's manners there was something better than politeness; there was good humour and kindness. Mr. Darcy said very little, and Mr. Hurst nothing at all. The former was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone. The latter was thinking only of his breakfast.

Her inquiries after her sister were not very favourably answered. Miss Bennet had slept ill, and though up, was very feverish, and not well enough to leave her room. Elizabeth was glad to be taken to her immediately; and Jane, who had only been withheld by the fear of giving alarm or inconvenience from expressing in her note how much she longed for such a visit, was delighted at her entrance. She was not

equal, however, to much conversation, and when Miss Bingley left them together, could attempt little besides expressions of gratitude for the extraordinary kindness she was treated with. Elizabeth silently attended her.

When breakfast was over they were joined by the sisters; and Elizabeth began to like them herself, when she saw how much affection and solicitude they showed for Jane. The apothecary came, and having examined his patient, said, as might be supposed, that she had caught a violent cold, and that they must endeavour to get the better of it; advised her to return to bed, and promised her some draughts. The advice was followed readily, for the feverish symptoms increased, and her head ached acutely. Elizabeth did not quit her room for a moment; nor were the other ladies often absent; the gentlemen being out, they had, in fact, nothing to do elsewhere.

When the clock struck three, Elizabeth felt that she must go, and very unwillingly said so. Miss Bingley offered her the carriage, and she only wanted a little pressing to accept it, when Jane testified such concern in parting with her, that Miss Bingley was obliged to convert the offer of the chaise to an invitation to remain at Netherfield for the present. Elizabeth most thankfully consented, and a servant was dispatched to Longbourn to acquaint the family with her stay and bring back a supply of clothes.

## Chapter 8

At five o'clock the two ladies retired to dress, and at half-past six Elizabeth was summoned to dinner. To the civil inquiries which then poured in, and amongst which she had the pleasure of distinguishing the much superior solicitude of Mr. Bingley's, she could not make a very favourable answer. Jane was by no means better. The sisters, on hearing this, repeated three or four times how much they were grieved, how shocking it was to have a bad cold, and how excessively they disliked being ill themselves; and then thought no more of the matter: and their indifference towards Jane when not immediately before them restored Elizabeth to the enjoyment of all her former dislike.

Their brother, indeed, was the only one of the party whom she could regard with any complacency. His anxiety for Jane was evident, and his attentions to herself most pleasing, and they prevented her feeling herself so much an intruder as she believed she was considered by the others. She had very little notice from any but him. Miss Bingley was engrossed by Mr. Darcy, her sister scarcely less so; and as for Mr. Hurst, by whom Elizabeth sat, he was an indolent man, who lived only to eat, drink, and play at cards; who, when he found her to prefer a plain dish to a ragout, had nothing to say to her.

When dinner was over, she returned directly to Jane, and Miss Bingley began abusing her as soon as she was out of the room. Her manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride and impertinence; she had no conversation, no style, no beauty. Mrs. Hurst thought the same, and added:

"She has nothing, in short, to recommend her, but being an excellent walker. I shall never forget her appearance this morning. She really looked almost wild."

"She did, indeed, Louisa. I could hardly keep my countenance. Very nonsensical to come at all! Why must *she* be scampering about the country, because her sister had a cold? Her hair, so untidy, so blowsy!"

"Yes, and her petticoat; I hope you saw her petticoat, six inches deep in mud, I am absolutely certain; and the gown which had been let down to hide it not doing its office."

"Your picture may be very exact, Louisa," said Bingley; "but this was all lost upon me. I thought Miss Elizabeth Bennet looked remarkably well when she came into the room this morning. Her dirty petticoat quite escaped my notice."

"*You* observed it, Mr. Darcy, I am sure," said Miss Bingley; "and I am inclined to think that you would not wish to see *your* sister make such an exhibition."

"Certainly not."

"To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What could she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum."

"It shows an affection for her sister that is very pleasing," said Bingley.

"I am afraid, Mr. Darcy," observed Miss Bingley in a half whisper, "that this adventure has rather affected your admiration of her fine eyes."

"Not at all," he replied; "they were brightened by the exercise." A short pause followed this speech, and Mrs. Hurst began again:

"I have an excessive regard for Miss Jane Bennet, she is really a very sweet girl, and I wish with all my heart she were well settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it."

"I think I have heard you say that their uncle is an attorney in Meryton."

"Yes; and they have another, who lives somewhere near Cheapside."

"That is capital," added her sister, and they both laughed heartily.

"If they had uncles enough to fill *all* Cheapside," cried Bingley, "it would not make them one jot less agreeable."

"But it must very materially lessen their chance of marrying men of any consideration in the world," replied Darcy.

To this speech Bingley made no answer; but his sisters gave it their hearty assent, and indulged their mirth for some time at the expense of their dear friend's vulgar relations.

With a renewal of tenderness, however, they returned to her room on leaving the dining-parlour, and sat with her till summoned to coffee. She was still very poorly, and Elizabeth would not quit her at all, till late in the evening, when she had the comfort of seeing her sleep, and when it seemed to her rather right than pleasant that she should go downstairs herself. On entering the drawing-room she found the whole party at loo, and was immediately invited to join them; but suspecting them to be playing high she declined it, and making her sister the excuse, said she would amuse herself for the short time she could stay below, with a book. Mr. Hurst looked at her with astonishment.

"Do you prefer reading to cards?" said he; "that is rather singular."

"Miss Eliza Bennet," said Miss Bingley, "despises cards. She is a great reader, and has no pleasure in anything else."

"I deserve neither such praise nor such censure," cried Elizabeth; "I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things."

"In nursing your sister I am sure you have pleasure," said Bingley; "and I hope it will be soon increased by seeing her quite well."

Elizabeth thanked him from her heart, and then walked towards the table where a few books were lying. He immediately offered to fetch her others—all that his library afforded.

"And I wish my collection were larger for your benefit and my own credit; but I am an idle fellow, and though I have not many, I have more than I ever looked into."

Elizabeth assured him that she could suit herself perfectly with those in the room.

"I am astonished," said Miss Bingley, "that my father should have left so small a collection of books. What a delightful library you have at Pemberley, Mr. Darcy!"

"It ought to be good," he replied, "it has been the work of many generations."

"And then you have added so much to it yourself, you are always buying books."

"I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these."

"Neglect! I am sure you neglect nothing that can add to the beauties of that noble place. Charles, when you build *your* house, I wish it may be half as delightful as Pemberley."

"I wish it may."

"But I would really advise you to make your purchase in that neighbourhood, and take Pemberley for a kind of model. There is not a finer county in England than Derbyshire."

"With all my heart; I will buy Pemberley itself if Darcy will sell it."



"I am talking of possibilities, Charles."

"Upon my word, Caroline, I should think it more possible to get Pemberley by purchase than by imitation."

Elizabeth was so much caught with what passed, as to leave her very little attention for her book; and soon laying it wholly aside, she drew near the card-table, and stationed herself between Mr. Bingley and his eldest sister, to observe the game.

"Is Miss Darcy much grown since the spring?" said Miss Bingley; "will she be as tall as I am?"

"I think she will. She is now about Miss Elizabeth Bennet's height, or rather taller."

"How I long to see her again! I never met with anybody who delighted me so much. Such a countenance, such manners! And so extremely accomplished for her age! Her performance on the pianoforte is exquisite."

"It is amazing to me," said Bingley, "how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are."

"All young ladies accomplished! My dear Charles, what do you mean?"

"Yes, all of them, I think. They all paint tables, cover screens, and net purses. I scarcely know anyone who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished."

"Your list of the common extent of accomplishments," said Darcy, "has too much truth. The word is applied to many a woman who deserves it no otherwise than by netting a purse or covering a screen. But I am very far from agreeing with you in your estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished."

"Nor I, I am sure," said Miss Bingley.

"Then," observed Elizabeth, "you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman."

"Yes, I do comprehend a great deal in it."

"Oh! certainly," cried his faithful assistant, "no one can be really esteemed accomplished who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved."

"All this she must possess," added Darcy, "and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading."

"I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*."

"Are you so severe upon your own sex as to doubt the possibility of all this?"

"I never saw such a woman. I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe united."

Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley both cried out against the injustice of her implied doubt, and were both protesting that they knew many women who answered this description, when Mr. Hurst called them to order, with bitter complaints of their inattention to what was going forward. As all conversation was thereby at an end, Elizabeth soon afterwards left the room.

"Elizabeth Bennet," said Miss Bingley, when the door was closed on her, "is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own; and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art."

"Undoubtedly," replied Darcy, to whom this remark was chiefly addressed, "there is a meanness in *all* the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable."

Miss Bingley was not so entirely satisfied with this reply as to continue the subject.

Elizabeth joined them again only to say that her sister was worse, and that she could not leave her. Bingley urged Mr. Jones being sent for immediately; while his sisters, convinced that no country advice could be of any service, recommended an express to town for one of the most eminent physicians. This she would not hear of; but she was not so unwilling to comply with their brother's proposal; and it was settled that Mr. Jones should be sent for early in the morning, if Miss Bennet were not decidedly better. Bingley was quite uncomfortable; his sisters declared that they were miserable. They solaced their wretchedness, however, by duets after supper, while he could find no better relief to his feelings than by giving his housekeeper directions that every attention might be paid to the sick lady and her sister.

## Chapter 9

Elizabeth passed the chief of the night in her sister's room, and in the morning had the pleasure of being able to send a tolerable answer to the inquiries which she very early received from Mr. Bingley by a housemaid, and some time afterwards from the two elegant ladies who waited on his sisters. In spite of this amendment, however, she requested to have a note sent to Longbourn, desiring her mother to visit Jane, and form her own judgement of her situation. The note was immediately dispatched, and its contents as quickly complied with. Mrs. Bennet, accompanied by her two youngest girls, reached Netherfield soon after the family breakfast.

Had she found Jane in any apparent danger, Mrs. Bennet would have been very miserable; but being satisfied on seeing her that her illness was not alarming, she had no wish of her recovering immediately, as her restoration to health would probably remove her from Netherfield. She would not listen, therefore, to her daughter's proposal of being carried home; neither did the apothecary, who arrived about the same time, think it at all advisable. After sitting a little while with Jane, on Miss Bingley's appearance and invitation, the mother and three daughters all attended her into the breakfast parlour. Bingley met them with hopes that Mrs. Bennet had not found Miss Bennet worse than she expected.

"Indeed I have, sir," was her answer. "She is a great deal too ill to be moved. Mr. Jones says we must not think of moving her. We must trespass a little longer on your kindness."

"Removed!" cried Bingley. "It must not be thought of. My sister, I am sure, will not hear of her removal."

"You may depend upon it, Madam," said Miss Bingley, with cold civility, "that Miss Bennet will receive every possible attention while she remains with us."

Mrs. Bennet was profuse in her acknowledgments.

"I am sure," she added, "if it was not for such good friends I do not know what would become of her, for she is very ill indeed, and suffers a vast deal, though with the greatest patience in the world, which is always the way with her, for she has, without exception, the sweetest temper I have ever met with. I often tell my other girls they are nothing to *her*. You have a sweet room here, Mr. Bingley, and a charming prospect over the gravel walk. I do not know a place in the country that is equal to Netherfield. You will not think of quitting it in a hurry, I hope, though you have but a short lease."

"Whatever I do is done in a hurry," replied he; "and therefore if I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in five minutes. At present, however, I consider myself as quite fixed here."

"That is exactly what I should have supposed of you," said Elizabeth.

"You begin to comprehend me, do you?" cried he, turning towards her.

"Oh! yes—I understand you perfectly."

"I wish I might take this for a compliment; but to be so easily seen through I am afraid is pitiful."

"That is as it happens. It does not follow that a deep, intricate character is more or less estimable than such a one as yours."

"Lizzy," cried her mother, "remember where you are, and do not run on in the wild manner that you are suffered to do at home."

"I did not know before," continued Bingley immediately, "that you were a studier of character. It must be an amusing study."

"Yes, but intricate characters are the *most* amusing. They have at least that advantage."

"The country," said Darcy, "can in general supply but a few subjects for such a study. In a country neighbourhood you move in a very confined and unvarying society."

"But people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them for ever."

"Yes, indeed," cried Mrs. Bennet, offended by his manner of mentioning a country neighbourhood. "I assure you there is quite as much of *that* going on in the country as in town."

Everybody was surprised, and Darcy, after looking at her for a moment, turned silently away. Mrs. Bennet, who fancied she had gained a complete victory over him, continued her triumph.

"I cannot see that London has any great advantage over the country, for my part, except the shops and public places. The country is a vast deal pleasanter, is it not, Mr. Bingley?"

"When I am in the country," he replied, "I never wish to leave it; and when I am in town it is pretty much the same. They have each their advantages, and I can be equally happy in either."

"Aye—that is because you have the right disposition. But that gentleman," looking at Darcy, "seemed to think the country was nothing at all."

"Indeed, Mamma, you are mistaken," said Elizabeth, blushing for her mother. "You quite mistook Mr. Darcy. He only meant that there was not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in the town, which you must acknowledge to be true."

"Certainly, my dear, nobody said there were; but as to not meeting with many people in this neighbourhood, I believe there are few neighbourhoods larger. I know we dine with four-and-twenty families."

Nothing but concern for Elizabeth could enable Bingley to keep his countenance. His sister was less delicate, and directed her eyes towards Mr. Darcy with a very expressive smile. Elizabeth, for the sake of saying something that might turn her mother's thoughts, now asked her if Charlotte Lucas had been at Longbourn since *her* coming away.

"Yes, she called yesterday with her father. What an agreeable man Sir William is, Mr. Bingley, is not he? So much the man of fashion! So genteel and easy! He has always something to say to everybody. *That* is my idea of good breeding; and those persons who fancy themselves very important, and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter."

"Did Charlotte dine with you?"

"No, she would go home. I fancy she was wanted about the mince-pies. For my part, Mr. Bingley, I always keep servants that can do their own work; *my* daughters are brought up very differently. But everybody is to judge for themselves, and the Lucases are a very good sort of girls, I assure you. It is a pity they are not handsome! Not that I think Charlotte so *very* plain—but then she is our particular friend."

"She seems a very pleasant young woman."

"Oh! dear, yes; but you must own she is very plain. Lady Lucas herself has often said so, and envied me Jane's beauty. I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure, Jane—one does not often see anybody better looking. It is what everybody says. I do not trust my own partiality. When she was only fifteen, there was a man at my brother Gardiner's in town so much in love with her that my sister-in-law was sure he would make her an offer before we came away. But, however, he did not. Perhaps he thought her too young. However, he wrote some verses on her, and very pretty they were."

"And so ended his affection," said Elizabeth impatiently. "There has been many a one, I fancy, overcome in the same way. I wonder who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away love!"

"I have been used to consider poetry as the *food* of love," said Darcy.

"Of a fine, stout, healthy love it may. Everything nourishes what is strong already. But if it be only a slight, thin sort of inclination, I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away."

Darcy only smiled; and the general pause which ensued made Elizabeth tremble lest her mother should be exposing herself again. She longed to speak, but could think of nothing to say; and after a short silence Mrs. Bennet began repeating her thanks to Mr. Bingley for his kindness to Jane, with an apology for troubling him also with Lizzy. Mr. Bingley was unaffectedly civil in his answer, and forced his younger sister to be civil also, and say what the occasion required. She performed her part indeed without much graciousness, but Mrs. Bennet was satisfied, and soon afterwards ordered her carriage. Upon this signal, the youngest of her daughters put herself forward. The two girls had been whispering to each other during the whole visit, and the result of it was, that the youngest should tax Mr. Bingley with having promised on his first coming into the country to give a ball at Netherfield.

Lydia was a stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, with a fine complexion and good-humoured countenance; a favourite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age. She had high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attention of the officers, to whom her uncle's good dinners, and her own easy manners recommended her, had increased into assurance. She was very equal, therefore, to address Mr. Bingley on the subject of the ball, and abruptly reminded him of his promise; adding, that it would be the most shameful thing in the

world if he did not keep it. His answer to this sudden attack was delightful to their mother's ear:

"I am perfectly ready, I assure you, to keep my engagement; and when your sister is recovered, you shall, if you please, name the very day of the ball. But you would not wish to be dancing when she is ill."

Lydia declared herself satisfied. "Oh! yes—it would be much better to wait till Jane was well, and by that time most likely Captain Carter would be at Meryton again. And when you have given *your* ball," she added, "I shall insist on their giving one also. I shall tell Colonel Forster it will be quite a shame if he does not."

Mrs. Bennet and her daughters then departed, and Elizabeth returned instantly to Jane, leaving her own and her relations' behaviour to the remarks of the two ladies and Mr. Darcy; the latter of whom, however, could not be prevailed on to join in their censure of *her*, in spite of all Miss Bingley's witticisms on *fine eyes*.

## Chapter 10

The day passed much as the day before had done. Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley had spent some hours of the morning with the invalid, who continued, though slowly, to mend; and in the evening Elizabeth joined their party in the drawing-room. The loo-table, however, did not appear. Mr. Darcy was writing, and Miss Bingley, seated near him, was watching the progress of his letter and repeatedly calling off his attention by messages to his sister. Mr. Hurst and Mr. Bingley were at piquet, and Mrs. Hurst was observing their game.

Elizabeth took up some needlework, and was sufficiently amused in attending to what passed between Darcy and his companion. The perpetual commendations of the lady, either on his handwriting, or on the evenness of his lines, or on the length of his letter, with the perfect unconcern with which her praises were received, formed a curious dialogue, and was exactly in union with her opinion of each.

"How delighted Miss Darcy will be to receive such a letter!"

He made no answer.

"You write uncommonly fast."

"You are mistaken. I write rather slowly."

"How many letters you must have occasion to write in the course of a year! Letters of business, too! How odious I should think them!"

"It is fortunate, then, that they fall to my lot instead of yours."

"Pray tell your sister that I long to see her."

"I have already told her so once, by your desire."

"I am afraid you do not like your pen. Let me mend it for you. I mend pens remarkably well."

"Thank you—but I always mend my own."

"How can you contrive to write so even?"

He was silent.

"Tell your sister I am delighted to hear of her improvement on the harp; and pray let her know that I am quite in raptures with her beautiful little design for a table, and I think it infinitely superior to Miss Grantley's."

"Will you give me leave to defer your raptures till I write again? At present I have not room to do them justice."

"Oh! it is of no consequence. I shall see her in January. But do you always write such charming long letters to her, Mr. Darcy?"

"They are generally long; but whether always charming it is not for me to determine."

"It is a rule with me, that a person who can write a long letter with ease, cannot write ill."

"That will not do for a compliment to Darcy, Caroline," cried her brother, "because he does *not* write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables. Do not you, Darcy?"

"My style of writing is very different from yours."

"Oh!" cried Miss Bingley, "Charles writes in the most careless way imaginable. He leaves out half his words, and blots the rest."

"My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them—by which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents."

"Your humility, Mr. Bingley," said Elizabeth, "must disarm reproof."

"Nothing is more deceitful," said Darcy, "than the appearance of humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast."

"And which of the two do you call *my* little recent piece of modesty?"

"The indirect boast; for you are really proud of your defects in writing, because you consider them as proceeding from a rapidity of thought and carelessness of execution, which, if not estimable, you think at least highly interesting. The power of doing anything with quickness is always prized much by the possessor, and often without any attention to the imperfection of the performance. When you told Mrs. Bennet this morning that if you ever resolved upon quitting Netherfield you should be gone in five minutes, you meant it to be a sort of panegyric, of compliment to yourself—and yet what is there so very laudable in a precipitance which must leave very necessary business undone, and can be of no real advantage to yourself or anyone else?"

"Nay," cried Bingley, "this is too much, to remember at night all the foolish things that were said in the morning. And yet, upon my honour, I believe what I said of myself to be true, and I believe it at this moment. At least, therefore, I did not assume the character of needless precipitance merely to show off before the ladies."

"I dare say you believed it; but I am by no means convinced that you would be gone with such celerity. Your conduct would be quite as dependent on chance as that of any man I know; and if, as you were mounting your horse, a friend were to say, 'Bingley, you had better stay till next week,' you would probably do it, you would probably not go—and at another word, might stay a month."

"You have only proved by this," cried Elizabeth, "that Mr. Bingley did not do justice to his own disposition. You have shown him off now much more than he did himself."

"I am exceedingly gratified," said Bingley, "by your converting what my friend says into a compliment on the sweetness of my temper. But I am afraid you are giving it a turn which that gentleman did by no means intend; for he would certainly think better of me, if under such a circumstance I were to give a flat denial, and ride off as fast as I could."

"Would Mr. Darcy then consider the rashness of your original intentions as atoned for by your obstinacy in adhering to it?"

"Upon my word, I cannot exactly explain the matter; Darcy must speak for himself."

"You expect me to account for opinions which you choose to call mine, but which I have never acknowledged. Allowing the case, however, to stand according to your representation, you must remember, Miss Bennet, that the friend who is supposed to desire his return to the house, and the delay of his plan, has merely desired it, asked it without offering one argument in favour of its propriety."

"To yield readily—easily—to the *persuasion* of a friend is no merit with you."

"To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either."

"You appear to me, Mr. Darcy, to allow nothing for the influence of friendship and affection. A regard for the requester would often make one readily yield to a request, without waiting for arguments to reason one into it. I am not particularly speaking of such a case as you have supposed about Mr. Bingley. We may as well wait, perhaps, till the circumstance occurs before we discuss the discretion of his behaviour thereupon. But in general and ordinary cases between friend and friend, where one of them is desired by the other to change a resolution of no very great moment, should you think ill of that person for complying with the desire, without waiting to be argued into it?"



"Will it not be advisable, before we proceed on this subject, to arrange with rather more precision the degree of importance which is to appertain to this request, as well as the degree of intimacy subsisting between the parties?"

"By all means," cried Bingley; "let us hear all the particulars, not forgetting their comparative height and size; for that will have more weight in the argument, Miss Bennet, than you may be aware of. I assure you, that if Darcy were not such a great tall fellow, in comparison with myself, I should not pay him half so much deference. I declare I do not know a more awful object than Darcy, on particular occasions, and in particular places; at his own house especially, and of a Sunday evening, when he has nothing to do."

Mr. Darcy smiled; but Elizabeth thought she could perceive that he was rather offended, and therefore checked her laugh. Miss Bingley warmly resented the indignity he had received, in an expostulation with her brother for talking such nonsense.

"I see your design, Bingley," said his friend. "You dislike an argument, and want to silence this."

"Perhaps I do. Arguments are too much like disputes. If you and Miss Bennet will defer yours till I am out of the room, I shall be very thankful; and then you may say whatever you like of me."

"What you ask," said Elizabeth, "is no sacrifice on my side; and Mr. Darcy had much better finish his letter."

Mr. Darcy took her advice, and did finish his letter.

When that business was over, he applied to Miss Bingley and Elizabeth for an indulgence of some music. Miss Bingley moved with some alacrity to the pianoforte; and, after a polite request that Elizabeth would lead the way which the other as politely and more earnestly negatived, she seated herself.

Mrs. Hurst sang with her sister, and while they were thus employed, Elizabeth could not help observing, as she turned over some music-books that lay on the instrument, how frequently Mr. Darcy's eyes were fixed on her. She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still more strange. She could only imagine, however, at last that she drew his notice because there was something more wrong and reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other person present. The supposition did not pain her. She liked him too little to care for his approbation.

After playing some Italian songs, Miss Bingley varied the charm by a lively Scotch air; and soon afterwards Mr. Darcy, drawing near Elizabeth, said to her:

"Do not you feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?"

She smiled, but made no answer. He repeated the question, with some surprise at her silence.

"Oh!" said she, "I heard you before, but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say 'Yes,' that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have, therefore, made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all—and now despise me if you dare."

"Indeed I do not dare."

Elizabeth, having rather expected to affront him, was amazed at his gallantry; but there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody; and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger.

Miss Bingley saw, or suspected enough to be jealous; and her great anxiety for the recovery of her dear friend Jane received some assistance from her desire of getting rid of Elizabeth.

She often tried to provoke Darcy into disliking her guest, by talking of their supposed marriage, and planning his happiness in such an alliance.

"I hope," said she, as they were walking together in the shrubbery the next day, "you will give your mother-in-law a few hints, when this desirable event takes place, as to the advantage of holding her tongue; and if you can compass it, do cure the younger girls of running after officers. And, if I may mention so delicate a subject, endeavour to check that little something, bordering on conceit and impertinence, which your lady possesses."

"Have you anything else to propose for my domestic felicity?"

"Oh! yes. Do let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Phillips be placed in the gallery at Pemberley. Put them next to your great-uncle the judge. They are in the same profession, you know, only in different lines. As for your Elizabeth's picture, you must not have it taken, for what painter could do justice to those beautiful eyes?"

"It would not be easy, indeed, to catch their expression, but their colour and shape, and the eyelashes, so remarkably fine, might be copied."

At that moment they were met from another walk by Mrs. Hurst and Elizabeth herself.

"I did not know that you intended to walk," said Miss Bingley, in some confusion, lest they had been overheard.

"You used us abominably ill," answered Mrs. Hurst, "running away without telling us that you were coming out."

Then taking the disengaged arm of Mr. Darcy, she left Elizabeth to walk by herself. The path just admitted three. Mr. Darcy felt their rudeness, and immediately said:

"This walk is not wide enough for our party. We had better go into the avenue."

But Elizabeth, who had not the least inclination to remain with them, laughingly answered:

"No, no; stay where you are. You are charmingly grouped, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Good-bye."

She then ran gaily off, rejoicing as she rambled about, in the hope of being at home again in a day or two. Jane was already so much recovered as to intend leaving her room for a couple of hours that evening.

## Chapter 11

When the ladies removed after dinner, Elizabeth ran up to her sister, and seeing her well guarded from cold, attended her into the drawing-room, where she was welcomed by her two friends with many professions of pleasure; and Elizabeth had never seen them so agreeable as they were during the hour which passed before the gentlemen appeared. Their powers of conversation were considerable. They could describe an entertainment with accuracy, relate an anecdote with humour, and laugh at their acquaintance with spirit.

But when the gentlemen entered, Jane was no longer the first object; Miss Bingley's eyes were instantly turned toward Darcy, and she had something to say to him before he had advanced many steps. He addressed himself to Miss Bennet, with a polite congratulation; Mr. Hurst also made her a slight bow, and said he was "very glad;" but diffuseness and warmth remained for Bingley's salutation. He was full of joy and attention. The first half-hour was spent in piling up the fire, lest she should suffer from the change of room; and she removed at his desire to the other side of the fireplace, that she might be further from the door. He then sat down by her, and talked scarcely to anyone else. Elizabeth, at work in the opposite corner, saw it all with great delight.

When tea was over, Mr. Hurst reminded his sister-in-law of the card-table—but in vain. She had obtained private intelligence that Mr. Darcy did not wish for cards; and Mr. Hurst soon found even his open petition rejected. She assured him that no one intended to play, and the silence of the whole party on the subject seemed to justify her. Mr. Hurst had therefore nothing to do, but to stretch himself on one of the sofas and go to sleep. Darcy took up a book; Miss Bingley did the same; and Mrs. Hurst, principally occupied in playing with her bracelets and rings, joined now and then in her brother's conversation with Miss Bennet.

Miss Bingley's attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mr. Darcy's progress through *his* book, as in reading her own; and she was perpetually either making some inquiry, or looking at his page. She could not win him, however, to any conversation; he merely answered her question, and read on. At length, quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which she had only chosen because it was the second volume of his, she gave a great yawn and said, "How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything than of a book! When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library."

No one made any reply. She then yawned again, threw aside her book, and cast her eyes round the room in quest for some amusement; when hearing her brother mentioning a ball to Miss Bennet, she turned suddenly towards him and said:

"By the bye, Charles, are you really serious in meditating a dance at Netherfield? I would advise you, before you determine on it, to consult the wishes of the present party; I am much mistaken if there are not some among us to whom a ball would be rather a punishment than a pleasure."

"If you mean Darcy," cried her brother, "he may go to bed, if he chooses, before it begins—but as for the ball, it is quite a settled thing; and as soon as Nicholls has made white soup enough, I shall send round my cards."

"I should like balls infinitely better," she replied, "if they were carried on in a different manner; but there is something insufferably tedious in the usual process of such a meeting. It would surely be much more rational if conversation instead of dancing were made the order of the day."

"Much more rational, my dear Caroline, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a ball."

Miss Bingley made no answer, and soon afterwards she got up and walked about the room. Her figure was elegant, and she walked well; but Darcy, at whom it was all aimed, was still inflexibly studious. In the desperation of her feelings, she resolved on one effort more, and, turning to Elizabeth, said:

"Miss Eliza Bennet, let me persuade you to follow my example, and take a turn about the room. I assure you it is very refreshing after sitting so long in one attitude."

Elizabeth was surprised, but agreed to it immediately. Miss Bingley succeeded no less in the real object of her civility; Mr. Darcy looked up. He was as much awake to the novelty of attention in that quarter as Elizabeth herself could be, and unconsciously closed his book. He was directly invited to join their party, but he declined it, observing that he could imagine but two motives for their choosing to walk up and down the room together, with either of which motives his joining them would interfere. "What could he mean? She was dying to know what could be his meaning?"—and asked Elizabeth whether she could at all understand him?

"Not at all," was her answer; "but depend upon it, he means to be severe on us, and our surest way of disappointing him will be to ask nothing about it."

Miss Bingley, however, was incapable of disappointing Mr. Darcy in anything, and persevered therefore in requiring an explanation of his two motives.

"I have not the smallest objection to explaining them," said he, as soon as she allowed him to speak. "You either choose this method of passing the evening because you are in each other's confidence, and have secret affairs to discuss, or because you are conscious that your figures appear to the greatest advantage in walking; if the first, I would be completely in your way, and if the second, I can admire you much better as I sit by the fire."

"Oh! shocking!" cried Miss Bingley. "I never heard anything so abominable. How shall we punish him for such a speech?"

"Nothing so easy, if you have but the inclination," said Elizabeth. "We can all plague and punish one another. Tease him—laugh at him. Intimate as you are, you must know how it is to be done."

"But upon my honour, I do *not*. I do assure you that my intimacy has not yet taught me *that*. Tease calmness of manner and presence of mind! No, no; I feel he may defy us there. And as to laughter, we will not expose ourselves, if you please, by attempting to laugh without a subject. Mr. Darcy may hug himself."

"Mr. Darcy is not to be laughed at!" cried Elizabeth. "That is an uncommon advantage, and uncommon I hope it will continue, for it would be a great loss to *me* to have many such acquaintances. I dearly love a laugh."

"Miss Bingley," said he, "has given me more credit than can be. The wisest and the best of men—nay, the wisest and best of their actions—may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke."

"Certainly," replied Elizabeth—"there are such people, but I hope I am not one of *them*. I hope I never ridicule what is wise and good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, *do* divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can. But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without."

"Perhaps that is not possible for anyone. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule."

"Such as vanity and pride."

"Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride—where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation."

Elizabeth turned away to hide a smile.

"Your examination of Mr. Darcy is over, I presume," said Miss Bingley; "and pray what is the result?"

"I am perfectly convinced by it that Mr. Darcy has no defect. He owns it himself without disguise."

"No," said Darcy, "I have made no such pretension. I have faults enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for. It is, I believe, too little yielding—certainly too little for the convenience of the world. I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought, nor their offenses against myself. My feelings are not puffed about with every attempt to move them. My temper would perhaps be called resentful. My good opinion once lost, is lost forever."

"*That* is a failing indeed!" cried Elizabeth. "Implacable resentment *is* a shade in a character. But you have chosen your fault well. I really cannot *laugh* at it. You are safe from me."

"There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil—a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome."

"And *your* defect is to hate everybody."

"And yours," he replied with a smile, "is willfully to misunderstand them."

"Do let us have a little music," cried Miss Bingley, tired of a conversation in which she had no share. "Louisa, you will not mind my waking Mr. Hurst?"

Her sister had not the smallest objection, and the pianoforte was opened; and Darcy, after a few moments' recollection, was not sorry for it. He began to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention.

## Chapter 12

In consequence of an agreement between the sisters, Elizabeth wrote the next morning to their mother, to beg that the carriage might be sent for them in the course of the day. But Mrs. Bennet, who had calculated on her daughters remaining at Netherfield till the following Tuesday, which would exactly finish Jane's week, could not bring herself to receive them with pleasure before. Her answer, therefore, was not propitious, at least not to Elizabeth's wishes, for she was impatient to get home. Mrs. Bennet sent them word that they could not possibly have the carriage before Tuesday; and in her postscript it was added, that if Mr. Bingley and his sister pressed them to stay longer, she could spare them very well. Against staying longer, however, Elizabeth was positively resolved—nor did she much expect it would be asked; and fearful, on the contrary, as being considered as intruding themselves needlessly long, she urged Jane to borrow Mr. Bingley's carriage immediately, and at length it was settled that their original design of leaving Netherfield that morning should be mentioned, and the request made.

The communication excited many professions of concern; and enough was said of wishing them to stay at least till the following day to work on Jane; and till the

morrow their going was deferred. Miss Bingley was then sorry that she had proposed the delay, for her jealousy and dislike of one sister much exceeded her affection for the other.

The master of the house heard with real sorrow that they were to go so soon, and repeatedly tried to persuade Miss Bennet that it would not be safe for her—that she was not enough recovered; but Jane was firm where she felt herself to be right.

To Mr. Darcy it was welcome intelligence—Elizabeth had been at Netherfield long enough. She attracted him more than he liked—and Miss Bingley was uncivil to *her*, and more teasing than usual to himself. He wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no sign of admiration should *now* escape him, nothing that could elevate her with the hope of influencing his felicity; sensible that if such an idea had been suggested, his behaviour during the last day must have material weight in confirming or crushing it. Steady to his purpose, he scarcely spoke ten words to her through the whole of Saturday, and though they were at one time left by themselves for half-an-hour, he adhered most conscientiously to his book, and would not even look at her.

On Sunday, after morning service, the separation, so agreeable to almost all, took place. Miss Bingley's civility to Elizabeth increased at last very rapidly, as well as her affection for Jane; and when they parted, after assuring the latter of the pleasure it would always give her to see her either at Longbourn or Netherfield, and embracing her most tenderly, she even shook hands with the former. Elizabeth took leave of the whole party in the liveliest of spirits.

They were not welcomed home very cordially by their mother. Mrs. Bennet wondered at their coming, and thought them very wrong to give so much trouble, and was sure Jane would have caught cold again. But their father, though very laconic in his expressions of pleasure, was really glad to see them; he had felt their importance in the family circle. The evening conversation, when they were all assembled, had lost much of its animation, and almost all its sense by the absence of Jane and Elizabeth.

They found Mary, as usual, deep in the study of thorough-bass and human nature; and had some extracts to admire, and some new observations of threadbare morality to listen to. Catherine and Lydia had information for them of a different sort. Much had been done and much had been said in the regiment since the preceding Wednesday; several of the officers had dined lately with their uncle, a private had been flogged, and it had actually been hinted that Colonel Forster was going to be married.

## Chapter 13

"I hope, my dear," said Mr. Bennet to his wife, as they were at breakfast the next morning, "that you have ordered a good dinner to-day, because I have reason to expect an addition to our family party."

"Who do you mean, my dear? I know of nobody that is coming, I am sure, unless Charlotte Lucas should happen to call in—and I hope *my* dinners are good enough for her. I do not believe she often sees such at home."

"The person of whom I speak is a gentleman, and a stranger."

Mrs. Bennet's eyes sparkled. "A gentleman and a stranger! It is Mr. Bingley, I am sure! Well, I am sure I shall be extremely glad to see Mr. Bingley. But—good Lord! how unlucky! There is not a bit of fish to be got to-day. Lydia, my love, ring the bell—I must speak to Hill this moment."

"It is *not* Mr. Bingley," said her husband; "it is a person whom I never saw in the whole course of my life."

This roused a general astonishment; and he had the pleasure of being eagerly questioned by his wife and his five daughters at once.

After amusing himself some time with their curiosity, he thus explained:

"About a month ago I received this letter; and about a fortnight ago I answered it, for I thought it a case of some delicacy, and requiring early attention. It is from my cousin, Mr. Collins, who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases."

"Oh! my dear," cried his wife, "I cannot bear to hear that mentioned. Pray do not talk of that odious man. I do think it is the hardest thing in the world, that your estate should be entailed away from your own children; and I am sure, if I had been you, I should have tried long ago to do something or other about it."

Jane and Elizabeth tried to explain to her the nature of an entail. They had often attempted to do it before, but it was a subject on which Mrs. Bennet was beyond the reach of reason, and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about.

"It certainly is a most iniquitous affair," said Mr. Bennet, "and nothing can clear Mr. Collins from the guilt of inheriting Longbourn. But if you will listen to his letter, you may perhaps be a little softened by his manner of expressing himself."

"No, that I am sure I shall not; and I think it is very impertinent of him to write to you at all, and very hypocritical. I hate such false friends. Why could he not keep on quarreling with you, as his father did before him?"

"Why, indeed; he does seem to have had some filial scruples on that head, as you will hear."

"Hunsford, near Westerham, Kent, 15th October.

"Dear Sir,—



"The disagreement subsisting between yourself and my late honoured father always gave me much uneasiness, and since I have had the misfortune to lose him, I have frequently wished to heal the breach; but for some time I was kept back by my own doubts, fearing lest it might seem disrespectful to his memory for me to be on good terms with anyone with whom it had always pleased him to be at variance.—'There, Mrs. Bennet.'—My mind, however, is now made up on the subject, for having received ordination at Easter, I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Bourgh, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of this parish, where it shall be my earnest endeavour to demean myself with grateful respect towards her ladyship, and be ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England. As a clergyman, moreover, I feel it my duty to promote and establish the blessing of peace in all families within the reach of my influence; and on these grounds I flatter myself that my present overtures are highly commendable, and that the circumstance of my being next in the entail of Longbourn estate will be kindly overlooked on your side, and not lead you to reject the offered olive-branch. I cannot be otherwise than concerned at being the means of injuring your amiable daughters, and beg leave to apologise for it, as well as to assure you of my readiness to make them every possible amends—but of this hereafter. If you should have no objection to receive me into your house, I propose myself the satisfaction of waiting on you and your family, Monday, November 18th, by four o'clock, and shall probably trespass on your hospitality till the Saturday se'ennight following, which I can do without any inconvenience, as Lady Catherine is far from objecting to my occasional absence on a Sunday, provided that some other clergyman is engaged to do the duty of the day.—I remain, dear sir, with respectful compliments to your lady and daughters, your well-wisher and friend,

"WILLIAM COLLINS"

"At four o'clock, therefore, we may expect this peace-making gentleman," said Mr. Bennet, as he folded up the letter. "He seems to be a most conscientious and polite young man, upon my word, and I doubt not will prove a valuable acquaintance, especially if Lady Catherine should be so indulgent as to let him come to us again."

"There is some sense in what he says about the girls, however, and if he is disposed to make them any amends, I shall not be the person to discourage him."

"Though it is difficult," said Jane, "to guess in what way he can mean to make us the atonement he thinks our due, the wish is certainly to his credit."

Elizabeth was chiefly struck by his extraordinary deference for Lady Catherine, and his kind intention of christening, marrying, and burying his parishioners whenever it were required.

"He must be an oddity, I think," said she. "I cannot make him out.—There is something very pompous in his style.—And what can he mean by apologising for

being next in the entail?—We cannot suppose he would help it if he could.—Could he be a sensible man, sir?"

"No, my dear, I think not. I have great hopes of finding him quite the reverse. There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter, which promises well. I am impatient to see him."

"In point of composition," said Mary, "the letter does not seem defective. The idea of the olive-branch perhaps is not wholly new, yet I think it is well expressed."

To Catherine and Lydia, neither the letter nor its writer were in any degree interesting. It was next to impossible that their cousin should come in a scarlet coat, and it was now some weeks since they had received pleasure from the society of a man in any other colour. As for their mother, Mr. Collins's letter had done away much of her ill-will, and she was preparing to see him with a degree of composure which astonished her husband and daughters.

Mr. Collins was punctual to his time, and was received with great politeness by the whole family. Mr. Bennet indeed said little; but the ladies were ready enough to talk, and Mr. Collins seemed neither in need of encouragement, nor inclined to be silent himself. He was a tall, heavy-looking young man of five-and-twenty. His air was grave and stately, and his manners were very formal. He had not been long seated before he complimented Mrs. Bennet on having so fine a family of daughters; said he had heard much of their beauty, but that in this instance fame had fallen short of the truth; and added, that he did not doubt her seeing them all in due time disposed of in marriage. This gallantry was not much to the taste of some of his hearers; but Mrs. Bennet, who quarreled with no compliments, answered most readily.

"You are very kind, I am sure; and I wish with all my heart it may prove so, for else they will be destitute enough. Things are settled so oddly."

"You allude, perhaps, to the entail of this estate."

"Ah! sir, I do indeed. It is a grievous affair to my poor girls, you must confess. Not that I mean to find fault with *you*, for such things I know are all chance in this world. There is no knowing how estates will go when once they come to be entailed."

"I am very sensible, madam, of the hardship to my fair cousins, and could say much on the subject, but that I am cautious of appearing forward and precipitate. But I can assure the young ladies that I come prepared to admire them. At present I will not say more; but, perhaps, when we are better acquainted—"

He was interrupted by a summons to dinner; and the girls smiled on each other. They were not the only objects of Mr. Collins's admiration. The hall, the dining-room, and all its furniture, were examined and praised; and his commendation of everything would have touched Mrs. Bennet's heart, but for the mortifying supposition of his viewing it all as his own future property. The dinner too in its turn was highly admired; and he begged to know to which of his fair cousins the excellency of its cooking was owing. But he was set right there by Mrs. Bennet, who assured him with

some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen. He begged pardon for having displeased her. In a softened tone she declared herself not at all offended; but he continued to apologise for about a quarter of an hour.

## Chapter 14

During dinner, Mr. Bennet scarcely spoke at all; but when the servants were withdrawn, he thought it time to have some conversation with his guest, and therefore started a subject in which he expected him to shine, by observing that he seemed very fortunate in his patroness. Lady Catherine de Bourgh's attention to his wishes, and consideration for his comfort, appeared very remarkable. Mr. Bennet could not have chosen better. Mr. Collins was eloquent in her praise. The subject elevated him to more than usual solemnity of manner, and with a most important aspect he protested that "he had never in his life witnessed such behaviour in a person of rank—such affability and condescension, as he had himself experienced from Lady Catherine. She had been graciously pleased to approve of both of the discourses which he had already had the honour of preaching before her. She had also asked him twice to dine at Rosings, and had sent for him only the Saturday before, to make up her pool of quadrille in the evening. Lady Catherine was reckoned proud by many people he knew, but *he* had never seen anything but affability in her. She had always spoken to him as she would to any other gentleman; she made not the smallest objection to his joining in the society of the neighbourhood nor to his leaving the parish occasionally for a week or two, to visit his relations. She had even condescended to advise him to marry as soon as he could, provided he chose with discretion; and had once paid him a visit in his humble parsonage, where she had perfectly approved all the alterations he had been making, and had even vouchsafed to suggest some herself—some shelves in the closet up stairs."

"That is all very proper and civil, I am sure," said Mrs. Bennet, "and I dare say she is a very agreeable woman. It is a pity that great ladies in general are not more like her. Does she live near you, sir?"

"The garden in which stands my humble abode is separated only by a lane from Rosings Park, her ladyship's residence."

"I think you said she was a widow, sir? Has she any family?"

"She has only one daughter, the heiress of Rosings, and of very extensive property."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Bennet, shaking her head, "then she is better off than many girls. And what sort of young lady is she? Is she handsome?"

"She is a most charming young lady indeed. Lady Catherine herself says that, in point of true beauty, Miss de Bourgh is far superior to the handsomest of her sex, because there is that in her features which marks the young lady of distinguished birth. She is unfortunately of a sickly constitution, which has prevented her from making that progress in many accomplishments which she could not have otherwise failed of, as I am informed by the lady who superintended her education, and who still resides with them. But she is perfectly amiable, and often condescends to drive by my humble abode in her little phaeton and ponies."

"Has she been presented? I do not remember her name among the ladies at court."

"Her indifferent state of health unhappily prevents her being in town; and by that means, as I told Lady Catherine one day, has deprived the British court of its brightest ornament. Her ladyship seemed pleased with the idea; and you may imagine that I am happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate compliments which are always acceptable to ladies. I have more than once observed to Lady Catherine, that her charming daughter seemed born to be a duchess, and that the most elevated rank, instead of giving her consequence, would be adorned by her. These are the kind of little things which please her ladyship, and it is a sort of attention which I conceive myself peculiarly bound to pay."

"You judge very properly," said Mr. Bennet, "and it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are the result of previous study?"

"They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time, and though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible."

Mr. Bennet's expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance, and, except in an occasional glance at Elizabeth, requiring no partner in his pleasure.

By tea-time, however, the dose had been enough, and Mr. Bennet was glad to take his guest into the drawing-room again, and, when tea was over, glad to invite him to read aloud to the ladies. Mr. Collins readily assented, and a book was produced; but, on beholding it (for everything announced it to be from a circulating library), he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels. Kitty stared at him, and Lydia exclaimed. Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce's Sermons. Lydia gaped as he opened the volume, and before he had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, she interrupted him with:

"Do you know, mamma, that my uncle Phillips talks of turning away Richard; and if he does, Colonel Forster will hire him. My aunt told me so herself on Saturday. I

shall walk to Meryton to-morrow to hear more about it, and to ask when Mr. Denny comes back from town."

Lydia was bid by her two eldest sisters to hold her tongue; but Mr. Collins, much offended, laid aside his book, and said:

"I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess; for, certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin."

Then turning to Mr. Bennet, he offered himself as his antagonist at backgammon. Mr. Bennet accepted the challenge, observing that he acted very wisely in leaving the girls to their own trifling amusements. Mrs. Bennet and her daughters apologised most civilly for Lydia's interruption, and promised that it should not occur again, if he would resume his book; but Mr. Collins, after assuring them that he bore his young cousin no ill-will, and should never resent her behaviour as any affront, seated himself at another table with Mr. Bennet, and prepared for backgammon.

## Chapter 15

Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society; the greatest part of his life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly father; and though he belonged to one of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms, without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in which his father had brought him up had given him originally great humility of manner; but it was now a good deal counteracted by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect which he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his right as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.

Having now a good house and a very sufficient income, he intended to marry; and in seeking a reconciliation with the Longbourn family he had a wife in view, as he meant to choose one of the daughters, if he found them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by common report. This was his plan of amends—for atonement—for inheriting their father's estate; and he thought it an excellent one, full

of eligibility and suitableness, and excessively generous and disinterested on his own part.

His plan did not vary on seeing them. Miss Bennet's lovely face confirmed his views, and established all his strictest notions of what was due to seniority; and for the first evening *she* was his settled choice. The next morning, however, made an alteration; for in a quarter of an hour's *tete-a-tete* with Mrs. Bennet before breakfast, a conversation beginning with his parsonage-house, and leading naturally to the avowal of his hopes, that a mistress might be found for it at Longbourn, produced from her, amid very complaisant smiles and general encouragement, a caution against the very Jane he had fixed on. "As to her *younger* daughters, she could not take upon her to say—she could not positively answer—but she did not *know* of any prepossession; her *eldest* daughter, she must just mention—she felt it incumbent on her to hint, was likely to be very soon engaged."

Mr. Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth—and it was soon done—done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire. Elizabeth, equally next to Jane in birth and beauty, succeeded her of course.

Mrs. Bennet treasured up the hint, and trusted that she might soon have two daughters married; and the man whom she could not bear to speak of the day before was now high in her good graces.

Lydia's intention of walking to Meryton was not forgotten; every sister except Mary agreed to go with her; and Mr. Collins was to attend them, at the request of Mr. Bennet, who was most anxious to get rid of him, and have his library to himself; for thither Mr. Collins had followed him after breakfast; and there he would continue, nominally engaged with one of the largest folios in the collection, but really talking to Mr. Bennet, with little cessation, of his house and garden at Hunsford. Such doings discomposed Mr. Bennet exceedingly. In his library he had been always sure of leisure and tranquillity; and though prepared, as he told Elizabeth, to meet with folly and conceit in every other room of the house, he was used to be free from them there; his civility, therefore, was most prompt in inviting Mr. Collins to join his daughters in their walk; and Mr. Collins, being in fact much better fitted for a walker than a reader, was extremely pleased to close his large book, and go.

In pompous nothings on his side, and civil assents on that of his cousins, their time passed till they entered Meryton. The attention of the younger ones was then no longer to be gained by him. Their eyes were immediately wandering up in the street in quest of the officers, and nothing less than a very smart bonnet indeed, or a really new muslin in a shop window, could recall them.

But the attention of every lady was soon caught by a young man, whom they had never seen before, of most gentlemanlike appearance, walking with another officer on the other side of the way. The officer was the very Mr. Denny concerning whose return from London Lydia came to inquire, and he bowed as they passed. All were

struck with the stranger's air, all wondered who he could be; and Kitty and Lydia, determined if possible to find out, led the way across the street, under pretense of wanting something in an opposite shop, and fortunately had just gained the pavement when the two gentlemen, turning back, had reached the same spot. Mr. Denny addressed them directly, and entreated permission to introduce his friend, Mr. Wickham, who had returned with him the day before from town, and he was happy to say had accepted a commission in their corps. This was exactly as it should be; for the young man wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming. His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address. The introduction was followed up on his side by a happy readiness of conversation—a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming; and the whole party were still standing and talking together very agreeably, when the sound of horses drew their notice, and Darcy and Bingley were seen riding down the street. On distinguishing the ladies of the group, the two gentlemen came directly towards them, and began the usual civilities. Bingley was the principal spokesman, and Miss Bennet the principal object. He was then, he said, on his way to Longbourn on purpose to inquire after her. Mr. Darcy corroborated it with a bow, and was beginning to determine not to fix his eyes on Elizabeth, when they were suddenly arrested by the sight of the stranger, and Elizabeth happening to see the countenance of both as they looked at each other, was all astonishment at the effect of the meeting. Both changed colour, one looked white, the other red. Mr. Wickham, after a few moments, touched his hat—a salutation which Mr. Darcy just deigned to return. What could be the meaning of it? It was impossible to imagine; it was impossible not to long to know.

In another minute, Mr. Bingley, but without seeming to have noticed what passed, took leave and rode on with his friend.

Mr. Denny and Mr. Wickham walked with the young ladies to the door of Mr. Phillips's house, and then made their bows, in spite of Miss Lydia's pressing entreaties that they should come in, and even in spite of Mrs. Phillips's throwing up the parlour window and loudly seconding the invitation.

Mrs. Phillips was always glad to see her nieces; and the two eldest, from their recent absence, were particularly welcome, and she was eagerly expressing her surprise at their sudden return home, which, as their own carriage had not fetched them, she should have known nothing about, if she had not happened to see Mr. Jones's shop-boy in the street, who had told her that they were not to send any more draughts to Netherfield because the Miss Bennets were come away, when her civility was claimed towards Mr. Collins by Jane's introduction of him. She received him with her very best politeness, which he returned with as much more, apologising for his intrusion, without any previous acquaintance with her, which he could not help flattering himself, however, might be justified by his relationship to the young ladies who introduced him to her notice. Mrs. Phillips was quite awed by such an excess of

good breeding; but her contemplation of one stranger was soon put to an end by exclamations and inquiries about the other; of whom, however, she could only tell her nieces what they already knew, that Mr. Denny had brought him from London, and that he was to have a lieutenant's commission in the ——shire. She had been watching him the last hour, she said, as he walked up and down the street, and had Mr. Wickham appeared, Kitty and Lydia would certainly have continued the occupation, but unluckily no one passed windows now except a few of the officers, who, in comparison with the stranger, were become "stupid, disagreeable fellows." Some of them were to dine with the Phillipses the next day, and their aunt promised to make her husband call on Mr. Wickham, and give him an invitation also, if the family from Longbourn would come in the evening. This was agreed to, and Mrs. Phillips protested that they would have a nice comfortable noisy game of lottery tickets, and a little bit of hot supper afterwards. The prospect of such delights was very cheering, and they parted in mutual good spirits. Mr. Collins repeated his apologies in quitting the room, and was assured with unwearying civility that they were perfectly needless.

As they walked home, Elizabeth related to Jane what she had seen pass between the two gentlemen; but though Jane would have defended either or both, had they appeared to be in the wrong, she could no more explain such behaviour than her sister.

Mr. Collins on his return highly gratified Mrs. Bennet by admiring Mrs. Phillips's manners and politeness. He protested that, except Lady Catherine and her daughter, he had never seen a more elegant woman; for she had not only received him with the utmost civility, but even pointedly included him in her invitation for the next evening, although utterly unknown to her before. Something, he supposed, might be attributed to his connection with them, but yet he had never met with so much attention in the whole course of his life.

## Chapter 16

As no objection was made to the young people's engagement with their aunt, and all Mr. Collins's scruples of leaving Mr. and Mrs. Bennet for a single evening during his visit were most steadily resisted, the coach conveyed him and his five cousins at a suitable hour to Meryton; and the girls had the pleasure of hearing, as they entered the drawing-room, that Mr. Wickham had accepted their uncle's invitation, and was then in the house.

When this information was given, and they had all taken their seats, Mr. Collins was at leisure to look around him and admire, and he was so much struck with the size and furniture of the apartment, that he declared he might almost have supposed



himself in the small summer breakfast parlour at Rosings; a comparison that did not at first convey much gratification; but when Mrs. Phillips understood from him what Rosings was, and who was its proprietor—when she had listened to the description of only one of Lady Catherine's drawing-rooms, and found that the chimney-piece alone had cost eight hundred pounds, she felt all the force of the compliment, and would hardly have resented a comparison with the housekeeper's room.

In describing to her all the grandeur of Lady Catherine and her mansion, with occasional digressions in praise of his own humble abode, and the improvements it was receiving, he was happily employed until the gentlemen joined them; and he found in Mrs. Phillips a very attentive listener, whose opinion of his consequence increased with what she heard, and who was resolving to retail it all among her neighbours as soon as she could. To the girls, who could not listen to their cousin, and who had nothing to do but to wish for an instrument, and examine their own indifferent imitations of china on the mantelpiece, the interval of waiting appeared very long. It was over at last, however. The gentlemen did approach, and when Mr. Wickham walked into the room, Elizabeth felt that she had neither been seeing him before, nor thinking of him since, with the smallest degree of unreasonable admiration. The officers of the ——shire were in general a very creditable, gentlemanlike set, and the best of them were of the present party; but Mr. Wickham was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk, as *they* were superior to the broad-faced, stuffy uncle Phillips, breathing port wine, who followed them into the room.

Mr. Wickham was the happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned, and Elizabeth was the happy woman by whom he finally seated himself; and the agreeable manner in which he immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on its being a wet night, made her feel that the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker.

With such rivals for the notice of the fair as Mr. Wickham and the officers, Mr. Collins seemed to sink into insignificance; to the young ladies he certainly was nothing; but he had still at intervals a kind listener in Mrs. Phillips, and was by her watchfulness, most abundantly supplied with coffee and muffin. When the card-tables were placed, he had the opportunity of obliging her in turn, by sitting down to whist.

"I know little of the game at present," said he, "but I shall be glad to improve myself, for in my situation in life—" Mrs. Phillips was very glad for his compliance, but could not wait for his reason.

Mr. Wickham did not play at whist, and with ready delight was he received at the other table between Elizabeth and Lydia. At first there seemed danger of Lydia's engrossing him entirely, for she was a most determined talker; but being likewise extremely fond of lottery tickets, she soon grew too much interested in the game, too eager in making bets and exclaiming after prizes to have attention for anyone in

particular. Allowing for the common demands of the game, Mr. Wickham was therefore at leisure to talk to Elizabeth, and she was very willing to hear him, though what she chiefly wished to hear she could not hope to be told—the history of his acquaintance with Mr. Darcy. She dared not even mention that gentleman. Her curiosity, however, was unexpectedly relieved. Mr. Wickham began the subject himself. He inquired how far Netherfield was from Meryton; and, after receiving her answer, asked in a hesitating manner how long Mr. Darcy had been staying there.

"About a month," said Elizabeth; and then, unwilling to let the subject drop, added, "He is a man of very large property in Derbyshire, I understand."

"Yes," replied Mr. Wickham; "his estate there is a noble one. A clear ten thousand per annum. You could not have met with a person more capable of giving you certain information on that head than myself, for I have been connected with his family in a particular manner from my infancy."

Elizabeth could not but look surprised.

"You may well be surprised, Miss Bennet, at such an assertion, after seeing, as you probably might, the very cold manner of our meeting yesterday. Are you much acquainted with Mr. Darcy?"

"As much as I ever wish to be," cried Elizabeth very warmly. "I have spent four days in the same house with him, and I think him very disagreeable."

"I have no right to give *my* opinion," said Wickham, "as to his being agreeable or otherwise. I am not qualified to form one. I have known him too long and too well to be a fair judge. It is impossible for *me* to be impartial. But I believe your opinion of him would in general astonish—and perhaps you would not express it quite so strongly anywhere else. Here you are in your own family."

"Upon my word, I say no more *here* than I might say in any house in the neighbourhood, except Netherfield. He is not at all liked in Hertfordshire. Everybody is disgusted with his pride. You will not find him more favourably spoken of by anyone."

"I cannot pretend to be sorry," said Wickham, after a short interruption, "that he or that any man should not be estimated beyond their deserts; but with *him* I believe it does not often happen. The world is blinded by his fortune and consequence, or frightened by his high and imposing manners, and sees him only as he chooses to be seen."

"I should take him, even on *my* slight acquaintance, to be an ill-tempered man." Wickham only shook his head.

"I wonder," said he, at the next opportunity of speaking, "whether he is likely to be in this country much longer."

"I do not at all know; but I *heard* nothing of his going away when I was at Netherfield. I hope your plans in favour of the ——shire will not be affected by his being in the neighbourhood."

"Oh! no—it is not for *me* to be driven away by Mr. Darcy. If *he* wishes to avoid seeing *me*, he must go. We are not on friendly terms, and it always gives me pain to meet him, but I have no reason for avoiding *him* but what I might proclaim before all the world, a sense of very great ill-usage, and most painful regrets at his being what he is. His father, Miss Bennet, the late Mr. Darcy, was one of the best men that ever breathed, and the truest friend I ever had; and I can never be in company with this Mr. Darcy without being grieved to the soul by a thousand tender recollections. His behaviour to myself has been scandalous; but I verily believe I could forgive him anything and everything, rather than his disappointing the hopes and disgracing the memory of his father."

Elizabeth found the interest of the subject increase, and listened with all her heart; but the delicacy of it prevented further inquiry.

Mr. Wickham began to speak on more general topics, Meryton, the neighbourhood, the society, appearing highly pleased with all that he had yet seen, and speaking of the latter with gentle but very intelligible gallantry.

"It was the prospect of constant society, and good society," he added, "which was my chief inducement to enter the ——shire. I knew it to be a most respectable, agreeable corps, and my friend Denny tempted me further by his account of their present quarters, and the very great attentions and excellent acquaintances Meryton had procured them. Society, I own, is necessary to me. I have been a disappointed man, and my spirits will not bear solitude. I *must* have employment and society. A military life is not what I was intended for, but circumstances have now made it eligible. The churchought to have been my profession—I was brought up for the church, and I should at this time have been in possession of a most valuable living, had it pleased the gentleman we were speaking of just now."

"Indeed!"

"Yes—the late Mr. Darcy bequeathed me the next presentation of the best living in his gift. He was my godfather, and excessively attached to me. I cannot do justice to his kindness. He meant to provide for me amply, and thought he had done it; but when the living fell, it was given elsewhere."

"Good heavens!" cried Elizabeth; "but how could *that* be? How could his will be disregarded? Why did you not seek legal redress?"

"There was just such an informality in the terms of the bequest as to give me no hope from law. A man of honour could not have doubted the intention, but Mr. Darcy chose to doubt it—or to treat it as a merely conditional recommendation, and to assert that I had forfeited all claim to it by extravagance, imprudence—in short anything or nothing. Certain it is, that the living became vacant two years ago, exactly as I was of

an age to hold it, and that it was given to another man; and no less certain is it, that I cannot accuse myself of having really done anything to deserve to lose it. I have a warm, unguarded temper, and I may have spoken my opinion *of* him, and *to* him, too freely. I can recall nothing worse. But the fact is, that we are very different sort of men, and that he hates me."

"This is quite shocking! He deserves to be publicly disgraced."

"Some time or other he *will* be—but it shall not be by *me*. Till I can forget his father, I can never defy or expose *him*."

Elizabeth honoured him for such feelings, and thought him handsomer than ever as he expressed them.

"But what," said she, after a pause, "can have been his motive? What can have induced him to behave so cruelly?"

"A thorough, determined dislike of me—a dislike which I cannot but attribute in some measure to jealousy. Had the late Mr. Darcy liked me less, his son might have borne with me better; but his father's uncommon attachment to me irritated him, I believe, very early in life. He had not a temper to bear the sort of competition in which we stood—the sort of preference which was often given me."

"I had not thought Mr. Darcy so bad as this—though I have never liked him. I had not thought so very ill of him. I had supposed him to be despising his fellow-creatures in general, but did not suspect him of descending to such malicious revenge, such injustice, such inhumanity as this."

After a few minutes' reflection, however, she continued, "I *do* remember his boasting one day, at Netherfield, of the implacability of his resentments, of his having an unforgiving temper. His disposition must be dreadful."

"I will not trust myself on the subject," replied Wickham; "I can hardly be just to him."

Elizabeth was again deep in thought, and after a time exclaimed, "To treat in such a manner the godson, the friend, the favourite of his father!" She could have added, "A young man, too, like *you*, whose very countenance may vouch for your being amiable"—but she contented herself with, "and one, too, who had probably been his companion from childhood, connected together, as I think you said, in the closest manner!"

"We were born in the same parish, within the same park; the greatest part of our youth was passed together; inmates of the same house, sharing the same amusements, objects of the same parental care. *My* father began life in the profession which your uncle, Mr. Phillips, appears to do so much credit to—but he gave up everything to be of use to the late Mr. Darcy and devoted all his time to the care of the Pemberley property. He was most highly esteemed by Mr. Darcy, a most intimate, confidential friend. Mr. Darcy often acknowledged himself to be under the greatest obligations to

my father's active superintendence, and when, immediately before my father's death, Mr. Darcy gave him a voluntary promise of providing for me, I am convinced that he felt it to be as much a debt of gratitude to *him*, as of his affection to myself."

"How strange!" cried Elizabeth. "How abominable! I wonder that the very pride of this Mr. Darcy has not made him just to you! If from no better motive, that he should not have been too proud to be dishonest—for dishonesty I must call it."

"It *is* wonderful," replied Wickham, "for almost all his actions may be traced to pride; and pride had often been his best friend. It has connected him nearer with virtue than with any other feeling. But we are none of us consistent, and in his behaviour to me there were stronger impulses even than pride."

"Can such abominable pride as his have ever done him good?"

"Yes. It has often led him to be liberal and generous, to give his money freely, to display hospitality, to assist his tenants, and relieve the poor. Family pride, and *filial* pride—for he is very proud of what his father was—have done this. Not to appear to disgrace his family, to degenerate from the popular qualities, or lose the influence of the Pemberley House, is a powerful motive. He has also *brotherly* pride, which, with *some* brotherly affection, makes him a very kind and careful guardian of his sister, and you will hear him generally cried up as the most attentive and best of brothers."

"What sort of girl is Miss Darcy?"

He shook his head. "I wish I could call her amiable. It gives me pain to speak ill of a Darcy. But she is too much like her brother—very, very proud. As a child, she was affectionate and pleasing, and extremely fond of me; and I have devoted hours and hours to her amusement. But she is nothing to me now. She is a handsome girl, about fifteen or sixteen, and, I understand, highly accomplished. Since her father's death, her home has been London, where a lady lives with her, and superintends her education."

After many pauses and many trials of other subjects, Elizabeth could not help reverting once more to the first, and saying:

"I am astonished at his intimacy with Mr. Bingley! How can Mr. Bingley, who seems good humour itself, and is, I really believe, truly amiable, be in friendship with such a man? How can they suit each other? Do you know Mr. Bingley?"

"Not at all."

"He is a sweet-tempered, amiable, charming man. He cannot know what Mr. Darcy is."

"Probably not; but Mr. Darcy can please where he chooses. He does not want abilities. He can be a conversible companion if he thinks it worth his while. Among those who are at all his equals in consequence, he is a very different man from what he is to the less prosperous. His pride never deserts him; but with the rich he is liberal-

mind, just, sincere, rational, honourable, and perhaps agreeable—allowing something for fortune and figure."

The whist party soon afterwards breaking up, the players gathered round the other table and Mr. Collins took his station between his cousin Elizabeth and Mrs. Phillips. The usual inquiries as to his success were made by the latter. It had not been very great; he had lost every point; but when Mrs. Phillips began to express her concern thereupon, he assured her with much earnest gravity that it was not of the least importance, that he considered the money as a mere trifle, and begged that she would not make herself uneasy.

"I know very well, madam," said he, "that when persons sit down to a card-table, they must take their chances of these things, and happily I am not in such circumstances as to make five shillings any object. There are undoubtedly many who could not say the same, but thanks to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, I am removed far beyond the necessity of regarding little matters."

Mr. Wickham's attention was caught; and after observing Mr. Collins for a few moments, he asked Elizabeth in a low voice whether her relation was very intimately acquainted with the family of de Bourgh.

"Lady Catherine de Bourgh," she replied, "has very lately given him a living. I hardly know how Mr. Collins was first introduced to her notice, but he certainly has not known her long."

"You know of course that Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Lady Anne Darcy were sisters; consequently that she is aunt to the present Mr. Darcy."

"No, indeed, I did not. I knew nothing at all of Lady Catherine's connections. I never heard of her existence till the day before yesterday."

"Her daughter, Miss de Bourgh, will have a very large fortune, and it is believed that she and her cousin will unite the two estates."

This information made Elizabeth smile, as she thought of poor Miss Bingley. Vain indeed must be all her attentions, vain and useless her affection for his sister and her praise of himself, if he were already self-destined for another.

"Mr. Collins," said she, "speaks highly both of Lady Catherine and her daughter; but from some particulars that he has related of her ladyship, I suspect his gratitude misleads him, and that in spite of her being his patroness, she is an arrogant, conceited woman."

"I believe her to be both in a great degree," replied Wickham; "I have not seen her for many years, but I very well remember that I never liked her, and that her manners were dictatorial and insolent. She has the reputation of being remarkably sensible and clever; but I rather believe she derives part of her abilities from her rank and fortune, part from her authoritative manner, and the rest from the pride for her nephew, who

chooses that everyone connected with him should have an understanding of the first class."

Elizabeth allowed that he had given a very rational account of it, and they continued talking together, with mutual satisfaction till supper put an end to cards, and gave the rest of the ladies their share of Mr. Wickham's attentions. There could be no conversation in the noise of Mrs. Phillips's supper party, but his manners recommended him to everybody. Whatever he said, was said well; and whatever he did, done gracefully. Elizabeth went away with her head full of him. She could think of nothing but of Mr. Wickham, and of what he had told her, all the way home; but there was not time for her even to mention his name as they went, for neither Lydia nor Mr. Collins were once silent. Lydia talked incessantly of lottery tickets, of the fish she had lost and the fish she had won; and Mr. Collins in describing the civility of Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, protesting that he did not in the least regard his losses at whist, enumerating all the dishes at supper, and repeatedly fearing that he crowded his cousins, had more to say than he could well manage before the carriage stopped at Longbourn House.

## Chapter 17

Elizabeth related to Jane the next day what had passed between Mr. Wickham and herself. Jane listened with astonishment and concern; she knew not how to believe that Mr. Darcy could be so unworthy of Mr. Bingley's regard; and yet, it was not in her nature to question the veracity of a young man of such amiable appearance as Wickham. The possibility of his having endured such unkindness, was enough to interest all her tender feelings; and nothing remained therefore to be done, but to think well of them both, to defend the conduct of each, and throw into the account of accident or mistake whatever could not be otherwise explained.

"They have both," said she, "been deceived, I dare say, in some way or other, of which we can form no idea. Interested people have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side."

"Very true, indeed; and now, my dear Jane, what have you got to say on behalf of the interested people who have probably been concerned in the business? Do clear *them* too, or we shall be obliged to think ill of somebody."

"Laugh as much as you choose, but you will not laugh me out of my opinion. My dearest Lizzy, do but consider in what a disgraceful light it places Mr. Darcy, to be treating his father's favourite in such a manner, one whom his father had promised to

provide for. It is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had any value for his character, could be capable of it. Can his most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? Oh! no."

"I can much more easily believe Mr. Bingley's being imposed on, than that Mr. Wickham should invent such a history of himself as he gave me last night; names, facts, everything mentioned without ceremony. If it be not so, let Mr. Darcy contradict it. Besides, there was truth in his looks."

"It is difficult indeed—it is distressing. One does not know what to think."

"I beg your pardon; one knows exactly what to think."

But Jane could think with certainty on only one point—that Mr. Bingley, if he *had* been imposed on, would have much to suffer when the affair became public.

The two young ladies were summoned from the shrubbery, where this conversation passed, by the arrival of the very persons of whom they had been speaking; Mr. Bingley and his sisters came to give their personal invitation for the long-expected ball at Netherfield, which was fixed for the following Tuesday. The two ladies were delighted to see their dear friend again, called it an age since they had met, and repeatedly asked what she had been doing with herself since their separation. To the rest of the family they paid little attention; avoiding Mrs. Bennet as much as possible, saying not much to Elizabeth, and nothing at all to the others. They were soon gone again, rising from their seats with an activity which took their brother by surprise, and hurrying off as if eager to escape from Mrs. Bennet's civilities.

The prospect of the Netherfield ball was extremely agreeable to every female of the family. Mrs. Bennet chose to consider it as given in compliment to her eldest daughter, and was particularly flattered by receiving the invitation from Mr. Bingley himself, instead of a ceremonious card. Jane pictured to herself a happy evening in the society of her two friends, and the attentions of their brother; and Elizabeth thought with pleasure of dancing a great deal with Mr. Wickham, and of seeing a confirmation of everything in Mr. Darcy's look and behaviour. The happiness anticipated by Catherine and Lydia depended less on any single event, or any particular person, for though they each, like Elizabeth, meant to dance half the evening with Mr. Wickham, he was by no means the only partner who could satisfy them, and a ball was, at any rate, a ball. And even Mary could assure her family that she had no disinclination for it.

"While I can have my mornings to myself," said she, "it is enough—I think it is no sacrifice to join occasionally in evening engagements. Society has claims on us all; and I profess myself one of those who consider intervals of recreation and amusement as desirable for everybody."

Elizabeth's spirits were so high on this occasion, that though she did not often speak unnecessarily to Mr. Collins, she could not help asking him whether he intended to accept Mr. Bingley's invitation, and if he did, whether he would think it proper to join



in the evening's amusement; and she was rather surprised to find that he entertained no scruple whatever on that head, and was very far from dreading a rebuke either from the Archbishop, or Lady Catherine de Bourgh, by venturing to dance.

"I am by no means of the opinion, I assure you," said he, "that a ball of this kind, given by a young man of character, to respectable people, can have any evil tendency; and I am so far from objecting to dancing myself, that I shall hope to be honoured with the hands of all my fair cousins in the course of the evening; and I take this opportunity of soliciting yours, Miss Elizabeth, for the two first dances especially, a preference which I trust my cousin Jane will attribute to the right cause, and not to any disrespect for her."

Elizabeth felt herself completely taken in. She had fully proposed being engaged by Mr. Wickham for those very dances; and to have Mr. Collins instead! her liveliness had never been worse timed. There was no help for it, however. Mr. Wickham's happiness and her own were perforce delayed a little longer, and Mr. Collins's proposal accepted with as good a grace as she could. She was not the better pleased with his gallantry from the idea it suggested of something more. It now first struck her, that *she* was selected from among her sisters as worthy of being mistress of Hunsford Parsonage, and of assisting to form a quadrille table at Rosings, in the absence of more eligible visitors. The idea soon reached to conviction, as she observed his increasing civilities toward herself, and heard his frequent attempt at a compliment on her wit and vivacity; and though more astonished than gratified herself by this effect of her charms, it was not long before her mother gave her to understand that the probability of their marriage was extremely agreeable to *her*. Elizabeth, however, did not choose to take the hint, being well aware that a serious dispute must be the consequence of any reply. Mr. Collins might never make the offer, and till he did, it was useless to quarrel about him.

If there had not been a Netherfield ball to prepare for and talk of, the younger Miss Bennets would have been in a very pitiable state at this time, for from the day of the invitation, to the day of the ball, there was such a succession of rain as prevented their walking to Meryton once. No aunt, no officers, no news could be sought after—the very shoe-roses for Netherfield were got by proxy. Even Elizabeth might have found some trial of her patience in weather which totally suspended the improvement of her acquaintance with Mr. Wickham; and nothing less than a dance on Tuesday, could have made such a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday endurable to Kitty and Lydia.

## Chapter 18

Till Elizabeth entered the drawing-room at Netherfield, and looked in vain for Mr. Wickham among the cluster of red coats there assembled, a doubt of his being present had never occurred to her. The certainty of meeting him had not been checked by any of those recollections that might not unreasonably have alarmed her. She had dressed with more than usual care, and prepared in the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of his heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening. But in an instant arose the dreadful suspicion of his being purposely omitted for Mr. Darcy's pleasure in the Bingleys' invitation to the officers; and though this was not exactly the case, the absolute fact of his absence was pronounced by his friend Denny, to whom Lydia eagerly applied, and who told them that Wickham had been obliged to go to town on business the day before, and was not yet returned; adding, with a significant smile, "I do not imagine his business would have called him away just now, if he had not wanted to avoid a certain gentleman here."

This part of his intelligence, though unheard by Lydia, was caught by Elizabeth, and, as it assured her that Darcy was not less answerable for Wickham's absence than if her first surmise had been just, every feeling of displeasure against the former was so sharpened by immediate disappointment, that she could hardly reply with tolerable civility to the polite inquiries which he directly afterwards approached to make. Attendance, forbearance, patience with Darcy, was injury to Wickham. She was resolved against any sort of conversation with him, and turned away with a degree of ill-humour which she could not wholly surmount even in speaking to Mr. Bingley, whose blind partiality provoked her.

But Elizabeth was not formed for ill-humour; and though every prospect of her own was destroyed for the evening, it could not dwell long on her spirits; and having told all her griefs to Charlotte Lucas, whom she had not seen for a week, she was soon able to make a voluntary transition to the oddities of her cousin, and to point him out to her particular notice. The first two dances, however, brought a return of distress; they were dances of mortification. Mr. Collins, awkward and solemn, apologising instead of attending, and often moving wrong without being aware of it, gave her all the shame and misery which a disagreeable partner for a couple of dances can give. The moment of her release from him was ecstasy.

She danced next with an officer, and had the refreshment of talking of Wickham, and of hearing that he was universally liked. When those dances were over, she returned to Charlotte Lucas, and was in conversation with her, when she found herself suddenly addressed by Mr. Darcy who took her so much by surprise in his application for her hand, that, without knowing what she did, she accepted him. He walked away again immediately, and she was left to fret over her own want of presence of mind; Charlotte tried to console her:

"I dare say you will find him very agreeable."

"Heaven forbid! *That* would be the greatest misfortune of all! To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate! Do not wish me such an evil."

When the dancing recommenced, however, and Darcy approached to claim her hand, Charlotte could not help cautioning her in a whisper, not to be a simpleton, and allow her fancy for Wickham to make her appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man ten times his consequence. Elizabeth made no answer, and took her place in the set, amazed at the dignity to which she was arrived in being allowed to stand opposite to Mr. Darcy, and reading in her neighbours' looks, their equal amazement in beholding it. They stood for some time without speaking a word; and she began to imagine that their silence was to last through the two dances, and at first was resolved not to break it; till suddenly fancying that it would be the greater punishment to her partner to oblige him to talk, she made some slight observation on the dance. He replied, and was again silent. After a pause of some minutes, she addressed him a second time with:—"It is *your* turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy. I talked about the dance, and *you* ought to make some sort of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples."

He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wished him to say should be said.

"Very well. That reply will do for the present. Perhaps by and by I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones. But *now* we may be silent."

"Do you talk by rule, then, while you are dancing?"

"Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together; and yet for the advantage of *some*, conversation ought to be so arranged, as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible."

"Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine?"

"Both," replied Elizabeth archly; "for I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds. We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the eclat of a proverb."

"This is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am sure," said he. "How near it may be to *mine*, I cannot pretend to say. *You* think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly."

"I must not decide on my own performance."

He made no answer, and they were again silent till they had gone down the dance, when he asked her if she and her sisters did not very often walk to Meryton. She answered in the affirmative, and, unable to resist the temptation, added, "When you met us there the other day, we had just been forming a new acquaintance."

The effect was immediate. A deeper shade of *hauteur* overspread his features, but he said not a word, and Elizabeth, though blaming herself for her own weakness,

could not go on. At length Darcy spoke, and in a constrained manner said, "Mr. Wickham is blessed with such happy manners as may ensure his *making* friends—whether he may be equally capable of *retaining* them, is less certain."

"He has been so unlucky as to lose *your* friendship," replied Elizabeth with emphasis, "and in a manner which he is likely to suffer from all his life."

Darcy made no answer, and seemed desirous of changing the subject. At that moment, Sir William Lucas appeared close to them, meaning to pass through the set to the other side of the room; but on perceiving Mr. Darcy, he stopped with a bow of superior courtesy to compliment him on his dancing and his partner.

"I have been most highly gratified indeed, my dear sir. Such very superior dancing is not often seen. It is evident that you belong to the first circles. Allow me to say, however, that your fair partner does not disgrace you, and that I must hope to have this pleasure often repeated, especially when a certain desirable event, my dear Eliza (glancing at her sister and Bingley) shall take place. What congratulations will then flow in! I appeal to Mr. Darcy:—but let me not interrupt you, sir. You will not thank me for detaining you from the bewitching converse of that young lady, whose bright eyes are also upbraiding me."

The latter part of this address was scarcely heard by Darcy; but Sir William's allusion to his friend seemed to strike him forcibly, and his eyes were directed with a very serious expression towards Bingley and Jane, who were dancing together. Recovering himself, however, shortly, he turned to his partner, and said, "Sir William's interruption has made me forget what we were talking of."

"I do not think we were speaking at all. Sir William could not have interrupted two people in the room who had less to say for themselves. We have tried two or three subjects already without success, and what we are to talk of next I cannot imagine."

"What think you of books?" said he, smiling.

"Books—oh! no. I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings."

"I am sorry you think so; but if that be the case, there can at least be no want of subject. We may compare our different opinions."

"No—I cannot talk of books in a ball-room; my head is always full of something else."

"The *present* always occupies you in such scenes—does it?" said he, with a look of doubt.

"Yes, always," she replied, without knowing what she said, for her thoughts had wandered far from the subject, as soon afterwards appeared by her suddenly exclaiming, "I remember hearing you once say, Mr. Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its *being created*."

"I am," said he, with a firm voice.

"And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?"

"I hope not."

"It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first."

"May I ask to what these questions tend?"

"Merely to the illustration of *your* character," said she, endeavouring to shake off her gravity. "I am trying to make it out."

"And what is your success?"

She shook her head. "I do not get on at all. I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly."

"I can readily believe," answered he gravely, "that reports may vary greatly with respect to me; and I could wish, Miss Bennet, that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either."

"But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity."

"I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours," he coldly replied. She said no more, and they went down the other dance and parted in silence; and on each side dissatisfied, though not to an equal degree, for in Darcy's breast there was a tolerably powerful feeling towards her, which soon procured her pardon, and directed all his anger against another.

They had not long separated, when Miss Bingley came towards her, and with an expression of civil disdain accosted her:

"So, Miss Eliza, I hear you are quite delighted with George Wickham! Your sister has been talking to me about him, and asking me a thousand questions; and I find that the young man quite forgot to tell you, among his other communication, that he was the son of old Wickham, the late Mr. Darcy's steward. Let me recommend you, however, as a friend, not to give implicit confidence to all his assertions; for as to Mr. Darcy's using him ill, it is perfectly false; for, on the contrary, he has always been remarkably kind to him, though George Wickham has treated Mr. Darcy in a most infamous manner. I do not know the particulars, but I know very well that Mr. Darcy is not in the least to blame, that he cannot bear to hear George Wickham mentioned, and that though my brother thought that he could not well avoid including him in his invitation to the officers, he was excessively glad to find that he had taken himself out of the way. His coming into the country at all is a most insolent thing, indeed, and I wonder how he could presume to do it. I pity you, Miss Eliza, for this discovery of your favourite's guilt; but really, considering his descent, one could not expect much better."

"His guilt and his descent appear by your account to be the same," said Elizabeth angrily; "for I have heard you accuse him of nothing worse than of being the son of Mr. Darcy's steward, and of *that*, I can assure you, he informed me himself."

"I beg your pardon," replied Miss Bingley, turning away with a sneer. "Excuse my interference—it was kindly meant."

"Insolent girl!" said Elizabeth to herself. "You are much mistaken if you expect to influence me by such a paltry attack as this. I see nothing in it but your own wilful ignorance and the malice of Mr. Darcy." She then sought her eldest sister, who had undertaken to make inquiries on the same subject of Bingley. Jane met her with a smile of such sweet complacency, a glow of such happy expression, as sufficiently marked how well she was satisfied with the occurrences of the evening. Elizabeth instantly read her feelings, and at that moment solicitude for Wickham, resentment against his enemies, and everything else, gave way before the hope of Jane's being in the fairest way for happiness.

"I want to know," said she, with a countenance no less smiling than her sister's, "what you have learnt about Mr. Wickham. But perhaps you have been too pleasantly engaged to think of any third person; in which case you may be sure of my pardon."

"No," replied Jane, "I have not forgotten him; but I have nothing satisfactory to tell you. Mr. Bingley does not know the whole of his history, and is quite ignorant of the circumstances which have principally offended Mr. Darcy; but he will vouch for the good conduct, the probity, and honour of his friend, and is perfectly convinced that Mr. Wickham has deserved much less attention from Mr. Darcy than he has received; and I am sorry to say by his account as well as his sister's, Mr. Wickham is by no means a respectable young man. I am afraid he has been very imprudent, and has deserved to lose Mr. Darcy's regard."

"Mr. Bingley does not know Mr. Wickham himself?"

"No; he never saw him till the other morning at Meryton."

"This account then is what he has received from Mr. Darcy. I am satisfied. But what does he say of the living?"

"He does not exactly recollect the circumstances, though he has heard them from Mr. Darcy more than once, but he believes that it was left to him *conditionally* only."

"I have not a doubt of Mr. Bingley's sincerity," said Elizabeth warmly; "but you must excuse my not being convinced by assurances only. Mr. Bingley's defense of his friend was a very able one, I dare say; but since he is unacquainted with several parts of the story, and has learnt the rest from that friend himself, I shall venture to still think of both gentlemen as I did before."

She then changed the discourse to one more gratifying to each, and on which there could be no difference of sentiment. Elizabeth listened with delight to the happy, though modest hopes which Jane entertained of Mr. Bingley's regard, and said all in

her power to heighten her confidence in it. On their being joined by Mr. Bingley himself, Elizabeth withdrew to Miss Lucas; to whose inquiry after the pleasantness of her last partner she had scarcely replied, before Mr. Collins came up to them, and told her with great exultation that he had just been so fortunate as to make a most important discovery.

"I have found out," said he, "by a singular accident, that there is now in the room a near relation of my patroness. I happened to overhear the gentleman himself mentioning to the young lady who does the honours of the house the names of his cousin Miss de Bourgh, and of her mother Lady Catherine. How wonderfully these sort of things occur! Who would have thought of my meeting with, perhaps, a nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in this assembly! I am most thankful that the discovery is made in time for me to pay my respects to him, which I am now going to do, and trust he will excuse my not having done it before. My total ignorance of the connection must plead my apology."

"You are not going to introduce yourself to Mr. Darcy!"

"Indeed I am. I shall entreat his pardon for not having done it earlier. I believe him to be Lady Catherine's *nephew*. It will be in my power to assure him that her ladyship was quite well yesterday se'nnight."

Elizabeth tried hard to dissuade him from such a scheme, assuring him that Mr. Darcy would consider his addressing him without introduction as an impertinent freedom, rather than a compliment to his aunt; that it was not in the least necessary there should be any notice on either side; and that if it were, it must belong to Mr. Darcy, the superior in consequence, to begin the acquaintance. Mr. Collins listened to her with the determined air of following his own inclination, and, when she ceased speaking, replied thus:

"My dear Miss Elizabeth, I have the highest opinion in the world in your excellent judgement in all matters within the scope of your understanding; but permit me to say, that there must be a wide difference between the established forms of ceremony amongst the laity, and those which regulate the clergy; for, give me leave to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom—provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained. You must therefore allow me to follow the dictates of my conscience on this occasion, which leads me to perform what I look on as a point of duty. Pardon me for neglecting to profit by your advice, which on every other subject shall be my constant guide, though in the case before us I consider myself more fitted by education and habitual study to decide on what is right than a young lady like yourself." And with a low bow he left her to attack Mr. Darcy, whose reception of his advances she eagerly watched, and whose astonishment at being so addressed was very evident. Her cousin prefaced his speech with a solemn bow and though she could not hear a word of it, she felt as if hearing it all, and saw in the motion of his lips the

words "apology," "Hunsford," and "Lady Catherine de Bourgh." It vexed her to see him expose himself to such a man. Mr. Darcy was eyeing him with unrestrained wonder, and when at last Mr. Collins allowed him time to speak, replied with an air of distant civility. Mr. Collins, however, was not discouraged from speaking again, and Mr. Darcy's contempt seemed abundantly increasing with the length of his second speech, and at the end of it he only made him a slight bow, and moved another way. Mr. Collins then returned to Elizabeth.

"I have no reason, I assure you," said he, "to be dissatisfied with my reception. Mr. Darcy seemed much pleased with the attention. He answered me with the utmost civility, and even paid me the compliment of saying that he was so well convinced of Lady Catherine's discernment as to be certain she could never bestow a favour unworthily. It was really a very handsome thought. Upon the whole, I am much pleased with him."

As Elizabeth had no longer any interest of her own to pursue, she turned her attention almost entirely on her sister and Mr. Bingley; and the train of agreeable reflections which her observations gave birth to, made her perhaps almost as happy as Jane. She saw her in idea settled in that very house, in all the felicity which a marriage of true affection could bestow; and she felt capable, under such circumstances, of endeavouring even to like Bingley's two sisters. Her mother's thoughts she plainly saw were bent the same way, and she determined not to venture near her, lest she might hear too much. When they sat down to supper, therefore, she considered it a most unlucky perverseness which placed them within one of each other; and deeply was she vexed to find that her mother was talking to that one person (Lady Lucas) freely, openly, and of nothing else but her expectation that Jane would soon be married to Mr. Bingley. It was an animating subject, and Mrs. Bennet seemed incapable of fatigue while enumerating the advantages of the match. His being such a charming young man, and so rich, and living but three miles from them, were the first points of self-gratulation; and then it was such a comfort to think how fond the two sisters were of Jane, and to be certain that they must desire the connection as much as she could do. It was, moreover, such a promising thing for her younger daughters, as Jane's marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men; and lastly, it was so pleasant at her time of life to be able to consign her single daughters to the care of their sister, that she might not be obliged to go into company more than she liked. It was necessary to make this circumstance a matter of pleasure, because on such occasions it is the etiquette; but no one was less likely than Mrs. Bennet to find comfort in staying home at any period of her life. She concluded with many good wishes that Lady Lucas might soon be equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing there was no chance of it.

In vain did Elizabeth endeavour to check the rapidity of her mother's words, or persuade her to describe her felicity in a less audible whisper; for, to her inexpressible



vexation, she could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Mr. Darcy, who sat opposite to them. Her mother only scolded her for being nonsensical.

"What is Mr. Darcy to me, pray, that I should be afraid of him? I am sure we owe him no such particular civility as to be obliged to say nothing *hemay* not like to hear."

"For heaven's sake, madam, speak lower. What advantage can it be for you to offend Mr. Darcy? You will never recommend yourself to his friend by so doing!"

Nothing that she could say, however, had any influence. Her mother would talk of her views in the same intelligible tone. Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. She could not help frequently glancing her eye at Mr. Darcy, though every glance convinced her of what she dreaded; for though he was not always looking at her mother, she was convinced that his attention was invariably fixed by her. The expression of his face changed gradually from indignant contempt to a composed and steady gravity.

At length, however, Mrs. Bennet had no more to say; and Lady Lucas, who had been long yawning at the repetition of delights which she saw no likelihood of sharing, was left to the comforts of cold ham and chicken. Elizabeth now began to revive. But not long was the interval of tranquillity; for, when supper was over, singing was talked of, and she had the mortification of seeing Mary, after very little entreaty, preparing to oblige the company. By many significant looks and silent entreaties, did she endeavour to prevent such a proof of complaisance, but in vain; Mary would not understand them; such an opportunity of exhibiting was delightful to her, and she began her song. Elizabeth's eyes were fixed on her with most painful sensations, and she watched her progress through the several stanzas with an impatience which was very ill rewarded at their close; for Mary, on receiving, amongst the thanks of the table, the hint of a hope that she might be prevailed on to favour them again, after the pause of half a minute began another. Mary's powers were by no means fitted for such a display; her voice was weak, and her manner affected. Elizabeth was in agonies. She looked at Jane, to see how she bore it; but Jane was very composedly talking to Bingley. She looked at his two sisters, and saw them making signs of derision at each other, and at Darcy, who continued, however, imperturbably grave. She looked at her father to entreat his interference, lest Mary should be singing all night. He took the hint, and when Mary had finished her second song, said aloud, "That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit."

Mary, though pretending not to hear, was somewhat disconcerted; and Elizabeth, sorry for her, and sorry for her father's speech, was afraid her anxiety had done no good. Others of the party were now applied to.

"If I," said Mr. Collins, "were so fortunate as to be able to sing, I should have great pleasure, I am sure, in obliging the company with an air; for I consider music as a very innocent diversion, and perfectly compatible with the profession of a clergyman."

I do not mean, however, to assert that we can be justified in devoting too much of our time to music, for there are certainly other things to be attended to. The rector of a parish has much to do. In the first place, he must make such an agreement for tithes as may be beneficial to himself and not offensive to his patron. He must write his own sermons; and the time that remains will not be too much for his parish duties, and the care and improvement of his dwelling, which he cannot be excused from making as comfortable as possible. And I do not think it of light importance that he should have attentive and conciliatory manners towards everybody, especially towards those to whom he owes his preferment. I cannot acquit him of that duty; nor could I think well of the man who should omit an occasion of testifying his respect towards anybody connected with the family." And with a bow to Mr. Darcy, he concluded his speech, which had been spoken so loud as to be heard by half the room. Many stared—many smiled; but no one looked more amused than Mr. Bennet himself, while his wife seriously commended Mr. Collins for having spoken so sensibly, and observed in a half-whisper to Lady Lucas, that he was a remarkably clever, good kind of young man.

To Elizabeth it appeared that, had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit or finer success; and happy did she think it for Bingley and her sister that some of the exhibition had escaped his notice, and that his feelings were not of a sort to be much distressed by the folly which he must have witnessed. That his two sisters and Mr. Darcy, however, should have such an opportunity of ridiculing her relations, was bad enough, and she could not determine whether the silent contempt of the gentleman, or the insolent smiles of the ladies, were more intolerable.

The rest of the evening brought her little amusement. She was teased by Mr. Collins, who continued most perseveringly by her side, and though he could not prevail on her to dance with him again, put it out of her power to dance with others. In vain did she entreat him to stand up with somebody else, and offer to introduce him to any young lady in the room. He assured her, that as to dancing, he was perfectly indifferent to it; that his chief object was by delicate attentions to recommend himself to her and that he should therefore make a point of remaining close to her the whole evening. There was no arguing upon such a project. She owed her greatest relief to her friend Miss Lucas, who often joined them, and good-naturedly engaged Mr. Collins's conversation to herself.

She was at least free from the offense of Mr. Darcy's further notice; though often standing within a very short distance of her, quite disengaged, he never came near enough to speak. She felt it to be the probable consequence of her allusions to Mr. Wickham, and rejoiced in it.

The Longbourn party were the last of all the company to depart, and, by a manoeuvre of Mrs. Bennet, had to wait for their carriage a quarter of an hour after everybody else was gone, which gave them time to see how heartily they were wished away by some of the family. Mrs. Hurst and her sister scarcely opened their mouths, except to complain of fatigue, and were evidently impatient to have the house to themselves. They repulsed every attempt of Mrs. Bennet at conversation, and by so doing threw a languor over the whole party, which was very little relieved by the long speeches of Mr. Collins, who was complimenting Mr. Bingley and his sisters on the elegance of their entertainment, and the hospitality and politeness which had marked their behaviour to their guests. Darcy said nothing at all. Mr. Bennet, in equal silence, was enjoying the scene. Mr. Bingley and Jane were standing together, a little detached from the rest, and talked only to each other. Elizabeth preserved as steady a silence as either Mrs. Hurst or Miss Bingley; and even Lydia was too much fatigued to utter more than the occasional exclamation of "Lord, how tired I am!" accompanied by a violent yawn.

When at length they arose to take leave, Mrs. Bennet was most pressingly civil in her hope of seeing the whole family soon at Longbourn, and addressed herself especially to Mr. Bingley, to assure him how happy he would make them by eating a family dinner with them at any time, without the ceremony of a formal invitation. Bingley was all grateful pleasure, and he readily engaged for taking the earliest opportunity of waiting on her, after his return from London, whither he was obliged to go the next day for a short time.

Mrs. Bennet was perfectly satisfied, and quitted the house under the delightful persuasion that, allowing for the necessary preparations of settlements, new carriages, and wedding clothes, she should undoubtedly see her daughter settled at Netherfield in the course of three or four months. Of having another daughter married to Mr. Collins, she thought with equal certainty, and with considerable, though not equal, pleasure. Elizabeth was the least dear to her of all her children; and though the man and the match were quite good enough for *her*, the worth of each was eclipsed by Mr. Bingley and Netherfield.

## Chapter 19

The next day opened a new scene at Longbourn. Mr. Collins made his declaration in form. Having resolved to do it without loss of time, as his leave of absence extended only to the following Saturday, and having no feelings of diffidence to make it distressing to himself even at the moment, he set about it in a very orderly manner, with all the observances, which he supposed a regular part of the business. On finding

Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth, and one of the younger girls together, soon after breakfast, he addressed the mother in these words:

"May I hope, madam, for your interest with your fair daughter Elizabeth, when I solicit for the honour of a private audience with her in the course of this morning?"

Before Elizabeth had time for anything but a blush of surprise, Mrs. Bennet answered instantly, "Oh dear!—yes—certainly. I am sure Lizzy will be very happy—I am sure she can have no objection. Come, Kitty, I want you up stairs." And, gathering her work together, she was hastening away, when Elizabeth called out:

"Dear madam, do not go. I beg you will not go. Mr. Collins must excuse me. He can have nothing to say to me that anybody need not hear. I am going away myself."

"No, no, nonsense, Lizzy. I desire you to stay where you are." And upon Elizabeth's seeming really, with vexed and embarrassed looks, about to escape, she added: "Lizzy, I *insist* upon your staying and hearing Mr. Collins."

Elizabeth would not oppose such an injunction—and a moment's consideration making her also sensible that it would be wisest to get it over as soon and as quietly as possible, she sat down again and tried to conceal, by incessant employment the feelings which were divided between distress and diversion. Mrs. Bennet and Kitty walked off, and as soon as they were gone, Mr. Collins began.

"Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had there *not* been this little unwillingness; but allow me to assure you, that I have your respected mother's permission for this address. You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble; my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away with by my feelings on this subject, perhaps it would be advisable for me to state my reasons for marrying—and, moreover, for coming into Hertfordshire with the design of selecting a wife, as I certainly did."

The idea of Mr. Collins, with all his solemn composure, being run away with by his feelings, made Elizabeth so near laughing, that she could not use the short pause he allowed in any attempt to stop him further, and he continued:

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Miss de Bourgh's footstool, that she said, 'Mr. Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry. Choose

properly, choose a gentlewoman for *my* sake; and for your *own*, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her.' Allow me, by the way, to observe, my fair cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lady Catherine de Bourgh as among the least of the advantages in my power to offer. You will find her manners beyond anything I can describe; and your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable to her, especially when tempered with the silence and respect which her rank will inevitably excite. Thus much for my general intention in favour of matrimony; it remains to be told why my views were directed towards Longbourn instead of my own neighbourhood, where I can assure you there are many amiable young women. But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured father (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a wife from among his daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place—which, however, as I have already said, may not be for several years. This has been my motive, my fair cousin, and I flatter myself it will not sink me in your esteem. And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection. To fortune I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of that nature on your father, since I am well aware that it could not be complied with; and that one thousand pounds in the four per cents, which will not be yours till after your mother's decease, is all that you may ever be entitled to. On that head, therefore, I shall be uniformly silent; and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married."

It was absolutely necessary to interrupt him now.

"You are too hasty, sir," she cried. "You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than to decline them."

"I am not now to learn," replied Mr. Collins, with a formal wave of the hand, "that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second, or even a third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long."

"Upon my word, sir," cried Elizabeth, "your hope is a rather extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who could

make you so. Nay, were your friend Lady Catherine to know me, I am persuaded she would find me in every respect ill qualified for the situation."

"Were it certain that Lady Catherine would think so," said Mr. Collins very gravely—"but I cannot imagine that her ladyship would at all disapprove of you. And you may be certain when I have the honour of seeing her again, I shall speak in the very highest terms of your modesty, economy, and other amiable qualification."

"Indeed, Mr. Collins, all praise of me will be unnecessary. You must give me leave to judge for myself, and pay me the compliment of believing what I say. I wish you very happy and very rich, and by refusing your hand, do all in my power to prevent your being otherwise. In making me the offer, you must have satisfied the delicacy of your feelings with regard to my family, and may take possession of Longbourn estate whenever it falls, without any self-reproach. This matter may be considered, therefore, as finally settled." And rising as she thus spoke, she would have quitted the room, had Mr. Collins not thus addressed her:

"When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on the subject, I shall hope to receive a more favourable answer than you have now given me; though I am far from accusing you of cruelty at present, because I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application, and perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as would be consistent with the true delicacy of the female character."

"Really, Mr. Collins," cried Elizabeth with some warmth, "you puzzle me exceedingly. If what I have hitherto said can appear to you in the form of encouragement, I know not how to express my refusal in such a way as to convince you of its being one."

"You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin, that your refusal of my addresses is merely words of course. My reasons for believing it are briefly these: It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy of your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than highly desirable. My situation in life, my connections with the family of de Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour; and you should take it into further consideration, that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females."

"I do assure you, sir, that I have no pretensions whatever to that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable man. I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed sincere. I thank you again and again for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My

feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me now as an elegant female, intending to plague you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart."

"You are uniformly charming!" cried he, with an air of awkward gallantry; "and I am persuaded that when sanctioned by the express authority of both your excellent parents, my proposals will not fail of being acceptable."

To such perseverance in wilful self-deception Elizabeth would make no reply, and immediately and in silence withdrew; determined, if he persisted in considering her repeated refusals as flattering encouragement, to apply to her father, whose negative might be uttered in such a manner as to be decisive, and whose behaviour at least could not be mistaken for the affectation and coquetry of an elegant female.

## Chapter 20

Mr. Collins was not left long to the silent contemplation of his successful love; for Mrs. Bennet, having dawdled about in the vestibule to watch for the end of the conference, no sooner saw Elizabeth open the door and with quick step pass her towards the staircase, than she entered the breakfast-room, and congratulated both him and herself in warm terms on the happy prospect of their nearer connection. Mr. Collins received and returned these felicitations with equal pleasure, and then proceeded to relate the particulars of their interview, with the result of which he trusted he had every reason to be satisfied, since the refusal which his cousin had steadfastly given him would naturally flow from her bashful modesty and the genuine delicacy of her character.

This information, however, startled Mrs. Bennet; she would have been glad to be equally satisfied that her daughter had meant to encourage him by protesting against his proposals, but she dared not believe it, and could not help saying so.

"But, depend upon it, Mr. Collins," she added, "that Lizzy shall be brought to reason. I will speak to her about it directly. She is a very headstrong, foolish girl, and does not know her own interest but I will *make* her know it."

"Pardon me for interrupting you, madam," cried Mr. Collins; "but if she is really headstrong and foolish, I know not whether she would altogether be a very desirable wife to a man in my situation, who naturally looks for happiness in the marriage state. If therefore she actually persists in rejecting my suit, perhaps it were better not to force her into accepting me, because if liable to such defects of temper, she could not contribute much to my felicity."

"Sir, you quite misunderstand me," said Mrs. Bennet, alarmed. "Lizzy is only headstrong in such matters as these. In everything else she is as good-natured a girl as ever lived. I will go directly to Mr. Bennet, and we shall very soon settle it with her, I am sure."

She would not give him time to reply, but hurrying instantly to her husband, called out as she entered the library, "Oh! Mr. Bennet, you are wanted immediately; we are all in an uproar. You must come and make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins, for she vows she will not have him, and if you do not make haste he will change his mind and not have *her*."

Mr. Bennet raised his eyes from his book as she entered, and fixed them on her face with a calm unconcern which was not in the least altered by her communication.

"I have not the pleasure of understanding you," said he, when she had finished her speech. "Of what are you talking?"

"Of Mr. Collins and Lizzy. Lizzy declares she will not have Mr. Collins, and Mr. Collins begins to say that he will not have Lizzy."

"And what am I to do on the occasion? It seems an hopeless business."

"Speak to Lizzy about it yourself. Tell her that you insist upon her marrying him."

"Let her be called down. She shall hear my opinion."

Mrs. Bennet rang the bell, and Miss Elizabeth was summoned to the library.

"Come here, child," cried her father as she appeared. "I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mr. Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?" Elizabeth replied that it was. "Very well—and this offer of marriage you have refused?"

"I have, sir."

"Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is it not so, Mrs. Bennet?"

"Yes, or I will never see her again."

"An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*."

Elizabeth could not but smile at such a conclusion of such a beginning, but Mrs. Bennet, who had persuaded herself that her husband regarded the affair as she wished, was excessively disappointed.

"What do you mean, Mr. Bennet, in talking this way? You promised me to *insist* upon her marrying him."

"My dear," replied her husband, "I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be."



Not yet, however, in spite of her disappointment in her husband, did Mrs. Bennet give up the point. She talked to Elizabeth again and again; coaxed and threatened her by turns. She endeavoured to secure Jane in her interest; but Jane, with all possible mildness, declined interfering; and Elizabeth, sometimes with real earnestness, and sometimes with playful gaiety, replied to her attacks. Though her manner varied, however, her determination never did.

Mr. Collins, meanwhile, was meditating in solitude on what had passed. He thought too well of himself to comprehend on what motives his cousin could refuse him; and though his pride was hurt, he suffered in no other way. His regard for her was quite imaginary; and the possibility of her deserving her mother's reproach prevented his feeling any regret.

While the family were in this confusion, Charlotte Lucas came to spend the day with them. She was met in the vestibule by Lydia, who, flying to her, cried in a half whisper, "I am glad you are come, for there is such fun here! What do you think has happened this morning? Mr. Collins has made an offer to Lizzy, and she will not have him."

Charlotte hardly had time to answer, before they were joined by Kitty, who came to tell the same news; and no sooner had they entered the breakfast-room, where Mrs. Bennet was alone, than she likewise began on the subject, calling on Miss Lucas for her compassion, and entreating her to persuade her friend Lizzy to comply with the wishes of all her family. "Pray do, my dear Miss Lucas," she added in a melancholy tone, "for nobody is on my side, nobody takes part with me. I am cruelly used, nobody feels for my poor nerves."

Charlotte's reply was spared by the entrance of Jane and Elizabeth.

"Aye, there she comes," continued Mrs. Bennet, "looking as unconcerned as may be, and caring no more for us than if we were at York, provided she can have her own way. But I tell you, Miss Lizzy—if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all—and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead. I shall not be able to keep you—and so I warn you. I have done with you from this very day. I told you in the library, you know, that I should never speak to you again, and you will find me as good as my word. I have no pleasure in talking to undutiful children. Not that I have much pleasure, indeed, in talking to anybody. People who suffer as I do from nervous complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can tell what I suffer! But it is always so. Those who do not complain are never pitied."

Her daughters listened in silence to this effusion, sensible that any attempt to reason with her or soothe her would only increase the irritation. She talked on, therefore, without interruption from any of them, till they were joined by Mr. Collins, who entered the room with an air more stately than usual, and on perceiving whom, she

said to the girls, "Now, I do insist upon it, that you, all of you, hold your tongues, and let me and Mr. Collins have a little conversation together."

Elizabeth passed quietly out of the room, Jane and Kitty followed, but Lydia stood her ground, determined to hear all she could; and Charlotte, detained first by the civility of Mr. Collins, whose inquiries after herself and all her family were very minute, and then by a little curiosity, satisfied herself with walking to the window and pretending not to hear. In a doleful voice Mrs. Bennet began the projected conversation: "Oh! Mr. Collins!"

"My dear madam," replied he, "let us be for ever silent on this point. Far be it from me," he presently continued, in a voice that marked his displeasure, "to resent the behaviour of your daughter. Resignation to inevitable evils is the duty of us all; the peculiar duty of a young man who has been so fortunate as I have been in early preferment; and I trust I am resigned. Perhaps not the less so from feeling a doubt of my positive happiness had my fair cousin honoured me with her hand; for I have often observed that resignation is never so perfect as when the blessing denied begins to lose somewhat of its value in our estimation. You will not, I hope, consider me as showing any disrespect to your family, my dear madam, by thus withdrawing my pretensions to your daughter's favour, without having paid yourself and Mr. Bennet the compliment of requesting you to interpose your authority in my behalf. My conduct may, I fear, be objectionable in having accepted my dismissal from your daughter's lips instead of your own. But we are all liable to error. I have certainly meant well through the whole affair. My object has been to secure an amiable companion for myself, with due consideration for the advantage of all your family, and if my *manner* has been at all reprehensible, I here beg leave to apologise."

## Chapter 21

The discussion of Mr. Collins's offer was now nearly at an end, and Elizabeth had only to suffer from the uncomfortable feelings necessarily attending it, and occasionally from some peevish allusions of her mother. As for the gentleman himself, *his* feelings were chiefly expressed, not by embarrassment or dejection, or by trying to avoid her, but by stiffness of manner and resentful silence. He scarcely ever spoke to her, and the assiduous attentions which he had been so sensible of himself were transferred for the rest of the day to Miss Lucas, whose civility in listening to him was a seasonable relief to them all, and especially to her friend.

The morrow produced no abatement of Mrs. Bennet's ill-humour or ill health. Mr. Collins was also in the same state of angry pride. Elizabeth had hoped that his

resentment might shorten his visit, but his plan did not appear in the least affected by it. He was always to have gone on Saturday, and to Saturday he meant to stay.

After breakfast, the girls walked to Meryton to inquire if Mr. Wickham were returned, and to lament over his absence from the Netherfield ball. He joined them on their entering the town, and attended them to their aunt's where his regret and vexation, and the concern of everybody, was well talked over. To Elizabeth, however, he voluntarily acknowledged that the necessity of his absence *had* been self-imposed.

"I found," said he, "as the time drew near that I had better not meet Mr. Darcy; that to be in the same room, the same party with him for so many hours together, might be more than I could bear, and that scenes might arise unpleasant to more than myself."

She highly approved his forbearance, and they had leisure for a full discussion of it, and for all the commendation which they civilly bestowed on each other, as Wickham and another officer walked back with them to Longbourn, and during the walk he particularly attended to her. His accompanying them was a double advantage; she felt all the compliment it offered to herself, and it was most acceptable as an occasion of introducing him to her father and mother.

Soon after their return, a letter was delivered to Miss Bennet; it came from Netherfield. The envelope contained a sheet of elegant, little, hot-pressed paper, well covered with a lady's fair, flowing hand; and Elizabeth saw her sister's countenance change as she read it, and saw her dwelling intently on some particular passages. Jane recollected herself soon, and putting the letter away, tried to join with her usual cheerfulness in the general conversation; but Elizabeth felt an anxiety on the subject which drew off her attention even from Wickham; and no sooner had he and his companion taken leave, than a glance from Jane invited her to follow her up stairs. When they had gained their own room, Jane, taking out the letter, said:

"This is from Caroline Bingley; what it contains has surprised me a good deal. The whole party have left Netherfield by this time, and are on their way to town—and without any intention of coming back again. You shall hear what she says."

She then read the first sentence aloud, which comprised the information of their having just resolved to follow their brother to town directly, and of their meaning to dine in Grosvenor Street, where Mr. Hurst had a house. The next was in these words: "I do not pretend to regret anything I shall leave in Hertfordshire, except your society, my dearest friend; but we will hope, at some future period, to enjoy many returns of that delightful intercourse we have known, and in the meanwhile may lessen the pain of separation by a very frequent and most unreserved correspondence. I depend on you for that." To these highflown expressions Elizabeth listened with all the insensibility of distrust; and though the suddenness of their removal surprised her, she saw nothing in it really to lament; it was not to be supposed that their absence from Netherfield would prevent Mr. Bingley's being there; and as to the loss of their society, she was persuaded that Jane must cease to regard it, in the enjoyment of his.

"It is unlucky," said she, after a short pause, "that you should not be able to see your friends before they leave the country. But may we not hope that the period of future happiness to which Miss Bingley looks forward may arrive earlier than she is aware, and that the delightful intercourse you have known as friends will be renewed with yet greater satisfaction as sisters? Mr. Bingley will not be detained in London by them."

"Caroline decidedly says that none of the party will return into Hertfordshire this winter. I will read it to you:"

"When my brother left us yesterday, he imagined that the business which took him to London might be concluded in three or four days; but as we are certain it cannot be so, and at the same time convinced that when Charles gets to town he will be in no hurry to leave it again, we have determined on following him thither, that he may not be obliged to spend his vacant hours in a comfortless hotel. Many of my acquaintances are already there for the winter; I wish that I could hear that you, my dearest friend, had any intention of making one of the crowd—but of that I despair. I sincerely hope your Christmas in Hertfordshire may abound in the gaities which that season generally brings, and that your beaux will be so numerous as to prevent your feeling the loss of the three of whom we shall deprive you."

"It is evident by this," added Jane, "that he comes back no more this winter."

"It is only evident that Miss Bingley does not mean that he *should*."

"Why will you think so? It must be his own doing. He is his own master. But you do not know *all*. I *will* read you the passage which particularly hurts me. I will have no reserves from *you*."

"Mr. Darcy is impatient to see his sister; and, to confess the truth, *we* are scarcely less eager to meet her again. I really do not think Georgiana Darcy has her equal for beauty, elegance, and accomplishments; and the affection she inspires in Louisa and myself is heightened into something still more interesting, from the hope we dare entertain of her being hereafter our sister. I do not know whether I ever before mentioned to you my feelings on this subject; but I will not leave the country without confiding them, and I trust you will not esteem them unreasonable. My brother admires her greatly already; he will have frequent opportunity now of seeing her on the most intimate footing; her relations all wish the connection as much as his own; and a sister's partiality is not misleading me, I think, when I call Charles most capable of engaging any woman's heart. With all these circumstances to favour an attachment, and nothing to prevent it, am I wrong, my dearest Jane, in indulging the hope of an event which will secure the happiness of so many?"

"What do you think of *this* sentence, my dear Lizzy?" said Jane as she finished it. "Is it not clear enough? Does it not expressly declare that Caroline neither expects nor wishes me to be her sister; that she is perfectly convinced of her brother's indifference; and that if she suspects the nature of my feelings for him, she means

(most kindly!) to put me on my guard? Can there be any other opinion on the subject?"

"Yes, there can; for mine is totally different. Will you hear it?"

"Most willingly."

"You shall have it in a few words. Miss Bingley sees that her brother is in love with you, and wants him to marry Miss Darcy. She follows him to town in hope of keeping him there, and tries to persuade you that he does not care about you."

Jane shook her head.

"Indeed, Jane, you ought to believe me. No one who has ever seen you together can doubt his affection. Miss Bingley, I am sure, cannot. She is not such a simpleton. Could she have seen half as much love in Mr. Darcy for herself, she would have ordered her wedding clothes. But the case is this: We are not rich enough or grand enough for them; and she is the more anxious to get Miss Darcy for her brother, from the notion that when there has been *one* intermarriage, she may have less trouble in achieving a second; in which there is certainly some ingenuity, and I dare say it would succeed, if Miss de Bourgh were out of the way. But, my dearest Jane, you cannot seriously imagine that because Miss Bingley tells you her brother greatly admires Miss Darcy, he is in the smallest degree less sensible of *your* merit than when he took leave of you on Tuesday, or that it will be in her power to persuade him that, instead of being in love with you, he is very much in love with her friend."

"If we thought alike of Miss Bingley," replied Jane, "your representation of all this might make me quite easy. But I know the foundation is unjust. Caroline is incapable of wilfully deceiving anyone; and all that I can hope in this case is that she is deceiving herself."

"That is right. You could not have started a more happy idea, since you will not take comfort in mine. Believe her to be deceived, by all means. You have now done your duty by her, and must fret no longer."

"But, my dear sister, can I be happy, even supposing the best, in accepting a man whose sisters and friends are all wishing him to marry elsewhere?"

"You must decide for yourself," said Elizabeth; "and if, upon mature deliberation, you find that the misery of disobliging his two sisters is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his wife, I advise you by all means to refuse him."

"How can you talk so?" said Jane, faintly smiling. "You must know that though I should be exceedingly grieved at their disapprobation, I could not hesitate."

"I did not think you would; and that being the case, I cannot consider your situation with much compassion."

"But if he returns no more this winter, my choice will never be required. A thousand things may arise in six months!"

The idea of his returning no more Elizabeth treated with the utmost contempt. It appeared to her merely the suggestion of Caroline's interested wishes, and she could not for a moment suppose that those wishes, however openly or artfully spoken, could influence a young man so totally independent of everyone.

She represented to her sister as forcibly as possible what she felt on the subject, and had soon the pleasure of seeing its happy effect. Jane's temper was not desponding, and she was gradually led to hope, though the diffidence of affection sometimes overcame the hope, that Bingley would return to Netherfield and answer every wish of her heart.

They agreed that Mrs. Bennet should only hear of the departure of the family, without being alarmed on the score of the gentleman's conduct; but even this partial communication gave her a great deal of concern, and she bewailed it as exceedingly unlucky that the ladies should happen to go away just as they were all getting so intimate together. After lamenting it, however, at some length, she had the consolation that Mr. Bingley would be soon down again and soon dining at Longbourn, and the conclusion of all was the comfortable declaration, that though he had been invited only to a family dinner, she would take care to have two full courses.

## Chapter 22

The Bennets were engaged to dine with the Lucases and again during the chief of the day was Miss Lucas so kind as to listen to Mr. Collins. Elizabeth took an opportunity of thanking her. "It keeps him in good humour," said she, "and I am more obliged to you than I can express." Charlotte assured her friend of her satisfaction in being useful, and that it amply repaid her for the little sacrifice of her time. This was very amiable, but Charlotte's kindness extended farther than Elizabeth had any conception of; its object was nothing else than to secure her from any return of Mr. Collins's addresses, by engaging them towards herself. Such was Miss Lucas's scheme; and appearances were so favourable, that when they parted at night, she would have felt almost secure of success if he had not been to leave Hertfordshire so very soon. But here she did injustice to the fire and independence of his character, for it led him to escape out of Longbourn House the next morning with admirable slyness, and hasten to Lucas Lodge to throw himself at her feet. He was anxious to avoid the notice of his cousins, from a conviction that if they saw him depart, they could not fail to conjecture his design, and he was not willing to have the attempt known till its success might be known likewise; for though feeling almost secure, and with reason, for Charlotte had been tolerably encouraging, he was comparatively diffident since the adventure of Wednesday. His reception, however, was of the most flattering kind.

Miss Lucas perceived him from an upper window as he walked towards the house, and instantly set out to meet him accidentally in the lane. But little had she dared to hope that so much love and eloquence awaited her there.

In as short a time as Mr. Collins's long speeches would allow, everything was settled between them to the satisfaction of both; and as they entered the house he earnestly entreated her to name the day that was to make him the happiest of men; and though such a solicitation must be waived for the present, the lady felt no inclination to trifle with his happiness. The stupidity with which he was favoured by nature must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained.

Sir William and Lady Lucas were speedily applied to for their consent; and it was bestowed with a most joyful alacrity. Mr. Collins's present circumstances made it a most eligible match for their daughter, to whom they could give little fortune; and his prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair. Lady Lucas began directly to calculate, with more interest than the matter had ever excited before, how many years longer Mr. Bennet was likely to live; and Sir William gave it as his decided opinion, that whenever Mr. Collins should be in possession of the Longbourn estate, it would be highly expedient that both he and his wife should make their appearance at St. James's. The whole family, in short, were properly overjoyed on the occasion. The younger girls formed hopes of *coming out* a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done; and the boys were relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid. Charlotte herself was tolerably composed. She had gained her point, and had time to consider of it. Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. The least agreeable circumstance in the business was the surprise it must occasion to Elizabeth Bennet, whose friendship she valued beyond that of any other person. Elizabeth would wonder, and probably would blame her; and though her resolution was not to be shaken, her feelings must be hurt by such a disapprobation. She resolved to give her the information herself, and therefore charged Mr. Collins, when he returned to Longbourn to dinner, to drop no hint of what had passed before any of the family. A promise of secrecy was of course very dutifully given, but it could not be kept without difficulty; for the curiosity excited by his long absence burst forth in such very direct questions on his return as required some ingenuity to evade, and he

was at the same time exercising great self-denial, for he was longing to publish his prosperous love.

As he was to begin his journey too early on the morrow to see any of the family, the ceremony of leave-taking was performed when the ladies moved for the night; and Mrs. Bennet, with great politeness and cordiality, said how happy they should be to see him at Longbourn again, whenever his engagements might allow him to visit them.

"My dear madam," he replied, "this invitation is particularly gratifying, because it is what I have been hoping to receive; and you may be very certain that I shall avail myself of it as soon as possible."

They were all astonished; and Mr. Bennet, who could by no means wish for so speedy a return, immediately said:

"But is there not danger of Lady Catherine's disapprobation here, my good sir? You had better neglect your relations than run the risk of offending your patroness."

"My dear sir," replied Mr. Collins, "I am particularly obliged to you for this friendly caution, and you may depend upon my not taking so material a step without her ladyship's concurrence."

"You cannot be too much upon your guard. Risk anything rather than her displeasure; and if you find it likely to be raised by your coming to us again, which I should think exceedingly probable, stay quietly at home, and be satisfied that *we* shall take no offence."

"Believe me, my dear sir, my gratitude is warmly excited by such affectionate attention; and depend upon it, you will speedily receive from me a letter of thanks for this, and for every other mark of your regard during my stay in Hertfordshire. As for my fair cousins, though my absence may not be long enough to render it necessary, I shall now take the liberty of wishing them health and happiness, not excepting my cousin Elizabeth."

With proper civilities the ladies then withdrew; all of them equally surprised that he meditated a quick return. Mrs. Bennet wished to understand by it that he thought of paying his addresses to one of her younger girls, and Mary might have been prevailed on to accept him. She rated his abilities much higher than any of the others; there was a solidity in his reflections which often struck her, and though by no means so clever as herself, she thought that if encouraged to read and improve himself by such an example as hers, he might become a very agreeable companion. But on the following morning, every hope of this kind was done away. Miss Lucas called soon after breakfast, and in a private conference with Elizabeth related the event of the day before.

The possibility of Mr. Collins's fancying himself in love with her friend had once occurred to Elizabeth within the last day or two; but that Charlotte could encourage him seemed almost as far from possibility as she could encourage him herself, and her



astonishment was consequently so great as to overcome at first the bounds of decorum, and she could not help crying out:

"Engaged to Mr. Collins! My dear Charlotte—impossible!"

The steady countenance which Miss Lucas had commanded in telling her story, gave way to a momentary confusion here on receiving so direct a reproach; though, as it was no more than she expected, she soon regained her composure, and calmly replied:

"Why should you be surprised, my dear Eliza? Do you think it incredible that Mr. Collins should be able to procure any woman's good opinion, because he was not so happy as to succeed with you?"

But Elizabeth had now recollected herself, and making a strong effort for it, was able to assure with tolerable firmness that the prospect of their relationship was highly grateful to her, and that she wished her all imaginable happiness.

"I see what you are feeling," replied Charlotte. "You must be surprised, very much surprised—so lately as Mr. Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connection, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state."

Elizabeth quietly answered "Undoubtedly;" and after an awkward pause, they returned to the rest of the family. Charlotte did not stay much longer, and Elizabeth was then left to reflect on what she had heard. It was a long time before she became at all reconciled to the idea of so unsuitable a match. The strangeness of Mr. Collins's making two offers of marriage within three days was nothing in comparison of his being now accepted. She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she had not supposed it to be possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. Charlotte the wife of Mr. Collins was a most humiliating picture! And to the pang of a friend disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen.

## Chapter 23

Elizabeth was sitting with her mother and sisters, reflecting on what she had heard, and doubting whether she was authorised to mention it, when Sir William Lucas himself appeared, sent by his daughter, to announce her engagement to the family. With many compliments to them, and much self-gratulation on the prospect of a

connection between the houses, he unfolded the matter—to an audience not merely wondering, but incredulous; for Mrs. Bennet, with more perseverance than politeness, protested he must be entirely mistaken; and Lydia, always unguarded and often uncivil, boisterously exclaimed:

"Good Lord! Sir William, how can you tell such a story? Do not you know that Mr. Collins wants to marry Lizzy?"

Nothing less than the complaisance of a courtier could have borne without anger such treatment; but Sir William's good breeding carried him through it all; and though he begged leave to be positive as to the truth of his information, he listened to all their impertinence with the most forbearing courtesy.

Elizabeth, feeling it incumbent on her to relieve him from so unpleasant a situation, now put herself forward to confirm his account, by mentioning her prior knowledge of it from Charlotte herself; and endeavoured to put a stop to the exclamations of her mother and sisters by the earnestness of her congratulations to Sir William, in which she was readily joined by Jane, and by making a variety of remarks on the happiness that might be expected from the match, the excellent character of Mr. Collins, and the convenient distance of Hunsford from London.

Mrs. Bennet was in fact too much overpowered to say a great deal while Sir William remained; but no sooner had he left them than her feelings found a rapid vent. In the first place, she persisted in disbelieving the whole of the matter; secondly, she was very sure that Mr. Collins had been taken in; thirdly, she trusted that they would never be happy together; and fourthly, that the match might be broken off. Two inferences, however, were plainly deduced from the whole: one, that Elizabeth was the real cause of the mischief; and the other that she herself had been barbarously misused by them all; and on these two points she principally dwelt during the rest of the day. Nothing could console and nothing could appease her. Nor did that day wear out her resentment. A week elapsed before she could see Elizabeth without scolding her, a month passed away before she could speak to Sir William or Lady Lucas without being rude, and many months were gone before she could at all forgive their daughter.

Mr. Bennet's emotions were much more tranquil on the occasion, and such as he did experience he pronounced to be of a most agreeable sort; for it gratified him, he said, to discover that Charlotte Lucas, whom he had been used to think tolerably sensible, was as foolish as his wife, and more foolish than his daughter!

Jane confessed herself a little surprised at the match; but she said less of her astonishment than of her earnest desire for their happiness; nor could Elizabeth persuade her to consider it as improbable. Kitty and Lydia were far from envying Miss Lucas, for Mr. Collins was only a clergyman; and it affected them in no other way than as a piece of news to spread at Meryton.

Lady Lucas could not be insensible of triumph on being able to retort on Mrs. Bennet the comfort of having a daughter well married; and she called at Longbourn rather oftener than usual to say how happy she was, though Mrs. Bennet's sour looks and ill-natured remarks might have been enough to drive happiness away.

Between Elizabeth and Charlotte there was a restraint which kept them mutually silent on the subject; and Elizabeth felt persuaded that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again. Her disappointment in Charlotte made her turn with fonder regard to her sister, of whose rectitude and delicacy she was sure her opinion could never be shaken, and for whose happiness she grew daily more anxious, as Bingley had now been gone a week and nothing more was heard of his return.

Jane had sent Caroline an early answer to her letter, and was counting the days till she might reasonably hope to hear again. The promised letter of thanks from Mr. Collins arrived on Tuesday, addressed to their father, and written with all the solemnity of gratitude which a twelvemonth's abode in the family might have prompted. After discharging his conscience on that head, he proceeded to inform them, with many rapturous expressions, of his happiness in having obtained the affection of their amiable neighbour, Miss Lucas, and then explained that it was merely with the view of enjoying her society that he had been so ready to close with their kind wish of seeing him again at Longbourn, whither he hoped to be able to return on Monday fortnight; for Lady Catherine, he added, so heartily approved his marriage, that she wished it to take place as soon as possible, which he trusted would be an unanswerable argument with his amiable Charlotte to name an early day for making him the happiest of men.

Mr. Collins's return into Hertfordshire was no longer a matter of pleasure to Mrs. Bennet. On the contrary, she was as much disposed to complain of it as her husband. It was very strange that he should come to Longbourn instead of to Lucas Lodge; it was also very inconvenient and exceedingly troublesome. She hated having visitors in the house while her health was so indifferent, and lovers were of all people the most disagreeable. Such were the gentle murmurs of Mrs. Bennet, and they gave way only to the greater distress of Mr. Bingley's continued absence.

Neither Jane nor Elizabeth were comfortable on this subject. Day after day passed away without bringing any other tidings of him than the report which shortly prevailed in Meryton of his coming no more to Netherfield the whole winter; a report which highly incensed Mrs. Bennet, and which she never failed to contradict as a most scandalous falsehood.

Even Elizabeth began to fear—not that Bingley was indifferent—but that his sisters would be successful in keeping him away. Unwilling as she was to admit an idea so destructive of Jane's happiness, and so dishonorable to the stability of her lover, she could not prevent its frequently occurring. The united efforts of his two unfeeling sisters and of his overpowering friend, assisted by the attractions of Miss Darcy and

the amusements of London might be too much, she feared, for the strength of his attachment.

As for Jane, *her* anxiety under this suspense was, of course, more painful than Elizabeth's, but whatever she felt she was desirous of concealing, and between herself and Elizabeth, therefore, the subject was never alluded to. But as no such delicacy restrained her mother, an hour seldom passed in which she did not talk of Bingley, express her impatience for his arrival, or even require Jane to confess that if he did not come back she would think herself very ill used. It needed all Jane's steady mildness to bear these attacks with tolerable tranquillity.

Mr. Collins returned most punctually on Monday fortnight, but his reception at Longbourn was not quite so gracious as it had been on his first introduction. He was too happy, however, to need much attention; and luckily for the others, the business of love-making relieved them from a great deal of his company. The chief of every day was spent by him at Lucas Lodge, and he sometimes returned to Longbourn only in time to make an apology for his absence before the family went to bed.

Mrs. Bennet was really in a most pitiable state. The very mention of anything concerning the match threw her into an agony of ill-humour, and wherever she went she was sure of hearing it talked of. The sight of Miss Lucas was odious to her. As her successor in that house, she regarded her with jealous abhorrence. Whenever Charlotte came to see them, she concluded her to be anticipating the hour of possession; and whenever she spoke in a low voice to Mr. Collins, was convinced that they were talking of the Longbourn estate, and resolving to turn herself and her daughters out of the house, as soon as Mr. Bennet were dead. She complained bitterly of all this to her husband.

"Indeed, Mr. Bennet," said she, "it is very hard to think that Charlotte Lucas should ever be mistress of this house, that I should be forced to make way for *her*, and live to see her take her place in it!"

"My dear, do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that I may be the survivor."

This was not very consoling to Mrs. Bennet, and therefore, instead of making any answer, she went on as before.

"I cannot bear to think that they should have all this estate. If it was not for the entail, I should not mind it."

"What should not you mind?"

"I should not mind anything at all."

"Let us be thankful that you are preserved from a state of such insensibility."

"I never can be thankful, Mr. Bennet, for anything about the entail. How anyone could have the conscience to entail away an estate from one's own daughters, I cannot

understand; and all for the sake of Mr. Collins too! Why should *he* have it more than anybody else?"

"I leave it to yourself to determine," said Mr. Bennet.

## Chapter 24

Miss Bingley's letter arrived, and put an end to doubt. The very first sentence conveyed the assurance of their being all settled in London for the winter, and concluded with her brother's regret at not having had time to pay his respects to his friends in Hertfordshire before he left the country.

Hope was over, entirely over; and when Jane could attend to the rest of the letter, she found little, except the professed affection of the writer, that could give her any comfort. Miss Darcy's praise occupied the chief of it. Her many attractions were again dwelt on, and Caroline boasted joyfully of their increasing intimacy, and ventured to predict the accomplishment of the wishes which had been unfolded in her former letter. She wrote also with great pleasure of her brother's being an inmate of Mr. Darcy's house, and mentioned with raptures some plans of the latter with regard to new furniture.

Elizabeth, to whom Jane very soon communicated the chief of all this, heard it in silent indignation. Her heart was divided between concern for her sister, and resentment against all others. To Caroline's assertion of her brother's being partial to Miss Darcy she paid no credit. That he was really fond of Jane, she doubted no more than she had ever done; and much as she had always been disposed to like him, she could not think without anger, hardly without contempt, on that easiness of temper, that want of proper resolution, which now made him the slave of his designing friends, and led him to sacrifice of his own happiness to the caprice of their inclination. Had his own happiness, however, been the only sacrifice, he might have been allowed to sport with it in whatever manner he thought best, but her sister's was involved in it, as she thought he must be sensible himself. It was a subject, in short, on which reflection would be long indulged, and must be unavailing. She could think of nothing else; and yet whether Bingley's regard had really died away, or were suppressed by his friends' interference; whether he had been aware of Jane's attachment, or whether it had escaped his observation; whatever were the case, though her opinion of him must be materially affected by the difference, her sister's situation remained the same, her peace equally wounded.

A day or two passed before Jane had courage to speak of her feelings to Elizabeth; but at last, on Mrs. Bennet's leaving them together, after a longer irritation than usual about Netherfield and its master, she could not help saying:

"Oh, that my dear mother had more command over herself! She can have no idea of the pain she gives me by her continual reflections on him. But I will not repine. It cannot last long. He will be forgot, and we shall all be as we were before."

Elizabeth looked at her sister with incredulous solicitude, but said nothing.

"You doubt me," cried Jane, slightly colouring; "indeed, you have no reason. He may live in my memory as the most amiable man of my acquaintance, but that is all. I have nothing either to hope or fear, and nothing to reproach him with. Thank God! I have not *that* pain. A little time, therefore—I shall certainly try to get the better."

With a stronger voice she soon added, "I have this comfort immediately, that it has not been more than an error of fancy on my side, and that it has done no harm to anyone but myself."

"My dear Jane!" exclaimed Elizabeth, "you are too good. Your sweetness and disinterestedness are really angelic; I do not know what to say to you. I feel as if I had never done you justice, or loved you as you deserve."

Miss Bennet eagerly disclaimed all extraordinary merit, and threw back the praise on her sister's warm affection.

"Nay," said Elizabeth, "this is not fair. *You* wish to think all the world respectable, and are hurt if I speak ill of anybody. I only want to think *you* perfect, and you set yourself against it. Do not be afraid of my running into any excess, of my encroaching on your privilege of universal good-will. You need not. There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of merit or sense. I have met with two instances lately, one I will not mention; the other is Charlotte's marriage. It is unaccountable! In every view it is unaccountable!"

"My dear Lizzy, do not give way to such feelings as these. They will ruin your happiness. You do not make allowance enough for difference of situation and temper. Consider Mr. Collins's respectability, and Charlotte's steady, prudent character. Remember that she is one of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for everybody's sake, that she may feel something like regard and esteem for our cousin."

"To oblige you, I would try to believe almost anything, but no one else could be benefited by such a belief as this; for were I persuaded that Charlotte had any regard for him, I should only think worse of her understanding than I now do of her heart. My dear Jane, Mr. Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man; you know he is, as well as I do; and you must feel, as well as I do, that the woman who

married him cannot have a proper way of thinking. You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger security for happiness."

"I must think your language too strong in speaking of both," replied Jane; "and I hope you will be convinced of it by seeing them happy together. But enough of this. You alluded to something else. You mentioned *two* instances. I cannot misunderstand you, but I entreat you, dear Lizzy, not to pain me by thinking *that person* to blame, and saying your opinion of him is sunk. We must not be so ready to fancy ourselves intentionally injured. We must not expect a lively young man to be always so guarded and circumspect. It is very often nothing but our own vanity that deceives us. Women fancy admiration means more than it does."

"And men take care that they should."

"If it is designedly done, they cannot be justified; but I have no idea of there being so much design in the world as some persons imagine."

"I am far from attributing any part of Mr. Bingley's conduct to design," said Elizabeth; "but without scheming to do wrong, or to make others unhappy, there may be error, and there may be misery. Thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution, will do the business."

"And do you impute it to either of those?"

"Yes; to the last. But if I go on, I shall displease you by saying what I think of persons you esteem. Stop me whilst you can."

"You persist, then, in supposing his sisters influence him?"

"Yes, in conjunction with his friend."

"I cannot believe it. Why should they try to influence him? They can only wish his happiness; and if he is attached to me, no other woman can secure it."

"Your first position is false. They may wish many things besides his happiness; they may wish his increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish him to marry a girl who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride."

"Beyond a doubt, they *do* wish him to choose Miss Darcy," replied Jane; "but this may be from better feelings than you are supposing. They have known her much longer than they have known me; no wonder if they love her better. But, whatever may be their own wishes, it is very unlikely they should have opposed their brother's. What sister would think herself at liberty to do it, unless there were something very objectionable? If they believed him attached to me, they would not try to part us; if he were so, they could not succeed. By supposing such an affection, you make everybody acting unnaturally and wrong, and me most unhappy. Do not distress me by the idea. I am not ashamed of having been mistaken—or, at least, it is light, it is nothing in

comparison of what I should feel in thinking ill of him or his sisters. Let me take it in the best light, in the light in which it may be understood."

Elizabeth could not oppose such a wish; and from this time Mr. Bingley's name was scarcely ever mentioned between them.

Mrs. Bennet still continued to wonder and repine at his returning no more, and though a day seldom passed in which Elizabeth did not account for it clearly, there was little chance of her ever considering it with less perplexity. Her daughter endeavoured to convince her of what she did not believe herself, that his attentions to Jane had been merely the effect of a common and transient liking, which ceased when he saw her no more; but though the probability of the statement was admitted at the time, she had the same story to repeat every day. Mrs. Bennet's best comfort was that Mr. Bingley must be down again in the summer.

Mr. Bennet treated the matter differently. "So, Lizzy," said he one day, "your sister is crossed in love, I find. I congratulate her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed a little in love now and then. It is something to think of, and it gives her a sort of distinction among her companions. When is your turn to come? You will hardly bear to be long outdone by Jane. Now is your time. Here are officers enough in Meryton to disappoint all the young ladies in the country. Let Wickham be *your* man. He is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably."

"Thank you, sir, but a less agreeable man would satisfy me. We must not all expect Jane's good fortune."

"True," said Mr. Bennet, "but it is a comfort to think that whatever of that kind may befall you, you have an affectionate mother who will make the most of it."

Mr. Wickham's society was of material service in dispelling the gloom which the late perverse occurrences had thrown on many of the Longbourn family. They saw him often, and to his other recommendations was now added that of general unreserve. The whole of what Elizabeth had already heard, his claims on Mr. Darcy, and all that he had suffered from him, was now openly acknowledged and publicly canvassed; and everybody was pleased to know how much they had always disliked Mr. Darcy before they had known anything of the matter.

Miss Bennet was the only creature who could suppose there might be any extenuating circumstances in the case, unknown to the society of Hertfordshire; her mild and steady candour always pleaded for allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes—but by everybody else Mr. Darcy was condemned as the worst of men.

## Chapter 25



After a week spent in professions of love and schemes of felicity, Mr. Collins was called from his amiable Charlotte by the arrival of Saturday. The pain of separation, however, might be alleviated on his side, by preparations for the reception of his bride; as he had reason to hope, that shortly after his return into Hertfordshire, the day would be fixed that was to make him the happiest of men. He took leave of his relations at Longbourn with as much solemnity as before; wished his fair cousins health and happiness again, and promised their father another letter of thanks.

On the following Monday, Mrs. Bennet had the pleasure of receiving her brother and his wife, who came as usual to spend the Christmas at Longbourn. Mr. Gardiner was a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister, as well by nature as education. The Netherfield ladies would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses, could have been so well-bred and agreeable. Mrs. Gardiner, who was several years younger than Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Phillips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces. Between the two eldest and herself especially, there subsisted a particular regard. They had frequently been staying with her in town.

The first part of Mrs. Gardiner's business on her arrival was to distribute her presents and describe the newest fashions. When this was done she had a less active part to play. It became her turn to listen. Mrs. Bennet had many grievances to relate, and much to complain of. They had all been very ill-used since she last saw her sister. Two of her girls had been upon the point of marriage, and after all there was nothing in it.

"I do not blame Jane," she continued, "for Jane would have got Mr. Bingley if she could. But Lizzy! Oh, sister! It is very hard to think that she might have been Mr. Collins's wife by this time, had it not been for her own perverseness. He made her an offer in this very room, and she refused him. The consequence of it is, that Lady Lucas will have a daughter married before I have, and that the Longbourn estate is just as much entailed as ever. The Lucases are very artful people indeed, sister. They are all for what they can get. I am sorry to say it of them, but so it is. It makes me very nervous and poorly, to be thwarted so in my own family, and to have neighbours who think of themselves before anybody else. However, your coming just at this time is the greatest of comforts, and I am very glad to hear what you tell us, of long sleeves."

Mrs. Gardiner, to whom the chief of this news had been given before, in the course of Jane and Elizabeth's correspondence with her, made her sister a slight answer, and, in compassion to her nieces, turned the conversation.

When alone with Elizabeth afterwards, she spoke more on the subject. "It seems likely to have been a desirable match for Jane," said she. "I am sorry it went off. But these things happen so often! A young man, such as you describe Mr. Bingley, so easily falls in love with a pretty girl for a few weeks, and when accident separates them, so easily forgets her, that these sort of inconsistencies are very frequent."

"An excellent consolation in its way," said Elizabeth, "but it will not do for *us*. We do not suffer by *accident*. It does not often happen that the interference of friends will persuade a young man of independent fortune to think no more of a girl whom he was violently in love with only a few days before."

"But that expression of 'violently in love' is so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives me very little idea. It is as often applied to feelings which arise from a half-hour's acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment. Pray, how *violent* was Mr. Bingley's love?"

"I never saw a more promising inclination; he was growing quite inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by her. Every time they met, it was more decided and remarkable. At his own ball he offended two or three young ladies, by not asking them to dance; and I spoke to him twice myself, without receiving an answer. Could there be finer symptoms? Is not general incivility the very essence of love?"

"Oh, yes!—of that kind of love which I suppose him to have felt. Poor Jane! I am sorry for her, because, with her disposition, she may not get over it immediately. It had better have happened to *you*, Lizzy; you would have laughed yourself out of it sooner. But do you think she would be prevailed upon to go back with us? Change of scene might be of service—and perhaps a little relief from home may be as useful as anything."

Elizabeth was exceedingly pleased with this proposal, and felt persuaded of her sister's ready acquiescence.

"I hope," added Mrs. Gardiner, "that no consideration with regard to this young man will influence her. We live in so different a part of town, all our connections are so different, and, as you well know, we go out so little, that it is very improbable that they should meet at all, unless he really comes to see her."

"And *that* is quite impossible; for he is now in the custody of his friend, and Mr. Darcy would no more suffer him to call on Jane in such a part of London! My dear aunt, how could you think of it? Mr. Darcy may perhaps have *heard* of such a place as Gracechurch Street, but he would hardly think a month's ablution enough to cleanse him from its impurities, were he once to enter it; and depend upon it, Mr. Bingley never stirs without him."

"So much the better. I hope they will not meet at all. But does not Jane correspond with his sister? *She* will not be able to help calling."

"She will drop the acquaintance entirely."

But in spite of the certainty in which Elizabeth affected to place this point, as well as the still more interesting one of Bingley's being withheld from seeing Jane, she felt a solicitude on the subject which convinced her, on examination, that she did not consider it entirely hopeless. It was possible, and sometimes she thought it probable, that his affection might be reanimated, and the influence of his friends successfully combated by the more natural influence of Jane's attractions.

Miss Bennet accepted her aunt's invitation with pleasure; and the Bingleys were no otherwise in her thoughts at the same time, than as she hoped by Caroline's not living in the same house with her brother, she might occasionally spend a morning with her, without any danger of seeing him.

The Gardiners stayed a week at Longbourn; and what with the Phillipses, the Lucases, and the officers, there was not a day without its engagement. Mrs. Bennet had so carefully provided for the entertainment of her brother and sister, that they did not once sit down to a family dinner. When the engagement was for home, some of the officers always made part of it—of which officers Mr. Wickham was sure to be one; and on these occasions, Mrs. Gardiner, rendered suspicious by Elizabeth's warm commendation, narrowly observed them both. Without supposing them, from what she saw, to be very seriously in love, their preference of each other was plain enough to make her a little uneasy; and she resolved to speak to Elizabeth on the subject before she left Hertfordshire, and represent to her the imprudence of encouraging such an attachment.

To Mrs. Gardiner, Wickham had one means of affording pleasure, unconnected with his general powers. About ten or a dozen years ago, before her marriage, she had spent a considerable time in that very part of Derbyshire to which he belonged. They had, therefore, many acquaintances in common; and though Wickham had been little there since the death of Darcy's father, it was yet in his power to give her fresher intelligence of her former friends than she had been in the way of procuring.

Mrs. Gardiner had seen Pemberley, and known the late Mr. Darcy by character perfectly well. Here consequently was an inexhaustible subject of discourse. In comparing her recollection of Pemberley with the minute description which Wickham could give, and in bestowing her tribute of praise on the character of its late possessor, she was delighting both him and herself. On being made acquainted with the present Mr. Darcy's treatment of him, she tried to remember some of that gentleman's reputed disposition when quite a lad which might agree with it, and was confident at last that she recollected having heard Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy formerly spoken of as a very proud, ill-natured boy.

## Chapter 26

Mrs. Gardiner's caution to Elizabeth was punctually and kindly given on the first favourable opportunity of speaking to her alone; after honestly telling her what she thought, she thus went on:

"You are too sensible a girl, Lizzy, to fall in love merely because you are warned against it; and, therefore, I am not afraid of speaking openly. Seriously, I would have you be on your guard. Do not involve yourself or endeavour to involve him in an affection which the want of fortune would make so very imprudent. I have nothing to say against *him*; he is a most interesting young man; and if he had the fortune he ought to have, I should think you could not do better. But as it is, you must not let your fancy run away with you. You have sense, and we all expect you to use it. Your father would depend on *your* resolution and good conduct, I am sure. You must not disappoint your father."

"My dear aunt, this is being serious indeed."

"Yes, and I hope to engage you to be serious likewise."

"Well, then, you need not be under any alarm. I will take care of myself, and of Mr. Wickham too. He shall not be in love with me, if I can prevent it."

"Elizabeth, you are not serious now."

"I beg your pardon, I will try again. At present I am not in love with Mr. Wickham; no, I certainly am not. But he is, beyond all comparison, the most agreeable man I ever saw—and if he becomes really attached to me—I believe it will be better that he should not. I see the imprudence of it. Oh! *thatabominable* Mr. Darcy! My father's opinion of me does me the greatest honour, and I should be miserable to forfeit it. My father, however, is partial to Mr. Wickham. In short, my dear aunt, I should be very sorry to be the means of making any of you unhappy; but since we see every day that where there is affection, young people are seldom withheld by immediate want of fortune from entering into engagements with each other, how can I promise to be wiser than so many of my fellow-creatures if I am tempted, or how am I even to know that it would be wisdom to resist? All that I can promise you, therefore, is not to be in a hurry. I will not be in a hurry to believe myself his first object. When I am in company with him, I will not be wishing. In short, I will do my best."

"Perhaps it will be as well if you discourage his coming here so very often. At least, you should not *remind* your mother of inviting him."

"As I did the other day," said Elizabeth with a conscious smile: "very true, it will be wise in me to refrain from *that*. But do not imagine that he is always here so often. It is on your account that he has been so frequently invited this week. You know my mother's ideas as to the necessity of constant company for her friends. But really, and upon my honour, I will try to do what I think to be the wisest; and now I hope you are satisfied."

Her aunt assured her that she was, and Elizabeth having thanked her for the kindness of her hints, they parted; a wonderful instance of advice being given on such a point, without being resented.

Mr. Collins returned into Hertfordshire soon after it had been quitted by the Gardiners and Jane; but as he took up his abode with the Lucases, his arrival was no

great inconvenience to Mrs. Bennet. His marriage was now fast approaching, and she was at length so far resigned as to think it inevitable, and even repeatedly to say, in an ill-natured tone, that she "*wished* they might be happy." Thursday was to be the wedding day, and on Wednesday Miss Lucas paid her farewell visit; and when she rose to take leave, Elizabeth, ashamed of her mother's ungracious and reluctant good wishes, and sincerely affected herself, accompanied her out of the room. As they went downstairs together, Charlotte said:

"I shall depend on hearing from you very often, Eliza."

"*That* you certainly shall."

"And I have another favour to ask you. Will you come and see me?"

"We shall often meet, I hope, in Hertfordshire."

"I am not likely to leave Kent for some time. Promise me, therefore, to come to Hunsford."

Elizabeth could not refuse, though she foresaw little pleasure in the visit.

"My father and Maria are coming to me in March," added Charlotte, "and I hope you will consent to be of the party. Indeed, Eliza, you will be as welcome as either of them."

The wedding took place; the bride and bridegroom set off for Kent from the church door, and everybody had as much to say, or to hear, on the subject as usual. Elizabeth soon heard from her friend; and their correspondence was as regular and frequent as it had ever been; that it should be equally unreserved was impossible. Elizabeth could never address her without feeling that all the comfort of intimacy was over, and though determined not to slacken as a correspondent, it was for the sake of what had been, rather than what was. Charlotte's first letters were received with a good deal of eagerness; there could not but be curiosity to know how she would speak of her new home, how she would like Lady Catherine, and how happy she would dare pronounce herself to be; though, when the letters were read, Elizabeth felt that Charlotte expressed herself on every point exactly as she might have foreseen. She wrote cheerfully, seemed surrounded with comforts, and mentioned nothing which she could not praise. The house, furniture, neighbourhood, and roads, were all to her taste, and Lady Catherine's behaviour was most friendly and obliging. It was Mr. Collins's picture of Hunsford and Rosings rationally softened; and Elizabeth perceived that she must wait for her own visit there to know the rest.

Jane had already written a few lines to her sister to announce their safe arrival in London; and when she wrote again, Elizabeth hoped it would be in her power to say something of the Bingleys.

Her impatience for this second letter was as well rewarded as impatience generally is. Jane had been a week in town without either seeing or hearing from Caroline. She

accounted for it, however, by supposing that her last letter to her friend from Longbourn had by some accident been lost.

"My aunt," she continued, "is going to-morrow into that part of the town, and I shall take the opportunity of calling in Grosvenor Street."

She wrote again when the visit was paid, and she had seen Miss Bingley. "I did not think Caroline in spirits," were her words, "but she was very glad to see me, and reproached me for giving her no notice of my coming to London. I was right, therefore, my last letter had never reached her. I inquired after their brother, of course. He was well, but so much engaged with Mr. Darcy that they scarcely ever saw him. I found that Miss Darcy was expected to dinner. I wish I could see her. My visit was not long, as Caroline and Mrs. Hurst were going out. I dare say I shall see them soon here."

Elizabeth shook her head over this letter. It convinced her that accident only could discover to Mr. Bingley her sister's being in town.

Four weeks passed away, and Jane saw nothing of him. She endeavoured to persuade herself that she did not regret it; but she could no longer be blind to Miss Bingley's inattention. After waiting at home every morning for a fortnight, and inventing every evening a fresh excuse for her, the visitor did at last appear; but the shortness of her stay, and yet more, the alteration of her manner would allow Jane to deceive herself no longer. The letter which she wrote on this occasion to her sister will prove what she felt.

"My dearest Lizzy will, I am sure, be incapable of triumphing in her better judgement, at my expense, when I confess myself to have been entirely deceived in Miss Bingley's regard for me. But, my dear sister, though the event has proved you right, do not think me obstinate if I still assert that, considering what her behaviour was, my confidence was as natural as your suspicion. I do not at all comprehend her reason for wishing to be intimate with me; but if the same circumstances were to happen again, I am sure I should be deceived again. Caroline did not return my visit till yesterday; and not a note, not a line, did I receive in the meantime. When she did come, it was very evident that she had no pleasure in it; she made a slight, formal apology, for not calling before, said not a word of wishing to see me again, and was in every respect so altered a creature, that when she went away I was perfectly resolved to continue the acquaintance no longer. I pity, though I cannot help blaming her. She was very wrong in singling me out as she did; I can safely say that every advance to intimacy began on her side. But I pity her, because she must feel that she has been acting wrong, and because I am very sure that anxiety for her brother is the cause of it. I need not explain myself farther; and though we know this anxiety to be quite needless, yet if she feels it, it will easily account for her behaviour to me; and so deservedly dear as he is to his sister, whatever anxiety she must feel on his behalf is natural and amiable. I cannot but wonder, however, at her having any such fears now,

because, if he had at all cared about me, we must have met, long ago. He knows of my being in town, I am certain, from something she said herself; and yet it would seem, by her manner of talking, as if she wanted to persuade herself that he is really partial to Miss Darcy. I cannot understand it. If I were not afraid of judging harshly, I should be almost tempted to say that there is a strong appearance of duplicity in all this. But I will endeavour to banish every painful thought, and think only of what will make me happy—your affection, and the invariable kindness of my dear uncle and aunt. Let me hear from you very soon. Miss Bingley said something of his never returning to Netherfield again, of giving up the house, but not with any certainty. We had better not mention it. I am extremely glad that you have such pleasant accounts from our friends at Hunsford. Pray go to see them, with Sir William and Maria. I am sure you will be very comfortable there.—Yours, etc."

This letter gave Elizabeth some pain; but her spirits returned as she considered that Jane would no longer be duped, by the sister at least. All expectation from the brother was now absolutely over. She would not even wish for a renewal of his attentions. His character sunk on every review of it; and as a punishment for him, as well as a possible advantage to Jane, she seriously hoped he might really soon marry Mr. Darcy's sister, as by Wickham's account, she would make him abundantly regret what he had thrown away.

Mrs. Gardiner about this time reminded Elizabeth of her promise concerning that gentleman, and required information; and Elizabeth had such to send as might rather give contentment to her aunt than to herself. His apparent partiality had subsided, his attentions were over, he was the admirer of some one else. Elizabeth was watchful enough to see it all, but she could see it and write of it without material pain. Her heart had been but slightly touched, and her vanity was satisfied with believing that *she* would have been his only choice, had fortune permitted it. The sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds was the most remarkable charm of the young lady to whom he was now rendering himself agreeable; but Elizabeth, less clear-sighted perhaps in this case than in Charlotte's, did not quarrel with him for his wish of independence. Nothing, on the contrary, could be more natural; and while able to suppose that it cost him a few struggles to relinquish her, she was ready to allow it a wise and desirable measure for both, and could very sincerely wish him happy.

All this was acknowledged to Mrs. Gardiner; and after relating the circumstances, she thus went on: "I am now convinced, my dear aunt, that I have never been much in love; for had I really experienced that pure and elevating passion, I should at present detest his very name, and wish him all manner of evil. But my feelings are not only cordial towards *him*; they are even impartial towards Miss King. I cannot find out that I hate her at all, or that I am in the least unwilling to think her a very good sort of girl. There can be no love in all this. My watchfulness has been effectual; and though I certainly should be a more interesting object to all my acquaintances were I distractedly in love with him, I cannot say that I regret my comparative insignificance.

Importance may sometimes be purchased too dearly. Kitty and Lydia take his defection much more to heart than I do. They are young in the ways of the world, and not yet open to the mortifying conviction that handsome young men must have something to live on as well as the plain."

## Chapter 27

With no greater events than these in the Longbourn family, and otherwise diversified by little beyond the walks to Meryton, sometimes dirty and sometimes cold, did January and February pass away. March was to take Elizabeth to Hunsford. She had not at first thought very seriously of going thither; but Charlotte, she soon found, was depending on the plan and she gradually learned to consider it herself with greater pleasure as well as greater certainty. Absence had increased her desire of seeing Charlotte again, and weakened her disgust of Mr. Collins. There was novelty in the scheme, and as, with such a mother and such uncompanionable sisters, home could not be faultless, a little change was not unwelcome for its own sake. The journey would moreover give her a peep at Jane; and, in short, as the time drew near, she would have been very sorry for any delay. Everything, however, went on smoothly, and was finally settled according to Charlotte's first sketch. She was to accompany Sir William and his second daughter. The improvement of spending a night in London was added in time, and the plan became perfect as plan could be.

The only pain was in leaving her father, who would certainly miss her, and who, when it came to the point, so little liked her going, that he told her to write to him, and almost promised to answer her letter.

The farewell between herself and Mr. Wickham was perfectly friendly; on his side even more. His present pursuit could not make him forget that Elizabeth had been the first to excite and to deserve his attention, the first to listen and to pity, the first to be admired; and in his manner of bidding her adieu, wishing her every enjoyment, reminding her of what she was to expect in Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and trusting their opinion of her—their opinion of everybody—would always coincide, there was a solicitude, an interest which she felt must ever attach her to him with a most sincere regard; and she parted from him convinced that, whether married or single, he must always be her model of the amiable and pleasing.

Her fellow-travellers the next day were not of a kind to make her think him less agreeable. Sir William Lucas, and his daughter Maria, a good-humoured girl, but as empty-headed as himself, had nothing to say that could be worth hearing, and were listened to with about as much delight as the rattle of the chaise. Elizabeth loved



absurdities, but she had known Sir William's too long. He could tell her nothing new of the wonders of his presentation and knighthood; and his civilities were worn out, like his information.

It was a journey of only twenty-four miles, and they began it so early as to be in Gracechurch Street by noon. As they drove to Mr. Gardiner's door, Jane was at a drawing-room window watching their arrival; when they entered the passage she was there to welcome them, and Elizabeth, looking earnestly in her face, was pleased to see it healthful and lovely as ever. On the stairs were a troop of little boys and girls, whose eagerness for their cousin's appearance would not allow them to wait in the drawing-room, and whose shyness, as they had not seen her for a twelvemonth, prevented their coming lower. All was joy and kindness. The day passed most pleasantly away; the morning in bustle and shopping, and the evening at one of the theatres.

Elizabeth then contrived to sit by her aunt. Their first object was her sister; and she was more grieved than astonished to hear, in reply to her minute inquiries, that though Jane always struggled to support her spirits, there were periods of dejection. It was reasonable, however, to hope that they would not continue long. Mrs. Gardiner gave her the particulars also of Miss Bingley's visit in Gracechurch Street, and repeated conversations occurring at different times between Jane and herself, which proved that the former had, from her heart, given up the acquaintance.

Mrs. Gardiner then rallied her niece on Wickham's desertion, and complimented her on bearing it so well.

"But my dear Elizabeth," she added, "what sort of girl is Miss King? I should be sorry to think our friend mercenary."

"Pray, my dear aunt, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin? Last Christmas you were afraid of his marrying me, because it would be imprudent; and now, because he is trying to get a girl with only ten thousand pounds, you want to find out that he is mercenary."

"If you will only tell me what sort of girl Miss King is, I shall know what to think."

"She is a very good kind of girl, I believe. I know no harm of her."

"But he paid her not the smallest attention till her grandfather's death made her mistress of this fortune."

"No—why should he? If it were not allowable for him to gain *my* affections because I had no money, what occasion could there be for making love to a girl whom he did not care about, and who was equally poor?"

"But there seems an indelicacy in directing his attentions towards her so soon after this event."

"A man in distressed circumstances has not time for all those elegant decorums which other people may observe. If *she* does not object to it, why should *we*?"

"*Her* not objecting does not justify *him*. It only shows her being deficient in something herself—sense or feeling."

"Well," cried Elizabeth, "have it as you choose. *He* shall be mercenary, and *she* shall be foolish."

"No, Lizzy, that is what I do *not* choose. I should be sorry, you know, to think ill of a young man who has lived so long in Derbyshire."

"Oh! if that is all, I have a very poor opinion of young men who live in Derbyshire; and their intimate friends who live in Hertfordshire are not much better. I am sick of them all. Thank Heaven! I am going to-morrow where I shall find a man who has not one agreeable quality, who has neither manner nor sense to recommend him. Stupid men are the only ones worth knowing, after all."

"Take care, Lizzy; that speech savours strongly of disappointment."

Before they were separated by the conclusion of the play, she had the unexpected happiness of an invitation to accompany her uncle and aunt in a tour of pleasure which they proposed taking in the summer.

"We have not determined how far it shall carry us," said Mrs. Gardiner, "but, perhaps, to the Lakes."

No scheme could have been more agreeable to Elizabeth, and her acceptance of the invitation was most ready and grateful. "Oh, my dear, dear aunt," she rapturously cried, "what delight! what felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are young men to rocks and mountains? Oh! what hours of transport we shall spend! And when we *do* return, it shall not be like other travellers, without being able to give one accurate idea of anything. We *will* know where we have gone—we *will* recollect what we have seen. Lakes, mountains, and rivers shall not be jumbled together in our imaginations; nor when we attempt to describe any particular scene, will we begin quarreling about its relative situation. Let our first effusions be less insupportable than those of the generality of travellers."

## Chapter 28

Every object in the next day's journey was new and interesting to Elizabeth; and her spirits were in a state of enjoyment; for she had seen her sister looking so well as to banish all fear for her health, and the prospect of her northern tour was a constant source of delight.

When they left the high road for the lane to Hunsford, every eye was in search of the Parsonage, and every turning expected to bring it in view. The palings of Rosings Park was their boundary on one side. Elizabeth smiled at the recollection of all that she had heard of its inhabitants.

At length the Parsonage was discernible. The garden sloping to the road, the house standing in it, the green pales, and the laurel hedge, everything declared they were arriving. Mr. Collins and Charlotte appeared at the door, and the carriage stopped at the small gate which led by a short gravel walk to the house, amidst the nods and smiles of the whole party. In a moment they were all out of the chaise, rejoicing at the sight of each other. Mrs. Collins welcomed her friend with the liveliest pleasure, and Elizabeth was more and more satisfied with coming when she found herself so affectionately received. She saw instantly that her cousin's manners were not altered by his marriage; his formal civility was just what it had been, and he detained her some minutes at the gate to hear and satisfy his inquiries after all her family. They were then, with no other delay than his pointing out the neatness of the entrance, taken into the house; and as soon as they were in the parlour, he welcomed them a second time, with ostentatious formality to his humble abode, and punctually repeated all his wife's offers of refreshment.

Elizabeth was prepared to see him in his glory; and she could not help in fancying that in displaying the good proportion of the room, its aspect and its furniture, he addressed himself particularly to her, as if wishing to make her feel what she had lost in refusing him. But though everything seemed neat and comfortable, she was not able to gratify him by any sigh of repentance, and rather looked with wonder at her friend that she could have so cheerful an air with such a companion. When Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, she involuntarily turned her eye on Charlotte. Once or twice she could discern a faint blush; but in general Charlotte wisely did not hear. After sitting long enough to admire every article of furniture in the room, from the sideboard to the fender, to give an account of their journey, and of all that had happened in London, Mr. Collins invited them to take a stroll in the garden, which was large and well laid out, and to the cultivation of which he attended himself. To work in this garden was one of his most respectable pleasures; and Elizabeth admired the command of countenance with which Charlotte talked of the healthfulness of the exercise, and owned she encouraged it as much as possible. Here, leading the way through every walk and cross walk, and scarcely allowing them an interval to utter the praises he asked for, every view was pointed out with a minuteness which left beauty entirely behind. He could number the fields in every direction, and could tell how many trees there were in the most distant clump. But of all the views which his garden, or which the country or kingdom could boast, none were to be compared with the prospect of Rosings, afforded by an opening in the trees that bordered the park nearly opposite the front of his house. It was a handsome modern building, well situated on rising ground.

From his garden, Mr. Collins would have led them round his two meadows; but the ladies, not having shoes to encounter the remains of a white frost, turned back; and while Sir William accompanied him, Charlotte took her sister and friend over the house, extremely well pleased, probably, to have the opportunity of showing it without her husband's help. It was rather small, but well built and convenient; and everything was fitted up and arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Elizabeth gave Charlotte all the credit. When Mr. Collins could be forgotten, there was really an air of great comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten.

She had already learnt that Lady Catherine was still in the country. It was spoken of again while they were at dinner, when Mr. Collins joining in, observed:

"Yes, Miss Elizabeth, you will have the honour of seeing Lady Catherine de Bourgh on the ensuing Sunday at church, and I need not say you will be delighted with her. She is all affability and condescension, and I doubt not but you will be honoured with some portion of her notice when service is over. I have scarcely any hesitation in saying she will include you and my sister Maria in every invitation with which she honours us during your stay here. Her behaviour to my dear Charlotte is charming. We dine at Rosings twice every week, and are never allowed to walk home. Her ladyship's carriage is regularly ordered for us. I *should* say, one of her ladyship's carriages, for she has several."

"Lady Catherine is a very respectable, sensible woman indeed," added Charlotte, "and a most attentive neighbour."

"Very true, my dear, that is exactly what I say. She is the sort of woman whom one cannot regard with too much deference."

The evening was spent chiefly in talking over Hertfordshire news, and telling again what had already been written; and when it closed, Elizabeth, in the solitude of her chamber, had to meditate upon Charlotte's degree of contentment, to understand her address in guiding, and composure in bearing with, her husband, and to acknowledge that it was all done very well. She had also to anticipate how her visit would pass, the quiet tenor of their usual employments, the vexatious interruptions of Mr. Collins, and the gaieties of their intercourse with Rosings. A lively imagination soon settled it all.

About the middle of the next day, as she was in her room getting ready for a walk, a sudden noise below seemed to speak the whole house in confusion; and, after listening a moment, she heard somebody running up stairs in a violent hurry, and calling loudly after her. She opened the door and met Maria in the landing place, who, breathless with agitation, cried out—

"Oh, my dear Eliza! pray make haste and come into the dining-room, for there is such a sight to be seen! I will not tell you what it is. Make haste, and come down this moment."

Elizabeth asked questions in vain; Maria would tell her nothing more, and down they ran into the dining-room, which fronted the lane, in quest of this wonder; It was two ladies stopping in a low phaeton at the garden gate.

"And is this all?" cried Elizabeth. "I expected at least that the pigs were got into the garden, and here is nothing but Lady Catherine and her daughter."

"La! my dear," said Maria, quite shocked at the mistake, "it is not Lady Catherine. The old lady is Mrs. Jenkinson, who lives with them; the other is Miss de Bourgh. Only look at her. She is quite a little creature. Who would have thought that she could be so thin and small?"

"She is abominably rude to keep Charlotte out of doors in all this wind. Why does she not come in?"

"Oh, Charlotte says she hardly ever does. It is the greatest of favours when Miss de Bourgh comes in."

"I like her appearance," said Elizabeth, struck with other ideas. "She looks sickly and cross. Yes, she will do for him very well. She will make him a very proper wife."

Mr. Collins and Charlotte were both standing at the gate in conversation with the ladies; and Sir William, to Elizabeth's high diversion, was stationed in the doorway, in earnest contemplation of the greatness before him, and constantly bowing whenever Miss de Bourgh looked that way.

At length there was nothing more to be said; the ladies drove on, and the others returned into the house. Mr. Collins no sooner saw the two girls than he began to congratulate them on their good fortune, which Charlotte explained by letting them know that the whole party was asked to dine at Rosings the next day.

## Chapter 29

Mr. Collins's triumph, in consequence of this invitation, was complete. The power of displaying the grandeur of his patroness to his wondering visitors, and of letting them see her civility towards himself and his wife, was exactly what he had wished for; and that an opportunity of doing it should be given so soon, was such an instance of Lady Catherine's condescension, as he knew not how to admire enough.

"I confess," said he, "that I should not have been at all surprised by her ladyship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea and spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected, from my knowledge of her affability, that it would happen. But who could have foreseen such an attention as this? Who could have imagined that we should receive

an invitation to dine there (an invitation, moreover, including the whole party) so immediately after your arrival!"

"I am the less surprised at what has happened," replied Sir William, "from that knowledge of what the manners of the great really are, which my situation in life has allowed me to acquire. About the court, such instances of elegant breeding are not uncommon."

Scarcely anything was talked of the whole day or next morning but their visit to Rosings. Mr. Collins was carefully instructing them in what they were to expect, that the sight of such rooms, so many servants, and so splendid a dinner, might not wholly overpower them.

When the ladies were separating for the toilette, he said to Elizabeth—

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us which becomes herself and her daughter. I would advise you merely to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest—there is no occasion for anything more. Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved."

While they were dressing, he came two or three times to their different doors, to recommend their being quick, as Lady Catherine very much objected to be kept waiting for her dinner. Such formidable accounts of her ladyship, and her manner of living, quite frightened Maria Lucas who had been little used to company, and she looked forward to her introduction at Rosings with as much apprehension as her father had done to his presentation at St. James's.

As the weather was fine, they had a pleasant walk of about half a mile across the park. Every park has its beauty and its prospects; and Elizabeth saw much to be pleased with, though she could not be in such raptures as Mr. Collins expected the scene to inspire, and was but slightly affected by his enumeration of the windows in front of the house, and his relation of what the glazing altogether had originally cost Sir Lewis de Bourgh.

When they ascended the steps to the hall, Maria's alarm was every moment increasing, and even Sir William did not look perfectly calm. Elizabeth's courage did not fail her. She had heard nothing of Lady Catherine that spoke her awful from any extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue, and the mere stateliness of money or rank she thought she could witness without trepidation.

From the entrance-hall, of which Mr. Collins pointed out, with a rapturous air, the fine proportion and the finished ornaments, they followed the servants through an ante-chamber, to the room where Lady Catherine, her daughter, and Mrs. Jenkinson were sitting. Her ladyship, with great condescension, arose to receive them; and as Mrs. Collins had settled it with her husband that the office of introduction should be

hers, it was performed in a proper manner, without any of those apologies and thanks which he would have thought necessary.

In spite of having been at St. James's, Sir William was so completely awed by the grandeur surrounding him, that he had but just courage enough to make a very low bow, and take his seat without saying a word; and his daughter, frightened almost out of her senses, sat on the edge of her chair, not knowing which way to look. Elizabeth found herself quite equal to the scene, and could observe the three ladies before her composedly. Lady Catherine was a tall, large woman, with strongly-marked features, which might once have been handsome. Her air was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank. She was not rendered formidable by silence; but whatever she said was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance, and brought Mr. Wickham immediately to Elizabeth's mind; and from the observation of the day altogether, she believed Lady Catherine to be exactly what he represented.

When, after examining the mother, in whose countenance and deportment she soon found some resemblance of Mr. Darcy, she turned her eyes on the daughter, she could almost have joined in Maria's astonishment at her being so thin and so small. There was neither in figure nor face any likeness between the ladies. Miss de Bourgh was pale and sickly; her features, though not plain, were insignificant; and she spoke very little, except in a low voice, to Mrs. Jenkinson, in whose appearance there was nothing remarkable, and who was entirely engaged in listening to what she said, and placing a screen in the proper direction before her eyes.

After sitting a few minutes, they were all sent to one of the windows to admire the view, Mr. Collins attending them to point out its beauties, and Lady Catherine kindly informing them that it was much better worth looking at in the summer.

The dinner was exceedingly handsome, and there were all the servants and all the articles of plate which Mr. Collins had promised; and, as he had likewise foretold, he took his seat at the bottom of the table, by her ladyship's desire, and looked as if he felt that life could furnish nothing greater. He carved, and ate, and praised with delighted alacrity; and every dish was commended, first by him and then by Sir William, who was now enough recovered to echo whatever his son-in-law said, in a manner which Elizabeth wondered Lady Catherine could bear. But Lady Catherine seemed gratified by their excessive admiration, and gave most gracious smiles, especially when any dish on the table proved a novelty to them. The party did not supply much conversation. Elizabeth was ready to speak whenever there was an opening, but she was seated between Charlotte and Miss de Bourgh—the former of whom was engaged in listening to Lady Catherine, and the latter said not a word to her all dinner-time. Mrs. Jenkinson was chiefly employed in watching how little Miss de Bourgh ate, pressing her to try some other dish, and fearing she was indisposed.

Maria thought speaking out of the question, and the gentlemen did nothing but eat and admire.

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, there was little to be done but to hear Lady Catherine talk, which she did without any intermission till coffee came in, delivering her opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner, as proved that she was not used to have her judgement controverted. She inquired into Charlotte's domestic concerns familiarly and minutely, gave her a great deal of advice as to the management of them all; told her how everything ought to be regulated in so small a family as hers, and instructed her as to the care of her cows and her poultry. Elizabeth found that nothing was beneath this great lady's attention, which could furnish her with an occasion of dictating to others. In the intervals of her discourse with Mrs. Collins, she addressed a variety of questions to Maria and Elizabeth, but especially to the latter, of whose connections she knew the least, and who she observed to Mrs. Collins was a very genteel, pretty kind of girl. She asked her, at different times, how many sisters she had, whether they were older or younger than herself, whether any of them were likely to be married, whether they were handsome, where they had been educated, what carriage her father kept, and what had been her mother's maiden name? Elizabeth felt all the impertinence of her questions but answered them very composedly. Lady Catherine then observed,

"Your father's estate is entailed on Mr. Collins, I think. For your sake," turning to Charlotte, "I am glad of it; but otherwise I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line. It was not thought necessary in Sir Lewis de Bourgh's family. Do you play and sing, Miss Bennet?"

"A little."

"Oh! then—some time or other we shall be happy to hear you. Our instrument is a capital one, probably superior to——You shall try it some day. Do your sisters play and sing?"

"One of them does."

"Why did not you all learn? You ought all to have learned. The Miss Webbs all play, and their father has not so good an income as yours. Do you draw?"

"No, not at all."

"What, none of you?"

"Not one."

"That is very strange. But I suppose you had no opportunity. Your mother should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit of masters."

"My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates London."

"Has your governess left you?"

"We never had any governess."



"No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education."

Elizabeth could hardly help smiling as she assured her that had not been the case.

"Then, who taught you? who attended to you? Without a governess, you must have been neglected."

"Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might."

"Aye, no doubt; but that is what a governess will prevent, and if I had known your mother, I should have advised her most strenuously to engage one. I always say that nothing is to be done in education without steady and regular instruction, and nobody but a governess can give it. It is wonderful how many families I have been the means of supplying in that way. I am always glad to get a young person well placed out. Four nieces of Mrs. Jenkinson are most delightfully situated through my means; and it was but the other day that I recommended another young person, who was merely accidentally mentioned to me, and the family are quite delighted with her. Mrs. Collins, did I tell you of Lady Metcalf's calling yesterday to thank me? She finds Miss Pope a treasure. 'Lady Catherine,' said she, 'you have given me a treasure.' Are any of your younger sisters out, Miss Bennet?"

"Yes, ma'am, all."

"All! What, all five out at once? Very odd! And you only the second. The younger ones out before the elder ones are married! Your younger sisters must be very young?"

"Yes, my youngest is not sixteen. Perhaps *she* is full young to be much in company. But really, ma'am, I think it would be very hard upon younger sisters, that they should not have their share of society and amusement, because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early. The last-born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth as the first. And to be kept back on *such* a motive! I think it would not be very likely to promote sisterly affection or delicacy of mind."

"Upon my word," said her ladyship, "you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person. Pray, what is your age?"

"With three younger sisters grown up," replied Elizabeth, smiling, "your ladyship can hardly expect me to own it."

Lady Catherine seemed quite astonished at not receiving a direct answer; and Elizabeth suspected herself to be the first creature who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence.

"You cannot be more than twenty, I am sure, therefore you need not conceal your age."

"I am not one-and-twenty."

When the gentlemen had joined them, and tea was over, the card-tables were placed. Lady Catherine, Sir William, and Mr. and Mrs. Collins sat down to quadrille; and as Miss de Bourgh chose to play at cassino, the two girls had the honour of assisting Mrs. Jenkinson to make up her party. Their table was superlatively stupid. Scarcely a syllable was uttered that did not relate to the game, except when Mrs. Jenkinson expressed her fears of Miss de Bourgh's being too hot or too cold, or having too much or too little light. A great deal more passed at the other table. Lady Catherine was generally speaking—stating the mistakes of the three others, or relating some anecdote of herself. Mr. Collins was employed in agreeing to everything her ladyship said, thanking her for every fish he won, and apologising if he thought he won too many. Sir William did not say much. He was storing his memory with anecdotes and noble names.

When Lady Catherine and her daughter had played as long as they chose, the tables were broken up, the carriage was offered to Mrs. Collins, gratefully accepted and immediately ordered. The party then gathered round the fire to hear Lady Catherine determine what weather they were to have on the morrow. From these instructions they were summoned by the arrival of the coach; and with many speeches of thankfulness on Mr. Collins's side and as many bows on Sir William's they departed. As soon as they had driven from the door, Elizabeth was called on by her cousin to give her opinion of all that she had seen at Rosings, which, for Charlotte's sake, she made more favourable than it really was. But her commendation, though costing her some trouble, could by no means satisfy Mr. Collins, and he was very soon obliged to take her ladyship's praise into his own hands.

## Chapter 30

Sir William stayed only a week at Hunsford, but his visit was long enough to convince him of his daughter's being most comfortably settled, and of her possessing such a husband and such a neighbour as were not often met with. While Sir William was with them, Mr. Collins devoted his morning to driving him out in his gig, and showing him the country; but when he went away, the whole family returned to their usual employments, and Elizabeth was thankful to find that they did not see more of her cousin by the alteration, for the chief of the time between breakfast and dinner was now passed by him either at work in the garden or in reading and writing, and looking out of the window in his own book-room, which fronted the road. The room in which the ladies sat was backwards. Elizabeth had at first rather wondered that Charlotte should not prefer the dining-parlour for common use; it was a better sized room, and

had a more pleasant aspect; but she soon saw that her friend had an excellent reason for what she did, for Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment, had they sat in one equally lively; and she gave Charlotte credit for the arrangement.

From the drawing-room they could distinguish nothing in the lane, and were indebted to Mr. Collins for the knowledge of what carriages went along, and how often especially Miss de Bourgh drove by in her phaeton, which he never failed coming to inform them of, though it happened almost every day. She not unfrequently stopped at the Parsonage, and had a few minutes' conversation with Charlotte, but was scarcely ever prevailed upon to get out.

Very few days passed in which Mr. Collins did not walk to Rosings, and not many in which his wife did not think it necessary to go likewise; and till Elizabeth recollected that there might be other family livings to be disposed of, she could not understand the sacrifice of so many hours. Now and then they were honoured with a call from her ladyship, and nothing escaped her observation that was passing in the room during these visits. She examined into their employments, looked at their work, and advised them to do it differently; found fault with the arrangement of the furniture; or detected the housemaid in negligence; and if she accepted any refreshment, seemed to do it only for the sake of finding out that Mrs. Collins's joints of meat were too large for her family.

Elizabeth soon perceived, that though this great lady was not in commission of the peace of the county, she was a most active magistrate in her own parish, the minutest concerns of which were carried to her by Mr. Collins; and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented, or too poor, she sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty.

The entertainment of dining at Rosings was repeated about twice a week; and, allowing for the loss of Sir William, and there being only one card-table in the evening, every such entertainment was the counterpart of the first. Their other engagements were few, as the style of living in the neighbourhood in general was beyond Mr. Collins's reach. This, however, was no evil to Elizabeth, and upon the whole she spent her time comfortably enough; there were half-hours of pleasant conversation with Charlotte, and the weather was so fine for the time of year that she had often great enjoyment out of doors. Her favourite walk, and where she frequently went while the others were calling on Lady Catherine, was along the open grove which edged that side of the park, where there was a nice sheltered path, which no one seemed to value but herself, and where she felt beyond the reach of Lady Catherine's curiosity.

In this quiet way, the first fortnight of her visit soon passed away. Easter was approaching, and the week preceding it was to bring an addition to the family at

Rosings, which in so small a circle must be important. Elizabeth had heard soon after her arrival that Mr. Darcy was expected there in the course of a few weeks, and though there were not many of her acquaintances whom she did not prefer, his coming would furnish one comparatively new to look at in their Rosings parties, and she might be amused in seeing how hopeless Miss Bingley's designs on him were, by his behaviour to his cousin, for whom he was evidently destined by Lady Catherine, who talked of his coming with the greatest satisfaction, spoke of him in terms of the highest admiration, and seemed almost angry to find that he had already been frequently seen by Miss Lucas and herself.

His arrival was soon known at the Parsonage; for Mr. Collins was walking the whole morning within view of the lodges opening into Hunsford Lane, in order to have the earliest assurance of it, and after making his bow as the carriage turned into the Park, hurried home with the great intelligence. On the following morning he hastened to Rosings to pay his respects. There were two nephews of Lady Catherine to require them, for Mr. Darcy had brought with him a Colonel Fitzwilliam, the younger son of his uncle Lord —, and, to the great surprise of all the party, when Mr. Collins returned, the gentlemen accompanied him. Charlotte had seen them from her husband's room, crossing the road, and immediately running into the other, told the girls what an honour they might expect, adding:

"I may thank you, Eliza, for this piece of civility. Mr. Darcy would never have come so soon to wait upon me."

Elizabeth had scarcely time to disclaim all right to the compliment, before their approach was announced by the door-bell, and shortly afterwards the three gentlemen entered the room. Colonel Fitzwilliam, who led the way, was about thirty, not handsome, but in person and address most truly the gentleman. Mr. Darcy looked just as he had been used to look in Hertfordshire—paid his compliments, with his usual reserve, to Mrs. Collins, and whatever might be his feelings toward her friend, met her with every appearance of composure. Elizabeth merely curtsied to him without saying a word.

Colonel Fitzwilliam entered into conversation directly with the readiness and ease of a well-bred man, and talked very pleasantly; but his cousin, after having addressed a slight observation on the house and garden to Mrs. Collins, sat for some time without speaking to anybody. At length, however, his civility was so far awakened as to inquire of Elizabeth after the health of her family. She answered him in the usual way, and after a moment's pause, added:

"My eldest sister has been in town these three months. Have you never happened to see her there?"

She was perfectly sensible that he never had; but she wished to see whether he would betray any consciousness of what had passed between the Bingleys and Jane, and she thought he looked a little confused as he answered that he had never been so

fortunate as to meet Miss Bennet. The subject was pursued no farther, and the gentlemen soon afterwards went away.

## Chapter 31

Colonel Fitzwilliam's manners were very much admired at the Parsonage, and the ladies all felt that he must add considerably to the pleasures of their engagements at Rosings. It was some days, however, before they received any invitation thither—for while there were visitors in the house, they could not be necessary; and it was not till Easter-day, almost a week after the gentlemen's arrival, that they were honoured by such an attention, and then they were merely asked on leaving church to come there in the evening. For the last week they had seen very little of Lady Catherine or her daughter. Colonel Fitzwilliam had called at the Parsonage more than once during the time, but Mr. Darcy they had seen only at church.

The invitation was accepted of course, and at a proper hour they joined the party in Lady Catherine's drawing-room. Her ladyship received them civilly, but it was plain that their company was by no means so acceptable as when she could get nobody else; and she was, in fact, almost engrossed by her nephews, speaking to them, especially to Darcy, much more than to any other person in the room.

Colonel Fitzwilliam seemed really glad to see them; anything was a welcome relief to him at Rosings; and Mrs. Collins's pretty friend had moreover caught his fancy very much. He now seated himself by her, and talked so agreeably of Kent and Hertfordshire, of travelling and staying at home, of new books and music, that Elizabeth had never been half so well entertained in that room before; and they conversed with so much spirit and flow, as to draw the attention of Lady Catherine herself, as well as of Mr. Darcy. *His* eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned towards them with a look of curiosity; and that her ladyship, after a while, shared the feeling, was more openly acknowledged, for she did not scruple to call out:

"What is that you are saying, Fitzwilliam? What is it you are talking of? What are you telling Miss Bennet? Let me hear what it is."

"We are speaking of music, madam," said he, when no longer able to avoid a reply.

"Of music! Then pray speak aloud. It is of all subjects my delight. I must have my share in the conversation if you are speaking of music. There are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste. If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient. And so would Anne, if her health had allowed her to apply. I am confident that she would have performed delightfully. How does Georgiana get on, Darcy?"

Mr. Darcy spoke with affectionate praise of his sister's proficiency.

"I am very glad to hear such a good account of her," said Lady Catherine; "and pray tell her from me, that she cannot expect to excel if she does not practice a good deal."

"I assure you, madam," he replied, "that she does not need such advice. She practises very constantly."

"So much the better. It cannot be done too much; and when I next write to her, I shall charge her not to neglect it on any account. I often tell young ladies that no excellence in music is to be acquired without constant practice. I have told Miss Bennet several times, that she will never play really well unless she practises more; and though Mrs. Collins has no instrument, she is very welcome, as I have often told her, to come to Rosings every day, and play on the pianoforte in Mrs. Jenkinson's room. She would be in nobody's way, you know, in that part of the house."

Mr. Darcy looked a little ashamed of his aunt's ill-breeding, and made no answer.

When coffee was over, Colonel Fitzwilliam reminded Elizabeth of having promised to play to him; and she sat down directly to the instrument. He drew a chair near her. Lady Catherine listened to half a song, and then talked, as before, to her other nephew; till the latter walked away from her, and making with his usual deliberation towards the pianoforte stationed himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance. Elizabeth saw what he was doing, and at the first convenient pause, turned to him with an arch smile, and said:

"You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy, by coming in all this state to hear me? I will not be alarmed though your sister *does* play so well. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me."

"I shall not say you are mistaken," he replied, "because you could not really believe me to entertain any design of alarming you; and I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own."

Elizabeth laughed heartily at this picture of herself, and said to Colonel Fitzwilliam, "Your cousin will give you a very pretty notion of me, and teach you not to believe a word I say. I am particularly unlucky in meeting with a person so able to expose my real character, in a part of the world where I had hoped to pass myself off with some degree of credit. Indeed, Mr. Darcy, it is very ungenerous in you to mention all that you knew to my disadvantage in Hertfordshire—and, give me leave to say, very impolitic too—for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such things may come out as will shock your relations to hear."

"I am not afraid of you," said he, smilingly.

"Pray let me hear what you have to accuse him of," cried Colonel Fitzwilliam. "I should like to know how he behaves among strangers."

"You shall hear then—but prepare yourself for something very dreadful. The first time of my ever seeing him in Hertfordshire, you must know, was at a ball—and at this ball, what do you think he did? He danced only four dances, though gentlemen were scarce; and, to my certain knowledge, more than one young lady was sitting down in want of a partner. Mr. Darcy, you cannot deny the fact."

"I had not at that time the honour of knowing any lady in the assembly beyond my own party."

"True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a ball-room. Well, Colonel Fitzwilliam, what do I play next? My fingers wait your orders."

"Perhaps," said Darcy, "I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction; but I am ill-qualified to recommend myself to strangers."

"Shall we ask your cousin the reason of this?" said Elizabeth, still addressing Colonel Fitzwilliam. "Shall we ask him why a man of sense and education, and who has lived in the world, is ill qualified to recommend himself to strangers?"

"I can answer your question," said Fitzwilliam, "without applying to him. It is because he will not give himself the trouble."

"I certainly have not the talent which some people possess," said Darcy, "of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done."

"My fingers," said Elizabeth, "do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I will not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe *my* fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution."

Darcy smiled and said, "You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better. No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you can think anything wanting. We neither of us perform to strangers."

Here they were interrupted by Lady Catherine, who called out to know what they were talking of. Elizabeth immediately began playing again. Lady Catherine approached, and, after listening for a few minutes, said to Darcy:

"Miss Bennet would not play at all amiss if she practised more, and could have the advantage of a London master. She has a very good notion of fingering, though her taste is not equal to Anne's. Anne would have been a delightful performer, had her health allowed her to learn."

Elizabeth looked at Darcy to see how cordially he assented to his cousin's praise; but neither at that moment nor at any other could she discern any symptom of love; and from the whole of his behaviour to Miss de Bourgh she derived this comfort for Miss Bingley, that he might have been just as likely to marry *her*, had she been his relation.

Lady Catherine continued her remarks on Elizabeth's performance, mixing with them many instructions on execution and taste. Elizabeth received them with all the forbearance of civility, and, at the request of the gentlemen, remained at the instrument till her ladyship's carriage was ready to take them all home.

## Chapter 32

Elizabeth was sitting by herself the next morning, and writing to Jane while Mrs. Collins and Maria were gone on business into the village, when she was startled by a ring at the door, the certain signal of a visitor. As she had heard no carriage, she thought it not unlikely to be Lady Catherine, and under that apprehension was putting away her half-finished letter that she might escape all impertinent questions, when the door opened, and, to her very great surprise, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Darcy only, entered the room.

He seemed astonished too on finding her alone, and apologised for his intrusion by letting her know that he had understood all the ladies were to be within.

They then sat down, and when her inquiries after Rosings were made, seemed in danger of sinking into total silence. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, to think of something, and in this emergence recollecting *when* she had seen him last in Hertfordshire, and feeling curious to know what he would say on the subject of their hasty departure, she observed:

"How very suddenly you all quitted Netherfield last November, Mr. Darcy! It must have been a most agreeable surprise to Mr. Bingley to see you all after him so soon; for, if I recollect right, he went but the day before. He and his sisters were well, I hope, when you left London?"

"Perfectly so, I thank you."

She found that she was to receive no other answer, and, after a short pause added:

"I think I have understood that Mr. Bingley has not much idea of ever returning to Netherfield again?"

"I have never heard him say so; but it is probable that he may spend very little of his time there in the future. He has many friends, and is at a time of life when friends and engagements are continually increasing."

"If he means to be but little at Netherfield, it would be better for the neighbourhood that he should give up the place entirely, for then we might possibly get a settled family there. But, perhaps, Mr. Bingley did not take the house so much for the



convenience of the neighbourhood as for his own, and we must expect him to keep it or quit it on the same principle."

"I should not be surprised," said Darcy, "if he were to give it up as soon as any eligible purchase offers."

Elizabeth made no answer. She was afraid of talking longer of his friend; and, having nothing else to say, was now determined to leave the trouble of finding a subject to him.

He took the hint, and soon began with, "This seems a very comfortable house. Lady Catherine, I believe, did a great deal to it when Mr. Collins first came to Hunsford."

"I believe she did—and I am sure she could not have bestowed her kindness on a more grateful object."

"Mr. Collins appears to be very fortunate in his choice of a wife."

"Yes, indeed, his friends may well rejoice in his having met with one of the very few sensible women who would have accepted him, or have made him happy if they had. My friend has an excellent understanding—though I am not certain that I consider her marrying Mr. Collins as the wisest thing she ever did. She seems perfectly happy, however, and in a prudential light it is certainly a very good match for her."

"It must be very agreeable for her to be settled within so easy a distance of her own family and friends."

"An easy distance, do you call it? It is nearly fifty miles."

"And what is fifty miles of good road? Little more than half a day's journey. Yes, I call it a *very* easy distance."

"I should never have considered the distance as one of the *advantages* of the match," cried Elizabeth. "I should never have said Mrs. Collins was settled *near* her family."

"It is a proof of your own attachment to Hertfordshire. Anything beyond the very neighbourhood of Longbourn, I suppose, would appear far."

As he spoke there was a sort of smile which Elizabeth fancied she understood; he must be supposing her to be thinking of Jane and Netherfield, and she blushed as she answered:

"I do not mean to say that a woman may not be settled too near her family. The far and the near must be relative, and depend on many varying circumstances. Where there is fortune to make the expenses of travelling unimportant, distance becomes no evil. But that is not the case *here*. Mr. and Mrs. Collins have a comfortable income, but not such a one as will allow of frequent journeys—and I am persuaded my friend would not call herself *near* her family under less than *half* the present distance."

Mr. Darcy drew his chair a little towards her, and said, "*You* cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. *You* cannot have been always at Longbourn."

Elizabeth looked surprised. The gentleman experienced some change of feeling; he drew back his chair, took a newspaper from the table, and glancing over it, said, in a colder voice:

"Are you pleased with Kent?"

A short dialogue on the subject of the country ensued, on either side calm and concise—and soon put an end to by the entrance of Charlotte and her sister, just returned from her walk. The *tete-a-tete* surprised them. Mr. Darcy related the mistake which had occasioned his intruding on Miss Bennet, and after sitting a few minutes longer without saying much to anybody, went away.

"What can be the meaning of this?" said Charlotte, as soon as he was gone. "My dear, Eliza, he must be in love with you, or he would never have called us in this familiar way."

But when Elizabeth told of his silence, it did not seem very likely, even to Charlotte's wishes, to be the case; and after various conjectures, they could at last only suppose his visit to proceed from the difficulty of finding anything to do, which was the more probable from the time of year. All field sports were over. Within doors there was Lady Catherine, books, and a billiard-table, but gentlemen cannot always be within doors; and in the nearness of the Parsonage, or the pleasantness of the walk to it, or of the people who lived in it, the two cousins found a temptation from this period of walking thither almost every day. They called at various times of the morning, sometimes separately, sometimes together, and now and then accompanied by their aunt. It was plain to them all that Colonel Fitzwilliam came because he had pleasure in their society, a persuasion which of course recommended him still more; and Elizabeth was reminded by her own satisfaction in being with him, as well as by his evident admiration of her, of her former favourite George Wickham; and though, in comparing them, she saw there was less captivating softness in Colonel Fitzwilliam's manners, she believed he might have the best informed mind.

But why Mr. Darcy came so often to the Parsonage, it was more difficult to understand. It could not be for society, as he frequently sat there ten minutes together without opening his lips; and when he did speak, it seemed the effect of necessity rather than of choice—a sacrifice to propriety, not a pleasure to himself. He seldom appeared really animated. Mrs. Collins knew not what to make of him. Colonel Fitzwilliam's occasionally laughing at his stupidity, proved that he was generally different, which her own knowledge of him could not have told her; and as she would liked to have believed this change the effect of love, and the object of that love her friend Eliza, she set herself seriously to work to find it out. She watched him whenever they were at Rosings, and whenever he came to Hunsford; but without much success. He certainly looked at her friend a great deal, but the expression of that look was disputable. It was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but she often doubted whether

there were much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind.

She had once or twice suggested to Elizabeth the possibility of his being partial to her, but Elizabeth always laughed at the idea; and Mrs. Collins did not think it right to press the subject, from the danger of raising expectations which might only end in disappointment; for in her opinion it admitted not of a doubt, that all her friend's dislike would vanish, if she could suppose him to be in her power.

In her kind schemes for Elizabeth, she sometimes planned her marrying Colonel Fitzwilliam. He was beyond comparison the most pleasant man; he certainly admired her, and his situation in life was most eligible; but, to counterbalance these advantages, Mr. Darcy had considerable patronage in the church, and his cousin could have none at all.

## Chapter 33

More than once did Elizabeth, in her ramble within the park, unexpectedly meet Mr. Darcy. She felt all the perverseness of the mischance that should bring him where no one else was brought, and, to prevent its ever happening again, took care to inform him at first that it was a favourite haunt of hers. How it could occur a second time, therefore, was very odd! Yet it did, and even a third. It seemed like wilful ill-nature, or a voluntary penance, for on these occasions it was not merely a few formal inquiries and an awkward pause and then away, but he actually thought it necessary to turn back and walk with her. He never said a great deal, nor did she give herself the trouble of talking or of listening much; but it struck her in the course of their third rencontre that he was asking some odd unconnected questions—about her pleasure in being at Hunsford, her love of solitary walks, and her opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Collins's happiness; and that in speaking of Rosings and her not perfectly understanding the house, he seemed to expect that whenever she came into Kent again she would be staying *there* too. His words seemed to imply it. Could he have Colonel Fitzwilliam in his thoughts? She supposed, if he meant anything, he must mean an allusion to what might arise in that quarter. It distressed her a little, and she was quite glad to find herself at the gate in the pales opposite the Parsonage.

She was engaged one day as she walked, in perusing Jane's last letter, and dwelling on some passages which proved that Jane had not written in spirits, when, instead of being again surprised by Mr. Darcy, she saw on looking up that Colonel Fitzwilliam was meeting her. Putting away the letter immediately and forcing a smile, she said:

"I did not know before that you ever walked this way."

"I have been making the tour of the park," he replied, "as I generally do every year, and intend to close it with a call at the Parsonage. Are you going much farther?"

"No, I should have turned in a moment."

And accordingly she did turn, and they walked towards the Parsonage together.

"Do you certainly leave Kent on Saturday?" said she.

"Yes—if Darcy does not put it off again. But I am at his disposal. He arranges the business just as he pleases."

"And if not able to please himself in the arrangement, he has at least pleasure in the great power of choice. I do not know anybody who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what he likes than Mr. Darcy."

"He likes to have his own way very well," replied Colonel Fitzwilliam. "But so we all do. It is only that he has better means of having it than many others, because he is rich, and many others are poor. I speak feelingly. A younger son, you know, must be inured to self-denial and dependence."

"In my opinion, the younger son of an earl can know very little of either. Now seriously, what have you ever known of self-denial and dependence? When have you been prevented by want of money from going wherever you chose, or procuring anything you had a fancy for?"

"These are home questions—and perhaps I cannot say that I have experienced many hardships of that nature. But in matters of greater weight, I may suffer from want of money. Younger sons cannot marry where they like."

"Unless where they like women of fortune, which I think they very often do."

"Our habits of expense make us too dependent, and there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money."

"Is this," thought Elizabeth, "meant for me?" and she coloured at the idea; but, recovering herself, said in a lively tone, "And pray, what is the usual price of an earl's younger son? Unless the elder brother is very sickly, I suppose you would not ask above fifty thousand pounds."

He answered her in the same style, and the subject dropped. To interrupt a silence which might make him fancy her affected with what had passed, she soon afterwards said:

"I imagine your cousin brought you down with him chiefly for the sake of having someone at his disposal. I wonder he does not marry, to secure a lasting convenience of that kind. But, perhaps, his sister does as well for the present, and, as she is under his sole care, he may do what he likes with her."

"No," said Colonel Fitzwilliam, "that is an advantage which he must divide with me. I am joined with him in the guardianship of Miss Darcy."

"Are you indeed? And pray what sort of guardians do you make? Does your charge give you much trouble? Young ladies of her age are sometimes a little difficult to manage, and if she has the true Darcy spirit, she may like to have her own way."

As she spoke she observed him looking at her earnestly; and the manner in which he immediately asked her why she supposed Miss Darcy likely to give them any uneasiness, convinced her that she had somehow or other got pretty near the truth. She directly replied:

"You need not be frightened. I never heard any harm of her; and I dare say she is one of the most tractable creatures in the world. She is a very great favourite with some ladies of my acquaintance, Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley. I think I have heard you say that you know them."

"I know them a little. Their brother is a pleasant gentlemanlike man—he is a great friend of Darcy's."

"Oh! yes," said Elizabeth drily; "Mr. Darcy is uncommonly kind to Mr. Bingley, and takes a prodigious deal of care of him."

"Care of him! Yes, I really believe Darcy *does* take care of him in those points where he most wants care. From something that he told me in our journey hither, I have reason to think Bingley very much indebted to him. But I ought to beg his pardon, for I have no right to suppose that Bingley was the person meant. It was all conjecture."

"What is it you mean?"

"It is a circumstance which Darcy could not wish to be generally known, because if it were to get round to the lady's family, it would be an unpleasant thing."

"You may depend upon my not mentioning it."

"And remember that I have not much reason for supposing it to be Bingley. What he told me was merely this: that he congratulated himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage, but without mentioning names or any other particulars, and I only suspected it to be Bingley from believing him the kind of young man to get into a scrape of that sort, and from knowing them to have been together the whole of last summer."

"Did Mr. Darcy give you reasons for this interference?"

"I understood that there were some very strong objections against the lady."

"And what arts did he use to separate them?"

"He did not talk to me of his own arts," said Fitzwilliam, smiling. "He only told me what I have now told you."

Elizabeth made no answer, and walked on, her heart swelling with indignation. After watching her a little, Fitzwilliam asked her why she was so thoughtful.

"I am thinking of what you have been telling me," said she. "Your cousin's conduct does not suit my feelings. Why was he to be the judge?"

"You are rather disposed to call his interference officious?"

"I do not see what right Mr. Darcy had to decide on the propriety of his friend's inclination, or why, upon his own judgement alone, he was to determine and direct in what manner his friend was to be happy. But," she continued, recollecting herself, "as we know none of the particulars, it is not fair to condemn him. It is not to be supposed that there was much affection in the case."

"That is not an unnatural surmise," said Fitzwilliam, "but it is a lessening of the honour of my cousin's triumph very sadly."

This was spoken jestingly; but it appeared to her so just a picture of Mr. Darcy, that she would not trust herself with an answer, and therefore, abruptly changing the conversation talked on indifferent matters until they reached the Parsonage. There, shut into her own room, as soon as their visitor left them, she could think without interruption of all that she had heard. It was not to be supposed that any other people could be meant than those with whom she was connected. There could not exist in the world *two* men over whom Mr. Darcy could have such boundless influence. That he had been concerned in the measures taken to separate Bingley and Jane she had never doubted; but she had always attributed to Miss Bingley the principal design and arrangement of them. If his own vanity, however, did not mislead him, *he* was the cause, his pride and caprice were the cause, of all that Jane had suffered, and still continued to suffer. He had ruined for a while every hope of happiness for the most affectionate, generous heart in the world; and no one could say how lasting an evil he might have inflicted.

"There were some very strong objections against the lady," were Colonel Fitzwilliam's words; and those strong objections probably were, her having one uncle who was a country attorney, and another who was in business in London.

"To Jane herself," she exclaimed, "there could be no possibility of objection; all loveliness and goodness as she is!—her understanding excellent, her mind improved, and her manners captivating. Neither could anything be urged against my father, who, though with some peculiarities, has abilities Mr. Darcy himself need not disdain, and respectability which he will probably never reach." When she thought of her mother, her confidence gave way a little; but she would not allow that any objections *there* had material weight with Mr. Darcy, whose pride, she was convinced, would receive a deeper wound from the want of importance in his friend's connections, than from their want of sense; and she was quite decided, at last, that he had been partly governed by this worst kind of pride, and partly by the wish of retaining Mr. Bingley for his sister.

The agitation and tears which the subject occasioned, brought on a headache; and it grew so much worse towards the evening, that, added to her unwillingness to see Mr.

Darcy, it determined her not to attend her cousins to Rosings, where they were engaged to drink tea. Mrs. Collins, seeing that she was really unwell, did not press her to go and as much as possible prevented her husband from pressing her; but Mr. Collins could not conceal his apprehension of Lady Catherine's being rather displeased by her staying at home.

## Chapter 34

When they were gone, Elizabeth, as if intending to exasperate herself as much as possible against Mr. Darcy, chose for her employment the examination of all the letters which Jane had written to her since her being in Kent. They contained no actual complaint, nor was there any revival of past occurrences, or any communication of present suffering. But in all, and in almost every line of each, there was a want of that cheerfulness which had been used to characterise her style, and which, proceeding from the serenity of a mind at ease with itself and kindly disposed towards everyone, had been scarcely ever clouded. Elizabeth noticed every sentence conveying the idea of uneasiness, with an attention which it had hardly received on the first perusal. Mr. Darcy's shameful boast of what misery he had been able to inflict, gave her a keener sense of her sister's sufferings. It was some consolation to think that his visit to Rosings was to end on the day after the next—and, a still greater, that in less than a fortnight she should herself be with Jane again, and enabled to contribute to the recovery of her spirits, by all that affection could do.

She could not think of Darcy's leaving Kent without remembering that his cousin was to go with him; but Colonel Fitzwilliam had made it clear that he had no intentions at all, and agreeable as he was, she did not mean to be unhappy about him.

While settling this point, she was suddenly roused by the sound of the door-bell, and her spirits were a little fluttered by the idea of its being Colonel Fitzwilliam himself, who had once before called late in the evening, and might now come to inquire particularly after her. But this idea was soon banished, and her spirits were very differently affected, when, to her utter amazement, she saw Mr. Darcy walk into the room. In an hurried manner he immediately began an inquiry after her health, imputing his visit to a wish of hearing that she were better. She answered him with cold civility. He sat down for a few moments, and then getting up, walked about the room. Elizabeth was surprised, but said not a word. After a silence of several minutes, he came towards her in an agitated manner, and thus began:

"In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

Elizabeth's astonishment was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement; and the avowal of all that he felt, and had long felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed; and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive; till, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in anger. She tried, however, to compose herself to answer him with patience, when he should have done. He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand. As he said this, she could easily see that he had no doubt of a favourable answer. He *spoke* of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther, and, when he ceased, the colour rose into her cheeks, and she said:

"In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could *feel* gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot—I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to have occasioned pain to anyone. It has been most unconsciously done, however, and I hope will be of short duration. The feelings which, you tell me, have long prevented the acknowledgment of your regard, can have little difficulty in overcoming it after this explanation."

Mr. Darcy, who was leaning against the mantelpiece with his eyes fixed on her face, seemed to catch her words with no less resentment than surprise. His complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature. He was struggling for the appearance of composure, and would not open his lips till he believed himself to have attained it. The pause was to Elizabeth's feelings dreadful. At length, with a voice of forced calmness, he said:

"And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why, with so little *endeavour* at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance."

"I might as well inquire," replied she, "why with so evident a desire of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I *was* uncivil? But I have other provocations. You know I have. Had not my feelings



decided against you—had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?"

As she pronounced these words, Mr. Darcy changed colour; but the emotion was short, and he listened without attempting to interrupt her while she continued:

"I have every reason in the world to think ill of you. No motive can excuse the unjust and ungenerous part you acted *there*. You dare not, you cannot deny, that you have been the principal, if not the only means of dividing them from each other—of exposing one to the censure of the world for caprice and instability, and the other to its derision for disappointed hopes, and involving them both in misery of the acutest kind."

She paused, and saw with no slight indignation that he was listening with an air which proved him wholly unmoved by any feeling of remorse. He even looked at her with a smile of affected incredulity.

"Can you deny that you have done it?" she repeated.

With assumed tranquillity he then replied: "I have no wish of denying that I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister, or that I rejoice in my success. Towards *him* I have been kinder than towards myself."

Elizabeth disdained the appearance of noticing this civil reflection, but its meaning did not escape, nor was it likely to conciliate her.

"But it is not merely this affair," she continued, "on which my dislike is founded. Long before it had taken place my opinion of you was decided. Your character was unfolded in the recital which I received many months ago from Mr. Wickham. On this subject, what can you have to say? In what imaginary act of friendship can you here defend yourself? or under what misrepresentation can you here impose upon others?"

"You take an eager interest in that gentleman's concerns," said Darcy, in a less tranquil tone, and with a heightened colour.

"Who that knows what his misfortunes have been, can help feeling an interest in him?"

"His misfortunes!" repeated Darcy contemptuously; "yes, his misfortunes have been great indeed."

"And of your infliction," cried Elizabeth with energy. "You have reduced him to his present state of poverty—comparative poverty. You have withheld the advantages which you must know to have been designed for him. You have deprived the best years of his life of that independence which was no less his due than his desert. You have done all this! and yet you can treat the mention of his misfortune with contempt and ridicule."

"And this," cried Darcy, as he walked with quick steps across the room, "is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for

explaining it so fully. My faults, according to this calculation, are heavy indeed! But perhaps," added he, stopping in his walk, and turning towards her, "these offenses might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design. These bitter accusations might have been suppressed, had I, with greater policy, concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed inclination; by reason, by reflection, by everything. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence. Nor am I ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and just. Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?—to congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?"

Elizabeth felt herself growing more angry every moment; yet she tried to the utmost to speak with composure when she said:

"You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner."

She saw him start at this, but he said nothing, and she continued:

"You could not have made the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it."

Again his astonishment was obvious; and he looked at her with an expression of mingled incredulity and mortification. She went on:

"From the very beginning—from the first moment, I may almost say—of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry."

"You have said quite enough, madam. I perfectly comprehend your feelings, and have now only to be ashamed of what my own have been. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time, and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness."

And with these words he hastily left the room, and Elizabeth heard him the next moment open the front door and quit the house.

The tumult of her mind, was now painfully great. She knew not how to support herself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried for half-an-hour. Her astonishment, as she reflected on what had passed, was increased by every review of it. That she should receive an offer of marriage from Mr. Darcy! That he should have been in love with her for so many months! So much in love as to wish to marry her in spite of all the objections which had made him prevent his friend's marrying her sister, and which must appear at least with equal force in his own case—was almost

incredible! It was gratifying to have inspired unconsciously so strong an affection. But his pride, his abominable pride—his shameless avowal of what he had done with respect to Jane—his unpardonable assurance in acknowledging, though he could not justify it, and the unfeeling manner in which he had mentioned Mr. Wickham, his cruelty towards whom he had not attempted to deny, soon overcame the pity which the consideration of his attachment had for a moment excited. She continued in very agitated reflections till the sound of Lady Catherine's carriage made her feel how unequal she was to encounter Charlotte's observation, and hurried her away to her room.

## Chapter 35

Elizabeth awoke the next morning to the same thoughts and meditations which had at length closed her eyes. She could not yet recover from the surprise of what had happened; it was impossible to think of anything else; and, totally indisposed for employment, she resolved, soon after breakfast, to indulge herself in air and exercise. She was proceeding directly to her favourite walk, when the recollection of Mr. Darcy's sometimes coming there stopped her, and instead of entering the park, she turned up the lane, which led farther from the turnpike-road. The park paling was still the boundary on one side, and she soon passed one of the gates into the ground.

After walking two or three times along that part of the lane, she was tempted, by the pleasantness of the morning, to stop at the gates and look into the park. The five weeks which she had now passed in Kent had made a great difference in the country, and every day was adding to the verdure of the early trees. She was on the point of continuing her walk, when she caught a glimpse of a gentleman within the sort of grove which edged the park; he was moving that way; and, fearful of its being Mr. Darcy, she was directly retreating. But the person who advanced was now near enough to see her, and stepping forward with eagerness, pronounced her name. She had turned away; but on hearing herself called, though in a voice which proved it to be Mr. Darcy, she moved again towards the gate. He had by that time reached it also, and, holding out a letter, which she instinctively took, said, with a look of haughty composure, "I have been walking in the grove some time in the hope of meeting you. Will you do me the honour of reading that letter?" And then, with a slight bow, turned again into the plantation, and was soon out of sight.

With no expectation of pleasure, but with the strongest curiosity, Elizabeth opened the letter, and, to her still increasing wonder, perceived an envelope containing two sheets of letter-paper, written quite through, in a very close hand. The envelope itself

was likewise full. Pursuing her way along the lane, she then began it. It was dated from Rosings, at eight o'clock in the morning, and was as follows:—

"Be not alarmed, madam, on receiving this letter, by the apprehension of its containing any repetition of those sentiments or renewal of those offers which were last night so disgusting to you. I write without any intention of paining you, or humbling myself, by dwelling on wishes which, for the happiness of both, cannot be too soon forgotten; and the effort which the formation and the perusal of this letter must occasion, should have been spared, had not my character required it to be written and read. You must, therefore, pardon the freedom with which I demand your attention; your feelings, I know, will bestow it unwillingly, but I demand it of your justice.

"Two offenses of a very different nature, and by no means of equal magnitude, you last night laid to my charge. The first mentioned was, that, regardless of the sentiments of either, I had detached Mr. Bingley from your sister, and the other, that I had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity and blasted the prospects of Mr. Wickham. Wilfully and wantonly to have thrown off the companion of my youth, the acknowledged favourite of my father, a young man who had scarcely any other dependence than on our patronage, and who had been brought up to expect its exertion, would be a depravity, to which the separation of two young persons, whose affection could be the growth of only a few weeks, could bear no comparison. But from the severity of that blame which was last night so liberally bestowed, respecting each circumstance, I shall hope to be in the future secured, when the following account of my actions and their motives has been read. If, in the explanation of them, which is due to myself, I am under the necessity of relating feelings which may be offensive to yours, I can only say that I am sorry. The necessity must be obeyed, and further apology would be absurd.

"I had not been long in Hertfordshire, before I saw, in common with others, that Bingley preferred your elder sister to any other young woman in the country. But it was not till the evening of the dance at Netherfield that I had any apprehension of his feeling a serious attachment. I had often seen him in love before. At that ball, while I had the honour of dancing with you, I was first made acquainted, by Sir William Lucas's accidental information, that Bingley's attentions to your sister had given rise to a general expectation of their marriage. He spoke of it as a certain event, of which the time alone could be undecided. From that moment I observed my friend's behaviour attentively; and I could then perceive that his partiality for Miss Bennet was beyond what I had ever witnessed in him. Your sister I also watched. Her look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I remained convinced from the evening's scrutiny, that though she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by any participation of sentiment. If *you* have not been mistaken here, *I* must have been in error. Your

superior knowledge of your sister must make the latter probable. If it be so, if I have been misled by such error to inflict pain on her, your resentment has not been unreasonable. But I shall not scruple to assert, that the serenity of your sister's countenance and air was such as might have given the most acute observer a conviction that, however amiable her temper, her heart was not likely to be easily touched. That I was desirous of believing her indifferent is certain—but I will venture to say that my investigation and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or fears. I did not believe her to be indifferent because I wished it; I believed it on impartial conviction, as truly as I wished it in reason. My objections to the marriage were not merely those which I last night acknowledged to have the utmost force of passion to put aside, in my own case; the want of connection could not be so great an evil to my friend as to me. But there were other causes of repugnance; causes which, though still existing, and existing to an equal degree in both instances, I had myself endeavoured to forget, because they were not immediately before me. These causes must be stated, though briefly. The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison to that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father. Pardon me. It pains me to offend you. But amidst your concern for the defects of your nearest relations, and your displeasure at this representation of them, let it give you consolation to consider that, to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share of the like censure, is praise no less generally bestowed on you and your elder sister, than it is honourable to the sense and disposition of both. I will only say farther that from what passed that evening, my opinion of all parties was confirmed, and every inducement heightened which could have led me before, to preserve my friend from what I esteemed a most unhappy connection. He left Netherfield for London, on the day following, as you, I am certain, remember, with the design of soon returning.

"The part which I acted is now to be explained. His sisters' uneasiness had been equally excited with my own; our coincidence of feeling was soon discovered, and, alike sensible that no time was to be lost in detaching their brother, we shortly resolved on joining him directly in London. We accordingly went—and there I readily engaged in the office of pointing out to my friend the certain evils of such a choice. I described, and enforced them earnestly. But, however this remonstrance might have staggered or delayed his determination, I do not suppose that it would ultimately have prevented the marriage, had it not been seconded by the assurance that I hesitated not in giving, of your sister's indifference. He had before believed her to return his affection with sincere, if not with equal regard. But Bingley has great natural modesty, with a stronger dependence on my judgement than on his own. To convince him, therefore, that he had deceived himself, was no very difficult point. To persuade him against returning into Hertfordshire, when that conviction had been given, was scarcely the work of a moment. I cannot blame myself for having done thus much.

There is but one part of my conduct in the whole affair on which I do not reflect with satisfaction; it is that I condescended to adopt the measures of art so far as to conceal from him your sister's being in town. I knew it myself, as it was known to Miss Bingley; but her brother is even yet ignorant of it. That they might have met without ill consequence is perhaps probable; but his regard did not appear to me enough extinguished for him to see her without some danger. Perhaps this concealment, this disguise was beneath me; it is done, however, and it was done for the best. On this subject I have nothing more to say, no other apology to offer. If I have wounded your sister's feelings, it was unknowingly done and though the motives which governed me may to you very naturally appear insufficient, I have not yet learnt to condemn them.

"With respect to that other, more weighty accusation, of having injured Mr. Wickham, I can only refute it by laying before you the whole of his connection with my family. Of what he has *particularly* accused me I am ignorant; but of the truth of what I shall relate, I can summon more than one witness of undoubted veracity.

"Mr. Wickham is the son of a very respectable man, who had for many years the management of all the Pemberley estates, and whose good conduct in the discharge of his trust naturally inclined my father to be of service to him; and on George Wickham, who was his godson, his kindness was therefore liberally bestowed. My father supported him at school, and afterwards at Cambridge—most important assistance, as his own father, always poor from the extravagance of his wife, would have been unable to give him a gentleman's education. My father was not only fond of this young man's society, whose manners were always engaging; he had also the highest opinion of him, and hoping the church would be his profession, intended to provide for him in it. As for myself, it is many, many years since I first began to think of him in a very different manner. The vicious propensities—the want of principle, which he was careful to guard from the knowledge of his best friend, could not escape the observation of a young man of nearly the same age with himself, and who had opportunities of seeing him in unguarded moments, which Mr. Darcy could not have. Here again I shall give you pain—to what degree you only can tell. But whatever may be the sentiments which Mr. Wickham has created, a suspicion of their nature shall not prevent me from unfolding his real character—it adds even another motive.

"My excellent father died about five years ago; and his attachment to Mr. Wickham was to the last so steady, that in his will he particularly recommended it to me, to promote his advancement in the best manner that his profession might allow—and if he took orders, desired that a valuable family living might be his as soon as it became vacant. There was also a legacy of one thousand pounds. His own father did not long survive mine, and within half a year from these events, Mr. Wickham wrote to inform me that, having finally resolved against taking orders, he hoped I should not think it unreasonable for him to expect some more immediate pecuniary advantage, in lieu of the preferment, by which he could not be benefited. He had some intention, he added, of studying law, and I must be aware that the interest of one thousand pounds would

be a very insufficient support therein. I rather wished, than believed him to be sincere; but, at any rate, was perfectly ready to accede to his proposal. I knew that Mr. Wickham ought not to be a clergyman; the business was therefore soon settled—he resigned all claim to assistance in the church, were it possible that he could ever be in a situation to receive it, and accepted in return three thousand pounds. All connection between us seemed now dissolved. I thought too ill of him to invite him to Pemberley, or admit his society in town. In town I believe he chiefly lived, but his studying the law was a mere pretence, and being now free from all restraint, his life was a life of idleness and dissipation. For about three years I heard little of him; but on the decease of the incumbent of the living which had been designed for him, he applied to me again by letter for the presentation. His circumstances, he assured me, and I had no difficulty in believing it, were exceedingly bad. He had found the law a most unprofitable study, and was now absolutely resolved on being ordained, if I would present him to the living in question—of which he trusted there could be little doubt, as he was well assured that I had no other person to provide for, and I could not have forgotten my revered father's intentions. You will hardly blame me for refusing to comply with this entreaty, or for resisting every repetition to it. His resentment was in proportion to the distress of his circumstances—and he was doubtless as violent in his abuse of me to others as in his reproaches to myself. After this period every appearance of acquaintance was dropped. How he lived I know not. But last summer he was again most painfully obtruded on my notice.

"I must now mention a circumstance which I would wish to forget myself, and which no obligation less than the present should induce me to unfold to any human being. Having said thus much, I feel no doubt of your secrecy. My sister, who is more than ten years my junior, was left to the guardianship of my mother's nephew, Colonel Fitzwilliam, and myself. About a year ago, she was taken from school, and an establishment formed for her in London; and last summer she went with the lady who presided over it, to Ramsgate; and thither also went Mr. Wickham, undoubtedly by design; for there proved to have been a prior acquaintance between him and Mrs. Younge, in whose character we were most unhappily deceived; and by her connivance and aid, he so far recommended himself to Georgiana, whose affectionate heart retained a strong impression of his kindness to her as a child, that she was persuaded to believe herself in love, and to consent to an elopement. She was then but fifteen, which must be her excuse; and after stating her imprudence, I am happy to add, that I owed the knowledge of it to herself. I joined them unexpectedly a day or two before the intended elopement, and then Georgiana, unable to support the idea of grieving and offending a brother whom she almost looked up to as a father, acknowledged the whole to me. You may imagine what I felt and how I acted. Regard for my sister's credit and feelings prevented any public exposure; but I wrote to Mr. Wickham, who left the place immediately, and Mrs. Younge was of course removed from her charge. Mr. Wickham's chief object was unquestionably my sister's fortune, which is thirty

thousand pounds; but I cannot help supposing that the hope of revenging himself on me was a strong inducement. His revenge would have been complete indeed.

"This, madam, is a faithful narrative of every event in which we have been concerned together; and if you do not absolutely reject it as false, you will, I hope, acquit me henceforth of cruelty towards Mr. Wickham. I know not in what manner, under what form of falsehood he had imposed on you; but his success is not perhaps to be wondered at. Ignorant as you previously were of everything concerning either, detection could not be in your power, and suspicion certainly not in your inclination.

"You may possibly wonder why all this was not told you last night; but I was not then master enough of myself to know what could or ought to be revealed. For the truth of everything here related, I can appeal more particularly to the testimony of Colonel Fitzwilliam, who, from our near relationship and constant intimacy, and, still more, as one of the executors of my father's will, has been unavoidably acquainted with every particular of these transactions. If your abhorrence of *me* should make *my* assertions valueless, you cannot be prevented by the same cause from confiding in my cousin; and that there may be the possibility of consulting him, I shall endeavour to find some opportunity of putting this letter in your hands in the course of the morning. I will only add, God bless you.

"FITZWILLIAM DARCY"

## Chapter 36

If Elizabeth, when Mr. Darcy gave her the letter, did not expect it to contain a renewal of his offers, she had formed no expectation at all of its contents. But such as they were, it may well be supposed how eagerly she went through them, and what a contrariety of emotion they excited. Her feelings as she read were scarcely to be defined. With amazement did she first understand that he believed any apology to be in his power; and steadfastly was she persuaded, that he could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With a strong prejudice against everything he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield. She read with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes. His belief of her sister's insensibility she instantly resolved to be false; and his account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made her too angry to have any wish of doing him justice. He expressed no regret for what he had done which satisfied her; his style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence.



But when this subject was succeeded by his account of Mr. Wickham—when she read with somewhat clearer attention a relation of events which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion of his worth, and which bore so alarming an affinity to his own history of himself—her feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition. Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror, oppressed her. She wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!"—and when she had gone through the whole letter, though scarcely knowing anything of the last page or two, put it hastily away, protesting that she would not regard it, that she would never look in it again.

In this perturbed state of mind, with thoughts that could rest on nothing, she walked on; but it would not do; in half a minute the letter was unfolded again, and collecting herself as well as she could, she again began the mortifying perusal of all that related to Wickham, and commanded herself so far as to examine the meaning of every sentence. The account of his connection with the Pemberley family was exactly what he had related himself; and the kindness of the late Mr. Darcy, though she had not before known its extent, agreed equally well with his own words. So far each recital confirmed the other; but when she came to the will, the difference was great. What Wickham had said of the living was fresh in her memory, and as she recalled his very words, it was impossible not to feel that there was gross duplicity on one side or the other; and, for a few moments, she flattered herself that her wishes did not err. But when she read and re-read with the closest attention, the particulars immediately following of Wickham's resigning all pretensions to the living, of his receiving in lieu so considerable a sum as three thousand pounds, again was she forced to hesitate. She put down the letter, weighed every circumstance with what she meant to be impartiality—deliberated on the probability of each statement—but with little success. On both sides it was only assertion. Again she read on; but every line proved more clearly that the affair, which she had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent as to render Mr. Darcy's conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole.

The extravagance and general profligacy which he scrupled not to lay at Mr. Wickham's charge, exceedingly shocked her; the more so, as she could bring no proof of its injustice. She had never heard of him before his entrance into the —shire Militia, in which he had engaged at the persuasion of the young man who, on meeting him accidentally in town, had there renewed a slight acquaintance. Of his former way of life nothing had been known in Hertfordshire but what he told himself. As to his real character, had information been in her power, she had never felt a wish of inquiring. His countenance, voice, and manner had established him at once in the possession of every virtue. She tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr. Darcy; or at least, by the predominance of virtue, atone for those casual errors

under which she would endeavour to class what Mr. Darcy had described as the idleness and vice of many years' continuance. But no such recollection befriended her. She could see him instantly before her, in every charm of air and address; but she could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him in the mess. After pausing on this point a considerable while, she once more continued to read. But, alas! the story which followed, of his designs on Miss Darcy, received some confirmation from what had passed between Colonel Fitzwilliam and herself only the morning before; and at last she was referred for the truth of every particular to Colonel Fitzwilliam himself—from whom she had previously received the information of his near concern in all his cousin's affairs, and whose character she had no reason to question. At one time she had almost resolved on applying to him, but the idea was checked by the awkwardness of the application, and at length wholly banished by the conviction that Mr. Darcy would never have hazarded such a proposal, if he had not been well assured of his cousin's corroboration.

She perfectly remembered everything that had passed in conversation between Wickham and herself, in their first evening at Mr. Phillips's. Many of his expressions were still fresh in her memory. She was *now* struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her before. She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done, and the inconsistency of his professions with his conduct. She remembered that he had boasted of having no fear of seeing Mr. Darcy—that Mr. Darcy might leave the country, but that *he* should stand his ground; yet he had avoided the Netherfield ball the very next week. She remembered also that, till the Netherfield family had quitted the country, he had told his story to no one but herself; but that after their removal it had been everywhere discussed; that he had then no reserves, no scruples in sinking Mr. Darcy's character, though he had assured her that respect for the father would always prevent his exposing the son.

How differently did everything now appear in which he was concerned! His attentions to Miss King were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocrity of her fortune proved no longer the moderation of his wishes, but his eagerness to grasp at anything. His behaviour to herself could now have had no tolerable motive; he had either been deceived with regard to her fortune, or had been gratifying his vanity by encouraging the preference which she believed she had most incautiously shown. Every lingering struggle in his favour grew fainter and fainter; and in farther justification of Mr. Darcy, she could not but allow that Mr. Bingley, when questioned by Jane, had long ago asserted his blamelessness in the affair; that proud and repulsive as were his manners, she had never, in the whole course of their acquaintance—an acquaintance which had latterly brought them much together, and given her a sort of intimacy with his ways—seen anything that betrayed him to be unprincipled or unjust—anything that spoke him of irreligious or immoral

habits; that among his own connections he was esteemed and valued—that even Wickham had allowed him merit as a brother, and that she had often heard him speak so affectionately of his sister as to prove him capable of *some* amiable feeling; that had his actions been what Mr. Wickham represented them, so gross a violation of everything right could hardly have been concealed from the world; and that friendship between a person capable of it, and such an amiable man as Mr. Bingley, was incomprehensible.

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think without feeling she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

"How despicably I have acted!" she cried; "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable mistrust! How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind! But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself."

From herself to Jane—from Jane to Bingley, her thoughts were in a line which soon brought to her recollection that Mr. Darcy's explanation *there* had appeared very insufficient, and she read it again. Widely different was the effect of a second perusal. How could she deny that credit to his assertions in one instance, which she had been obliged to give in the other? He declared himself to be totally unsuspecting of her sister's attachment; and she could not help remembering what Charlotte's opinion had always been. Neither could she deny the justice of his description of Jane. She felt that Jane's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant complacency in her air and manner not often united with great sensibility.

When she came to that part of the letter in which her family were mentioned in terms of such mortifying, yet merited reproach, her sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial, and the circumstances to which he particularly alluded as having passed at the Netherfield ball, and as confirming all his first disapprobation, could not have made a stronger impression on his mind than on hers.

The compliment to herself and her sister was not unfelt. It soothed, but it could not console her for the contempt which had thus been self-attracted by the rest of her family; and as she considered that Jane's disappointment had in fact been the work of her nearest relations, and reflected how materially the credit of both must be hurt by such impropriety of conduct, she felt depressed beyond anything she had ever known before.

After wandering along the lane for two hours, giving way to every variety of thought—re-considering events, determining probabilities, and reconciling herself, as well as she could, to a change so sudden and so important, fatigue, and a recollection of her long absence, made her at length return home; and she entered the house with the wish of appearing cheerful as usual, and the resolution of repressing such reflections as must make her unfit for conversation.

She was immediately told that the two gentlemen from Rosings had each called during her absence; Mr. Darcy, only for a few minutes, to take leave—but that Colonel Fitzwilliam had been sitting with them at least an hour, hoping for her return, and almost resolving to walk after her till she could be found. Elizabeth could but just *affect* concern in missing him; she really rejoiced at it. Colonel Fitzwilliam was no longer an object; she could think only of her letter.

## Chapter 37

The two gentlemen left Rosings the next morning, and Mr. Collins having been in waiting near the lodges, to make them his parting obeisance, was able to bring home the pleasing intelligence, of their appearing in very good health, and in as tolerable spirits as could be expected, after the melancholy scene so lately gone through at Rosings. To Rosings he then hastened, to console Lady Catherine and her daughter; and on his return brought back, with great satisfaction, a message from her ladyship, importing that she felt herself so dull as to make her very desirous of having them all to dine with her.

Elizabeth could not see Lady Catherine without recollecting that, had she chosen it, she might by this time have been presented to her as her future niece; nor could she think, without a smile, of what her ladyship's indignation would have been. "What would she have said? how would she have behaved?" were questions with which she amused herself.

Their first subject was the diminution of the Rosings party. "I assure you, I feel it exceedingly," said Lady Catherine; "I believe no one feels the loss of friends so much as I do. But I am particularly attached to these young men, and know them to be so much attached to me! They were excessively sorry to go! But so they always are. The dear Colonel rallied his spirits tolerably till just at last; but Darcy seemed to feel it most acutely, more, I think, than last year. His attachment to Rosings certainly increases."

Mr. Collins had a compliment, and an allusion to throw in here, which were kindly smiled on by the mother and daughter.

Lady Catherine observed, after dinner, that Miss Bennet seemed out of spirits, and immediately accounting for it by herself, by supposing that she did not like to go home again so soon, she added:

"But if that is the case, you must write to your mother and beg that you may stay a little longer. Mrs. Collins will be very glad of your company, I am sure."

"I am much obliged to your ladyship for your kind invitation," replied Elizabeth, "but it is not in my power to accept it. I must be in town next Saturday."

"Why, at that rate, you will have been here only six weeks. I expected you to stay two months. I told Mrs. Collins so before you came. There can be no occasion for your going so soon. Mrs. Bennet could certainly spare you for another fortnight."

"But my father cannot. He wrote last week to hurry my return."

"Oh! your father of course may spare you, if your mother can. Daughters are never of so much consequence to a father. And if you will stay another *month* complete, it will be in my power to take one of you as far as London, for I am going there early in June, for a week; and as Dawson does not object to the barouche-box, there will be very good room for one of you—and indeed, if the weather should happen to be cool, I should not object to taking you both, as you are neither of you large."

"You are all kindness, madam; but I believe we must abide by our original plan."

Lady Catherine seemed resigned. "Mrs. Collins, you must send a servant with them. You know I always speak my mind, and I cannot bear the idea of two young women travelling post by themselves. It is highly improper. You must contrive to send somebody. I have the greatest dislike in the world to that sort of thing. Young women should always be properly guarded and attended, according to their situation in life. When my niece Georgiana went to Ramsgate last summer, I made a point of her having two men-servants go with her. Miss Darcy, the daughter of Mr. Darcy, of Pemberley, and Lady Anne, could not have appeared with propriety in a different manner. I am excessively attentive to all those things. You must send John with the young ladies, Mrs. Collins. I am glad it occurred to me to mention it; for it would really be discreditable to *you* to let them go alone."

"My uncle is to send a servant for us."

"Oh! Your uncle! He keeps a man-servant, does he? I am very glad you have somebody who thinks of these things. Where shall you change horses? Oh! Bromley, of course. If you mention my name at the Bell, you will be attended to."

Lady Catherine had many other questions to ask respecting their journey, and as she did not answer them all herself, attention was necessary, which Elizabeth believed to be lucky for her; or, with a mind so occupied, she might have forgotten where she was. Reflection must be reserved for solitary hours; whenever she was alone, she gave way to it as the greatest relief; and not a day went by without a solitary walk, in which she might indulge in all the delight of unpleasant recollections.

Mr. Darcy's letter she was in a fair way of soon knowing by heart. She studied every sentence; and her feelings towards its writer were at times widely different. When she remembered the style of his address, she was still full of indignation; but when she considered how unjustly she had condemned and upbraided him, her anger was turned against herself; and his disappointed feelings became the object of compassion. His attachment excited gratitude, his general character respect; but she could not approve him; nor could she for a moment repent her refusal, or feel the slightest inclination ever to see him again. In her own past behaviour, there was a constant source of vexation and regret; and in the unhappy defects of her family, a subject of yet heavier chagrin. They were hopeless of remedy. Her father, contented with laughing at them, would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters; and her mother, with manners so far from right herself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia; but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement? Catherine, weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia's guidance, had been always affronted by their advice; and Lydia, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They were ignorant, idle, and vain. While there was an officer in Meryton, they would flirt with him; and while Meryton was within a walk of Longbourn, they would be going there forever.

Anxiety on Jane's behalf was another prevailing concern; and Mr. Darcy's explanation, by restoring Bingley to all her former good opinion, heightened the sense of what Jane had lost. His affection was proved to have been sincere, and his conduct cleared of all blame, unless any could attach to the implicitness of his confidence in his friend. How grievous then was the thought that, of a situation so desirable in every respect, so replete with advantage, so promising for happiness, Jane had been deprived, by the folly and indecorum of her own family!

When to these recollections was added the development of Wickham's character, it may be easily believed that the happy spirits which had seldom been depressed before, were now so much affected as to make it almost impossible for her to appear tolerably cheerful.

Their engagements at Rosings were as frequent during the last week of her stay as they had been at first. The very last evening was spent there; and her ladyship again inquired minutely into the particulars of their journey, gave them directions as to the best method of packing, and was so urgent on the necessity of placing gowns in the only right way, that Maria thought herself obliged, on her return, to undo all the work of the morning, and pack her trunk afresh.

When they parted, Lady Catherine, with great condescension, wished them a good journey, and invited them to come to Hunsford again next year; and Miss de Bourgh exerted herself so far as to curtsy and hold out her hand to both.

## Chapter 38

On Saturday morning Elizabeth and Mr. Collins met for breakfast a few minutes before the others appeared; and he took the opportunity of paying the parting civilities which he deemed indispensably necessary.

"I know not, Miss Elizabeth," said he, "whether Mrs. Collins has yet expressed her sense of your kindness in coming to us; but I am very certain you will not leave the house without receiving her thanks for it. The favour of your company has been much felt, I assure you. We know how little there is to tempt anyone to our humble abode. Our plain manner of living, our small rooms and few domestics, and the little we see of the world, must make Hunsford extremely dull to a young lady like yourself; but I hope you will believe us grateful for the condescension, and that we have done everything in our power to prevent your spending your time unpleasantly."

Elizabeth was eager with her thanks and assurances of happiness. She had spent six weeks with great enjoyment; and the pleasure of being with Charlotte, and the kind attentions she had received, must make *her* feel the obliged. Mr. Collins was gratified, and with a more smiling solemnity replied:

"It gives me great pleasure to hear that you have passed your time not disagreeably. We have certainly done our best; and most fortunately having it in our power to introduce you to very superior society, and, from our connection with Rosings, the frequent means of varying the humble home scene, I think we may flatter ourselves that your Hunsford visit cannot have been entirely irksome. Our situation with regard to Lady Catherine's family is indeed the sort of extraordinary advantage and blessing which few can boast. You see on what a footing we are. You see how continually we are engaged there. In truth I must acknowledge that, with all the disadvantages of this humble parsonage, I should not think anyone abiding in it an object of compassion, while they are sharers of our intimacy at Rosings."

Words were insufficient for the elevation of his feelings; and he was obliged to walk about the room, while Elizabeth tried to unite civility and truth in a few short sentences.

"You may, in fact, carry a very favourable report of us into Hertfordshire, my dear cousin. I flatter myself at least that you will be able to do so. Lady Catherine's great attentions to Mrs. Collins you have been a daily witness of; and altogether I trust it does not appear that your friend has drawn an unfortunate—but on this point it will be as well to be silent. Only let me assure you, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that I can from my heart most cordially wish you equal felicity in marriage. My dear Charlotte and I

have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in everything a most remarkable resemblance of character and ideas between us. We seem to have been designed for each other."

Elizabeth could safely say that it was a great happiness where that was the case, and with equal sincerity could add, that she firmly believed and rejoiced in his domestic comforts. She was not sorry, however, to have the recital of them interrupted by the lady from whom they sprang. Poor Charlotte! it was melancholy to leave her to such society! But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion. Her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms.

At length the chaise arrived, the trunks were fastened on, the parcels placed within, and it was pronounced to be ready. After an affectionate parting between the friends, Elizabeth was attended to the carriage by Mr. Collins, and as they walked down the garden he was commissioning her with his best respects to all her family, not forgetting his thanks for the kindness he had received at Longbourn in the winter, and his compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, though unknown. He then handed her in, Maria followed, and the door was on the point of being closed, when he suddenly reminded them, with some consternation, that they had hitherto forgotten to leave any message for the ladies at Rosings.

"But," he added, "you will of course wish to have your humble respects delivered to them, with your grateful thanks for their kindness to you while you have been here."

Elizabeth made no objection; the door was then allowed to be shut, and the carriage drove off.

"Good gracious!" cried Maria, after a few minutes' silence, "it seems but a day or two since we first came! and yet how many things have happened!"

"A great many indeed," said her companion with a sigh.

"We have dined nine times at Rosings, besides drinking tea there twice! How much I shall have to tell!"

Elizabeth added privately, "And how much I shall have to conceal!"

Their journey was performed without much conversation, or any alarm; and within four hours of their leaving Hunsford they reached Mr. Gardiner's house, where they were to remain a few days.

Jane looked well, and Elizabeth had little opportunity of studying her spirits, amidst the various engagements which the kindness of her aunt had reserved for them. But Jane was to go home with her, and at Longbourn there would be leisure enough for observation.

It was not without an effort, meanwhile, that she could wait even for Longbourn, before she told her sister of Mr. Darcy's proposals. To know that she had the power of



revealing what would so exceedingly astonish Jane, and must, at the same time, so highly gratify whatever of her own vanity she had not yet been able to reason away, was such a temptation to openness as nothing could have conquered but the state of indecision in which she remained as to the extent of what she should communicate; and her fear, if she once entered on the subject, of being hurried into repeating something of Bingley which might only grieve her sister further.

## Chapter 39

It was the second week in May, in which the three young ladies set out together from Gracechurch Street for the town of —, in Hertfordshire; and, as they drew near the appointed inn where Mr. Bennet's carriage was to meet them, they quickly perceived, in token of the coachman's punctuality, both Kitty and Lydia looking out of a dining-room up stairs. These two girls had been above an hour in the place, happily employed in visiting an opposite milliner, watching the sentinel on guard, and dressing a salad and cucumber.

After welcoming their sisters, they triumphantly displayed a table set out with such cold meat as an inn larder usually affords, exclaiming, "Is not this nice? Is not this an agreeable surprise?"

"And we mean to treat you all," added Lydia, "but you must lend us the money, for we have just spent ours at the shop out there." Then, showing her purchases—"Look here, I have bought this bonnet. I do not think it is very pretty; but I thought I might as well buy it as not. I shall pull it to pieces as soon as I get home, and see if I can make it up any better."

And when her sisters abused it as ugly, she added, with perfect unconcern, "Oh! but there were two or three much uglier in the shop; and when I have bought some prettier-coloured satin to trim it with fresh, I think it will be very tolerable. Besides, it will not much signify what one wears this summer, after the —shire have left Meryton, and they are going in a fortnight."

"Are they indeed!" cried Elizabeth, with the greatest satisfaction.

"They are going to be encamped near Brighton; and I do so want papa to take us all there for the summer! It would be such a delicious scheme; and I dare say would hardly cost anything at all. Mamma would like to go too of all things! Only think what a miserable summer else we shall have!"

"Yes," thought Elizabeth, "*that* would be a delightful scheme indeed, and completely do for us at once. Good Heaven! Brighton, and a whole campful of

soldiers, to us, who have been overset already by one poor regiment of militia, and the monthly balls of Meryton!"

"Now I have got some news for you," said Lydia, as they sat down at table. "What do you think? It is excellent news—capital news—and about a certain person we all like!"

Jane and Elizabeth looked at each other, and the waiter was told he need not stay. Lydia laughed, and said:

"Aye, that is just like your formality and discretion. You thought the waiter must not hear, as if he cared! I dare say he often hears worse things said than I am going to say. But he is an ugly fellow! I am glad he is gone. I never saw such a long chin in my life. Well, but now for my news; it is about dear Wickham; too good for the waiter, is it not? There is no danger of Wickham's marrying Mary King. There's for you! She is gone down to her uncle at Liverpool: gone to stay. Wickham is safe."

"And Mary King is safe!" added Elizabeth; "safe from a connection imprudent as to fortune."

"She is a great fool for going away, if she liked him."

"But I hope there is no strong attachment on either side," said Jane.

"I am sure there is not on *his*. I will answer for it, he never cared three straws about her—who could about such a nasty little freckled thing?"

Elizabeth was shocked to think that, however incapable of such coarseness of *expression* herself, the coarseness of the *sentiment* was little other than her own breast had harboured and fancied liberal!

As soon as all had ate, and the elder ones paid, the carriage was ordered; and after some contrivance, the whole party, with all their boxes, work-bags, and parcels, and the unwelcome addition of Kitty's and Lydia's purchases, were seated in it.

"How nicely we are all crammed in," cried Lydia. "I am glad I bought my bonnet, if it is only for the fun of having another bandbox! Well, now let us be quite comfortable and snug, and talk and laugh all the way home. And in the first place, let us hear what has happened to you all since you went away. Have you seen any pleasant men? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes that one of you would have got a husband before you came back. Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three-and-twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not being married before three-and-twenty! My aunt Phillips wants you so to get husbands, you can't think. She says Lizzy had better have taken Mr. Collins; but *I* do not think there would have been any fun in it. Lord! how I should like to be married before any of you; and then I would chaperon you about to all the balls. Dear me! we had such a good piece of fun the other day at Colonel Forster's. Kitty and me were to spend the day there, and Mrs. Forster promised to have a little dance in the evening; (by the bye, Mrs. Forster and me are *such* friends!) and so she asked the two Harringtons to come, but Harriet was

ill, and so Pen was forced to come by herself; and then, what do you think we did? We dressed up Chamberlayne in woman's clothes on purpose to pass for a lady, only think what fun! Not a soul knew of it, but Colonel and Mrs. Forster, and Kitty and me, except my aunt, for we were forced to borrow one of her gowns; and you cannot imagine how well he looked! When Denny, and Wickham, and Pratt, and two or three more of the men came in, they did not know him in the least. Lord! how I laughed! and so did Mrs. Forster. I thought I should have died. And *that* made the men suspect something, and then they soon found out what was the matter."

With such kinds of histories of their parties and good jokes, did Lydia, assisted by Kitty's hints and additions, endeavour to amuse her companions all the way to Longbourn. Elizabeth listened as little as she could, but there was no escaping the frequent mention of Wickham's name.

Their reception at home was most kind. Mrs. Bennet rejoiced to see Jane in undiminished beauty; and more than once during dinner did Mr. Bennet say voluntarily to Elizabeth:

"I am glad you are come back, Lizzy."

Their party in the dining-room was large, for almost all the Lucases came to meet Maria and hear the news; and various were the subjects that occupied them: Lady Lucas was inquiring of Maria, after the welfare and poultry of her eldest daughter; Mrs. Bennet was doubly engaged, on one hand collecting an account of the present fashions from Jane, who sat some way below her, and, on the other, retailing them all to the younger Lucases; and Lydia, in a voice rather louder than any other person's, was enumerating the various pleasures of the morning to anybody who would hear her.

"Oh! Mary," said she, "I wish you had gone with us, for we had such fun! As we went along, Kitty and I drew up the blinds, and pretended there was nobody in the coach; and I should have gone so all the way, if Kitty had not been sick; and when we got to the George, I do think we behaved very handsomely, for we treated the other three with the nicest cold luncheon in the world, and if you would have gone, we would have treated you too. And then when we came away it was such fun! I thought we never should have got into the coach. I was ready to die of laughter. And then we were so merry all the way home! we talked and laughed so loud, that anybody might have heard us ten miles off!"

To this Mary very gravely replied, "Far be it from me, my dear sister, to depreciate such pleasures! They would doubtless be congenial with the generality of female minds. But I confess they would have no charms for *me*—I should infinitely prefer a book."

But of this answer Lydia heard not a word. She seldom listened to anybody for more than half a minute, and never attended to Mary at all.

In the afternoon Lydia was urgent with the rest of the girls to walk to Meryton, and to see how everybody went on; but Elizabeth steadily opposed the scheme. It should not be said that the Miss Bennets could not be at home half a day before they were in pursuit of the officers. There was another reason too for her opposition. She dreaded seeing Mr. Wickham again, and was resolved to avoid it as long as possible. The comfort to *her* of the regiment's approaching removal was indeed beyond expression. In a fortnight they were to go—and once gone, she hoped there could be nothing more to plague her on his account.

She had not been many hours at home before she found that the Brighton scheme, of which Lydia had given them a hint at the inn, was under frequent discussion between her parents. Elizabeth saw directly that her father had not the smallest intention of yielding; but his answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal, that her mother, though often disheartened, had never yet despaired of succeeding at last.

## Chapter 40

Elizabeth's impatience to acquaint Jane with what had happened could no longer be overcome; and at length, resolving to suppress every particular in which her sister was concerned, and preparing her to be surprised, she related to her the next morning the chief of the scene between Mr. Darcy and herself.

Miss Bennet's astonishment was soon lessened by the strong sisterly partiality which made any admiration of Elizabeth appear perfectly natural; and all surprise was shortly lost in other feelings. She was sorry that Mr. Darcy should have delivered his sentiments in a manner so little suited to recommend them; but still more was she grieved for the unhappiness which her sister's refusal must have given him.

"His being so sure of succeeding was wrong," said she, "and certainly ought not to have appeared; but consider how much it must increase his disappointment!"

"Indeed," replied Elizabeth, "I am heartily sorry for him; but he has other feelings, which will probably soon drive away his regard for me. You do not blame me, however, for refusing him?"

"Blame you! Oh, no."

"But you blame me for having spoken so warmly of Wickham?"

"No—I do not know that you were wrong in saying what you did."

"But you *will* know it, when I tell you what happened the very next day."

She then spoke of the letter, repeating the whole of its contents as far as they concerned George Wickham. What a stroke was this for poor Jane! who would willingly have gone through the world without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole race of mankind, as was here collected in one individual. Nor was Darcy's vindication, though grateful to her feelings, capable of consoling her for such discovery. Most earnestly did she labour to prove the probability of error, and seek to clear the one without involving the other.

"This will not do," said Elizabeth; "you never will be able to make both of them good for anything. Take your choice, but you must be satisfied with only one. There is but such a quantity of merit between them; just enough to make one good sort of man; and of late it has been shifting about pretty much. For my part, I am inclined to believe it all Darcy's; but you shall do as you choose."

It was some time, however, before a smile could be extorted from Jane.

"I do not know when I have been more shocked," said she. "Wickham so very bad! It is almost past belief. And poor Mr. Darcy! Dear Lizzy, only consider what he must have suffered. Such a disappointment! and with the knowledge of your ill opinion, too! and having to relate such a thing of his sister! It is really too distressing. I am sure you must feel it so."

"Oh! no, my regret and compassion are all done away by seeing you so full of both. I know you will do him such ample justice, that I am growing every moment more unconcerned and indifferent. Your profusion makes me saving; and if you lament over him much longer, my heart will be as light as a feather."

"Poor Wickham! there is such an expression of goodness in his countenance! such an openness and gentleness in his manner!"

"There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it."

"I never thought Mr. Darcy so deficient in the *appearance* of it as you used to do."

"And yet I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit, to have a dislike of that kind. One may be continually abusive without saying anything just; but one cannot always be laughing at a man without now and then stumbling on something witty."

"Lizzy, when you first read that letter, I am sure you could not treat the matter as you do now."

"Indeed, I could not. I was uncomfortable enough, I may say unhappy. And with no one to speak to about what I felt, no Jane to comfort me and say that I had not been so very weak and vain and nonsensical as I knew I had! Oh! how I wanted you!"

"How unfortunate that you should have used such very strong expressions in speaking of Wickham to Mr. Darcy, for now they *do* appear wholly undeserved."

"Certainly. But the misfortune of speaking with bitterness is a most natural consequence of the prejudices I had been encouraging. There is one point on which I want your advice. I want to be told whether I ought, or ought not, to make our acquaintances in general understand Wickham's character."

Miss Bennet paused a little, and then replied, "Surely there can be no occasion for exposing him so dreadfully. What is your opinion?"

"That it ought not to be attempted. Mr. Darcy has not authorised me to make his communication public. On the contrary, every particular relative to his sister was meant to be kept as much as possible to myself; and if I endeavour to undeceive people as to the rest of his conduct, who will believe me? The general prejudice against Mr. Darcy is so violent, that it would be the death of half the good people in Meryton to attempt to place him in an amiable light. I am not equal to it. Wickham will soon be gone; and therefore it will not signify to anyone here what he really is. Some time hence it will be all found out, and then we may laugh at their stupidity in not knowing it before. At present I will say nothing about it."

"You are quite right. To have his errors made public might ruin him for ever. He is now, perhaps, sorry for what he has done, and anxious to re-establish a character. We must not make him desperate."

The tumult of Elizabeth's mind was allayed by this conversation. She had got rid of two of the secrets which had weighed on her for a fortnight, and was certain of a willing listener in Jane, whenever she might wish to talk again of either. But there was still something lurking behind, of which prudence forbade the disclosure. She dared not relate the other half of Mr. Darcy's letter, nor explain to her sister how sincerely she had been valued by her friend. Here was knowledge in which no one could partake; and she was sensible that nothing less than a perfect understanding between the parties could justify her in throwing off this last encumbrance of mystery. "And then," said she, "if that very improbable event should ever take place, I shall merely be able to tell what Bingley may tell in a much more agreeable manner himself. The liberty of communication cannot be mine till it has lost all its value!"

She was now, on being settled at home, at leisure to observe the real state of her sister's spirits. Jane was not happy. She still cherished a very tender affection for Bingley. Having never even fancied herself in love before, her regard had all the warmth of first attachment, and, from her age and disposition, greater steadiness than most first attachments often boast; and so fervently did she value his remembrance, and prefer him to every other man, that all her good sense, and all her attention to the feelings of her friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets which must have been injurious to her own health and their tranquillity.

"Well, Lizzy," said Mrs. Bennet one day, "what is your opinion *now* of this sad business of Jane's? For my part, I am determined never to speak of it again to anybody. I told my sister Phillips so the other day. But I cannot find out that Jane saw

anything of him in London. Well, he is a very undeserving young man—and I do not suppose there's the least chance in the world of her ever getting him now. There is no talk of his coming to Netherfield again in the summer; and I have inquired of everybody, too, who is likely to know."

"I do not believe he will ever live at Netherfield any more."

"Oh well! it is just as he chooses. Nobody wants him to come. Though I shall always say he used my daughter extremely ill; and if I was her, I would not have put up with it. Well, my comfort is, I am sure Jane will die of a broken heart; and then he will be sorry for what he has done."

But as Elizabeth could not receive comfort from any such expectation, she made no answer.

"Well, Lizzy," continued her mother, soon afterwards, "and so the Collinses live very comfortable, do they? Well, well, I only hope it will last. And what sort of table do they keep? Charlotte is an excellent manager, I dare say. If she is half as sharp as her mother, she is saving enough. There is nothing extravagant in *their* housekeeping, I dare say."

"No, nothing at all."

"A great deal of good management, depend upon it. Yes, yes, *they* will take care not to outrun their income. *They* will never be distressed for money. Well, much good may it do them! And so, I suppose, they often talk of having Longbourn when your father is dead. They look upon it as quite their own, I dare say, whenever that happens."

"It was a subject which they could not mention before me."

"No; it would have been strange if they had; but I make no doubt they often talk of it between themselves. Well, if they can be easy with an estate that is not lawfully their own, so much the better. I should be ashamed of having one that was only entailed on me."

## Chapter 41

The first week of their return was soon gone. The second began. It was the last of the regiment's stay in Meryton, and all the young ladies in the neighbourhood were drooping apace. The dejection was almost universal. The elder Miss Bennets alone were still able to eat, drink, and sleep, and pursue the usual course of their employments. Very frequently were they reproached for this insensibility by Kitty and

Lydia, whose own misery was extreme, and who could not comprehend such hard-heartedness in any of the family.

"Good Heaven! what is to become of us? What are we to do?" would they often exclaim in the bitterness of woe. "How can you be smiling so, Lizzy?"

Their affectionate mother shared all their grief; she remembered what she had herself endured on a similar occasion, five-and-twenty years ago.

"I am sure," said she, "I cried for two days together when Colonel Miller's regiment went away. I thought I should have broken my heart."

"I am sure I shall break *mine*," said Lydia.

"If one could but go to Brighton!" observed Mrs. Bennet.

"Oh, yes!—if one could but go to Brighton! But papa is so disagreeable."

"A little sea-bathing would set me up forever."

"And my aunt Phillips is sure it would do *me* a great deal of good," added Kitty.

Such were the kind of lamentations resounding perpetually through Longbourn House. Elizabeth tried to be diverted by them; but all sense of pleasure was lost in shame. She felt anew the justice of Mr. Darcy's objections; and never had she been so much disposed to pardon his interference in the views of his friend.

But the gloom of Lydia's prospect was shortly cleared away; for she received an invitation from Mrs. Forster, the wife of the colonel of the regiment, to accompany her to Brighton. This invaluable friend was a very young woman, and very lately married. A resemblance in good humour and good spirits had recommended her and Lydia to each other, and out of their *three* months' acquaintance they had been intimate *two*.

The rapture of Lydia on this occasion, her adoration of Mrs. Forster, the delight of Mrs. Bennet, and the mortification of Kitty, are scarcely to be described. Wholly inattentive to her sister's feelings, Lydia flew about the house in restless ecstasy, calling for everyone's congratulations, and laughing and talking with more violence than ever; whilst the luckless Kitty continued in the parlour repined at her fate in terms as unreasonable as her accent was peevish.

"I cannot see why Mrs. Forster should not ask *me* as well as Lydia," said she, "Though I am *not* her particular friend. I have just as much right to be asked as she has, and more too, for I am two years older."

In vain did Elizabeth attempt to make her reasonable, and Jane to make her resigned. As for Elizabeth herself, this invitation was so far from exciting in her the same feelings as in her mother and Lydia, that she considered it as the death warrant of all possibility of common sense for the latter; and detestable as such a step must make her were it known, she could not help secretly advising her father not to let her go. She represented to him all the improprieties of Lydia's general behaviour, the little advantage she could derive from the friendship of such a woman as Mrs. Forster, and



the probability of her being yet more imprudent with such a companion at Brighton, where the temptations must be greater than at home. He heard her attentively, and then said:

"Lydia will never be easy until she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances."

"If you were aware," said Elizabeth, "of the very great disadvantage to us all which must arise from the public notice of Lydia's unguarded and imprudent manner—nay, which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair."

"Already arisen?" repeated Mr. Bennet. "What, has she frightened away some of your lovers? Poor little Lizzy! But do not be cast down. Such squeamish youths as cannot bear to be connected with a little absurdity are not worth a regret. Come, let me see the list of pitiful fellows who have been kept aloof by Lydia's folly."

"Indeed you are mistaken. I have no such injuries to resent. It is not of particular, but of general evils, which I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character. Excuse me, for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself or her family ridiculous; a flirt, too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and, from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite. In this danger Kitty also is comprehended. She will follow wherever Lydia leads. Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled! Oh! my dear father, can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their sisters will not be often involved in the disgrace?"

Mr. Bennet saw that her whole heart was in the subject, and affectionately taking her hand said in reply:

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my love. Wherever you and Jane are known you must be respected and valued; and you will not appear to less advantage for having a couple of—or I may say, three—very silly sisters. We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton. Let her go, then. Colonel Forster is a sensible man, and will keep her out of any real mischief; and she is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to anybody. At Brighton she will be of less importance even as a common flirt than she has been here. The officers will find women better worth their notice. Let us hope, therefore, that her being there may teach her her own

insignificance. At any rate, she cannot grow many degrees worse, without authorising us to lock her up for the rest of her life."

With this answer Elizabeth was forced to be content; but her own opinion continued the same, and she left him disappointed and sorry. It was not in her nature, however, to increase her vexations by dwelling on them. She was confident of having performed her duty, and to fret over unavoidable evils, or augment them by anxiety, was no part of her disposition.

Had Lydia and her mother known the substance of her conference with her father, their indignation would hardly have found expression in their united volubility. In Lydia's imagination, a visit to Brighton comprised every possibility of earthly happiness. She saw, with the creative eye of fancy, the streets of that gay bathing-place covered with officers. She saw herself the object of attention, to tens and to scores of them at present unknown. She saw all the glories of the camp—its tents stretched forth in beauteous uniformity of lines, crowded with the young and the gay, and dazzling with scarlet; and, to complete the view, she saw herself seated beneath a tent, tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once.

Had she known her sister sought to tear her from such prospects and such realities as these, what would have been her sensations? They could have been understood only by her mother, who might have felt nearly the same. Lydia's going to Brighton was all that consoled her for her melancholy conviction of her husband's never intending to go there himself.

But they were entirely ignorant of what had passed; and their raptures continued, with little intermission, to the very day of Lydia's leaving home.

Elizabeth was now to see Mr. Wickham for the last time. Having been frequently in company with him since her return, agitation was pretty well over; the agitations of former partiality entirely so. She had even learnt to detect, in the very gentleness which had first delighted her, an affectation and a sameness to disgust and weary. In his present behaviour to herself, moreover, she had a fresh source of displeasure, for the inclination he soon testified of renewing those intentions which had marked the early part of their acquaintance could only serve, after what had since passed, to provoke her. She lost all concern for him in finding herself thus selected as the object of such idle and frivolous gallantry; and while she steadily repressed it, could not but feel the reproof contained in his believing, that however long, and for whatever cause, his attentions had been withdrawn, her vanity would be gratified, and her preference secured at any time by their renewal.

On the very last day of the regiment's remaining at Meryton, he dined, with other of the officers, at Longbourn; and so little was Elizabeth disposed to part from him in good humour, that on his making some inquiry as to the manner in which her time had passed at Hunsford, she mentioned Colonel Fitzwilliam's and Mr. Darcy's having both spent three weeks at Rosings, and asked him, if he was acquainted with the former.

He looked surprised, displeased, alarmed; but with a moment's recollection and a returning smile, replied, that he had formerly seen him often; and, after observing that he was a very gentlemanlike man, asked her how she had liked him. Her answer was warmly in his favour. With an air of indifference he soon afterwards added:

"How long did you say he was at Rosings?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"And you saw him frequently?"

"Yes, almost every day."

"His manners are very different from his cousin's."

"Yes, very different. But I think Mr. Darcy improves upon acquaintance."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Wickham with a look which did not escape her. "And pray, may I ask?—" But checking himself, he added, in a gayer tone, "Is it in address that he improves? Has he deigned to add aught of civility to his ordinary style?—for I dare not hope," he continued in a lower and more serious tone, "that he is improved in essentials."

"Oh, no!" said Elizabeth. "In essentials, I believe, he is very much what he ever was."

While she spoke, Wickham looked as if scarcely knowing whether to rejoice over her words, or to distrust their meaning. There was a something in her countenance which made him listen with an apprehensive and anxious attention, while she added:

"When I said that he improved on acquaintance, I did not mean that his mind or his manners were in a state of improvement, but that, from knowing him better, his disposition was better understood."

Wickham's alarm now appeared in a heightened complexion and agitated look; for a few minutes he was silent, till, shaking off his embarrassment, he turned to her again, and said in the gentlest of accents:

"You, who so well know my feeling towards Mr. Darcy, will readily comprehend how sincerely I must rejoice that he is wise enough to assume even the *appearance* of what is right. His pride, in that direction, may be of service, if not to himself, to many others, for it must only deter him from such foul misconduct as I have suffered by. I only fear that the sort of cautiousness to which you, I imagine, have been alluding, is merely adopted on his visits to his aunt, of whose good opinion and judgement he stands much in awe. His fear of her has always operated, I know, when they were together; and a good deal is to be imputed to his wish of forwarding the match with Miss de Bourgh, which I am certain he has very much at heart."

Elizabeth could not repress a smile at this, but she answered only by a slight inclination of the head. She saw that he wanted to engage her on the old subject of his grievances, and she was in no humour to indulge him. The rest of the evening passed with the *appearance*, on his side, of usual cheerfulness, but with no further attempt to

distinguish Elizabeth; and they parted at last with mutual civility, and possibly a mutual desire of never meeting again.

When the party broke up, Lydia returned with Mrs. Forster to Meryton, from whence they were to set out early the next morning. The separation between her and her family was rather noisy than pathetic. Kitty was the only one who shed tears; but she did weep from vexation and envy. Mrs. Bennet was diffuse in her good wishes for the felicity of her daughter, and impressive in her injunctions that she should not miss the opportunity of enjoying herself as much as possible—advice which there was every reason to believe would be well attended to; and in the clamorous happiness of Lydia herself in bidding farewell, the more gentle adieus of her sisters were uttered without being heard.

## Chapter 42

Had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. Her father, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown. But Mr. Bennet was not of a disposition to seek comfort for the disappointment which his own imprudence had brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate for their folly or their vice. He was fond of the country and of books; and from these tastes had arisen his principal enjoyments. To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit from such as are given.

Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents, which, rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife.

When Elizabeth had rejoiced over Wickham's departure she found little other cause for satisfaction in the loss of the regiment. Their parties abroad were less varied than before, and at home she had a mother and sister whose constant repinings at the dullness of everything around them threw a real gloom over their domestic circle; and, though Kitty might in time regain her natural degree of sense, since the disturbers of her brain were removed, her other sister, from whose disposition greater evil might be apprehended, was likely to be hardened in all her folly and assurance by a situation of such double danger as a watering-place and a camp. Upon the whole, therefore, she found, what has been sometimes found before, that an event to which she had been looking with impatient desire did not, in taking place, bring all the satisfaction she had promised herself. It was consequently necessary to name some other period for the commencement of actual felicity—to have some other point on which her wishes and hopes might be fixed, and by again enjoying the pleasure of anticipation, console herself for the present, and prepare for another disappointment. Her tour to the Lakes was now the object of her happiest thoughts; it was her best consolation for all the uncomfortable hours which the discontentedness of her mother and Kitty made inevitable; and could she have included Jane in the scheme, every part of it would have been perfect.

"But it is fortunate," thought she, "that I have something to wish for. Were the whole arrangement complete, my disappointment would be certain. But here, by carrying with me one ceaseless source of regret in my sister's absence, I may reasonably hope to have all my expectations of pleasure realised. A scheme of which every part promises delight can never be successful; and general disappointment is only warded off by the defence of some little peculiar vexation."

When Lydia went away she promised to write very often and very minutely to her mother and Kitty; but her letters were always long expected, and always very short. Those to her mother contained little else than that they were just returned from the library, where such and such officers had attended them, and where she had seen such beautiful ornaments as made her quite wild; that she had a new gown, or a new parasol, which she would have described more fully, but was obliged to leave off in a violent hurry, as Mrs. Forster called her, and they were going off to the camp; and from her correspondence with her sister, there was still less to be learnt—for her letters to Kitty, though rather longer, were much too full of lines under the words to be made public.

After the first fortnight or three weeks of her absence, health, good humour, and cheerfulness began to reappear at Longbourn. Everything wore a happier aspect. The families who had been in town for the winter came back again, and summer finery and summer engagements arose. Mrs. Bennet was restored to her usual querulous serenity; and, by the middle of June, Kitty was so much recovered as to be able to enter Meryton without tears; an event of such happy promise as to make Elizabeth hope that by the following Christmas she might be so tolerably reasonable as not to mention an

officer above once a day, unless, by some cruel and malicious arrangement at the War Office, another regiment should be quartered in Meryton.

The time fixed for the beginning of their northern tour was now fast approaching, and a fortnight only was wanting of it, when a letter arrived from Mrs. Gardiner, which at once delayed its commencement and curtailed its extent. Mr. Gardiner would be prevented by business from setting out till a fortnight later in July, and must be in London again within a month, and as that left too short a period for them to go so far, and see so much as they had proposed, or at least to see it with the leisure and comfort they had built on, they were obliged to give up the Lakes, and substitute a more contracted tour, and, according to the present plan, were to go no farther northwards than Derbyshire. In that county there was enough to be seen to occupy the chief of their three weeks; and to Mrs. Gardiner it had a peculiarly strong attraction. The town where she had formerly passed some years of her life, and where they were now to spend a few days, was probably as great an object of her curiosity as all the celebrated beauties of Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale, or the Peak.

Elizabeth was excessively disappointed; she had set her heart on seeing the Lakes, and still thought there might have been time enough. But it was her business to be satisfied—and certainly her temper to be happy; and all was soon right again.

With the mention of Derbyshire there were many ideas connected. It was impossible for her to see the word without thinking of Pemberley and its owner. "But surely," said she, "I may enter his county with impunity, and rob it of a few petrified spars without his perceiving me."

The period of expectation was now doubled. Four weeks were to pass away before her uncle and aunt's arrival. But they did pass away, and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, with their four children, did at length appear at Longbourn. The children, two girls of six and eight years old, and two younger boys, were to be left under the particular care of their cousin Jane, who was the general favourite, and whose steady sense and sweetness of temper exactly adapted her for attending to them in every way—teaching them, playing with them, and loving them.

The Gardiners stayed only one night at Longbourn, and set off the next morning with Elizabeth in pursuit of novelty and amusement. One enjoyment was certain—that of suitableness of companions; a suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences—cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure—and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if there were disappointments abroad.

It is not the object of this work to give a description of Derbyshire, nor of any of the remarkable places through which their route thither lay; Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenilworth, Birmingham, etc. are sufficiently known. A small part of Derbyshire is all the present concern. To the little town of Lambton, the scene of Mrs. Gardiner's former residence, and where she had lately learned some acquaintance still remained,

they bent their steps, after having seen all the principal wonders of the country; and within five miles of Lambton, Elizabeth found from her aunt that Pemberley was situated. It was not in their direct road, nor more than a mile or two out of it. In talking over their route the evening before, Mrs. Gardiner expressed an inclination to see the place again. Mr. Gardiner declared his willingness, and Elizabeth was applied to for her approbation.

"My love, should not you like to see a place of which you have heard so much?" said her aunt; "a place, too, with which so many of your acquaintances are connected. Wickham passed all his youth there, you know."

Elizabeth was distressed. She felt that she had no business at Pemberley, and was obliged to assume a disinclination for seeing it. She must own that she was tired of seeing great houses; after going over so many, she really had no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains.

Mrs. Gardiner abused her stupidity. "If it were merely a fine house richly furnished," said she, "I should not care about it myself; but the grounds are delightful. They have some of the finest woods in the country."

Elizabeth said no more—but her mind could not acquiesce. The possibility of meeting Mr. Darcy, while viewing the place, instantly occurred. It would be dreadful! She blushed at the very idea, and thought it would be better to speak openly to her aunt than to run such a risk. But against this there were objections; and she finally resolved that it could be the last resource, if her private inquiries to the absence of the family were unfavourably answered.

Accordingly, when she retired at night, she asked the chambermaid whether Pemberley were not a very fine place? what was the name of its proprietor? and, with no little alarm, whether the family were down for the summer? A most welcome negative followed the last question—and her alarms now being removed, she was at leisure to feel a great deal of curiosity to see the house herself; and when the subject was revived the next morning, and she was again applied to, could readily answer, and with a proper air of indifference, that she had not really any dislike to the scheme. To Pemberley, therefore, they were to go.

## Chapter 43

Elizabeth, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter.

The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood stretching over a wide extent.

Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half-a-mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!

They descended the hill, crossed the bridge, and drove to the door; and, while examining the nearer aspect of the house, all her apprehension of meeting its owner returned. She dreaded lest the chambermaid had been mistaken. On applying to see the place, they were admitted into the hall; and Elizabeth, as they waited for the housekeeper, had leisure to wonder at her being where she was.

The housekeeper came; a respectable-looking elderly woman, much less fine, and more civil, than she had any notion of finding her. They followed her into the dining-parlour. It was a large, well proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Elizabeth, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight. As they passed into other rooms these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen. The rooms were lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of its proprietor; but Elizabeth saw, with admiration of his taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendour, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings.

"And of this place," thought she, "I might have been mistress! With these rooms I might now have been familiarly acquainted! Instead of viewing them as a stranger, I might have rejoiced in them as my own, and welcomed to them as visitors my uncle and aunt. But no,"—recollecting herself—"that could never be; my uncle and aunt would have been lost to me; I should not have been allowed to invite them."

This was a lucky recollection—it saved her from something very like regret.



She longed to inquire of the housekeeper whether her master was really absent, but had not the courage for it. At length however, the question was asked by her uncle; and she turned away with alarm, while Mrs. Reynolds replied that he was, adding, "But we expect him to-morrow, with a large party of friends." How rejoiced was Elizabeth that their own journey had not by any circumstance been delayed a day!

Her aunt now called her to look at a picture. She approached and saw the likeness of Mr. Wickham, suspended, amongst several other miniatures, over the mantelpiece. Her aunt asked her, smilingly, how she liked it. The housekeeper came forward, and told them it was a picture of a young gentleman, the son of her late master's steward, who had been brought up by him at his own expense. "He is now gone into the army," she added; "but I am afraid he has turned out very wild."

Mrs. Gardiner looked at her niece with a smile, but Elizabeth could not return it.

"And that," said Mrs. Reynolds, pointing to another of the miniatures, "is my master—and very like him. It was drawn at the same time as the other—about eight years ago."

"I have heard much of your master's fine person," said Mrs. Gardiner, looking at the picture; "it is a handsome face. But, Lizzy, you can tell us whether it is like or not."

Mrs. Reynolds respect for Elizabeth seemed to increase on this intimation of her knowing her master.

"Does that young lady know Mr. Darcy?"

Elizabeth coloured, and said: "A little."

"And do not you think him a very handsome gentleman, ma'am?"

"Yes, very handsome."

"I am sure I know none so handsome; but in the gallery up stairs you will see a finer, larger picture of him than this. This room was my late master's favourite room, and these miniatures are just as they used to be then. He was very fond of them."

This accounted to Elizabeth for Mr. Wickham's being among them.

Mrs. Reynolds then directed their attention to one of Miss Darcy, drawn when she was only eight years old.

"And is Miss Darcy as handsome as her brother?" said Mrs. Gardiner.

"Oh! yes—the handsomest young lady that ever was seen; and so accomplished!—She plays and sings all day long. In the next room is a new instrument just come down for her—a present from my master; she comes here to-morrow with him."

Mr. Gardiner, whose manners were very easy and pleasant, encouraged her communicativeness by his questions and remarks; Mrs. Reynolds, either by pride or attachment, had evidently great pleasure in talking of her master and his sister.

"Is your master much at Pemberley in the course of the year?"

"Not so much as I could wish, sir; but I dare say he may spend half his time here; and Miss Darcy is always down for the summer months."

"Except," thought Elizabeth, "when she goes to Ramsgate."

"If your master would marry, you might see more of him."

"Yes, sir; but I do not know when *that* will be. I do not know who is good enough for him."

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner smiled. Elizabeth could not help saying, "It is very much to his credit, I am sure, that you should think so."

"I say no more than the truth, and everybody will say that knows him," replied the other. Elizabeth thought this was going pretty far; and she listened with increasing astonishment as the housekeeper added, "I have never known a cross word from him in my life, and I have known him ever since he was four years old."

This was praise, of all others most extraordinary, most opposite to her ideas. That he was not a good-tempered man had been her firmest opinion. Her keenest attention was awakened; she longed to hear more, and was grateful to her uncle for saying:

"There are very few people of whom so much can be said. You are lucky in having such a master."

"Yes, sir, I know I am. If I were to go through the world, I could not meet with a better. But I have always observed, that they who are good-natured when children, are good-natured when they grow up; and he was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted boy in the world."

Elizabeth almost stared at her. "Can this be Mr. Darcy?" thought she.

"His father was an excellent man," said Mrs. Gardiner.

"Yes, ma'am, that he was indeed; and his son will be just like him—just as affable to the poor."

Elizabeth listened, wondered, doubted, and was impatient for more. Mrs. Reynolds could interest her on no other point. She related the subjects of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms, and the price of the furniture, in vain. Mr. Gardiner, highly amused by the kind of family prejudice to which he attributed her excessive commendation of her master, soon led again to the subject; and she dwelt with energy on his many merits as they proceeded together up the great staircase.

"He is the best landlord, and the best master," said she, "that ever lived; not like the wild young men nowadays, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants or servants but will give him a good name. Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it. To my fancy, it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men."

"In what an amiable light does this place him!" thought Elizabeth.

"This fine account of him," whispered her aunt as they walked, "is not quite consistent with his behaviour to our poor friend."

"Perhaps we might be deceived."

"That is not very likely; our authority was too good."

On reaching the spacious lobby above they were shown into a very pretty sitting-room, lately fitted up with greater elegance and lightness than the apartments below; and were informed that it was but just done to give pleasure to Miss Darcy, who had taken a liking to the room when last at Pemberley.

"He is certainly a good brother," said Elizabeth, as she walked towards one of the windows.

Mrs. Reynolds anticipated Miss Darcy's delight, when she should enter the room. "And this is always the way with him," she added. "Whatever can give his sister any pleasure is sure to be done in a moment. There is nothing he would not do for her."

The picture-gallery, and two or three of the principal bedrooms, were all that remained to be shown. In the former were many good paintings; but Elizabeth knew nothing of the art; and from such as had been already visible below, she had willingly turned to look at some drawings of Miss Darcy's, in crayons, whose subjects were usually more interesting, and also more intelligible.

In the gallery there were many family portraits, but they could have little to fix the attention of a stranger. Elizabeth walked in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her. At last it arrested her—and she beheld a striking resemblance to Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face as she remembered to have sometimes seen when he looked at her. She stood several minutes before the picture, in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before they quitted the gallery. Mrs. Reynolds informed them that it had been taken in his father's lifetime.

There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original than she had ever felt at the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship!—how much of pleasure or pain was it in his power to bestow!—how much of good or evil must be done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression.

When all of the house that was open to general inspection had been seen, they returned downstairs, and, taking leave of the housekeeper, were consigned over to the gardener, who met them at the hall-door.

As they walked across the hall towards the river, Elizabeth turned back to look again; her uncle and aunt stopped also, and while the former was conjecturing as to the date of the building, the owner of it himself suddenly came forward from the road, which led behind it to the stables.

They were within twenty yards of each other, and so abrupt was his appearance, that it was impossible to avoid his sight. Their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of both were overspread with the deepest blush. He absolutely started, and for a moment seemed immovable from surprise; but shortly recovering himself, advanced towards the party, and spoke to Elizabeth, if not in terms of perfect composure, at least of perfect civility.

She had instinctively turned away; but stopping on his approach, received his compliments with an embarrassment impossible to be overcome. Had his first appearance, or his resemblance to the picture they had just been examining, been insufficient to assure the other two that they now saw Mr. Darcy, the gardener's expression of surprise, on beholding his master, must immediately have told it. They stood a little aloof while he was talking to their niece, who, astonished and confused, scarcely dared lift her eyes to his face, and knew not what answer she returned to his civil inquiries after her family. Amazed at the alteration of his manner since they last parted, every sentence that he uttered was increasing her embarrassment; and every idea of the impropriety of her being found there recurring to her mind, the few minutes in which they continued were some of the most uncomfortable in her life. Nor did he seem much more at ease; when he spoke, his accent had none of its usual sedateness; and he repeated his inquiries as to the time of her having left Longbourn, and of her having stayed in Derbyshire, so often, and in so hurried a way, as plainly spoke the distraction of his thoughts.

At length every idea seemed to fail him; and, after standing a few moments without saying a word, he suddenly recollected himself, and took leave.

The others then joined her, and expressed admiration of his figure; but Elizabeth heard not a word, and wholly engrossed by her own feelings, followed them in silence. She was overpowered by shame and vexation. Her coming there was the most unfortunate, the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange it must appear to him! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man! It might seem as if she had purposely thrown herself in his way again! Oh! why did she come? Or, why did he thus come a day before he was expected? Had they been only ten minutes sooner, they should have been beyond the reach of his discrimination; for it was plain that he was that moment arrived—that moment alighted from his horse or his carriage. She blushed again and again over the perverseness of the meeting. And his behaviour, so strikingly altered—what could it mean? That he should even speak to her was amazing!—but to speak with such civility, to inquire after her family! Never in her life had she seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with such

gentleness as on this unexpected meeting. What a contrast did it offer to his last address in Rosings Park, when he put his letter into her hand! She knew not what to think, or how to account for it.

They had now entered a beautiful walk by the side of the water, and every step was bringing forward a nobler fall of ground, or a finer reach of the woods to which they were approaching; but it was some time before Elizabeth was sensible of any of it; and, though she answered mechanically to the repeated appeals of her uncle and aunt, and seemed to direct her eyes to such objects as they pointed out, she distinguished no part of the scene. Her thoughts were all fixed on that one spot of Pemberley House, whichever it might be, where Mr. Darcy then was. She longed to know what at the moment was passing in his mind—in what manner he thought of her, and whether, in defiance of everything, she was still dear to him. Perhaps he had been civil only because he felt himself at ease; yet there had been *that* in his voice which was not like ease. Whether he had felt more of pain or of pleasure in seeing her she could not tell, but he certainly had not seen her with composure.

At length, however, the remarks of her companions on her absence of mind aroused her, and she felt the necessity of appearing more like herself.

They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a while, ascended some of the higher grounds; when, in spots where the opening of the trees gave the eye power to wander, were many charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream. Mr. Gardiner expressed a wish of going round the whole park, but feared it might be beyond a walk. With a triumphant smile they were told that it was ten miles round. It settled the matter; and they pursued the accustomed circuit; which brought them again, after some time, in a descent among hanging woods, to the edge of the water, and one of its narrowest parts. They crossed it by a simple bridge, in character with the general air of the scene; it was a spot less adorned than any they had yet visited; and the valley, here contracted into a glen, allowed room only for the stream, and a narrow walk amidst the rough coppice-wood which bordered it. Elizabeth longed to explore its windings; but when they had crossed the bridge, and perceived their distance from the house, Mrs. Gardiner, who was not a great walker, could go no farther, and thought only of returning to the carriage as quickly as possible. Her niece was, therefore, obliged to submit, and they took their way towards the house on the opposite side of the river, in the nearest direction; but their progress was slow, for Mr. Gardiner, though seldom able to indulge the taste, was very fond of fishing, and was so much engaged in watching the occasional appearance of some trout in the water, and talking to the man about them, that he advanced but little. Whilst wandering on in this slow manner, they were again surprised, and Elizabeth's astonishment was quite equal to what it had been at first, by the sight of Mr. Darcy approaching them, and at no great distance. The walk here being here less sheltered than on the other side, allowed them to see him before they met. Elizabeth, however astonished, was at least

more prepared for an interview than before, and resolved to appear and to speak with calmness, if he really intended to meet them. For a few moments, indeed, she felt that he would probably strike into some other path. The idea lasted while a turning in the walk concealed him from their view; the turning past, he was immediately before them. With a glance, she saw that he had lost none of his recent civility; and, to imitate his politeness, she began, as they met, to admire the beauty of the place; but she had not got beyond the words "delightful," and "charming," when some unlucky recollections obtruded, and she fancied that praise of Pemberley from her might be mischievously construed. Her colour changed, and she said no more.

Mrs. Gardiner was standing a little behind; and on her pausing, he asked her if she would do him the honour of introducing him to her friends. This was a stroke of civility for which she was quite unprepared; and she could hardly suppress a smile at his being now seeking the acquaintance of some of those very people against whom his pride had revolted in his offer to herself. "What will be his surprise," thought she, "when he knows who they are? He takes them now for people of fashion."

The introduction, however, was immediately made; and as she named their relationship to herself, she stole a sly look at him, to see how he bore it, and was not without the expectation of his decamping as fast as he could from such disgraceful companions. That he was *surprised* by the connection was evident; he sustained it, however, with fortitude, and so far from going away, turned back with them, and entered into conversation with Mr. Gardiner. Elizabeth could not but be pleased, could not but triumph. It was consoling that he should know she had some relations for whom there was no need to blush. She listened most attentively to all that passed between them, and gloried in every expression, every sentence of her uncle, which marked his intelligence, his taste, or his good manners.

The conversation soon turned upon fishing; and she heard Mr. Darcy invite him, with the greatest civility, to fish there as often as he chose while he continued in the neighbourhood, offering at the same time to supply him with fishing tackle, and pointing out those parts of the stream where there was usually most sport. Mrs. Gardiner, who was walking arm-in-arm with Elizabeth, gave her a look expressive of wonder. Elizabeth said nothing, but it gratified her exceedingly; the compliment must be all for herself. Her astonishment, however, was extreme, and continually was she repeating, "Why is he so altered? From what can it proceed? It cannot be for *me*—it cannot be for *my* sake that his manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Hunsford could not work such a change as this. It is impossible that he should still love me."

After walking some time in this way, the two ladies in front, the two gentlemen behind, on resuming their places, after descending to the brink of the river for the better inspection of some curious water-plant, there chanced to be a little alteration. It originated in Mrs. Gardiner, who, fatigued by the exercise of the morning, found Elizabeth's arm inadequate to her support, and consequently preferred her husband's.

Mr. Darcy took her place by her niece, and they walked on together. After a short silence, the lady first spoke. She wished him to know that she had been assured of his absence before she came to the place, and accordingly began by observing, that his arrival had been very unexpected—"for your housekeeper," she added, "informed us that you would certainly not be here till to-morrow; and indeed, before we left Bakewell, we understood that you were not immediately expected in the country." He acknowledged the truth of it all, and said that business with his steward had occasioned his coming forward a few hours before the rest of the party with whom he had been travelling. "They will join me early to-morrow," he continued, "and among them are some who will claim an acquaintance with you—Mr. Bingley and his sisters."

Elizabeth answered only by a slight bow. Her thoughts were instantly driven back to the time when Mr. Bingley's name had been the last mentioned between them; and, if she might judge by his complexion, *his* mind was not very differently engaged.

"There is also one other person in the party," he continued after a pause, "who more particularly wishes to be known to you. Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my sister to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?"

The surprise of such an application was great indeed; it was too great for her to know in what manner she acceded to it. She immediately felt that whatever desire Miss Darcy might have of being acquainted with her must be the work of her brother, and, without looking farther, it was satisfactory; it was gratifying to know that his resentment had not made him think really ill of her.

They now walked on in silence, each of them deep in thought. Elizabeth was not comfortable; that was impossible; but she was flattered and pleased. His wish of introducing his sister to her was a compliment of the highest kind. They soon outstripped the others, and when they had reached the carriage, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner were half a quarter of a mile behind.

He then asked her to walk into the house—but she declared herself not tired, and they stood together on the lawn. At such a time much might have been said, and silence was very awkward. She wanted to talk, but there seemed to be an embargo on every subject. At last she recollected that she had been travelling, and they talked of Matlock and Dove Dale with great perseverance. Yet time and her aunt moved slowly—and her patience and her ideas were nearly worn out before the *tete-a-tete* was over. On Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner's coming up they were all pressed to go into the house and take some refreshment; but this was declined, and they parted on each side with utmost politeness. Mr. Darcy handed the ladies into the carriage; and when it drove off, Elizabeth saw him walking slowly towards the house.

The observations of her uncle and aunt now began; and each of them pronounced him to be infinitely superior to anything they had expected. "He is perfectly well behaved, polite, and unassuming," said her uncle.

"There *is* something a little stately in him, to be sure," replied her aunt, "but it is confined to his air, and is not unbecoming. I can now say with the housekeeper, that though some people may call him proud, I have seen nothing of it."

"I was never more surprised than by his behaviour to us. It was more than civil; it was really attentive; and there was no necessity for such attention. His acquaintance with Elizabeth was very trifling."

"To be sure, Lizzy," said her aunt, "he is not so handsome as Wickham; or, rather, he has not Wickham's countenance, for his features are perfectly good. But how came you to tell me that he was so disagreeable?"

Elizabeth excused herself as well as she could; said that she had liked him better when they had met in Kent than before, and that she had never seen him so pleasant as this morning.

"But perhaps he may be a little whimsical in his civilities," replied her uncle. "Your great men often are; and therefore I shall not take him at his word, as he might change his mind another day, and warn me off his grounds."

Elizabeth felt that they had entirely misunderstood his character, but said nothing.

"From what we have seen of him," continued Mrs. Gardiner, "I really should not have thought that he could have behaved in so cruel a way by anybody as he has done by poor Wickham. He has not an ill-natured look. On the contrary, there is something pleasing about his mouth when he speaks. And there is something of dignity in his countenance that would not give one an unfavourable idea of his heart. But, to be sure, the good lady who showed us his house did give him a most flaming character! I could hardly help laughing aloud sometimes. But he is a liberal master, I suppose, and *that* in the eye of a servant comprehends every virtue."

Elizabeth here felt herself called on to say something in vindication of his behaviour to Wickham; and therefore gave them to understand, in as guarded a manner as she could, that by what she had heard from his relations in Kent, his actions were capable of a very different construction; and that his character was by no means so faulty, nor Wickham's so amiable, as they had been considered in Hertfordshire. In confirmation of this, she related the particulars of all the pecuniary transactions in which they had been connected, without actually naming her authority, but stating it to be such as might be relied on.

Mrs. Gardiner was surprised and concerned; but as they were now approaching the scene of her former pleasures, every idea gave way to the charm of recollection; and she was too much engaged in pointing out to her husband all the interesting spots in its environs to think of anything else. Fatigued as she had been by the morning's walk they had no sooner dined than she set off again in quest of her former acquaintance, and the evening was spent in the satisfactions of a intercourse renewed after many years' discontinuance.



The occurrences of the day were too full of interest to leave Elizabeth much attention for any of these new friends; and she could do nothing but think, and think with wonder, of Mr. Darcy's civility, and, above all, of his wishing her to be acquainted with his sister.

## Chapter 44

Elizabeth had settled it that Mr. Darcy would bring his sister to visit her the very day after her reaching Pemberley; and was consequently resolved not to be out of sight of the inn the whole of that morning. But her conclusion was false; for on the very morning after their arrival at Lambton, these visitors came. They had been walking about the place with some of their new friends, and were just returning to the inn to dress themselves for dining with the same family, when the sound of a carriage drew them to a window, and they saw a gentleman and a lady in a curricule driving up the street. Elizabeth immediately recognizing the livery, guessed what it meant, and imparted no small degree of her surprise to her relations by acquainting them with the honour which she expected. Her uncle and aunt were all amazement; and the embarrassment of her manner as she spoke, joined to the circumstance itself, and many of the circumstances of the preceding day, opened to them a new idea on the business. Nothing had ever suggested it before, but they felt that there was no other way of accounting for such attentions from such a quarter than by supposing a partiality for their niece. While these newly-born notions were passing in their heads, the perturbation of Elizabeth's feelings was at every moment increasing. She was quite amazed at her own discomposure; but amongst other causes of disquiet, she dreaded lest the partiality of the brother should have said too much in her favour; and, more than commonly anxious to please, she naturally suspected that every power of pleasing would fail her.

She retreated from the window, fearful of being seen; and as she walked up and down the room, endeavouring to compose herself, saw such looks of inquiring surprise in her uncle and aunt as made everything worse.

Miss Darcy and her brother appeared, and this formidable introduction took place. With astonishment did Elizabeth see that her new acquaintance was at least as much embarrassed as herself. Since her being at Lambton, she had heard that Miss Darcy was exceedingly proud; but the observation of a very few minutes convinced her that she was only exceedingly shy. She found it difficult to obtain even a word from her beyond a monosyllable.

Miss Darcy was tall, and on a larger scale than Elizabeth; and, though little more than sixteen, her figure was formed, and her appearance womanly and graceful. She was less handsome than her brother; but there was sense and good humour in her face, and her manners were perfectly unassuming and gentle. Elizabeth, who had expected to find in her as acute and unembarrassed an observer as ever Mr. Darcy had been, was much relieved by discerning such different feelings.

They had not long been together before Mr. Darcy told her that Bingley was also coming to wait on her; and she had barely time to express her satisfaction, and prepare for such a visitor, when Bingley's quick step was heard on the stairs, and in a moment he entered the room. All Elizabeth's anger against him had been long done away; but had she still felt any, it could hardly have stood its ground against the unaffected cordiality with which he expressed himself on seeing her again. He inquired in a friendly, though general way, after her family, and looked and spoke with the same good-humoured ease that he had ever done.

To Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner he was scarcely a less interesting personage than to herself. They had long wished to see him. The whole party before them, indeed, excited a lively attention. The suspicions which had just arisen of Mr. Darcy and their niece directed their observation towards each with an earnest though guarded inquiry; and they soon drew from those inquiries the full conviction that one of them at least knew what it was to love. Of the lady's sensations they remained a little in doubt; but that the gentleman was overflowing with admiration was evident enough.

Elizabeth, on her side, had much to do. She wanted to ascertain the feelings of each of her visitors; she wanted to compose her own, and to make herself agreeable to all; and in the latter object, where she feared most to fail, she was most sure of success, for those to whom she endeavoured to give pleasure were prepossessed in her favour. Bingley was ready, Georgiana was eager, and Darcy determined, to be pleased.

In seeing Bingley, her thoughts naturally flew to her sister; and, oh! how ardently did she long to know whether any of his were directed in a like manner. Sometimes she could fancy that he talked less than on former occasions, and once or twice pleased herself with the notion that, as he looked at her, he was trying to trace a resemblance. But, though this might be imaginary, she could not be deceived as to his behaviour to Miss Darcy, who had been set up as a rival to Jane. No look appeared on either side that spoke particular regard. Nothing occurred between them that could justify the hopes of his sister. On this point she was soon satisfied; and two or three little circumstances occurred ere they parted, which, in her anxious interpretation, denoted a recollection of Jane not untinctured by tenderness, and a wish of saying more that might lead to the mention of her, had he dared. He observed to her, at a moment when the others were talking together, and in a tone which had something of real regret, that it "was a very long time since he had had the pleasure of seeing her;"

and, before she could reply, he added, "It is above eight months. We have not met since the 26th of November, when we were all dancing together at Netherfield."

Elizabeth was pleased to find his memory so exact; and he afterwards took occasion to ask her, when unattended to by any of the rest, whether *all* her sisters were at Longbourn. There was not much in the question, nor in the preceding remark; but there was a look and a manner which gave them meaning.

It was not often that she could turn her eyes on Mr. Darcy himself; but, whenever she did catch a glimpse, she saw an expression of general complaisance, and in all that he said she heard an accent so removed from *hauteur* or disdain of his companions, as convinced her that the improvement of manners which she had yesterday witnessed however temporary its existence might prove, had at least outlived one day. When she saw him thus seeking the acquaintance and courting the good opinion of people with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace—when she saw him thus civil, not only to herself, but to the very relations whom he had openly disdained, and recollected their last lively scene in Hunsford Parsonage—the difference, the change was so great, and struck so forcibly on her mind, that she could hardly restrain her astonishment from being visible. Never, even in the company of his dear friends at Netherfield, or his dignified relations at Rosings, had she seen him so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence or unbending reserve, as now, when no importance could result from the success of his endeavours, and when even the acquaintance of those to whom his attentions were addressed would draw down the ridicule and censure of the ladies both of Netherfield and Rosings.

Their visitors stayed with them above half-an-hour; and when they arose to depart, Mr. Darcy called on his sister to join him in expressing their wish of seeing Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, and Miss Bennet, to dinner at Pemberley, before they left the country. Miss Darcy, though with a diffidence which marked her little in the habit of giving invitations, readily obeyed. Mrs. Gardiner looked at her niece, desirous of knowing how *she*, whom the invitation most concerned, felt disposed as to its acceptance, but Elizabeth had turned away her head. Presuming however, that this studied avoidance spoke rather a momentary embarrassment than any dislike of the proposal, and seeing in her husband, who was fond of society, a perfect willingness to accept it, she ventured to engage for her attendance, and the day after the next was fixed on.

Bingley expressed great pleasure in the certainty of seeing Elizabeth again, having still a great deal to say to her, and many inquiries to make after all their Hertfordshire friends. Elizabeth, construing all this into a wish of hearing her speak of her sister, was pleased, and on this account, as well as some others, found herself, when their visitors left them, capable of considering the last half-hour with some satisfaction, though while it was passing, the enjoyment of it had been little. Eager to be alone, and fearful of inquiries or hints from her uncle and aunt, she stayed with them only long enough to hear their favourable opinion of Bingley, and then hurried away to dress.

But she had no reason to fear Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner's curiosity; it was not their wish to force her communication. It was evident that she was much better acquainted with Mr. Darcy than they had before any idea of; it was evident that he was very much in love with her. They saw much to interest, but nothing to justify inquiry.

Of Mr. Darcy it was now a matter of anxiety to think well; and, as far as their acquaintance reached, there was no fault to find. They could not be untouched by his politeness; and had they drawn his character from their own feelings and his servant's report, without any reference to any other account, the circle in Hertfordshire to which he was known would not have recognized it for Mr. Darcy. There was now an interest, however, in believing the housekeeper; and they soon became sensible that the authority of a servant who had known him since he was four years old, and whose own manners indicated respectability, was not to be hastily rejected. Neither had anything occurred in the intelligence of their Lambton friends that could materially lessen its weight. They had nothing to accuse him of but pride; pride he probably had, and if not, it would certainly be imputed by the inhabitants of a small market-town where the family did not visit. It was acknowledged, however, that he was a liberal man, and did much good among the poor.

With respect to Wickham, the travellers soon found that he was not held there in much estimation; for though the chief of his concerns with the son of his patron were imperfectly understood, it was yet a well-known fact that, on his quitting Derbyshire, he had left many debts behind him, which Mr. Darcy afterwards discharged.

As for Elizabeth, her thoughts were at Pemberley this evening more than the last; and the evening, though as it passed it seemed long, was not long enough to determine her feelings towards *one* in that mansion; and she lay awake two whole hours endeavouring to make them out. She certainly did not hate him. No; hatred had vanished long ago, and she had almost as long been ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against him, that could be so called. The respect created by the conviction of his valuable qualities, though at first unwillingly admitted, had for some time ceased to be repugnant to her feeling; and it was now heightened into somewhat of a friendlier nature, by the testimony so highly in his favour, and bringing forward his disposition in so amiable a light, which yesterday had produced. But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within her of goodwill which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude; gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection. He who, she had been persuaded, would avoid her as his greatest enemy, seemed, on this accidental meeting, most eager to preserve the acquaintance, and without any indelicate display of regard, or any peculiarity of manner, where their two selves only were concerned, was soliciting the good opinion of her friends, and bent on making her known to his sister. Such a change in a man of so much pride exciting not only astonishment but gratitude—for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed; and as such its impression on

her was of a sort to be encouraged, as by no means unpleasing, though it could not be exactly defined. She respected, she esteemed, she was grateful to him, she felt a real interest in his welfare; and she only wanted to know how far she wished that welfare to depend upon herself, and how far it would be for the happiness of both that she should employ the power, which her fancy told her she still possessed, of bringing on her the renewal of his addresses.

It had been settled in the evening between the aunt and the niece, that such a striking civility as Miss Darcy's in coming to see them on the very day of her arrival at Pemberley, for she had reached it only to a late breakfast, ought to be imitated, though it could not be equalled, by some exertion of politeness on their side; and, consequently, that it would be highly expedient to wait on her at Pemberley the following morning. They were, therefore, to go. Elizabeth was pleased; though when she asked herself the reason, she had very little to say in reply.

Mr. Gardiner left them soon after breakfast. The fishing scheme had been renewed the day before, and a positive engagement made of his meeting some of the gentlemen at Pemberley before noon.

## Chapter 45

Convinced as Elizabeth now was that Miss Bingley's dislike of her had originated in jealousy, she could not help feeling how unwelcome her appearance at Pemberley must be to her, and was curious to know with how much civility on that lady's side the acquaintance would now be renewed.

On reaching the house, they were shown through the hall into the saloon, whose northern aspect rendered it delightful for summer. Its windows opening to the ground, admitted a most refreshing view of the high woody hills behind the house, and of the beautiful oaks and Spanish chestnuts which were scattered over the intermediate lawn.

In this house they were received by Miss Darcy, who was sitting there with Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley, and the lady with whom she lived in London. Georgiana's reception of them was very civil, but attended with all the embarrassment which, though proceeding from shyness and the fear of doing wrong, would easily give to those who felt themselves inferior the belief of her being proud and reserved. Mrs. Gardiner and her niece, however, did her justice, and pitied her.

By Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley they were noticed only by a curtsey; and, on their being seated, a pause, awkward as such pauses must always be, succeeded for a few moments. It was first broken by Mrs. Annesley, a genteel, agreeable-looking woman, whose endeavour to introduce some kind of discourse proved her to be more truly

well-bred than either of the others; and between her and Mrs. Gardiner, with occasional help from Elizabeth, the conversation was carried on. Miss Darcy looked as if she wished for courage enough to join in it; and sometimes did venture a short sentence when there was least danger of its being heard.

Elizabeth soon saw that she was herself closely watched by Miss Bingley, and that she could not speak a word, especially to Miss Darcy, without calling her attention. This observation would not have prevented her from trying to talk to the latter, had they not been seated at an inconvenient distance; but she was not sorry to be spared the necessity of saying much. Her own thoughts were employing her. She expected every moment that some of the gentlemen would enter the room. She wished, she feared that the master of the house might be amongst them; and whether she wished or feared it most, she could scarcely determine. After sitting in this manner a quarter of an hour without hearing Miss Bingley's voice, Elizabeth was roused by receiving from her a cold inquiry after the health of her family. She answered with equal indifference and brevity, and the other said no more.

The next variation which their visit afforded was produced by the entrance of servants with cold meat, cake, and a variety of all the finest fruits in season; but this did not take place till after many a significant look and smile from Mrs. Annesley to Miss Darcy had been given, to remind her of her post. There was now employment for the whole party—for though they could not all talk, they could all eat; and the beautiful pyramids of grapes, nectarines, and peaches soon collected them round the table.

While thus engaged, Elizabeth had a fair opportunity of deciding whether she most feared or wished for the appearance of Mr. Darcy, by the feelings which prevailed on his entering the room; and then, though but a moment before she had believed her wishes to predominate, she began to regret that he came.

He had been some time with Mr. Gardiner, who, with two or three other gentlemen from the house, was engaged by the river, and had left him only on learning that the ladies of the family intended a visit to Georgiana that morning. No sooner did he appear than Elizabeth wisely resolved to be perfectly easy and unembarrassed; a resolution the more necessary to be made, but perhaps not the more easily kept, because she saw that the suspicions of the whole party were awakened against them, and that there was scarcely an eye which did not watch his behaviour when he first came into the room. In no countenance was attentive curiosity so strongly marked as in Miss Bingley's, in spite of the smiles which overspread her face whenever she spoke to one of its objects; for jealousy had not yet made her desperate, and her attentions to Mr. Darcy were by no means over. Miss Darcy, on her brother's entrance, exerted herself much more to talk, and Elizabeth saw that he was anxious for his sister and herself to get acquainted, and forwarded as much as possible, every attempt at

conversation on either side. Miss Bingley saw all this likewise; and, in the imprudence of anger, took the first opportunity of saying, with sneering civility:

"Pray, Miss Eliza, are not the ——shire Militia removed from Meryton? They must be a great loss to *your* family."

In Darcy's presence she dared not mention Wickham's name; but Elizabeth instantly comprehended that he was uppermost in her thoughts; and the various recollections connected with him gave her a moment's distress; but exerting herself vigorously to repel the ill-natured attack, she presently answered the question in a tolerably detached tone. While she spoke, an involuntary glance showed her Darcy, with a heightened complexion, earnestly looking at her, and his sister overcome with confusion, and unable to lift up her eyes. Had Miss Bingley known what pain she was then giving her beloved friend, she undoubtedly would have refrained from the hint; but she had merely intended to discompose Elizabeth by bringing forward the idea of a man to whom she believed her partial, to make her betray a sensibility which might injure her in Darcy's opinion, and, perhaps, to remind the latter of all the follies and absurdities by which some part of her family were connected with that corps. Not a syllable had ever reached her of Miss Darcy's meditated elopement. To no creature had it been revealed, where secrecy was possible, except to Elizabeth; and from all Bingley's connections her brother was particularly anxious to conceal it, from the very wish which Elizabeth had long ago attributed to him, of their becoming hereafter her own. He had certainly formed such a plan, and without meaning that it should affect his endeavour to separate him from Miss Bennet, it is probable that it might add something to his lively concern for the welfare of his friend.

Elizabeth's collected behaviour, however, soon quieted his emotion; and as Miss Bingley, vexed and disappointed, dared not approach nearer to Wickham, Georgiana also recovered in time, though not enough to be able to speak any more. Her brother, whose eye she feared to meet, scarcely recollected her interest in the affair, and the very circumstance which had been designed to turn his thoughts from Elizabeth seemed to have fixed them on her more and more cheerfully.

Their visit did not continue long after the question and answer above mentioned; and while Mr. Darcy was attending them to their carriage Miss Bingley was venting her feelings in criticisms on Elizabeth's person, behaviour, and dress. But Georgiana would not join her. Her brother's recommendation was enough to ensure her favour; his judgement could not err. And he had spoken in such terms of Elizabeth as to leave Georgiana without the power of finding her otherwise than lovely and amiable. When Darcy returned to the saloon, Miss Bingley could not help repeating to him some part of what she had been saying to his sister.

"How very ill Miss Eliza Bennet looks this morning, Mr. Darcy," she cried; "I never in my life saw anyone so much altered as she is since the winter. She is grown so

brown and coarse! Louisa and I were agreeing that we should not have known her again."

However little Mr. Darcy might have liked such an address, he contented himself with coolly replying that he perceived no other alteration than her being rather tanned, no miraculous consequence of travelling in the summer.

"For my own part," she rejoined, "I must confess that I never could see any beauty in her. Her face is too thin; her complexion has no brilliancy; and her features are not at all handsome. Her nose wants character—there is nothing marked in its lines. Her teeth are tolerable, but not out of the common way; and as for her eyes, which have sometimes been called so fine, I could never see anything extraordinary in them. They have a sharp, shrewish look, which I do not like at all; and in her air altogether there is a self-sufficiency without fashion, which is intolerable."

Persuaded as Miss Bingley was that Darcy admired Elizabeth, this was not the best method of recommending herself; but angry people are not always wise; and in seeing him at last look somewhat nettled, she had all the success she expected. He was resolutely silent, however, and, from a determination of making him speak, she continued:

"I remember, when we first knew her in Hertfordshire, how amazed we all were to find that she was a reputed beauty; and I particularly recollect your saying one night, after they had been dining at Netherfield, '*She* a beauty!—I should as soon call her mother a wit.' But afterwards she seemed to improve on you, and I believe you thought her rather pretty at one time."

"Yes," replied Darcy, who could contain himself no longer, "but *that* was only when I first saw her, for it is many months since I have considered her as one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance."

He then went away, and Miss Bingley was left to all the satisfaction of having forced him to say what gave no one any pain but herself.

Mrs. Gardiner and Elizabeth talked of all that had occurred during their visit, as they returned, except what had particularly interested them both. The look and behaviour of everybody they had seen were discussed, except of the person who had mostly engaged their attention. They talked of his sister, his friends, his house, his fruit—of everything but himself; yet Elizabeth was longing to know what Mrs. Gardiner thought of him, and Mrs. Gardiner would have been highly gratified by her niece's beginning the subject.

## Chapter 46



Elizabeth had been a good deal disappointed in not finding a letter from Jane on their first arrival at Lambton; and this disappointment had been renewed on each of the mornings that had now been spent there; but on the third her repining was over, and her sister justified, by the receipt of two letters from her at once, on one of which was marked that it had been missent elsewhere. Elizabeth was not surprised at it, as Jane had written the direction remarkably ill.

They had just been preparing to walk as the letters came in; and her uncle and aunt, leaving her to enjoy them in quiet, set off by themselves. The one missent must first be attended to; it had been written five days ago. The beginning contained an account of all their little parties and engagements, with such news as the country afforded; but the latter half, which was dated a day later, and written in evident agitation, gave more important intelligence. It was to this effect:

"Since writing the above, dearest Lizzy, something has occurred of a most unexpected and serious nature; but I am afraid of alarming you—be assured that we are all well. What I have to say relates to poor Lydia. An express came at twelve last night, just as we were all gone to bed, from Colonel Forster, to inform us that she was gone off to Scotland with one of his officers; to own the truth, with Wickham! Imagine our surprise. To Kitty, however, it does not seem so wholly unexpected. I am very, very sorry. So imprudent a match on both sides! But I am willing to hope the best, and that his character has been misunderstood. Thoughtless and indiscreet I can easily believe him, but this step (and let us rejoice over it) marks nothing bad at heart. His choice is disinterested at least, for he must know my father can give her nothing. Our poor mother is sadly grieved. My father bears it better. How thankful am I that we never let them know what has been said against him; we must forget it ourselves. They were off Saturday night about twelve, as is conjectured, but were not missed till yesterday morning at eight. The express was sent off directly. My dear Lizzy, they must have passed within ten miles of us. Colonel Forster gives us reason to expect him here soon. Lydia left a few lines for his wife, informing her of their intention. I must conclude, for I cannot be long from my poor mother. I am afraid you will not be able to make it out, but I hardly know what I have written."

Without allowing herself time for consideration, and scarcely knowing what she felt, Elizabeth on finishing this letter instantly seized the other, and opening it with the utmost impatience, read as follows: it had been written a day later than the conclusion of the first.

"By this time, my dearest sister, you have received my hurried letter; I wish this may be more intelligible, but though not confined for time, my head is so bewildered that I cannot answer for being coherent. Dearest Lizzy, I hardly know what I would write, but I have bad news for you, and it cannot be delayed. Imprudent as the marriage between Mr. Wickham and our poor Lydia would be, we are now anxious to be assured it has taken place, for there is but too much reason to fear they are not gone

to Scotland. Colonel Forster came yesterday, having left Brighton the day before, not many hours after the express. Though Lydia's short letter to Mrs. F. gave them to understand that they were going to Gretna Green, something was dropped by Denny expressing his belief that W. never intended to go there, or to marry Lydia at all, which was repeated to Colonel F., who, instantly taking the alarm, set off from B. intending to trace their route. He did trace them easily to Clapham, but no further; for on entering that place, they removed into a hackney coach, and dismissed the chaise that brought them from Epsom. All that is known after this is, that they were seen to continue the London road. I know not what to think. After making every possible inquiry on that side London, Colonel F. came on into Hertfordshire, anxiously renewing them at all the turnpikes, and at the inns in Barnet and Hatfield, but without any success—no such people had been seen to pass through. With the kindest concern he came on to Longbourn, and broke his apprehensions to us in a manner most creditable to his heart. I am sincerely grieved for him and Mrs. F., but no one can throw any blame on them. Our distress, my dear Lizzy, is very great. My father and mother believe the worst, but I cannot think so ill of him. Many circumstances might make it more eligible for them to be married privately in town than to pursue their first plan; and even if *he* could form such a design against a young woman of Lydia's connections, which is not likely, can I suppose her so lost to everything? Impossible! I grieve to find, however, that Colonel F. is not disposed to depend upon their marriage; he shook his head when I expressed my hopes, and said he feared W. was not a man to be trusted. My poor mother is really ill, and keeps her room. Could she exert herself, it would be better; but this is not to be expected. And as to my father, I never in my life saw him so affected. Poor Kitty has anger for having concealed their attachment; but as it was a matter of confidence, one cannot wonder. I am truly glad, dearest Lizzy, that you have been spared something of these distressing scenes; but now, as the first shock is over, shall I own that I long for your return? I am not so selfish, however, as to press for it, if inconvenient. Adieu! I take up my pen again to do what I have just told you I would not; but circumstances are such that I cannot help earnestly begging you all to come here as soon as possible. I know my dear uncle and aunt so well, that I am not afraid of requesting it, though I have still something more to ask of the former. My father is going to London with Colonel Forster instantly, to try to discover her. What he means to do I am sure I know not; but his excessive distress will not allow him to pursue any measure in the best and safest way, and Colonel Forster is obliged to be at Brighton again to-morrow evening. In such an exigence, my uncle's advice and assistance would be everything in the world; he will immediately comprehend what I must feel, and I rely upon his goodness."

"Oh! where, where is my uncle?" cried Elizabeth, darting from her seat as she finished the letter, in eagerness to follow him, without losing a moment of the time so precious; but as she reached the door it was opened by a servant, and Mr. Darcy appeared. Her pale face and impetuous manner made him start, and before he could

recover himself to speak, she, in whose mind every idea was superseded by Lydia's situation, hastily exclaimed, "I beg your pardon, but I must leave you. I must find Mr. Gardiner this moment, on business that cannot be delayed; I have not an instant to lose."

"Good God! what is the matter?" cried he, with more feeling than politeness; then recollecting himself, "I will not detain you a minute; but let me, or let the servant go after Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner. You are not well enough; you cannot go yourself."

Elizabeth hesitated, but her knees trembled under her and she felt how little would be gained by her attempting to pursue them. Calling back the servant, therefore, she commissioned him, though in so breathless an accent as made her almost unintelligible, to fetch his master and mistress home instantly.

On his quitting the room she sat down, unable to support herself, and looking so miserably ill, that it was impossible for Darcy to leave her, or to refrain from saying, in a tone of gentleness and commiseration, "Let me call your maid. Is there nothing you could take to give you present relief? A glass of wine; shall I get you one? You are very ill."

"No, I thank you," she replied, endeavouring to recover herself. "There is nothing the matter with me. I am quite well; I am only distressed by some dreadful news which I have just received from Longbourn."

She burst into tears as she alluded to it, and for a few minutes could not speak another word. Darcy, in wretched suspense, could only say something indistinctly of his concern, and observe her in compassionate silence. At length she spoke again. "I have just had a letter from Jane, with such dreadful news. It cannot be concealed from anyone. My younger sister has left all her friends—has eloped; has thrown herself into the power of—of Mr. Wickham. They are gone off together from Brighton. *You* know him too well to doubt the rest. She has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt him to—she is lost for ever."

Darcy was fixed in astonishment. "When I consider," she added in a yet more agitated voice, "that I might have prevented it! I, who knew what he was. Had I but explained some part of it only—some part of what I learnt, to my own family! Had his character been known, this could not have happened. But it is all—all too late now."

"I am grieved indeed," cried Darcy; "grieved—shocked. But is it certain—absolutely certain?"

"Oh, yes! They left Brighton together on Sunday night, and were traced almost to London, but not beyond; they are certainly not gone to Scotland."

"And what has been done, what has been attempted, to recover her?"

"My father is gone to London, and Jane has written to beg my uncle's immediate assistance; and we shall be off, I hope, in half-an-hour. But nothing can be done—I

know very well that nothing can be done. How is such a man to be worked on? How are they even to be discovered? I have not the smallest hope. It is every way horrible!"

Darcy shook his head in silent acquiescence.

"When *my* eyes were opened to his real character—Oh! had I known what I ought, what I dared to do! But I knew not—I was afraid of doing too much. Wretched, wretched mistake!"

Darcy made no answer. He seemed scarcely to hear her, and was walking up and down the room in earnest meditation, his brow contracted, his air gloomy. Elizabeth soon observed, and instantly understood it. Her power was sinking; everything *must* sink under such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace. She could neither wonder nor condemn, but the belief of his self-conquest brought nothing consolatory to her bosom, afforded no palliation of her distress. It was, on the contrary, exactly calculated to make her understand her own wishes; and never had she so honestly felt that she could have loved him, as now, when all love must be vain.

But self, though it would intrude, could not engross her. Lydia—the humiliation, the misery she was bringing on them all, soon swallowed up every private care; and covering her face with her handkerchief, Elizabeth was soon lost to everything else; and, after a pause of several minutes, was only recalled to a sense of her situation by the voice of her companion, who, in a manner which, though it spoke compassion, spoke likewise restraint, said, "I am afraid you have been long desiring my absence, nor have I anything to plead in excuse of my stay, but real, though unavailing concern. Would to Heaven that anything could be either said or done on my part that might offer consolation to such distress! But I will not torment you with vain wishes, which may seem purposely to ask for your thanks. This unfortunate affair will, I fear, prevent my sister's having the pleasure of seeing you at Pemberley to-day."

"Oh, yes. Be so kind as to apologise for us to Miss Darcy. Say that urgent business calls us home immediately. Conceal the unhappy truth as long as it is possible, I know it cannot be long."

He readily assured her of his secrecy; again expressed his sorrow for her distress, wished it a happier conclusion than there was at present reason to hope, and leaving his compliments for her relations, with only one serious, parting look, went away.

As he quitted the room, Elizabeth felt how improbable it was that they should ever see each other again on such terms of cordiality as had marked their several meetings in Derbyshire; and as she threw a retrospective glance over the whole of their acquaintance, so full of contradictions and varieties, sighed at the perverseness of those feelings which would now have promoted its continuance, and would formerly have rejoiced in its termination.

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise—if regard springing

from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in her defence, except that she had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill success might, perhaps, authorise her to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. Be that as it may, she saw him go with regret; and in this early example of what Lydia's infamy must produce, found additional anguish as she reflected on that wretched business. Never, since reading Jane's second letter, had she entertained a hope of Wickham's meaning to marry her. No one but Jane, she thought, could flatter herself with such an expectation. Surprise was the least of her feelings on this development. While the contents of the first letter remained in her mind, she was all surprise—all astonishment that Wickham should marry a girl whom it was impossible he could marry for money; and how Lydia could ever have attached him had appeared incomprehensible. But now it was all too natural. For such an attachment as this she might have sufficient charms; and though she did not suppose Lydia to be deliberately engaging in an elopement without the intention of marriage, she had no difficulty in believing that neither her virtue nor her understanding would preserve her from falling an easy prey.

She had never perceived, while the regiment was in Hertfordshire, that Lydia had any partiality for him; but she was convinced that Lydia wanted only encouragement to attach herself to anybody. Sometimes one officer, sometimes another, had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections had continually been fluctuating but never without an object. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl—oh! how acutely did she now feel it!

She was wild to be at home—to hear, to see, to be upon the spot to share with Jane in the cares that must now fall wholly upon her, in a family so deranged, a father absent, a mother incapable of exertion, and requiring constant attendance; and though almost persuaded that nothing could be done for Lydia, her uncle's interference seemed of the utmost importance, and till he entered the room her impatience was severe. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner had hurried back in alarm, supposing by the servant's account that their niece was taken suddenly ill; but satisfying them instantly on that head, she eagerly communicated the cause of their summons, reading the two letters aloud, and dwelling on the postscript of the last with trembling energy.— Though Lydia had never been a favourite with them, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner could not but be deeply afflicted. Not Lydia only, but all were concerned in it; and after the first exclamations of surprise and horror, Mr. Gardiner promised every assistance in his power. Elizabeth, though expecting no less, thanked him with tears of gratitude; and all three being actuated by one spirit, everything relating to their journey was speedily settled. They were to be off as soon as possible. "But what is to be done about Pemberley?" cried Mrs. Gardiner. "John told us Mr. Darcy was here when you sent for us; was it so?"

"Yes; and I told him we should not be able to keep our engagement. *That* is all settled."

"What is all settled?" repeated the other, as she ran into her room to prepare. "And are they upon such terms as for her to disclose the real truth? Oh, that I knew how it was!"

But wishes were vain, or at least could only serve to amuse her in the hurry and confusion of the following hour. Had Elizabeth been at leisure to be idle, she would have remained certain that all employment was impossible to one so wretched as herself; but she had her share of business as well as her aunt, and amongst the rest there were notes to be written to all their friends at Lambton, with false excuses for their sudden departure. An hour, however, saw the whole completed; and Mr. Gardiner meanwhile having settled his account at the inn, nothing remained to be done but to go; and Elizabeth, after all the misery of the morning, found herself, in a shorter space of time than she could have supposed, seated in the carriage, and on the road to Longbourn.

## Chapter 47

"I have been thinking it over again, Elizabeth," said her uncle, as they drove from the town; "and really, upon serious consideration, I am much more inclined than I was to judge as your eldest sister does on the matter. It appears to me so very unlikely that any young man should form such a design against a girl who is by no means unprotected or friendless, and who was actually staying in his colonel's family, that I am strongly inclined to hope the best. Could he expect that her friends would not step forward? Could he expect to be noticed again by the regiment, after such an affront to Colonel Forster? His temptation is not adequate to the risk!"

"Do you really think so?" cried Elizabeth, brightening up for a moment.

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Gardiner, "I begin to be of your uncle's opinion. It is really too great a violation of decency, honour, and interest, for him to be guilty of. I cannot think so very ill of Wickham. Can you yourself, Lizzy, so wholly give him up, as to believe him capable of it?"

"Not, perhaps, of neglecting his own interest; but of every other neglect I can believe him capable. If, indeed, it should be so! But I dare not hope it. Why should they not go on to Scotland if that had been the case?"

"In the first place," replied Mr. Gardiner, "there is no absolute proof that they are not gone to Scotland."

"Oh! but their removing from the chaise into a hackney coach is such a presumption! And, besides, no traces of them were to be found on the Barnet road."

"Well, then—supposing them to be in London. They may be there, though for the purpose of concealment, for no more exceptional purpose. It is not likely that money should be very abundant on either side; and it might strike them that they could be more economically, though less expeditiously, married in London than in Scotland."

"But why all this secrecy? Why any fear of detection? Why must their marriage be private? Oh, no, no—this is not likely. His most particular friend, you see by Jane's account, was persuaded of his never intending to marry her. Wickham will never marry a woman without some money. He cannot afford it. And what claims has Lydia—what attraction has she beyond youth, health, and good humour that could make him, for her sake, forego every chance of benefiting himself by marrying well? As to what restraint the apprehensions of disgrace in the corps might throw on a dishonourable elopement with her, I am not able to judge; for I know nothing of the effects that such a step might produce. But as to your other objection, I am afraid it will hardly hold good. Lydia has no brothers to step forward; and he might imagine, from my father's behaviour, from his indolence and the little attention he has ever seemed to give to what was going forward in his family, that *he* would do as little, and think as little about it, as any father could do, in such a matter."

"But can you think that Lydia is so lost to everything but love of him as to consent to live with him on any terms other than marriage?"

"It does seem, and it is most shocking indeed," replied Elizabeth, with tears in her eyes, "that a sister's sense of decency and virtue in such a point should admit of doubt. But, really, I know not what to say. Perhaps I am not doing her justice. But she is very young; she has never been taught to think on serious subjects; and for the last half-year, nay, for a twelvemonth—she has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. She has been allowed to dispose of her time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in her way. Since the ——shire were first quartered in Meryton, nothing but love, flirtation, and officers have been in her head. She has been doing everything in her power by thinking and talking on the subject, to give greater—what shall I call it? susceptibility to her feelings; which are naturally lively enough. And we all know that Wickham has every charm of person and address that can captivate a woman."

"But you see that Jane," said her aunt, "does not think so very ill of Wickham as to believe him capable of the attempt."

"Of whom does Jane ever think ill? And who is there, whatever might be their former conduct, that she would think capable of such an attempt, till it were proved against them? But Jane knows, as well as I do, what Wickham really is. We both know that he has been profligate in every sense of the word; that he has neither integrity nor honour; that he is as false and deceitful as he is insinuating."

"And do you really know all this?" cried Mrs. Gardiner, whose curiosity as to the mode of her intelligence was all alive.

"I do indeed," replied Elizabeth, colouring. "I told you, the other day, of his infamous behaviour to Mr. Darcy; and you yourself, when last at Longbourn, heard in what manner he spoke of the man who had behaved with such forbearance and liberality towards him. And there are other circumstances which I am not at liberty—which it is not worth while to relate; but his lies about the whole Pemberley family are endless. From what he said of Miss Darcy I was thoroughly prepared to see a proud, reserved, disagreeable girl. Yet he knew to the contrary himself. He must know that she was as amiable and unpretending as we have found her."

"But does Lydia know nothing of this? can she be ignorant of what you and Jane seem so well to understand?"

"Oh, yes!—that, that is the worst of all. Till I was in Kent, and saw so much both of Mr. Darcy and his relation Colonel Fitzwilliam, I was ignorant of the truth myself. And when I returned home, the —shire was to leave Meryton in a week or fortnight's time. As that was the case, neither Jane, to whom I related the whole, nor I, thought it necessary to make our knowledge public; for of what use could it apparently be to any one, that the good opinion which all the neighbourhood had of him should then be overthrown? And even when it was settled that Lydia should go with Mrs. Forster, the necessity of opening her eyes to his character never occurred to me. That *she* could be in any danger from the deception never entered my head. That such a consequence as *this* could ensue, you may easily believe, was far enough from my thoughts."

"When they all removed to Brighton, therefore, you had no reason, I suppose, to believe them fond of each other?"

"Not the slightest. I can remember no symptom of affection on either side; and had anything of the kind been perceptible, you must be aware that ours is not a family on which it could be thrown away. When first he entered the corps, she was ready enough to admire him; but so we all were. Every girl in or near Meryton was out of her senses about him for the first two months; but he never distinguished *her* by any particular attention; and, consequently, after a moderate period of extravagant and wild admiration, her fancy for him gave way, and others of the regiment, who treated her with more distinction, again became her favourites."

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It may be easily believed, that however little of novelty could be added to their fears, hopes, and conjectures, on this interesting subject, by its repeated discussion, no other could detain them from it long, during the whole of the journey. From Elizabeth's thoughts it was never absent. Fixed there by the keenest of all anguish, self-reproach, she could find no interval of ease or forgetfulness.



They travelled as expeditiously as possible, and, sleeping one night on the road, reached Longbourn by dinner time the next day. It was a comfort to Elizabeth to consider that Jane could not have been wearied by long expectations.

The little Gardiners, attracted by the sight of a chaise, were standing on the steps of the house as they entered the paddock; and, when the carriage drove up to the door, the joyful surprise that lighted up their faces, and displayed itself over their whole bodies, in a variety of capers and frisks, was the first pleasing earnest of their welcome.

Elizabeth jumped out; and, after giving each of them a hasty kiss, hurried into the vestibule, where Jane, who came running down from her mother's apartment, immediately met her.

Elizabeth, as she affectionately embraced her, whilst tears filled the eyes of both, lost not a moment in asking whether anything had been heard of the fugitives.

"Not yet," replied Jane. "But now that my dear uncle is come, I hope everything will be well."

"Is my father in town?"

"Yes, he went on Tuesday, as I wrote you word."

"And have you heard from him often?"

"We have heard only twice. He wrote me a few lines on Wednesday to say that he had arrived in safety, and to give me his directions, which I particularly begged him to do. He merely added that he should not write again till he had something of importance to mention."

"And my mother—how is she? How are you all?"

"My mother is tolerably well, I trust; though her spirits are greatly shaken. She is up stairs and will have great satisfaction in seeing you all. She does not yet leave her dressing-room. Mary and Kitty, thank Heaven, are quite well."

"But you—how are you?" cried Elizabeth. "You look pale. How much you must have gone through!"

Her sister, however, assured her of her being perfectly well; and their conversation, which had been passing while Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner were engaged with their children, was now put an end to by the approach of the whole party. Jane ran to her uncle and aunt, and welcomed and thanked them both, with alternate smiles and tears.

When they were all in the drawing-room, the questions which Elizabeth had already asked were of course repeated by the others, and they soon found that Jane had no intelligence to give. The sanguine hope of good, however, which the benevolence of her heart suggested had not yet deserted her; she still expected that it would all end well, and that every morning would bring some letter, either from Lydia or her father, to explain their proceedings, and, perhaps, announce their marriage.

Mrs. Bennet, to whose apartment they all repaired, after a few minutes' conversation together, received them exactly as might be expected; with tears and lamentations of regret, invectives against the villainous conduct of Wickham, and complaints of her own sufferings and ill-usage; blaming everybody but the person to whose ill-judging indulgence the errors of her daughter must principally be owing.

"If I had been able," said she, "to carry my point in going to Brighton, with all my family, *this* would not have happened; but poor dear Lydia had nobody to take care of her. Why did the Forsters ever let her go out of their sight? I am sure there was some great neglect or other on their side, for she is not the kind of girl to do such a thing if she had been well looked after. I always thought they were very unfit to have the charge of her; but I was overruled, as I always am. Poor dear child! And now here's Mr. Bennet gone away, and I know he will fight Wickham, wherever he meets him and then he will be killed, and what is to become of us all? The Collinses will turn us out before he is cold in his grave, and if you are not kind to us, brother, I do not know what we shall do."

They all exclaimed against such terrific ideas; and Mr. Gardiner, after general assurances of his affection for her and all her family, told her that he meant to be in London the very next day, and would assist Mr. Bennet in every endeavour for recovering Lydia.

"Do not give way to useless alarm," added he; "though it is right to be prepared for the worst, there is no occasion to look on it as certain. It is not quite a week since they left Brighton. In a few days more we may gain some news of them; and till we know that they are not married, and have no design of marrying, do not let us give the matter over as lost. As soon as I get to town I shall go to my brother, and make him come home with me to Gracechurch Street; and then we may consult together as to what is to be done."

"Oh! my dear brother," replied Mrs. Bennet, "that is exactly what I could most wish for. And now do, when you get to town, find them out, wherever they may be; and if they are not married already, *make* them marry. And as for wedding clothes, do not let them wait for that, but tell Lydia she shall have as much money as she chooses to buy them, after they are married. And, above all, keep Mr. Bennet from fighting. Tell him what a dreadful state I am in, that I am frightened out of my wits—and have such tremblings, such flutterings, all over me—such spasms in my side and pains in my head, and such beatings at heart, that I can get no rest by night nor by day. And tell my dear Lydia not to give any directions about her clothes till she has seen me, for she does not know which are the best warehouses. Oh, brother, how kind you are! I know you will contrive it all."

But Mr. Gardiner, though he assured her again of his earnest endeavours in the cause, could not avoid recommending moderation to her, as well in her hopes as her fear; and after talking with her in this manner till dinner was on the table, they all left

her to vent all her feelings on the housekeeper, who attended in the absence of her daughters.

Though her brother and sister were persuaded that there was no real occasion for such a seclusion from the family, they did not attempt to oppose it, for they knew that she had not prudence enough to hold her tongue before the servants, while they waited at table, and judged it better that *one* only of the household, and the one whom they could most trust should comprehend all her fears and solicitude on the subject.

In the dining-room they were soon joined by Mary and Kitty, who had been too busily engaged in their separate apartments to make their appearance before. One came from her books, and the other from her toilette. The faces of both, however, were tolerably calm; and no change was visible in either, except that the loss of her favourite sister, or the anger which she had herself incurred in this business, had given more of fretfulness than usual to the accents of Kitty. As for Mary, she was mistress enough of herself to whisper to Elizabeth, with a countenance of grave reflection, soon after they were seated at table:

"This is a most unfortunate affair, and will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other the balm of sisterly consolation."

Then, perceiving in Elizabeth no inclination of replying, she added, "Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable; that one false step involves her in endless ruin; that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful; and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex."

Elizabeth lifted up her eyes in amazement, but was too much oppressed to make any reply. Mary, however, continued to console herself with such kind of moral extractions from the evil before them.

In the afternoon, the two elder Miss Bennets were able to be for half-an-hour by themselves; and Elizabeth instantly availed herself of the opportunity of making any inquiries, which Jane was equally eager to satisfy. After joining in general lamentations over the dreadful sequel of this event, which Elizabeth considered as all but certain, and Miss Bennet could not assert to be wholly impossible, the former continued the subject, by saying, "But tell me all and everything about it which I have not already heard. Give me further particulars. What did Colonel Forster say? Had they no apprehension of anything before the elopement took place? They must have seen them together for ever."

"Colonel Forster did own that he had often suspected some partiality, especially on Lydia's side, but nothing to give him any alarm. I am so grieved for him! His behaviour was attentive and kind to the utmost. He *was* coming to us, in order to assure us of his concern, before he had any idea of their not being gone to Scotland: when that apprehension first got abroad, it hastened his journey."

"And was Denny convinced that Wickham would not marry? Did he know of their intending to go off? Had Colonel Forster seen Denny himself?"

"Yes; but, when questioned by *him*, Denny denied knowing anything of their plans, and would not give his real opinion about it. He did not repeat his persuasion of their not marrying—and from *that*, I am inclined to hope, he might have been misunderstood before."

"And till Colonel Forster came himself, not one of you entertained a doubt, I suppose, of their being really married?"

"How was it possible that such an idea should enter our brains? I felt a little uneasy—a little fearful of my sister's happiness with him in marriage, because I knew that his conduct had not been always quite right. My father and mother knew nothing of that; they only felt how imprudent a match it must be. Kitty then owned, with a very natural triumph on knowing more than the rest of us, that in Lydia's last letter she had prepared her for such a step. She had known, it seems, of their being in love with each other, many weeks."

"But not before they went to Brighton?"

"No, I believe not."

"And did Colonel Forster appear to think well of Wickham himself? Does he know his real character?"

"I must confess that he did not speak so well of Wickham as he formerly did. He believed him to be imprudent and extravagant. And since this sad affair has taken place, it is said that he left Meryton greatly in debt; but I hope this may be false."

"Oh, Jane, had we been less secret, had we told what we knew of him, this could not have happened!"

"Perhaps it would have been better," replied her sister. "But to expose the former faults of any person without knowing what their present feelings were, seemed unjustifiable. We acted with the best intentions."

"Could Colonel Forster repeat the particulars of Lydia's note to his wife?"

"He brought it with him for us to see."

Jane then took it from her pocket-book, and gave it to Elizabeth. These were the contents:

"MY DEAR HARRIET,

"You will laugh when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help laughing myself at your surprise to-morrow morning, as soon as I am missed. I am going to Gretna Green, and if you cannot guess with who, I shall think you a simpleton, for there is but one man in the world I love, and he is an angel. I should never be happy without him, so think it no harm to be off. You need not send them word at Longbourn of my going, if you do not like it, for it will make the surprise the greater, when I write to them and sign my name 'Lydia Wickham.' What a good joke it will

be! I can hardly write for laughing. Pray make my excuses to Pratt for not keeping my engagement, and dancing with him to-night. Tell him I hope he will excuse me when he knows all; and tell him I will dance with him at the next ball we meet, with great pleasure. I shall send for my clothes when I get to Longbourn; but I wish you would tell Sally to mend a great slit in my worked muslin gown before they are packed up. Good-bye. Give my love to Colonel Forster. I hope you will drink to our good journey.

"Your affectionate friend,

"LYDIA BENNET."

"Oh! thoughtless, thoughtless Lydia!" cried Elizabeth when she had finished it. "What a letter is this, to be written at such a moment! But at least it shows that *she* was serious on the subject of their journey. Whatever he might afterwards persuade her to, it was not on her side a *scheme* of infamy. My poor father! how he must have felt it!"

"I never saw anyone so shocked. He could not speak a word for full ten minutes. My mother was taken ill immediately, and the whole house in such confusion!"

"Oh! Jane," cried Elizabeth, "was there a servant belonging to it who did not know the whole story before the end of the day?"

"I do not know. I hope there was. But to be guarded at such a time is very difficult. My mother was in hysterics, and though I endeavoured to give her every assistance in my power, I am afraid I did not do so much as I might have done! But the horror of what might possibly happen almost took from me my faculties."

"Your attendance upon her has been too much for you. You do not look well. Oh that I had been with you! you have had every care and anxiety upon yourself alone."

"Mary and Kitty have been very kind, and would have shared in every fatigue, I am sure; but I did not think it right for either of them. Kitty is slight and delicate; and Mary studies so much, that her hours of repose should not be broken in on. My aunt Phillips came to Longbourn on Tuesday, after my father went away; and was so good as to stay till Thursday with me. She was of great use and comfort to us all. And Lady Lucas has been very kind; she walked here on Wednesday morning to condole with us, and offered her services, or any of her daughters', if they should be of use to us."

"She had better have stayed at home," cried Elizabeth; "perhaps she *meant* well, but, under such a misfortune as this, one cannot see too little of one's neighbours. Assistance is impossible; condolence insufferable. Let them triumph over us at a distance, and be satisfied."

She then proceeded to inquire into the measures which her father had intended to pursue, while in town, for the recovery of his daughter.

"He meant I believe," replied Jane, "to go to Epsom, the place where they last changed horses, see the postilions and try if anything could be made out from them."

His principal object must be to discover the number of the hackney coach which took them from Clapham. It had come with a fare from London; and as he thought that the circumstance of a gentleman and lady's removing from one carriage into another might be remarked he meant to make inquiries at Clapham. If he could anyhow discover at what house the coachman had before set down his fare, he determined to make inquiries there, and hoped it might not be impossible to find out the stand and number of the coach. I do not know of any other designs that he had formed; but he was in such a hurry to be gone, and his spirits so greatly discomposed, that I had difficulty in finding out even so much as this."

## Chapter 48

The whole party were in hopes of a letter from Mr. Bennet the next morning, but the post came in without bringing a single line from him. His family knew him to be, on all common occasions, a most negligent and dilatory correspondent; but at such a time they had hoped for exertion. They were forced to conclude that he had no pleasing intelligence to send; but even of *that* they would have been glad to be certain. Mr. Gardiner had waited only for the letters before he set off.

When he was gone, they were certain at least of receiving constant information of what was going on, and their uncle promised, at parting, to prevail on Mr. Bennet to return to Longbourn, as soon as he could, to the great consolation of his sister, who considered it as the only security for her husband's not being killed in a duel.

Mrs. Gardiner and the children were to remain in Hertfordshire a few days longer, as the former thought her presence might be serviceable to her nieces. She shared in their attendance on Mrs. Bennet, and was a great comfort to them in their hours of freedom. Their other aunt also visited them frequently, and always, as she said, with the design of cheering and heartening them up—though, as she never came without reporting some fresh instance of Wickham's extravagance or irregularity, she seldom went away without leaving them more dispirited than she found them.

All Meryton seemed striving to blacken the man who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light. He was declared to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and his intrigues, all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradesman's family. Everybody declared that he was the wickedest young man in the world; and everybody began to find out that they had always distrusted the appearance of his goodness. Elizabeth, though she did not credit above half of what was said, believed enough to make her former assurance of her sister's ruin more certain; and even Jane, who believed still less of it, became almost hopeless, more

especially as the time was now come when, if they had gone to Scotland, which she had never before entirely despaired of, they must in all probability have gained some news of them.

Mr. Gardiner left Longbourn on Sunday; on Tuesday his wife received a letter from him; it told them that, on his arrival, he had immediately found out his brother, and persuaded him to come to Gracechurch Street; that Mr. Bennet had been to Epsom and Clapham, before his arrival, but without gaining any satisfactory information; and that he was now determined to inquire at all the principal hotels in town, as Mr. Bennet thought it possible they might have gone to one of them, on their first coming to London, before they procured lodgings. Mr. Gardiner himself did not expect any success from this measure, but as his brother was eager in it, he meant to assist him in pursuing it. He added that Mr. Bennet seemed wholly disinclined at present to leave London and promised to write again very soon. There was also a postscript to this effect:

"I have written to Colonel Forster to desire him to find out, if possible, from some of the young man's intimates in the regiment, whether Wickham has any relations or connections who would be likely to know in what part of town he has now concealed himself. If there were anyone that one could apply to with a probability of gaining such a clue as that, it might be of essential consequence. At present we have nothing to guide us. Colonel Forster will, I dare say, do everything in his power to satisfy us on this head. But, on second thoughts, perhaps, Lizzy could tell us what relations he has now living, better than any other person."

Elizabeth was at no loss to understand from whence this deference to her authority proceeded; but it was not in her power to give any information of so satisfactory a nature as the compliment deserved. She had never heard of his having had any relations, except a father and mother, both of whom had been dead many years. It was possible, however, that some of his companions in the ——shire might be able to give more information; and though she was not very sanguine in expecting it, the application was a something to look forward to.

Every day at Longbourn was now a day of anxiety; but the most anxious part of each was when the post was expected. The arrival of letters was the grand object of every morning's impatience. Through letters, whatever of good or bad was to be told would be communicated, and every succeeding day was expected to bring some news of importance.

But before they heard again from Mr. Gardiner, a letter arrived for their father, from a different quarter, from Mr. Collins; which, as Jane had received directions to open all that came for him in his absence, she accordingly read; and Elizabeth, who knew what curiosities his letters always were, looked over her, and read it likewise. It was as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I feel myself called upon, by our relationship, and my situation in life, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are now suffering under, of which we were yesterday informed by a letter from Hertfordshire. Be assured, my dear sir, that Mrs. Collins and myself sincerely sympathise with you and all your respectable family, in your present distress, which must be of the bitterest kind, because proceeding from a cause which no time can remove. No arguments shall be wanting on my part that can alleviate so severe a misfortune—or that may comfort you, under a circumstance that must be of all others the most afflicting to a parent's mind. The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this. And it is the more to be lamented, because there is reason to suppose as my dear Charlotte informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in your daughter has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence; though, at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mrs. Bennet, I am inclined to think that her own disposition must be naturally bad, or she could not be guilty of such an enormity, at so early an age. Howsoever that may be, you are grievously to be pitied; in which opinion I am not only joined by Mrs. Collins, but likewise by Lady Catherine and her daughter, to whom I have related the affair. They agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one daughter will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family? And this consideration leads me moreover to reflect, with augmented satisfaction, on a certain event of last November; for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace. Let me then advise you, dear sir, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offense.

"I am, dear sir, etc., etc."

Mr. Gardiner did not write again till he had received an answer from Colonel Forster; and then he had nothing of a pleasant nature to send. It was not known that Wickham had a single relationship with whom he kept up any connection, and it was certain that he had no near one living. His former acquaintances had been numerous; but since he had been in the militia, it did not appear that he was on terms of particular friendship with any of them. There was no one, therefore, who could be pointed out as likely to give any news of him. And in the wretched state of his own finances, there was a very powerful motive for secrecy, in addition to his fear of discovery by Lydia's relations, for it had just transpired that he had left gaming debts behind him to a very considerable amount. Colonel Forster believed that more than a thousand pounds would be necessary to clear his expenses at Brighton. He owed a good deal in town, but his debts of honour were still more formidable. Mr. Gardiner did not attempt to conceal these particulars from the Longbourn family. Jane heard them with horror. "A gamester!" she cried. "This is wholly unexpected. I had not an idea of it."

Mr. Gardiner added in his letter, that they might expect to see their father at home on the following day, which was Saturday. Rendered spiritless by the ill-success of all



their endeavours, he had yielded to his brother-in-law's entreaty that he would return to his family, and leave it to him to do whatever occasion might suggest to be advisable for continuing their pursuit. When Mrs. Bennet was told of this, she did not express so much satisfaction as her children expected, considering what her anxiety for his life had been before.

"What, is he coming home, and without poor Lydia?" she cried. "Sure he will not leave London before he has found them. Who is to fight Wickham, and make him marry her, if he comes away?"

As Mrs. Gardiner began to wish to be at home, it was settled that she and the children should go to London, at the same time that Mr. Bennet came from it. The coach, therefore, took them the first stage of their journey, and brought its master back to Longbourn.

Mrs. Gardiner went away in all the perplexity about Elizabeth and her Derbyshire friend that had attended her from that part of the world. His name had never been voluntarily mentioned before them by her niece; and the kind of half-expectation which Mrs. Gardiner had formed, of their being followed by a letter from him, had ended in nothing. Elizabeth had received none since her return that could come from Pemberley.

The present unhappy state of the family rendered any other excuse for the lowness of her spirits unnecessary; nothing, therefore, could be fairly conjectured from *that*, though Elizabeth, who was by this time tolerably well acquainted with her own feelings, was perfectly aware that, had she known nothing of Darcy, she could have borne the dread of Lydia's infamy somewhat better. It would have spared her, she thought, one sleepless night out of two.

When Mr. Bennet arrived, he had all the appearance of his usual philosophic composure. He said as little as he had ever been in the habit of saying; made no mention of the business that had taken him away, and it was some time before his daughters had courage to speak of it.

It was not till the afternoon, when he had joined them at tea, that Elizabeth ventured to introduce the subject; and then, on her briefly expressing her sorrow for what he must have endured, he replied, "Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it."

"You must not be too severe upon yourself," replied Elizabeth.

"You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so prone to fall into it! No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough."

"Do you suppose them to be in London?"

"Yes; where else can they be so well concealed?"

"And Lydia used to want to go to London," added Kitty.

"She is happy then," said her father drily; "and her residence there will probably be of some duration."

Then after a short silence he continued:

"Lizzy, I bear you no ill-will for being justified in your advice to me last May, which, considering the event, shows some greatness of mind."

They were interrupted by Miss Bennet, who came to fetch her mother's tea.

"This is a parade," he cried, "which does one good; it gives such an elegance to misfortune! Another day I will do the same; I will sit in my library, in my nightcap and powdering gown, and give as much trouble as I can; or, perhaps, I may defer it till Kitty runs away."

"I am not going to run away, papa," said Kitty fretfully. "If I should ever go to Brighton, I would behave better than Lydia."

"*You* go to Brighton. I would not trust you so near it as Eastbourne for fifty pounds! No, Kitty, I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is ever to enter into my house again, nor even to pass through the village. Balls will be absolutely prohibited, unless you stand up with one of your sisters. And you are never to stir out of doors till you can prove that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner."

Kitty, who took all these threats in a serious light, began to cry.

"Well, well," said he, "do not make yourself unhappy. If you are a good girl for the next ten years, I will take you to a review at the end of them."

## Chapter 49

Two days after Mr. Bennet's return, as Jane and Elizabeth were walking together in the shrubbery behind the house, they saw the housekeeper coming towards them, and, concluding that she came to call them to their mother, went forward to meet her; but, instead of the expected summons, when they approached her, she said to Miss Bennet, "I beg your pardon, madam, for interrupting you, but I was in hopes you might have got some good news from town, so I took the liberty of coming to ask."

"What do you mean, Hill? We have heard nothing from town."

"Dear madam," cried Mrs. Hill, in great astonishment, "don't you know there is an express come for master from Mr. Gardiner? He has been here this half-hour, and master has had a letter."

Away ran the girls, too eager to get in to have time for speech. They ran through the vestibule into the breakfast-room; from thence to the library; their father was in

neither; and they were on the point of seeking him up stairs with their mother, when they were met by the butler, who said:

"If you are looking for my master, ma'am, he is walking towards the little copse."

Upon this information, they instantly passed through the hall once more, and ran across the lawn after their father, who was deliberately pursuing his way towards a small wood on one side of the paddock.

Jane, who was not so light nor so much in the habit of running as Elizabeth, soon lagged behind, while her sister, panting for breath, came up with him, and eagerly cried out:

"Oh, papa, what news—what news? Have you heard from my uncle?"

"Yes I have had a letter from him by express."

"Well, and what news does it bring—good or bad?"

"What is there of good to be expected?" said he, taking the letter from his pocket. "But perhaps you would like to read it."

Elizabeth impatiently caught it from his hand. Jane now came up.

"Read it aloud," said their father, "for I hardly know myself what it is about."

"Gracechurch Street, Monday, August 2.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"At last I am able to send you some tidings of my niece, and such as, upon the whole, I hope it will give you satisfaction. Soon after you left me on Saturday, I was fortunate enough to find out in what part of London they were. The particulars I reserve till we meet; it is enough to know they are discovered. I have seen them both—"

"Then it is as I always hoped," cried Jane; "they are married!"

Elizabeth read on:

"I have seen them both. They are not married, nor can I find there was any intention of being so; but if you are willing to perform the engagements which I have ventured to make on your side, I hope it will not be long before they are. All that is required of you is, to assure to your daughter, by settlement, her equal share of the five thousand pounds secured among your children after the decease of yourself and my sister; and, moreover, to enter into an engagement of allowing her, during your life, one hundred pounds per annum. These are conditions which, considering everything, I had no hesitation in complying with, as far as I thought myself privileged, for you. I shall send this by express, that no time may be lost in bringing me your answer. You will easily comprehend, from these particulars, that Mr. Wickham's circumstances are not so hopeless as they are generally believed to be. The world has been deceived in that respect; and I am happy to say there will be some little money, even when all his debts are discharged, to settle on my niece, in addition to her own fortune. If, as I conclude

will be the case, you send me full powers to act in your name throughout the whole of this business, I will immediately give directions to Haggerston for preparing a proper settlement. There will not be the smallest occasion for your coming to town again; therefore stay quiet at Longbourn, and depend on my diligence and care. Send back your answer as fast as you can, and be careful to write explicitly. We have judged it best that my niece should be married from this house, of which I hope you will approve. She comes to us to-day. I shall write again as soon as anything more is determined on. Yours, etc.,

"EDW. GARDINER."

"Is it possible?" cried Elizabeth, when she had finished. "Can it be possible that he will marry her?"

"Wickham is not so undeserving, then, as we thought him," said her sister. "My dear father, I congratulate you."

"And have you answered the letter?" cried Elizabeth.

"No; but it must be done soon."

Most earnestly did she then entreat him to lose no more time before he wrote.

"Oh! my dear father," she cried, "come back and write immediately. Consider how important every moment is in such a case."

"Let me write for you," said Jane, "if you dislike the trouble yourself."

"I dislike it very much," he replied; "but it must be done."

And so saying, he turned back with them, and walked towards the house.

"And may I ask—" said Elizabeth; "but the terms, I suppose, must be complied with."

"Complied with! I am only ashamed of his asking so little."

"And they *must* marry! Yet he is *such* a man!"

"Yes, yes, they must marry. There is nothing else to be done. But there are two things that I want very much to know; one is, how much money your uncle has laid down to bring it about; and the other, how am I ever to pay him."

"Money! My uncle!" cried Jane, "what do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, that no man in his senses would marry Lydia on so slight a temptation as one hundred a year during my life, and fifty after I am gone."

"That is very true," said Elizabeth; "though it had not occurred to me before. His debts to be discharged, and something still to remain! Oh! it must be my uncle's doings! Generous, good man, I am afraid he has distressed himself. A small sum could not do all this."

"No," said her father; "Wickham's a fool if he takes her with a farthing less than ten thousand pounds. I should be sorry to think so ill of him, in the very beginning of our relationship."

"Ten thousand pounds! Heaven forbid! How is half such a sum to be repaid?"

Mr. Bennet made no answer, and each of them, deep in thought, continued silent till they reached the house. Their father then went on to the library to write, and the girls walked into the breakfast-room.

"And they are really to be married!" cried Elizabeth, as soon as they were by themselves. "How strange this is! And for *this* we are to be thankful. That they should marry, small as is their chance of happiness, and wretched as is his character, we are forced to rejoice. Oh, Lydia!"

"I comfort myself with thinking," replied Jane, "that he certainly would not marry Lydia if he had not a real regard for her. Though our kind uncle has done something towards clearing him, I cannot believe that ten thousand pounds, or anything like it, has been advanced. He has children of his own, and may have more. How could he spare half ten thousand pounds?"

"If he were ever able to learn what Wickham's debts have been," said Elizabeth, "and how much is settled on his side on our sister, we shall exactly know what Mr. Gardiner has done for them, because Wickham has not sixpence of his own. The kindness of my uncle and aunt can never be requited. Their taking her home, and affording her their personal protection and countenance, is such a sacrifice to her advantage as years of gratitude cannot enough acknowledge. By this time she is actually with them! If such goodness does not make her miserable now, she will never deserve to be happy! What a meeting for her, when she first sees my aunt!"

"We must endeavour to forget all that has passed on either side," said Jane: "I hope and trust they will yet be happy. His consenting to marry her is a proof, I will believe, that he is come to a right way of thinking. Their mutual affection will steady them; and I flatter myself they will settle so quietly, and live in so rational a manner, as may in time make their past imprudence forgotten."

"Their conduct has been such," replied Elizabeth, "as neither you, nor I, nor anybody can ever forget. It is useless to talk of it."

It now occurred to the girls that their mother was in all likelihood perfectly ignorant of what had happened. They went to the library, therefore, and asked their father whether he would not wish them to make it known to her. He was writing and, without raising his head, coolly replied:

"Just as you please."

"May we take my uncle's letter to read to her?"

"Take whatever you like, and get away."

Elizabeth took the letter from his writing-table, and they went up stairs together. Mary and Kitty were both with Mrs. Bennet: one communication would, therefore, do for all. After a slight preparation for good news, the letter was read aloud. Mrs. Bennet could hardly contain herself. As soon as Jane had read Mr. Gardiner's hope of

Lydia's being soon married, her joy burst forth, and every following sentence added to its exuberance. She was now in an irritation as violent from delight, as she had ever been fidgety from alarm and vexation. To know that her daughter would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for her felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct.

"My dear, dear Lydia!" she cried. "This is delightful indeed! She will be married! I shall see her again! She will be married at sixteen! My good, kind brother! I knew how it would be. I knew he would manage everything! How I long to see her! and to see dear Wickham too! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write to my sister Gardiner about them directly. Lizzy, my dear, run down to your father, and ask him how much he will give her. Stay, stay, I will go myself. Ring the bell, Kitty, for Hill. I will put on my things in a moment. My dear, dear Lydia! How merry we shall be together when we meet!"

Her eldest daughter endeavoured to give some relief to the violence of these transports, by leading her thoughts to the obligations which Mr. Gardiner's behaviour laid them all under.

"For we must attribute this happy conclusion," she added, "in a great measure to his kindness. We are persuaded that he has pledged himself to assist Mr. Wickham with money."

"Well," cried her mother, "it is all very right; who should do it but her own uncle? If he had not had a family of his own, I and my children must have had all his money, you know; and it is the first time we have ever had anything from him, except a few presents. Well! I am so happy! In a short time I shall have a daughter married. Mrs. Wickham! How well it sounds! And she was only sixteen last June. My dear Jane, I am in such a flutter, that I am sure I can't write; so I will dictate, and you write for me. We will settle with your father about the money afterwards; but the things should be ordered immediately."

She was then proceeding to all the particulars of calico, muslin, and cambric, and would shortly have dictated some very plentiful orders, had not Jane, though with some difficulty, persuaded her to wait till her father was at leisure to be consulted. One day's delay, she observed, would be of small importance; and her mother was too happy to be quite so obstinate as usual. Other schemes, too, came into her head.

"I will go to Meryton," said she, "as soon as I am dressed, and tell the good, good news to my sister Philips. And as I come back, I can call on Lady Lucas and Mrs. Long. Kitty, run down and order the carriage. An airing would do me a great deal of good, I am sure. Girls, can I do anything for you in Meryton? Oh! Here comes Hill! My dear Hill, have you heard the good news? Miss Lydia is going to be married; and you shall all have a bowl of punch to make merry at her wedding."

Mrs. Hill began instantly to express her joy. Elizabeth received her congratulations amongst the rest, and then, sick of this folly, took refuge in her own room, that she might think with freedom.

Poor Lydia's situation must, at best, be bad enough; but that it was no worse, she had need to be thankful. She felt it so; and though, in looking forward, neither rational happiness nor worldly prosperity could be justly expected for her sister, in looking back to what they had feared, only two hours ago, she felt all the advantages of what they had gained.

## Chapter 50

Mr. Bennet had very often wished before this period of his life that, instead of spending his whole income, he had laid by an annual sum for the better provision of his children, and of his wife, if she survived him. He now wished it more than ever. Had he done his duty in that respect, Lydia need not have been indebted to her uncle for whatever of honour or credit could now be purchased for her. The satisfaction of prevailing on one of the most worthless young men in Great Britain to be her husband might then have rested in its proper place.

He was seriously concerned that a cause of so little advantage to anyone should be forwarded at the sole expense of his brother-in-law, and he was determined, if possible, to find out the extent of his assistance, and to discharge the obligation as soon as he could.

When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless, for, of course, they were to have a son. The son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world, but yet the son was to come; and Mrs. Bennet, for many years after Lydia's birth, had been certain that he would. This event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy, and her husband's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income.

Five thousand pounds was settled by marriage articles on Mrs. Bennet and the children. But in what proportions it should be divided amongst the latter depended on the will of the parents. This was one point, with regard to Lydia, at least, which was now to be settled, and Mr. Bennet could have no hesitation in acceding to the proposal before him. In terms of grateful acknowledgment for the kindness of his brother, though expressed most concisely, he then delivered on paper his perfect approbation of all that was done, and his willingness to fulfil the engagements that had been made

for him. He had never before supposed that, could Wickham be prevailed on to marry his daughter, it would be done with so little inconvenience to himself as by the present arrangement. He would scarcely be ten pounds a year the loser by the hundred that was to be paid them; for, what with her board and pocket allowance, and the continual presents in money which passed to her through her mother's hands, Lydia's expenses had been very little within that sum.

That it would be done with such trifling exertion on his side, too, was another very welcome surprise; for his wish at present was to have as little trouble in the business as possible. When the first transports of rage which had produced his activity in seeking her were over, he naturally returned to all his former indolence. His letter was soon dispatched; for, though dilatory in undertaking business, he was quick in its execution. He begged to know further particulars of what he was indebted to his brother, but was too angry with Lydia to send any message to her.

The good news spread quickly through the house, and with proportionate speed through the neighbourhood. It was borne in the latter with decent philosophy. To be sure, it would have been more for the advantage of conversation had Miss Lydia Bennet come upon the town; or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded from the world, in some distant farmhouse. But there was much to be talked of in marrying her; and the good-natured wishes for her well-doing which had proceeded before from all the spiteful old ladies in Meryton lost but a little of their spirit in this change of circumstances, because with such an husband her misery was considered certain.

It was a fortnight since Mrs. Bennet had been downstairs; but on this happy day she again took her seat at the head of her table, and in spirits oppressively high. No sentiment of shame gave a damp to her triumph. The marriage of a daughter, which had been the first object of her wishes since Jane was sixteen, was now on the point of accomplishment, and her thoughts and her words ran wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine muslins, new carriages, and servants. She was busily searching through the neighbourhood for a proper situation for her daughter, and, without knowing or considering what their income might be, rejected many as deficient in size and importance.

"Haye Park might do," said she, "if the Gouldings could quit it—or the great house at Stoke, if the drawing-room were larger; but Ashworth is too far off! I could not bear to have her ten miles from me; and as for Pulvis Lodge, the attics are dreadful."

Her husband allowed her to talk on without interruption while the servants remained. But when they had withdrawn, he said to her: "Mrs. Bennet, before you take any or all of these houses for your son and daughter, let us come to a right understanding. Into *one* house in this neighbourhood they shall never have admittance. I will not encourage the impudence of either, by receiving them at Longbourn."



A long dispute followed this declaration; but Mr. Bennet was firm. It soon led to another; and Mrs. Bennet found, with amazement and horror, that her husband would not advance a guinea to buy clothes for his daughter. He protested that she should receive from him no mark of affection whatever on the occasion. Mrs. Bennet could hardly comprehend it. That his anger could be carried to such a point of inconceivable resentment as to refuse his daughter a privilege without which her marriage would scarcely seem valid, exceeded all she could believe possible. She was more alive to the disgrace which her want of new clothes must reflect on her daughter's nuptials, than to any sense of shame at her eloping and living with Wickham a fortnight before they took place.

Elizabeth was now most heartily sorry that she had, from the distress of the moment, been led to make Mr. Darcy acquainted with their fears for her sister; for since her marriage would so shortly give the proper termination to the elopement, they might hope to conceal its unfavourable beginning from all those who were not immediately on the spot.

She had no fear of its spreading farther through his means. There were few people on whose secrecy she would have more confidently depended; but, at the same time, there was no one whose knowledge of a sister's frailty would have mortified her so much—not, however, from any fear of disadvantage from it individually to herself, for, at any rate, there seemed a gulf impassable between them. Had Lydia's marriage been concluded on the most honourable terms, it was not to be supposed that Mr. Darcy would connect himself with a family where, to every other objection, would now be added an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with a man whom he so justly scorned.

From such a connection she could not wonder that he would shrink. The wish of procuring her regard, which she had assured herself of his feeling in Derbyshire, could not in rational expectation survive such a blow as this. She was humbled, she was grieved; she repented, though she hardly knew of what. She became jealous of his esteem, when she could no longer hope to be benefited by it. She wanted to hear of him, when there seemed the least chance of gaining intelligence. She was convinced that she could have been happy with him, when it was no longer likely they should meet.

What a triumph for him, as she often thought, could he know that the proposals which she had proudly spurned only four months ago, would now have been most gladly and gratefully received! He was as generous, she doubted not, as the most generous of his sex; but while he was mortal, there must be a triumph.

She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his

manners improved; and from his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance.

But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was. An union of a different tendency, and precluding the possibility of the other, was soon to be formed in their family.

How Wickham and Lydia were to be supported in tolerable independence, she could not imagine. But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she could easily conjecture.

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Mr. Gardiner soon wrote again to his brother. To Mr. Bennet's acknowledgments he briefly replied, with assurance of his eagerness to promote the welfare of any of his family; and concluded with entreaties that the subject might never be mentioned to him again. The principal purport of his letter was to inform them that Mr. Wickham had resolved on quitting the militia.

"It was greatly my wish that he should do so," he added, "as soon as his marriage was fixed on. And I think you will agree with me, in considering the removal from that corps as highly advisable, both on his account and my niece's. It is Mr. Wickham's intention to go into the regulars; and among his former friends, there are still some who are able and willing to assist him in the army. He has the promise of an ensigncy in General ——'s regiment, now quartered in the North. It is an advantage to have it so far from this part of the kingdom. He promises fairly; and I hope among different people, where they may each have a character to preserve, they will both be more prudent. I have written to Colonel Forster, to inform him of our present arrangements, and to request that he will satisfy the various creditors of Mr. Wickham in and near Brighton, with assurances of speedy payment, for which I have pledged myself. And will you give yourself the trouble of carrying similar assurances to his creditors in Meryton, of whom I shall subjoin a list according to his information? He has given in all his debts; I hope at least he has not deceived us. Haggerston has our directions, and all will be completed in a week. They will then join his regiment, unless they are first invited to Longbourn; and I understand from Mrs. Gardiner, that my niece is very desirous of seeing you all before she leaves the South. She is well, and begs to be dutifully remembered to you and her mother.—Yours, etc.,

"E. GARDINER."

Mr. Bennet and his daughters saw all the advantages of Wickham's removal from the ——shire as clearly as Mr. Gardiner could do. But Mrs. Bennet was not so well pleased with it. Lydia's being settled in the North, just when she had expected most pleasure and pride in her company, for she had by no means given up her plan of their residing in Hertfordshire, was a severe disappointment; and, besides, it was such a

pity that Lydia should be taken from a regiment where she was acquainted with everybody, and had so many favourites.

"She is so fond of Mrs. Forster," said she, "it will be quite shocking to send her away! And there are several of the young men, too, that she likes very much. The officers may not be so pleasant in General ——'s regiment."

His daughter's request, for such it might be considered, of being admitted into her family again before she set off for the North, received at first an absolute negative. But Jane and Elizabeth, who agreed in wishing, for the sake of their sister's feelings and consequence, that she should be noticed on her marriage by her parents, urged him so earnestly yet so rationally and so mildly, to receive her and her husband at Longbourn, as soon as they were married, that he was prevailed on to think as they thought, and act as they wished. And their mother had the satisfaction of knowing that she would be able to show her married daughter in the neighbourhood before she was banished to the North. When Mr. Bennet wrote again to his brother, therefore, he sent his permission for them to come; and it was settled, that as soon as the ceremony was over, they should proceed to Longbourn. Elizabeth was surprised, however, that Wickham should consent to such a scheme, and had she consulted only her own inclination, any meeting with him would have been the last object of her wishes.

## Chapter 51

Their sister's wedding day arrived; and Jane and Elizabeth felt for her probably more than she felt for herself. The carriage was sent to meet them at ——, and they were to return in it by dinner-time. Their arrival was dreaded by the elder Miss Bennets, and Jane more especially, who gave Lydia the feelings which would have attended herself, had she been the culprit, and was wretched in the thought of what her sister must endure.

They came. The family were assembled in the breakfast room to receive them. Smiles decked the face of Mrs. Bennet as the carriage drove up to the door; her husband looked impenetrably grave; her daughters, alarmed, anxious, uneasy.

Lydia's voice was heard in the vestibule; the door was thrown open, and she ran into the room. Her mother stepped forwards, embraced her, and welcomed her with rapture; gave her hand, with an affectionate smile, to Wickham, who followed his lady; and wished them both joy with an alacrity which shewed no doubt of their happiness.

Their reception from Mr. Bennet, to whom they then turned, was not quite so cordial. His countenance rather gained in austerity; and he scarcely opened his lips.

The easy assurance of the young couple, indeed, was enough to provoke him. Elizabeth was disgusted, and even Miss Bennet was shocked. Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. She turned from sister to sister, demanding their congratulations; and when at length they all sat down, looked eagerly round the room, took notice of some little alteration in it, and observed, with a laugh, that it was a great while since she had been there.

Wickham was not at all more distressed than herself, but his manners were always so pleasing, that had his character and his marriage been exactly what they ought, his smiles and his easy address, while he claimed their relationship, would have delighted them all. Elizabeth had not before believed him quite equal to such assurance; but she sat down, resolving within herself to draw no limits in future to the impudence of an impudent man. She blushed, and Jane blushed; but the cheeks of the two who caused their confusion suffered no variation of colour.

There was no want of discourse. The bride and her mother could neither of them talk fast enough; and Wickham, who happened to sit near Elizabeth, began inquiring after his acquaintance in that neighbourhood, with a good humoured ease which she felt very unable to equal in her replies. They seemed each of them to have the happiest memories in the world. Nothing of the past was recollected with pain; and Lydia led voluntarily to subjects which her sisters would not have alluded to for the world.

"Only think of its being three months," she cried, "since I went away; it seems but a fortnight I declare; and yet there have been things enough happened in the time. Good gracious! when I went away, I am sure I had no more idea of being married till I came back again! though I thought it would be very good fun if I was."

Her father lifted up his eyes. Jane was distressed. Elizabeth looked expressively at Lydia; but she, who never heard nor saw anything of which she chose to be insensible, gaily continued, "Oh! mamma, do the people hereabouts know I am married to-day? I was afraid they might not; and we overtook William Goulding in his curricule, so I was determined he should know it, and so I let down the side-glass next to him, and took off my glove, and let my hand just rest upon the window frame, so that he might see the ring, and then I bowed and smiled like anything."

Elizabeth could bear it no longer. She got up, and ran out of the room; and returned no more, till she heard them passing through the hall to the dining parlour. She then joined them soon enough to see Lydia, with anxious parade, walk up to her mother's right hand, and hear her say to her eldest sister, "Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman."

It was not to be supposed that time would give Lydia that embarrassment from which she had been so wholly free at first. Her ease and good spirits increased. She longed to see Mrs. Phillips, the Lucases, and all their other neighbours, and to hear herself called "Mrs. Wickham" by each of them; and in the mean time, she went after

dinner to show her ring, and boast of being married, to Mrs. Hill and the two housemaids.

"Well, mamma," said she, when they were all returned to the breakfast room, "and what do you think of my husband? Is not he a charming man? I am sure my sisters must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get husbands. What a pity it is, mamma, we did not all go."

"Very true; and if I had my will, we should. But my dear Lydia, I don't at all like your going such a way off. Must it be so?"

"Oh, lord! yes;—there is nothing in that. I shall like it of all things. You and papa, and my sisters, must come down and see us. We shall be at Newcastle all the winter, and I dare say there will be some balls, and I will take care to get good partners for them all."

"I should like it beyond anything!" said her mother.

"And then when you go away, you may leave one or two of my sisters behind you; and I dare say I shall get husbands for them before the winter is over."

"I thank you for my share of the favour," said Elizabeth; "but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands."

Their visitors were not to remain above ten days with them. Mr. Wickham had received his commission before he left London, and he was to join his regiment at the end of a fortnight.

No one but Mrs. Bennet regretted that their stay would be so short; and she made the most of the time by visiting about with her daughter, and having very frequent parties at home. These parties were acceptable to all; to avoid a family circle was even more desirable to such as did think, than such as did not.

Wickham's affection for Lydia was just what Elizabeth had expected to find it; not equal to Lydia's for him. She had scarcely needed her present observation to be satisfied, from the reason of things, that their elopement had been brought on by the strength of her love, rather than by his; and she would have wondered why, without violently caring for her, he chose to elope with her at all, had she not felt certain that his flight was rendered necessary by distress of circumstances; and if that were the case, he was not the young man to resist an opportunity of having a companion.

Lydia was exceedingly fond of him. He was her dear Wickham on every occasion; no one was to be put in competition with him. He did every thing best in the world; and she was sure he would kill more birds on the first of September, than any body else in the country.

One morning, soon after their arrival, as she was sitting with her two elder sisters, she said to Elizabeth:

"Lizzy, I never gave *you* an account of my wedding, I believe. You were not by, when I told mamma and the others all about it. Are not you curious to hear how it was managed?"

"No really," replied Elizabeth; "I think there cannot be too little said on the subject."

"La! You are so strange! But I must tell you how it went off. We were married, you know, at St. Clement's, because Wickham's lodgings were in that parish. And it was settled that we should all be there by eleven o'clock. My uncle and aunt and I were to go together; and the others were to meet us at the church. Well, Monday morning came, and I was in such a fuss! I was so afraid, you know, that something would happen to put it off, and then I should have gone quite distracted. And there was my aunt, all the time I was dressing, preaching and talking away just as if she was reading a sermon. However, I did not hear above one word in ten, for I was thinking, you may suppose, of my dear Wickham. I longed to know whether he would be married in his blue coat."

"Well, and so we breakfasted at ten as usual; I thought it would never be over; for, by the bye, you are to understand, that my uncle and aunt were horrid unpleasant all the time I was with them. If you'll believe me, I did not once put my foot out of doors, though I was there a fortnight. Not one party, or scheme, or anything. To be sure London was rather thin, but, however, the Little Theatre was open. Well, and so just as the carriage came to the door, my uncle was called away upon business to that horrid man Mr. Stone. And then, you know, when once they get together, there is no end of it. Well, I was so frightened I did not know what to do, for my uncle was to give me away; and if we were beyond the hour, we could not be married all day. But, luckily, he came back again in ten minutes' time, and then we all set out. However, I recollected afterwards that if he had been prevented going, the wedding need not be put off, for Mr. Darcy might have done as well."

"Mr. Darcy!" repeated Elizabeth, in utter amazement.

"Oh, yes!—he was to come there with Wickham, you know. But gracious me! I quite forgot! I ought not to have said a word about it. I promised them so faithfully! What will Wickham say? It was to be such a secret!"

"If it was to be secret," said Jane, "say not another word on the subject. You may depend upon my seeking no further."

"Oh! certainly," said Elizabeth, though burning with curiosity; "we will ask you no questions."

"Thank you," said Lydia, "for if you did, I should certainly tell you all, and then Wickham would be angry."

On such encouragement to ask, Elizabeth was forced to put it out of her power, by running away.

But to live in ignorance on such a point was impossible; or at least it was impossible not to try for information. Mr. Darcy had been at her sister's wedding. It was exactly a scene, and exactly among people, where he had apparently least to do, and least temptation to go. Conjectures as to the meaning of it, rapid and wild, hurried into her brain; but she was satisfied with none. Those that best pleased her, as placing his conduct in the noblest light, seemed most improbable. She could not bear such suspense; and hastily seizing a sheet of paper, wrote a short letter to her aunt, to request an explanation of what Lydia had dropt, if it were compatible with the secrecy which had been intended.

"You may readily comprehend," she added, "what my curiosity must be to know how a person unconnected with any of us, and (comparatively speaking) a stranger to our family, should have been amongst you at such a time. Pray write instantly, and let me understand it—unless it is, for very cogent reasons, to remain in the secrecy which Lydia seems to think necessary; and then I must endeavour to be satisfied with ignorance."

"Not that I *shall*, though," she added to herself, as she finished the letter; "and my dear aunt, if you do not tell me in an honourable manner, I shall certainly be reduced to tricks and stratagems to find it out."

Jane's delicate sense of honour would not allow her to speak to Elizabeth privately of what Lydia had let fall; Elizabeth was glad of it;—till it appeared whether her inquiries would receive any satisfaction, she had rather be without a confidante.

## Chapter 52

Elizabeth had the satisfaction of receiving an answer to her letter as soon as she possibly could. She was no sooner in possession of it than, hurrying into the little copse, where she was least likely to be interrupted, she sat down on one of the benches and prepared to be happy; for the length of the letter convinced her that it did not contain a denial.

"Gracechurch street, Sept. 6.

"MY DEAR NIECE,

"I have just received your letter, and shall devote this whole morning to answering it, as I foresee that a *little* writing will not comprise what I have to tell you. I must confess myself surprised by your application; I did not expect it from *you*. Don't think me angry, however, for I only mean to let you know that I had not imagined such inquiries to be necessary on *your* side. If you do not choose to understand me, forgive my impertinence. Your uncle is as much surprised as I am—and nothing but the belief

of your being a party concerned would have allowed him to act as he has done. But if you are really innocent and ignorant, I must be more explicit.

"On the very day of my coming home from Longbourn, your uncle had a most unexpected visitor. Mr. Darcy called, and was shut up with him several hours. It was all over before I arrived; so my curiosity was not so dreadfully racked as *yours* seems to have been. He came to tell Mr. Gardiner that he had found out where your sister and Mr. Wickham were, and that he had seen and talked with them both; Wickham repeatedly, Lydia once. From what I can collect, he left Derbyshire only one day after ourselves, and came to town with the resolution of hunting for them. The motive professed was his conviction of its being owing to himself that Wickham's worthlessness had not been so well known as to make it impossible for any young woman of character to love or confide in him. He generously imputed the whole to his mistaken pride, and confessed that he had before thought it beneath him to lay his private actions open to the world. His character was to speak for itself. He called it, therefore, his duty to step forward, and endeavour to remedy an evil which had been brought on by himself. If he *had another* motive, I am sure it would never disgrace him. He had been some days in town, before he was able to discover them; but he had something to direct his search, which was more than *we* had; and the consciousness of this was another reason for his resolving to follow us.

"There is a lady, it seems, a Mrs. Younge, who was some time ago governess to Miss Darcy, and was dismissed from her charge on some cause of disapprobation, though he did not say what. She then took a large house in Edward-street, and has since maintained herself by letting lodgings. This Mrs. Younge was, he knew, intimately acquainted with Wickham; and he went to her for intelligence of him as soon as he got to town. But it was two or three days before he could get from her what he wanted. She would not betray her trust, I suppose, without bribery and corruption, for she really did know where her friend was to be found. Wickham indeed had gone to her on their first arrival in London, and had she been able to receive them into her house, they would have taken up their abode with her. At length, however, our kind friend procured the wished-for direction. They were in —— street. He saw Wickham, and afterwards insisted on seeing Lydia. His first object with her, he acknowledged, had been to persuade her to quit her present disgraceful situation, and return to her friends as soon as they could be prevailed on to receive her, offering his assistance, as far as it would go. But he found Lydia absolutely resolved on remaining where she was. She cared for none of her friends; she wanted no help of his; she would not hear of leaving Wickham. She was sure they should be married some time or other, and it did not much signify when. Since such were her feelings, it only remained, he thought, to secure and expedite a marriage, which, in his very first conversation with Wickham, he easily learnt had never been *his* design. He confessed himself obliged to leave the regiment, on account of some debts of honour, which were very pressing; and scrupled not to lay all the ill-consequences of Lydia's flight on her own folly



alone. He meant to resign his commission immediately; and as to his future situation, he could conjecture very little about it. He must go somewhere, but he did not know where, and he knew he should have nothing to live on.

"Mr. Darcy asked him why he had not married your sister at once. Though Mr. Bennet was not imagined to be very rich, he would have been able to do something for him, and his situation must have been benefited by marriage. But he found, in reply to this question, that Wickham still cherished the hope of more effectually making his fortune by marriage in some other country. Under such circumstances, however, he was not likely to be proof against the temptation of immediate relief.

"They met several times, for there was much to be discussed. Wickham of course wanted more than he could get; but at length was reduced to be reasonable.

"Every thing being settled between *them*, Mr. Darcy's next step was to make your uncle acquainted with it, and he first called in Gracechurch street the evening before I came home. But Mr. Gardiner could not be seen, and Mr. Darcy found, on further inquiry, that your father was still with him, but would quit town the next morning. He did not judge your father to be a person whom he could so properly consult as your uncle, and therefore readily postponed seeing him till after the departure of the former. He did not leave his name, and till the next day it was only known that a gentleman had called on business.

"On Saturday he came again. Your father was gone, your uncle at home, and, as I said before, they had a great deal of talk together.

"They met again on Sunday, and then *I* saw him too. It was not all settled before Monday: as soon as it was, the express was sent off to Longbourn. But our visitor was very obstinate. I fancy, Lizzy, that obstinacy is the real defect of his character, after all. He has been accused of many faults at different times, but *this* is the true one. Nothing was to be done that he did not do himself; though I am sure (and I do not speak it to be thanked, therefore say nothing about it), your uncle would most readily have settled the whole.

"They battled it together for a long time, which was more than either the gentleman or lady concerned in it deserved. But at last your uncle was forced to yield, and instead of being allowed to be of use to his niece, was forced to put up with only having the probable credit of it, which went sorely against the grain; and I really believe your letter this morning gave him great pleasure, because it required an explanation that would rob him of his borrowed feathers, and give the praise where it was due. But, Lizzy, this must go no farther than yourself, or Jane at most.

"You know pretty well, I suppose, what has been done for the young people. His debts are to be paid, amounting, I believe, to considerably more than a thousand pounds, another thousand in addition to her own settled upon *her*, and his commission purchased. The reason why all this was to be done by him alone, was such as I have given above. It was owing to him, to his reserve and want of proper consideration, that

Wickham's character had been so misunderstood, and consequently that he had been received and noticed as he was. Perhaps there was some truth in *this*; though I doubt whether *his* reserve, or *anybody's* reserve, can be answerable for the event. But in spite of all this fine talking, my dear Lizzy, you may rest perfectly assured that your uncle would never have yielded, if we had not given him credit for *another interest* in the affair.

"When all this was resolved on, he returned again to his friends, who were still staying at Pemberley; but it was agreed that he should be in London once more when the wedding took place, and all money matters were then to receive the last finish.

"I believe I have now told you every thing. It is a relation which you tell me is to give you great surprise; I hope at least it will not afford you any displeasure. Lydia came to us; and Wickham had constant admission to the house. *He* was exactly what he had been, when I knew him in Hertfordshire; but I would not tell you how little I was satisfied with her behaviour while she staid with us, if I had not perceived, by Jane's letter last Wednesday, that her conduct on coming home was exactly of a piece with it, and therefore what I now tell you can give you no fresh pain. I talked to her repeatedly in the most serious manner, representing to her all the wickedness of what she had done, and all the unhappiness she had brought on her family. If she heard me, it was by good luck, for I am sure she did not listen. I was sometimes quite provoked, but then I recollected my dear Elizabeth and Jane, and for their sakes had patience with her.

"Mr. Darcy was punctual in his return, and as Lydia informed you, attended the wedding. He dined with us the next day, and was to leave town again on Wednesday or Thursday. Will you be very angry with me, my dear Lizzy, if I take this opportunity of saying (what I was never bold enough to say before) how much I like him. His behaviour to us has, in every respect, been as pleasing as when we were in Derbyshire. His understanding and opinions all please me; he wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and *that*, if he marry *prudently*, his wife may teach him. I thought him very sly;—he hardly ever mentioned your name. But slyness seems the fashion.

"Pray forgive me if I have been very presuming, or at least do not punish me so far as to exclude me from P. I shall never be quite happy till I have been all round the park. A low phaeton, with a nice little pair of ponies, would be the very thing.

"But I must write no more. The children have been wanting me this half hour.

"Yours, very sincerely,

"M. GARDINER."

The contents of this letter threw Elizabeth into a flutter of spirits, in which it was difficult to determine whether pleasure or pain bore the greatest share. The vague and unsettled suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mr. Darcy might have been doing to forward her sister's match, which she had feared to encourage as an

exertion of goodness too great to be probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true! He had followed them purposely to town, he had taken on himself all the trouble and mortification attendant on such a research; in which supplication had been necessary to a woman whom he must abominate and despise, and where he was reduced to meet, frequently meet, reason with, persuade, and finally bribe, the man whom he always most wished to avoid, and whose very name it was punishment to him to pronounce. He had done all this for a girl whom he could neither regard nor esteem. Her heart did whisper that he had done it for her. But it was a hope shortly checked by other considerations, and she soon felt that even her vanity was insufficient, when required to depend on his affection for her—for a woman who had already refused him—as able to overcome a sentiment so natural as abhorrence against relationship with Wickham. Brother-in-law of Wickham! Every kind of pride must revolt from the connection. He had, to be sure, done much. She was ashamed to think how much. But he had given a reason for his interference, which asked no extraordinary stretch of belief. It was reasonable that he should feel he had been wrong; he had liberality, and he had the means of exercising it; and though she would not place herself as his principal inducement, she could, perhaps, believe that remaining partiality for her might assist his endeavours in a cause where her peace of mind must be materially concerned. It was painful, exceedingly painful, to know that they were under obligations to a person who could never receive a return. They owed the restoration of Lydia, her character, every thing, to him. Oh! how heartily did she grieve over every ungracious sensation she had ever encouraged, every saucy speech she had ever directed towards him. For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself. She read over her aunt's commendation of him again and again. It was hardly enough; but it pleased her. She was even sensible of some pleasure, though mixed with regret, on finding how steadfastly both she and her uncle had been persuaded that affection and confidence subsisted between Mr. Darcy and herself.

She was roused from her seat, and her reflections, by some one's approach; and before she could strike into another path, she was overtaken by Wickham.

"I am afraid I interrupt your solitary ramble, my dear sister?" said he, as he joined her.

"You certainly do," she replied with a smile; "but it does not follow that the interruption must be unwelcome."

"I should be sorry indeed, if it were. We were always good friends; and now we are better."

"True. Are the others coming out?"

"I do not know. Mrs. Bennet and Lydia are going in the carriage to Meryton. And so, my dear sister, I find, from our uncle and aunt, that you have actually seen Pemberley."

She replied in the affirmative.

"I almost envy you the pleasure, and yet I believe it would be too much for me, or else I could take it in my way to Newcastle. And you saw the old housekeeper, I suppose? Poor Reynolds, she was always very fond of me. But of course she did not mention my name to you."

"Yes, she did."

"And what did she say?"

"That you were gone into the army, and she was afraid had—not turned out well. At such a distance as *that*, you know, things are strangely misrepresented."

"Certainly," he replied, biting his lips. Elizabeth hoped she had silenced him; but he soon afterwards said:

"I was surprised to see Darcy in town last month. We passed each other several times. I wonder what he can be doing there."

"Perhaps preparing for his marriage with Miss de Bourgh," said Elizabeth. "It must be something particular, to take him there at this time of year."

"Undoubtedly. Did you see him while you were at Lambton? I thought I understood from the Gardiners that you had."

"Yes; he introduced us to his sister."

"And do you like her?"

"Very much."

"I have heard, indeed, that she is uncommonly improved within this year or two. When I last saw her, she was not very promising. I am very glad you liked her. I hope she will turn out well."

"I dare say she will; she has got over the most trying age."

"Did you go by the village of Kympton?"

"I do not recollect that we did."

"I mention it, because it is the living which I ought to have had. A most delightful place!—Excellent Parsonage House! It would have suited me in every respect."

"How should you have liked making sermons?"

"Exceedingly well. I should have considered it as part of my duty, and the exertion would soon have been nothing. One ought not to repine;—but, to be sure, it would have been such a thing for me! The quiet, the retirement of such a life would have answered all my ideas of happiness! But it was not to be. Did you ever hear Darcy mention the circumstance, when you were in Kent?"

"I have heard from authority, which I thought *as good*, that it was left you conditionally only, and at the will of the present patron."

"You have. Yes, there was something in *that*; I told you so from the first, you may remember."

"I *did* hear, too, that there was a time, when sermon-making was not so palatable to you as it seems to be at present; that you actually declared your resolution of never taking orders, and that the business had been compromised accordingly."

"You did! and it was not wholly without foundation. You may remember what I told you on that point, when first we talked of it."

They were now almost at the door of the house, for she had walked fast to get rid of him; and unwilling, for her sister's sake, to provoke him, she only said in reply, with a good-humoured smile:

"Come, Mr. Wickham, we are brother and sister, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the past. In future, I hope we shall be always of one mind."

She held out her hand; he kissed it with affectionate gallantry, though he hardly knew how to look, and they entered the house.

## Chapter 53

Mr. Wickham was so perfectly satisfied with this conversation that he never again distressed himself, or provoked his dear sister Elizabeth, by introducing the subject of it; and she was pleased to find that she had said enough to keep him quiet.

The day of his and Lydia's departure soon came, and Mrs. Bennet was forced to submit to a separation, which, as her husband by no means entered into her scheme of their all going to Newcastle, was likely to continue at least a twelvemonth.

"Oh! my dear Lydia," she cried, "when shall we meet again?"

"Oh, lord! I don't know. Not these two or three years, perhaps."

"Write to me very often, my dear."

"As often as I can. But you know married women have never much time for writing. My sisters may write to *me*. They will have nothing else to do."

Mr. Wickham's adieus were much more affectionate than his wife's. He smiled, looked handsome, and said many pretty things.

"He is as fine a fellow," said Mr. Bennet, as soon as they were out of the house, "as ever I saw. He simpers, and smirks, and makes love to us all. I am prodigiously proud

of him. I defy even Sir William Lucas himself to produce a more valuable son-in-law."

The loss of her daughter made Mrs. Bennet very dull for several days.

"I often think," said she, "that there is nothing so bad as parting with one's friends. One seems so forlorn without them."

"This is the consequence, you see, Madam, of marrying a daughter," said Elizabeth. "It must make you better satisfied that your other four are single."

"It is no such thing. Lydia does not leave me because she is married, but only because her husband's regiment happens to be so far off. If that had been nearer, she would not have gone so soon."

But the spiritless condition which this event threw her into was shortly relieved, and her mind opened again to the agitation of hope, by an article of news which then began to be in circulation. The housekeeper at Netherfield had received orders to prepare for the arrival of her master, who was coming down in a day or two, to shoot there for several weeks. Mrs. Bennet was quite in the fidgets. She looked at Jane, and smiled and shook her head by turns.

"Well, well, and so Mr. Bingley is coming down, sister," (for Mrs. Phillips first brought her the news). "Well, so much the better. Not that I care about it, though. He is nothing to us, you know, and I am sure *I* never want to see him again. But, however, he is very welcome to come to Netherfield, if he likes it. And who knows what *may* happen? But that is nothing to us. You know, sister, we agreed long ago never to mention a word about it. And so, is it quite certain he is coming?"

"You may depend on it," replied the other, "for Mrs. Nicholls was in Meryton last night; I saw her passing by, and went out myself on purpose to know the truth of it; and she told me that it was certain true. He comes down on Thursday at the latest, very likely on Wednesday. She was going to the butcher's, she told me, on purpose to order in some meat on Wednesday, and she has got three couple of ducks just fit to be killed."

Miss Bennet had not been able to hear of his coming without changing colour. It was many months since she had mentioned his name to Elizabeth; but now, as soon as they were alone together, she said:

"I saw you look at me to-day, Lizzy, when my aunt told us of the present report; and I know I appeared distressed. But don't imagine it was from any silly cause. I was only confused for the moment, because I felt that I *should* be looked at. I do assure you that the news does not affect me either with pleasure or pain. I am glad of one thing, that he comes alone; because we shall see the less of him. Not that I am afraid of *myself*, but I dread other people's remarks."

Elizabeth did not know what to make of it. Had she not seen him in Derbyshire, she might have supposed him capable of coming there with no other view than what was

acknowledged; but she still thought him partial to Jane, and she wavered as to the greater probability of his coming there *with* his friend's permission, or being bold enough to come without it.

"Yet it is hard," she sometimes thought, "that this poor man cannot come to a house which he has legally hired, without raising all this speculation! I *will* leave him to himself."

In spite of what her sister declared, and really believed to be her feelings in the expectation of his arrival, Elizabeth could easily perceive that her spirits were affected by it. They were more disturbed, more unequal, than she had often seen them.

The subject which had been so warmly canvassed between their parents, about a twelvemonth ago, was now brought forward again.

"As soon as ever Mr. Bingley comes, my dear," said Mrs. Bennet, "you will wait on him of course."

"No, no. You forced me into visiting him last year, and promised, if I went to see him, he should marry one of my daughters. But it ended in nothing, and I will not be sent on a fool's errand again."

His wife represented to him how absolutely necessary such an attention would be from all the neighbouring gentlemen, on his returning to Netherfield.

"'Tis an etiquette I despise," said he. "If he wants our society, let him seek it. He knows where we live. I will not spend my hours in running after my neighbours every time they go away and come back again."

"Well, all I know is, that it will be abominably rude if you do not wait on him. But, however, that shan't prevent my asking him to dine here, I am determined. We must have Mrs. Long and the Gouldings soon. That will make thirteen with ourselves, so there will be just room at table for him."

Consoled by this resolution, she was the better able to bear her husband's incivility; though it was very mortifying to know that her neighbours might all see Mr. Bingley, in consequence of it, before *they* did. As the day of his arrival drew near,—

"I begin to be sorry that he comes at all," said Jane to her sister. "It would be nothing; I could see him with perfect indifference, but I can hardly bear to hear it thus perpetually talked of. My mother means well; but she does not know, no one can know, how much I suffer from what she says. Happy shall I be, when his stay at Netherfield is over!"

"I wish I could say anything to comfort you," replied Elizabeth; "but it is wholly out of my power. You must feel it; and the usual satisfaction of preaching patience to a sufferer is denied me, because you have always so much."

Mr. Bingley arrived. Mrs. Bennet, through the assistance of servants, contrived to have the earliest tidings of it, that the period of anxiety and fretfulness on her side might be as long as it could. She counted the days that must intervene before their

invitation could be sent; hopeless of seeing him before. But on the third morning after his arrival in Hertfordshire, she saw him, from her dressing-room window, enter the paddock and ride towards the house.

Her daughters were eagerly called to partake of her joy. Jane resolutely kept her place at the table; but Elizabeth, to satisfy her mother, went to the window—she looked,—she saw Mr. Darcy with him, and sat down again by her sister.

"There is a gentleman with him, mamma," said Kitty; "who can it be?"

"Some acquaintance or other, my dear, I suppose; I am sure I do not know."

"La!" replied Kitty, "it looks just like that man that used to be with him before. Mr. what's-his-name. That tall, proud man."

"Good gracious! Mr. Darcy!—and so it does, I vow. Well, any friend of Mr. Bingley's will always be welcome here, to be sure; but else I must say that I hate the very sight of him."

Jane looked at Elizabeth with surprise and concern. She knew but little of their meeting in Derbyshire, and therefore felt for the awkwardness which must attend her sister, in seeing him almost for the first time after receiving his explanatory letter. Both sisters were uncomfortable enough. Each felt for the other, and of course for themselves; and their mother talked on, of her dislike of Mr. Darcy, and her resolution to be civil to him only as Mr. Bingley's friend, without being heard by either of them. But Elizabeth had sources of uneasiness which could not be suspected by Jane, to whom she had never yet had courage to shew Mrs. Gardiner's letter, or to relate her own change of sentiment towards him. To Jane, he could be only a man whose proposals she had refused, and whose merit she had undervalued; but to her own more extensive information, he was the person to whom the whole family were indebted for the first of benefits, and whom she regarded herself with an interest, if not quite so tender, at least as reasonable and just as what Jane felt for Bingley. Her astonishment at his coming—at his coming to Netherfield, to Longbourn, and voluntarily seeking her again, was almost equal to what she had known on first witnessing his altered behaviour in Derbyshire.

The colour which had been driven from her face, returned for half a minute with an additional glow, and a smile of delight added lustre to her eyes, as she thought for that space of time that his affection and wishes must still be unshaken. But she would not be secure.

"Let me first see how he behaves," said she; "it will then be early enough for expectation."

She sat intently at work, striving to be composed, and without daring to lift up her eyes, till anxious curiosity carried them to the face of her sister as the servant was approaching the door. Jane looked a little paler than usual, but more sedate than Elizabeth had expected. On the gentlemen's appearing, her colour increased; yet she



received them with tolerable ease, and with a propriety of behaviour equally free from any symptom of resentment or any unnecessary complaisance.

Elizabeth said as little to either as civility would allow, and sat down again to her work, with an eagerness which it did not often command. She had ventured only one glance at Darcy. He looked serious, as usual; and, she thought, more as he had been used to look in Hertfordshire, than as she had seen him at Pemberley. But, perhaps he could not in her mother's presence be what he was before her uncle and aunt. It was a painful, but not an improbable, conjecture.

Bingley, she had likewise seen for an instant, and in that short period saw him looking both pleased and embarrassed. He was received by Mrs. Bennet with a degree of civility which made her two daughters ashamed, especially when contrasted with the cold and ceremonious politeness of her curtsy and address to his friend.

Elizabeth, particularly, who knew that her mother owed to the latter the preservation of her favourite daughter from irremediable infamy, was hurt and distressed to a most painful degree by a distinction so ill applied.

Darcy, after inquiring of her how Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner did, a question which she could not answer without confusion, said scarcely anything. He was not seated by her; perhaps that was the reason of his silence; but it had not been so in Derbyshire. There he had talked to her friends, when he could not to herself. But now several minutes elapsed without bringing the sound of his voice; and when occasionally, unable to resist the impulse of curiosity, she raised her eyes to his face, she as often found him looking at Jane as at herself, and frequently on no object but the ground. More thoughtfulness and less anxiety to please, than when they last met, were plainly expressed. She was disappointed, and angry with herself for being so.

"Could I expect it to be otherwise!" said she. "Yet why did he come?"

She was in no humour for conversation with anyone but himself; and to him she had hardly courage to speak.

She inquired after his sister, but could do no more.

"It is a long time, Mr. Bingley, since you went away," said Mrs. Bennet.

He readily agreed to it.

"I began to be afraid you would never come back again. People *did* say you meant to quit the place entirely at Michaelmas; but, however, I hope it is not true. A great many changes have happened in the neighbourhood, since you went away. Miss Lucas is married and settled. And one of my own daughters. I suppose you have heard of it; indeed, you must have seen it in the papers. It was in *The Times* and *The Courier*, I know; though it was not put in as it ought to be. It was only said, 'Lately, George Wickham, Esq. to Miss Lydia Bennet,' without there being a syllable said of her father, or the place where she lived, or anything. It was my brother Gardiner's drawing

up too, and I wonder how he came to make such an awkward business of it. Did you see it?"

Bingley replied that he did, and made his congratulations. Elizabeth dared not lift up her eyes. How Mr. Darcy looked, therefore, she could not tell.

"It is a delightful thing, to be sure, to have a daughter well married," continued her mother, "but at the same time, Mr. Bingley, it is very hard to have her taken such a way from me. They are gone down to Newcastle, a place quite northward, it seems, and there they are to stay I do not know how long. His regiment is there; for I suppose you have heard of his leaving the ——shire, and of his being gone into the regulars. Thank Heaven! he has *some* friends, though perhaps not so many as he deserves."

Elizabeth, who knew this to be levelled at Mr. Darcy, was in such misery of shame, that she could hardly keep her seat. It drew from her, however, the exertion of speaking, which nothing else had so effectually done before; and she asked Bingley whether he meant to make any stay in the country at present. A few weeks, he believed.

"When you have killed all your own birds, Mr. Bingley," said her mother, "I beg you will come here, and shoot as many as you please on Mr. Bennet's manor. I am sure he will be vastly happy to oblige you, and will save all the best of the covies for you."

Elizabeth's misery increased, at such unnecessary, such officious attention! Were the same fair prospect to arise at present as had flattered them a year ago, every thing, she was persuaded, would be hastening to the same vexatious conclusion. At that instant, she felt that years of happiness could not make Jane or herself amends for moments of such painful confusion.

"The first wish of my heart," said she to herself, "is never more to be in company with either of them. Their society can afford no pleasure that will atone for such wretchedness as this! Let me never see either one or the other again!"

Yet the misery, for which years of happiness were to offer no compensation, received soon afterwards material relief, from observing how much the beauty of her sister re-kindled the admiration of her former lover. When first he came in, he had spoken to her but little; but every five minutes seemed to be giving her more of his attention. He found her as handsome as she had been last year; as good natured, and as unaffected, though not quite so chatty. Jane was anxious that no difference should be perceived in her at all, and was really persuaded that she talked as much as ever. But her mind was so busily engaged, that she did not always know when she was silent.

When the gentlemen rose to go away, Mrs. Bennet was mindful of her intended civility, and they were invited and engaged to dine at Longbourn in a few days time.

"You are quite a visit in my debt, Mr. Bingley," she added, "for when you went to town last winter, you promised to take a family dinner with us, as soon as you

returned. I have not forgot, you see; and I assure you, I was very much disappointed that you did not come back and keep your engagement."

Bingley looked a little silly at this reflection, and said something of his concern at having been prevented by business. They then went away.

Mrs. Bennet had been strongly inclined to ask them to stay and dine there that day; but, though she always kept a very good table, she did not think anything less than two courses could be good enough for a man on whom she had such anxious designs, or satisfy the appetite and pride of one who had ten thousand a year.

## Chapter 54

As soon as they were gone, Elizabeth walked out to recover her spirits; or in other words, to dwell without interruption on those subjects that must deaden them more. Mr. Darcy's behaviour astonished and vexed her.

"Why, if he came only to be silent, grave, and indifferent," said she, "did he come at all?"

She could settle it in no way that gave her pleasure.

"He could be still amiable, still pleasing, to my uncle and aunt, when he was in town; and why not to me? If he fears me, why come hither? If he no longer cares for me, why silent? Teasing, teasing, man! I will think no more about him."

Her resolution was for a short time involuntarily kept by the approach of her sister, who joined her with a cheerful look, which showed her better satisfied with their visitors, than Elizabeth.

"Now," said she, "that this first meeting is over, I feel perfectly easy. I know my own strength, and I shall never be embarrassed again by his coming. I am glad he dines here on Tuesday. It will then be publicly seen that, on both sides, we meet only as common and indifferent acquaintance."

"Yes, very indifferent indeed," said Elizabeth, laughingly. "Oh, Jane, take care."

"My dear Lizzy, you cannot think me so weak, as to be in danger now?"

"I think you are in very great danger of making him as much in love with you as ever."

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They did not see the gentlemen again till Tuesday; and Mrs. Bennet, in the meanwhile, was giving way to all the happy schemes, which the good humour and common politeness of Bingley, in half an hour's visit, had revived.

On Tuesday there was a large party assembled at Longbourn; and the two who were most anxiously expected, to the credit of their punctuality as sportsmen, were in very good time. When they repaired to the dining-room, Elizabeth eagerly watched to see whether Bingley would take the place, which, in all their former parties, had belonged to him, by her sister. Her prudent mother, occupied by the same ideas, forbore to invite him to sit by herself. On entering the room, he seemed to hesitate; but Jane happened to look round, and happened to smile: it was decided. He placed himself by her.

Elizabeth, with a triumphant sensation, looked towards his friend. He bore it with noble indifference, and she would have imagined that Bingley had received his sanction to be happy, had she not seen his eyes likewise turned towards Mr. Darcy, with an expression of half-laughing alarm.

His behaviour to her sister was such, during dinner time, as showed an admiration of her, which, though more guarded than formerly, persuaded Elizabeth, that if left wholly to himself, Jane's happiness, and his own, would be speedily secured. Though she dared not depend upon the consequence, she yet received pleasure from observing his behaviour. It gave her all the animation that her spirits could boast; for she was in no cheerful humour. Mr. Darcy was almost as far from her as the table could divide them. He was on one side of her mother. She knew how little such a situation would give pleasure to either, or make either appear to advantage. She was not near enough to hear any of their discourse, but she could see how seldom they spoke to each other, and how formal and cold was their manner whenever they did. Her mother's ungraciousness, made the sense of what they owed him more painful to Elizabeth's mind; and she would, at times, have given anything to be privileged to tell him that his kindness was neither unknown nor unfelt by the whole of the family.

She was in hopes that the evening would afford some opportunity of bringing them together; that the whole of the visit would not pass away without enabling them to enter into something more of conversation than the mere ceremonious salutation attending his entrance. Anxious and uneasy, the period which passed in the drawing-room, before the gentlemen came, was wearisome and dull to a degree that almost made her uncivil. She looked forward to their entrance as the point on which all her chance of pleasure for the evening must depend.

"If he does not come to me, *then*," said she, "I shall give him up for ever."

The gentlemen came; and she thought he looked as if he would have answered her hopes; but, alas! the ladies had crowded round the table, where Miss Bennet was making tea, and Elizabeth pouring out the coffee, in so close a confederacy that there was not a single vacancy near her which would admit of a chair. And on the gentlemen's approaching, one of the girls moved closer to her than ever, and said, in a whisper:

"The men shan't come and part us, I am determined. We want none of them; do we?"

Darcy had walked away to another part of the room. She followed him with her eyes, envied everyone to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against herself for being so silly!

"A man who has once been refused! How could I ever be foolish enough to expect a renewal of his love? Is there one among the sex, who would not protest against such a weakness as a second proposal to the same woman? There is no indignity so abhorrent to their feelings!"

She was a little revived, however, by his bringing back his coffee cup himself; and she seized the opportunity of saying:

"Is your sister at Pemberley still?"

"Yes, she will remain there till Christmas."

"And quite alone? Have all her friends left her?"

"Mrs. Annesley is with her. The others have been gone on to Scarborough, these three weeks."

She could think of nothing more to say; but if he wished to converse with her, he might have better success. He stood by her, however, for some minutes, in silence; and, at last, on the young lady's whispering to Elizabeth again, he walked away.

When the tea-things were removed, and the card-tables placed, the ladies all rose, and Elizabeth was then hoping to be soon joined by him, when all her views were overthrown by seeing him fall a victim to her mother's rapacity for whist players, and in a few moments after seated with the rest of the party. She now lost every expectation of pleasure. They were confined for the evening at different tables, and she had nothing to hope, but that his eyes were so often turned towards her side of the room, as to make him play as unsuccessfully as herself.

Mrs. Bennet had designed to keep the two Netherfield gentlemen to supper; but their carriage was unluckily ordered before any of the others, and she had no opportunity of detaining them.

"Well girls," said she, as soon as they were left to themselves, "What say you to the day? I think every thing has passed off uncommonly well, I assure you. The dinner was as well dressed as any I ever saw. The venison was roasted to a turn—and everybody said they never saw so fat a haunch. The soup was fifty times better than what we had at the Lucases' last week; and even Mr. Darcy acknowledged, that the partridges were remarkably well done; and I suppose he has two or three French cooks at least. And, my dear Jane, I never saw you look in greater beauty. Mrs. Long said so too, for I asked her whether you did not. And what do you think she said besides? 'Ah! Mrs. Bennet, we shall have her at Netherfield at last.' She did indeed. I do think Mrs.

Long is as good a creature as ever lived—and her nieces are very pretty behaved girls, and not at all handsome: I like them prodigiously."

Mrs. Bennet, in short, was in very great spirits; she had seen enough of Bingley's behaviour to Jane, to be convinced that she would get him at last; and her expectations of advantage to her family, when in a happy humour, were so far beyond reason, that she was quite disappointed at not seeing him there again the next day, to make his proposals.

"It has been a very agreeable day," said Miss Bennet to Elizabeth. "The party seemed so well selected, so suitable one with the other. I hope we may often meet again."

Elizabeth smiled.

"Lizzy, you must not do so. You must not suspect me. It mortifies me. I assure you that I have now learnt to enjoy his conversation as an agreeable and sensible young man, without having a wish beyond it. I am perfectly satisfied, from what his manners now are, that he never had any design of engaging my affection. It is only that he is blessed with greater sweetness of address, and a stronger desire of generally pleasing, than any other man."

"You are very cruel," said her sister, "you will not let me smile, and are provoking me to it every moment."

"How hard it is in some cases to be believed!"

"And how impossible in others!"

"But why should you wish to persuade me that I feel more than I acknowledge?"

"That is a question which I hardly know how to answer. We all love to instruct, though we can teach only what is not worth knowing. Forgive me; and if you persist in indifference, do not make me your confidante."

## Chapter 55

A few days after this visit, Mr. Bingley called again, and alone. His friend had left him that morning for London, but was to return home in ten days time. He sat with them above an hour, and was in remarkably good spirits. Mrs. Bennet invited him to dine with them; but, with many expressions of concern, he confessed himself engaged elsewhere.

"Next time you call," said she, "I hope we shall be more lucky."

He should be particularly happy at any time, etc. etc.; and if she would give him leave, would take an early opportunity of waiting on them.

"Can you come to-morrow?"

Yes, he had no engagement at all for to-morrow; and her invitation was accepted with alacrity.

He came, and in such very good time that the ladies were none of them dressed. In ran Mrs. Bennet to her daughter's room, in her dressing gown, and with her hair half finished, crying out:

"My dear Jane, make haste and hurry down. He is come—Mr. Bingley is come. He is, indeed. Make haste, make haste. Here, Sarah, come to Miss Bennet this moment, and help her on with her gown. Never mind Miss Lizzy's hair."

"We will be down as soon as we can," said Jane; "but I dare say Kitty is forwarder than either of us, for she went up stairs half an hour ago."

"Oh! hang Kitty! what has she to do with it? Come be quick, be quick! Where is your sash, my dear?"

But when her mother was gone, Jane would not be prevailed on to go down without one of her sisters.

The same anxiety to get them by themselves was visible again in the evening. After tea, Mr. Bennet retired to the library, as was his custom, and Mary went up stairs to her instrument. Two obstacles of the five being thus removed, Mrs. Bennet sat looking and winking at Elizabeth and Catherine for a considerable time, without making any impression on them. Elizabeth would not observe her; and when at last Kitty did, she very innocently said, "What is the matter mamma? What do you keep winking at me for? What am I to do?"

"Nothing child, nothing. I did not wink at you." She then sat still five minutes longer; but unable to waste such a precious occasion, she suddenly got up, and saying to Kitty, "Come here, my love, I want to speak to you," took her out of the room. Jane instantly gave a look at Elizabeth which spoke her distress at such premeditation, and her entreaty that *she* would not give in to it. In a few minutes, Mrs. Bennet half-opened the door and called out:

"Lizzy, my dear, I want to speak with you."

Elizabeth was forced to go.

"We may as well leave them by themselves you know;" said her mother, as soon as she was in the hall. "Kitty and I are going up stairs to sit in my dressing-room."

Elizabeth made no attempt to reason with her mother, but remained quietly in the hall, till she and Kitty were out of sight, then returned into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Bennet's schemes for this day were ineffectual. Bingley was every thing that was charming, except the professed lover of her daughter. His ease and cheerfulness rendered him a most agreeable addition to their evening party; and he bore with the ill-judged officiousness of the mother, and heard all her silly remarks with a forbearance and command of countenance particularly grateful to the daughter.

He scarcely needed an invitation to stay supper; and before he went away, an engagement was formed, chiefly through his own and Mrs. Bennet's means, for his coming next morning to shoot with her husband.

After this day, Jane said no more of her indifference. Not a word passed between the sisters concerning Bingley; but Elizabeth went to bed in the happy belief that all must speedily be concluded, unless Mr. Darcy returned within the stated time. Seriously, however, she felt tolerably persuaded that all this must have taken place with that gentleman's concurrence.

Bingley was punctual to his appointment; and he and Mr. Bennet spent the morning together, as had been agreed on. The latter was much more agreeable than his companion expected. There was nothing of presumption or folly in Bingley that could provoke his ridicule, or disgust him into silence; and he was more communicative, and less eccentric, than the other had ever seen him. Bingley of course returned with him to dinner; and in the evening Mrs. Bennet's invention was again at work to get every body away from him and her daughter. Elizabeth, who had a letter to write, went into the breakfast room for that purpose soon after tea; for as the others were all going to sit down to cards, she could not be wanted to counteract her mother's schemes.

But on returning to the drawing-room, when her letter was finished, she saw, to her infinite surprise, there was reason to fear that her mother had been too ingenious for her. On opening the door, she perceived her sister and Bingley standing together over the hearth, as if engaged in earnest conversation; and had this led to no suspicion, the faces of both, as they hastily turned round and moved away from each other, would have told it all. Their situation was awkward enough; but *hers* she thought was still worse. Not a syllable was uttered by either; and Elizabeth was on the point of going away again, when Bingley, who as well as the other had sat down, suddenly rose, and whispering a few words to her sister, ran out of the room.

Jane could have no reserves from Elizabeth, where confidence would give pleasure; and instantly embracing her, acknowledged, with the liveliest emotion, that she was the happiest creature in the world.

"'Tis too much!" she added, "by far too much. I do not deserve it. Oh! why is not everybody as happy?"

Elizabeth's congratulations were given with a sincerity, a warmth, a delight, which words could but poorly express. Every sentence of kindness was a fresh source of happiness to Jane. But she would not allow herself to stay with her sister, or say half that remained to be said for the present.

"I must go instantly to my mother;" she cried. "I would not on any account trifle with her affectionate solicitude; or allow her to hear it from anyone but myself. He is gone to my father already. Oh! Lizzy, to know that what I have to relate will give such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much happiness!"



She then hastened away to her mother, who had purposely broken up the card party, and was sitting up stairs with Kitty.

Elizabeth, who was left by herself, now smiled at the rapidity and ease with which an affair was finally settled, that had given them so many previous months of suspense and vexation.

"And this," said she, "is the end of all his friend's anxious circumspection! of all his sister's falsehood and contrivance! the happiest, wisest, most reasonable end!"

In a few minutes she was joined by Bingley, whose conference with her father had been short and to the purpose.

"Where is your sister?" said he hastily, as he opened the door.

"With my mother up stairs. She will be down in a moment, I dare say."

He then shut the door, and, coming up to her, claimed the good wishes and affection of a sister. Elizabeth honestly and heartily expressed her delight in the prospect of their relationship. They shook hands with great cordiality; and then, till her sister came down, she had to listen to all he had to say of his own happiness, and of Jane's perfections; and in spite of his being a lover, Elizabeth really believed all his expectations of felicity to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the excellent understanding, and super-excellent disposition of Jane, and a general similarity of feeling and taste between her and himself.

It was an evening of no common delight to them all; the satisfaction of Miss Bennet's mind gave a glow of such sweet animation to her face, as made her look handsomer than ever. Kitty simpered and smiled, and hoped her turn was coming soon. Mrs. Bennet could not give her consent or speak her approbation in terms warm enough to satisfy her feelings, though she talked to Bingley of nothing else for half an hour; and when Mr. Bennet joined them at supper, his voice and manner plainly showed how really happy he was.

Not a word, however, passed his lips in allusion to it, till their visitor took his leave for the night; but as soon as he was gone, he turned to his daughter, and said:

"Jane, I congratulate you. You will be a very happy woman."

Jane went to him instantly, kissed him, and thanked him for his goodness.

"You are a good girl;" he replied, "and I have great pleasure in thinking you will be so happily settled. I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike. You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income."

"I hope not so. Imprudence or thoughtlessness in money matters would be unpardonable in me."

"Exceed their income! My dear Mr. Bennet," cried his wife, "what are you talking of? Why, he has four or five thousand a year, and very likely more." Then addressing

her daughter, "Oh! my dear, dear Jane, I am so happy! I am sure I shan't get a wink of sleep all night. I knew how it would be. I always said it must be so, at last. I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing! I remember, as soon as ever I saw him, when he first came into Hertfordshire last year, I thought how likely it was that you should come together. Oh! he is the handsomest young man that ever was seen!"

Wickham, Lydia, were all forgotten. Jane was beyond competition her favourite child. At that moment, she cared for no other. Her younger sisters soon began to make interest with her for objects of happiness which she might in future be able to dispense.

Mary petitioned for the use of the library at Netherfield; and Kitty begged very hard for a few balls there every winter.

Bingley, from this time, was of course a daily visitor at Longbourn; coming frequently before breakfast, and always remaining till after supper; unless when some barbarous neighbour, who could not be enough detested, had given him an invitation to dinner which he thought himself obliged to accept.

Elizabeth had now but little time for conversation with her sister; for while he was present, Jane had no attention to bestow on anyone else; but she found herself considerably useful to both of them in those hours of separation that must sometimes occur. In the absence of Jane, he always attached himself to Elizabeth, for the pleasure of talking of her; and when Bingley was gone, Jane constantly sought the same means of relief.

"He has made me so happy," said she, one evening, "by telling me that he was totally ignorant of my being in town last spring! I had not believed it possible."

"I suspected as much," replied Elizabeth. "But how did he account for it?"

"It must have been his sister's doing. They were certainly no friends to his acquaintance with me, which I cannot wonder at, since he might have chosen so much more advantageously in many respects. But when they see, as I trust they will, that their brother is happy with me, they will learn to be contented, and we shall be on good terms again; though we can never be what we once were to each other."

"That is the most unforgiving speech," said Elizabeth, "that I ever heard you utter. Good girl! It would vex me, indeed, to see you again the dupe of Miss Bingley's pretended regard."

"Would you believe it, Lizzy, that when he went to town last November, he really loved me, and nothing but a persuasion of *my* being indifferent would have prevented his coming down again!"

"He made a little mistake to be sure; but it is to the credit of his modesty."

This naturally introduced a panegyric from Jane on his diffidence, and the little value he put on his own good qualities. Elizabeth was pleased to find that he had not betrayed the interference of his friend; for, though Jane had the most generous and

forgiving heart in the world, she knew it was a circumstance which must prejudice her against him.

"I am certainly the most fortunate creature that ever existed!" cried Jane. "Oh! Lizzy, why am I thus singled from my family, and blessed above them all! If I could but see *you* as happy! If there *were* but such another man for you!"

"If you were to give me forty such men, I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness. No, no, let me shift for myself; and, perhaps, if I have very good luck, I may meet with another Mr. Collins in time."

The situation of affairs in the Longbourn family could not be long a secret. Mrs. Bennet was privileged to whisper it to Mrs. Phillips, and she ventured, without any permission, to do the same by all her neighbours in Meryton.

The Bennets were speedily pronounced to be the luckiest family in the world, though only a few weeks before, when Lydia had first run away, they had been generally proved to be marked out for misfortune.

## Chapter 56

One morning, about a week after Bingley's engagement with Jane had been formed, as he and the females of the family were sitting together in the dining-room, their attention was suddenly drawn to the window, by the sound of a carriage; and they perceived a chaise and four driving up the lawn. It was too early in the morning for visitors, and besides, the equipage did not answer to that of any of their neighbours. The horses were post; and neither the carriage, nor the livery of the servant who preceded it, were familiar to them. As it was certain, however, that somebody was coming, Bingley instantly prevailed on Miss Bennet to avoid the confinement of such an intrusion, and walk away with him into the shrubbery. They both set off, and the conjectures of the remaining three continued, though with little satisfaction, till the door was thrown open and their visitor entered. It was Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

They were of course all intending to be surprised; but their astonishment was beyond their expectation; and on the part of Mrs. Bennet and Kitty, though she was perfectly unknown to them, even inferior to what Elizabeth felt.

She entered the room with an air more than usually ungracious, made no other reply to Elizabeth's salutation than a slight inclination of the head, and sat down without saying a word. Elizabeth had mentioned her name to her mother on her ladyship's entrance, though no request of introduction had been made.

Mrs. Bennet, all amazement, though flattered by having a guest of such high importance, received her with the utmost politeness. After sitting for a moment in silence, she said very stiffly to Elizabeth,

"I hope you are well, Miss Bennet. That lady, I suppose, is your mother."

Elizabeth replied very concisely that she was.

"And *that* I suppose is one of your sisters."

"Yes, madam," said Mrs. Bennet, delighted to speak to Lady Catherine. "She is my youngest girl but one. My youngest of all is lately married, and my eldest is somewhere about the grounds, walking with a young man who, I believe, will soon become a part of the family."

"You have a very small park here," returned Lady Catherine after a short silence.

"It is nothing in comparison of Rosings, my lady, I dare say; but I assure you it is much larger than Sir William Lucas's."

"This must be a most inconvenient sitting room for the evening, in summer; the windows are full west."

Mrs. Bennet assured her that they never sat there after dinner, and then added:

"May I take the liberty of asking your ladyship whether you left Mr. and Mrs. Collins well."

"Yes, very well. I saw them the night before last."

Elizabeth now expected that she would produce a letter for her from Charlotte, as it seemed the only probable motive for her calling. But no letter appeared, and she was completely puzzled.

Mrs. Bennet, with great civility, begged her ladyship to take some refreshment; but Lady Catherine very resolutely, and not very politely, declined eating anything; and then, rising up, said to Elizabeth,

"Miss Bennet, there seemed to be a prettyish kind of a little wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a turn in it, if you will favour me with your company."

"Go, my dear," cried her mother, "and show her ladyship about the different walks. I think she will be pleased with the hermitage."

Elizabeth obeyed, and running into her own room for her parasol, attended her noble guest downstairs. As they passed through the hall, Lady Catherine opened the doors into the dining-parlour and drawing-room, and pronouncing them, after a short survey, to be decent looking rooms, walked on.

Her carriage remained at the door, and Elizabeth saw that her waiting-woman was in it. They proceeded in silence along the gravel walk that led to the copse; Elizabeth was determined to make no effort for conversation with a woman who was now more than usually insolent and disagreeable.

"How could I ever think her like her nephew?" said she, as she looked in her face.

As soon as they entered the copse, Lady Catherine began in the following manner:—

"You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of my journey hither. Your own heart, your own conscience, must tell you why I come."

Elizabeth looked with unaffected astonishment.

"Indeed, you are mistaken, Madam. I have not been at all able to account for the honour of seeing you here."

"Miss Bennet," replied her ladyship, in an angry tone, "you ought to know, that I am not to be trifled with. But however insincere *you* may choose to be, you shall not find *me* so. My character has ever been celebrated for its sincerity and frankness, and in a cause of such moment as this, I shall certainly not depart from it. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I was told that not only your sister was on the point of being most advantageously married, but that you, that Miss Elizabeth Bennet, would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my nephew, my own nephew, Mr. Darcy. Though I *know* it must be a scandalous falsehood, though I would not injure him so much as to suppose the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off for this place, that I might make my sentiments known to you."

"If you believed it impossible to be true," said Elizabeth, colouring with astonishment and disdain, "I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far. What could your ladyship propose by it?"

"At once to insist upon having such a report universally contradicted."

"Your coming to Longbourn, to see me and my family," said Elizabeth coolly, "will be rather a confirmation of it; if, indeed, such a report is in existence."

"If! Do you then pretend to be ignorant of it? Has it not been industriously circulated by yourselves? Do you not know that such a report is spread abroad?"

"I never heard that it was."

"And can you likewise declare, that there is no foundation for it?"

"I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship. You may ask questions which I shall not choose to answer."

"This is not to be borne. Miss Bennet, I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?"

"Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible."

"It ought to be so; it must be so, while he retains the use of his reason. But your arts and allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and to all his family. You may have drawn him in."

"If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it."

"Miss Bennet, do you know who I am? I have not been accustomed to such language as this. I am almost the nearest relation he has in the world, and am entitled to know all his dearest concerns."

"But you are not entitled to know mine; nor will such behaviour as this, ever induce me to be explicit."

"Let me be rightly understood. This match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. No, never. Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter. Now what have you to say?"

"Only this; that if he is so, you can have no reason to suppose he will make an offer to me."

Lady Catherine hesitated for a moment, and then replied:

"The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the favourite wish of *hismother*, as well as of hers. While in their cradles, we planned the union: and now, at the moment when the wishes of both sisters would be accomplished in their marriage, to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family! Do you pay no regard to the wishes of his friends? To his tacit engagement with Miss de Bourgh? Are you lost to every feeling of propriety and delicacy? Have you not heard me say that from his earliest hours he was destined for his cousin?"

"Yes, and I had heard it before. But what is that to me? If there is no other objection to my marrying your nephew, I shall certainly not be kept from it by knowing that his mother and aunt wished him to marry Miss de Bourgh. You both did as much as you could in planning the marriage. Its completion depended on others. If Mr. Darcy is neither by honour nor inclination confined to his cousin, why is not he to make another choice? And if I am that choice, why may not I accept him?"

"Because honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it. Yes, Miss Bennet, interest; for do not expect to be noticed by his family or friends, if you wilfully act against the inclinations of all. You will be censured, slighted, and despised, by everyone connected with him. Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us."

"These are heavy misfortunes," replied Elizabeth. "But the wife of Mr. Darcy must have such extraordinary sources of happiness necessarily attached to her situation, that she could, upon the whole, have no cause to repine."

"Obstinate, headstrong girl! I am ashamed of you! Is this your gratitude for my attentions to you last spring? Is nothing due to me on that score? Let us sit down. You are to understand, Miss Bennet, that I came here with the determined resolution of carrying my purpose; nor will I be dissuaded from it. I have not been used to submit to any person's whims. I have not been in the habit of brooking disappointment."

"*That* will make your ladyship's situation at present more pitiable; but it will have no effect on me."

"I will not be interrupted. Hear me in silence. My daughter and my nephew are formed for each other. They are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father's, from respectable, honourable, and ancient—though untitled—families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their respective houses; and what is to divide them? The upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune. Is this to be endured! But it must not, shall not be. If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up."

"In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal."

"True. You *are* a gentleman's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition."

"Whatever my connections may be," said Elizabeth, "if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to *you*."

"Tell me once for all, are you engaged to him?"

Though Elizabeth would not, for the mere purpose of obliging Lady Catherine, have answered this question, she could not but say, after a moment's deliberation:

"I am not."

Lady Catherine seemed pleased.

"And will you promise me, never to enter into such an engagement?"

"I will make no promise of the kind."

"Miss Bennet I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a more reasonable young woman. But do not deceive yourself into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away till you have given me the assurance I require."

"And I certainly *never* shall give it. I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your ladyship wants Mr. Darcy to marry your daughter; but would my giving you the wished-for promise make their marriage at all more probable? Supposing him to be attached to me, would my refusing to accept his hand make him wish to bestow it on his cousin? Allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged. You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. How far your nephew might approve of your interference in his affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject."

"Not so hasty, if you please. I have by no means done. To all the objections I have already urged, I have still another to add. I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest sister's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying her was a patched-up business, at the expence of your father and uncles. And is such a girl to be my nephew's sister? Is her husband, is the son of his late father's steward, to be his brother? Heaven and earth!—of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?"

"You can now have nothing further to say," she resentfully answered. "You have insulted me in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house."

And she rose as she spoke. Lady Catherine rose also, and they turned back. Her ladyship was highly incensed.

"You have no regard, then, for the honour and credit of my nephew! Unfeeling, selfish girl! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody?"

"Lady Catherine, I have nothing further to say. You know my sentiments."

"You are then resolved to have him?"

"I have said no such thing. I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me."

"It is well. You refuse, then, to oblige me. You refuse to obey the claims of duty, honour, and gratitude. You are determined to ruin him in the opinion of all his friends, and make him the contempt of the world."

"Neither duty, nor honour, nor gratitude," replied Elizabeth, "have any possible claim on me, in the present instance. No principle of either would be violated by my marriage with Mr. Darcy. And with regard to the resentment of his family, or the indignation of the world, if the former *were* excited by his marrying me, it would not give me one moment's concern—and the world in general would have too much sense to join in the scorn."

"And this is your real opinion! This is your final resolve! Very well. I shall now know how to act. Do not imagine, Miss Bennet, that your ambition will ever be gratified. I came to try you. I hoped to find you reasonable; but, depend upon it, I will carry my point."

In this manner Lady Catherine talked on, till they were at the door of the carriage, when, turning hastily round, she added, "I take no leave of you, Miss Bennet. I send no compliments to your mother. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously displeased."

Elizabeth made no answer; and without attempting to persuade her ladyship to return into the house, walked quietly into it herself. She heard the carriage drive away



as she proceeded up stairs. Her mother impatiently met her at the door of the dressing-room, to ask why Lady Catherine would not come in again and rest herself.

"She did not choose it," said her daughter, "she would go."

"She is a very fine-looking woman! and her calling here was prodigiously civil! for she only came, I suppose, to tell us the Collinses were well. She is on her road somewhere, I dare say, and so, passing through Meryton, thought she might as well call on you. I suppose she had nothing particular to say to you, Lizzy?"

Elizabeth was forced to give into a little falsehood here; for to acknowledge the substance of their conversation was impossible.

## Chapter 57

The discomposure of spirits which this extraordinary visit threw Elizabeth into, could not be easily overcome; nor could she, for many hours, learn to think of it less than incessantly. Lady Catherine, it appeared, had actually taken the trouble of this journey from Rosings, for the sole purpose of breaking off her supposed engagement with Mr. Darcy. It was a rational scheme, to be sure! but from what the report of their engagement could originate, Elizabeth was at a loss to imagine; till she recollected that *his* being the intimate friend of Bingley, and *her* being the sister of Jane, was enough, at a time when the expectation of one wedding made everybody eager for another, to supply the idea. She had not herself forgotten to feel that the marriage of her sister must bring them more frequently together. And her neighbours at Lucas Lodge, therefore (for through their communication with the Collinses, the report, she concluded, had reached Lady Catherine), had only set that down as almost certain and immediate, which she had looked forward to as possible at some future time.

In revolving Lady Catherine's expressions, however, she could not help feeling some uneasiness as to the possible consequence of her persisting in this interference. From what she had said of her resolution to prevent their marriage, it occurred to Elizabeth that she must meditate an application to her nephew; and how *he* might take a similar representation of the evils attached to a connection with her, she dared not pronounce. She knew not the exact degree of his affection for his aunt, or his dependence on her judgment, but it was natural to suppose that he thought much higher of her ladyship than *she* could do; and it was certain that, in enumerating the miseries of a marriage with *one*, whose immediate connections were so unequal to his own, his aunt would address him on his weakest side. With his notions of dignity, he would probably feel that the arguments, which to Elizabeth had appeared weak and ridiculous, contained much good sense and solid reasoning.

If he had been wavering before as to what he should do, which had often seemed likely, the advice and entreaty of so near a relation might settle every doubt, and determine him at once to be as happy as dignity unblemished could make him. In that case he would return no more. Lady Catherine might see him in her way through town; and his engagement to Bingley of coming again to Netherfield must give way.

"If, therefore, an excuse for not keeping his promise should come to his friend within a few days," she added, "I shall know how to understand it. I shall then give over every expectation, every wish of his constancy. If he is satisfied with only regretting me, when he might have obtained my affections and hand, I shall soon cease to regret him at all."

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The surprise of the rest of the family, on hearing who their visitor had been, was very great; but they obligingly satisfied it, with the same kind of supposition which had appeased Mrs. Bennet's curiosity; and Elizabeth was spared from much teasing on the subject.

The next morning, as she was going downstairs, she was met by her father, who came out of his library with a letter in his hand.

"Lizzy," said he, "I was going to look for you; come into my room."

She followed him thither; and her curiosity to know what he had to tell her was heightened by the supposition of its being in some manner connected with the letter he held. It suddenly struck her that it might be from Lady Catherine; and she anticipated with dismay all the consequent explanations.

She followed her father to the fire place, and they both sat down. He then said,

"I have received a letter this morning that has astonished me exceedingly. As it principally concerns yourself, you ought to know its contents. I did not know before, that I had two daughters on the brink of matrimony. Let me congratulate you on a very important conquest."

The colour now rushed into Elizabeth's cheeks in the instantaneous conviction of its being a letter from the nephew, instead of the aunt; and she was undetermined whether most to be pleased that he explained himself at all, or offended that his letter was not rather addressed to herself; when her father continued:

"You look conscious. Young ladies have great penetration in such matters as these; but I think I may defy even *your* sagacity, to discover the name of your admirer. This letter is from Mr. Collins."

"From Mr. Collins! and what can *he* have to say?"

"Something very much to the purpose of course. He begins with congratulations on the approaching nuptials of my eldest daughter, of which, it seems, he has been told by some of the good-natured, gossiping Lucases. I shall not sport with your impatience, by reading what he says on that point. What relates to yourself, is as

follows: 'Having thus offered you the sincere congratulations of Mrs. Collins and myself on this happy event, let me now add a short hint on the subject of another; of which we have been advertised by the same authority. Your daughter Elizabeth, it is presumed, will not long bear the name of Bennet, after her elder sister has resigned it, and the chosen partner of her fate may be reasonably looked up to as one of the most illustrious personages in this land.'

"Can you possibly guess, Lizzy, who is meant by this? 'This young gentleman is blessed, in a peculiar way, with every thing the heart of mortal can most desire,—splendid property, noble kindred, and extensive patronage. Yet in spite of all these temptations, let me warn my cousin Elizabeth, and yourself, of what evils you may incur by a precipitate closure with this gentleman's proposals, which, of course, you will be inclined to take immediate advantage of.'

"Have you any idea, Lizzy, who this gentleman is? But now it comes out:

"My motive for cautioning you is as follows. We have reason to imagine that his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, does not look on the match with a friendly eye.'

"*Mr. Darcy*, you see, is the man! Now, Lizzy, I think I *have* surprised you. Could he, or the Lucases, have pitched on any man within the circle of our acquaintance, whose name would have given the lie more effectually to what they related? *Mr. Darcy*, who never looks at any woman but to see a blemish, and who probably never looked at you in his life! It is admirable!"

Elizabeth tried to join in her father's pleasantry, but could only force one most reluctant smile. Never had his wit been directed in a manner so little agreeable to her.

"Are you not diverted?"

"Oh! yes. Pray read on."

"After mentioning the likelihood of this marriage to her ladyship last night, she immediately, with her usual condescension, expressed what she felt on the occasion; when it became apparent, that on the score of some family objections on the part of my cousin, she would never give her consent to what she termed so disgraceful a match. I thought it my duty to give the speediest intelligence of this to my cousin, that she and her noble admirer may be aware of what they are about, and not run hastily into a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned.' *Mr. Collins* moreover adds, 'I am truly rejoiced that my cousin Lydia's sad business has been so well hushed up, and am only concerned that their living together before the marriage took place should be so generally known. I must not, however, neglect the duties of my station, or refrain from declaring my amazement at hearing that you received the young couple into your house as soon as they were married. It was an encouragement of vice; and had I been the rector of Longbourn, I should very strenuously have opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them, as a Christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing.' That is his notion of Christian forgiveness! The rest of his letter is only about his dear Charlotte's situation, and his

expectation of a young olive-branch. But, Lizzy, you look as if you did not enjoy it. You are not going to be *missish*, I hope, and pretend to be affronted at an idle report. For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?"

"Oh!" cried Elizabeth, "I am excessively diverted. But it is so strange!"

"Yes—*that* is what makes it amusing. Had they fixed on any other man it would have been nothing; but *his* perfect indifference, and *your* pointed dislike, make it so delightfully absurd! Much as I abominate writing, I would not give up Mr. Collins's correspondence for any consideration. Nay, when I read a letter of his, I cannot help giving him the preference even over Wickham, much as I value the impudence and hypocrisy of my son-in-law. And pray, Lizzy, what said Lady Catherine about this report? Did she call to refuse her consent?"

To this question his daughter replied only with a laugh; and as it had been asked without the least suspicion, she was not distressed by his repeating it. Elizabeth had never been more at a loss to make her feelings appear what they were not. It was necessary to laugh, when she would rather have cried. Her father had most cruelly mortified her, by what he said of Mr. Darcy's indifference, and she could do nothing but wonder at such a want of penetration, or fear that perhaps, instead of his seeing too little, she might have fancied too much.

## Chapter 58

Instead of receiving any such letter of excuse from his friend, as Elizabeth half expected Mr. Bingley to do, he was able to bring Darcy with him to Longbourn before many days had passed after Lady Catherine's visit. The gentlemen arrived early; and, before Mrs. Bennet had time to tell him of their having seen his aunt, of which her daughter sat in momentary dread, Bingley, who wanted to be alone with Jane, proposed their all walking out. It was agreed to. Mrs. Bennet was not in the habit of walking; Mary could never spare time; but the remaining five set off together. Bingley and Jane, however, soon allowed the others to outstrip them. They lagged behind, while Elizabeth, Kitty, and Darcy were to entertain each other. Very little was said by either; Kitty was too much afraid of him to talk; Elizabeth was secretly forming a desperate resolution; and perhaps he might be doing the same.

They walked towards the Lucases, because Kitty wished to call upon Maria; and as Elizabeth saw no occasion for making it a general concern, when Kitty left them she went boldly on with him alone. Now was the moment for her resolution to be executed, and, while her courage was high, she immediately said:

"Mr. Darcy, I am a very selfish creature; and, for the sake of giving relief to my own feelings, care not how much I may be wounding yours. I can no longer help thanking you for your unexampled kindness to my poor sister. Ever since I have known it, I have been most anxious to acknowledge to you how gratefully I feel it. Were it known to the rest of my family, I should not have merely my own gratitude to express."

"I am sorry, exceedingly sorry," replied Darcy, in a tone of surprise and emotion, "that you have ever been informed of what may, in a mistaken light, have given you uneasiness. I did not think Mrs. Gardiner was so little to be trusted."

"You must not blame my aunt. Lydia's thoughtlessness first betrayed to me that you had been concerned in the matter; and, of course, I could not rest till I knew the particulars. Let me thank you again and again, in the name of all my family, for that generous compassion which induced you to take so much trouble, and bear so many mortifications, for the sake of discovering them."

"If you *will* thank me," he replied, "let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your *family* owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe I thought only of *you*."

Elizabeth was too much embarrassed to say a word. After a short pause, her companion added, "You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. *My* affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever."

Elizabeth, feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of his situation, now forced herself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently, gave him to understand that her sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure his present assurances. The happiness which this reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. Had Elizabeth been able to encounter his eye, she might have seen how well the expression of heartfelt delight, diffused over his face, became him; but, though she could not look, she could listen, and he told her of feelings, which, in proving of what importance she was to him, made his affection every moment more valuable.

They walked on, without knowing in what direction. There was too much to be thought, and felt, and said, for attention to any other objects. She soon learnt that they were indebted for their present good understanding to the efforts of his aunt, who did call on him in her return through London, and there relate her journey to Longbourn, its motive, and the substance of her conversation with Elizabeth; dwelling emphatically on every expression of the latter which, in her ladyship's apprehension, peculiarly denoted her perverseness and assurance; in the belief that such a relation

must assist her endeavours to obtain that promise from her nephew which she had refused to give. But, unluckily for her ladyship, its effect had been exactly contrariwise.

"It taught me to hope," said he, "as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly."

Elizabeth coloured and laughed as she replied, "Yes, you know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of *that*. After abusing you so abominably to your face, I could have no scruple in abusing you to all your relations."

"What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behaviour to you at the time had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable. I cannot think of it without abhorrence."

"We will not quarrel for the greater share of blame annexed to that evening," said Elizabeth. "The conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreproachable; but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility."

"I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: 'had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner.' Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me;—though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice."

"I was certainly very far from expecting them to make so strong an impression. I had not the smallest idea of their being ever felt in such a way."

"I can easily believe it. You thought me then devoid of every proper feeling, I am sure you did. The turn of your countenance I shall never forget, as you said that I could not have addressed you in any possible way that would induce you to accept me."

"Oh! do not repeat what I then said. These recollections will not do at all. I assure you that I have long been most heartily ashamed of it."

Darcy mentioned his letter. "Did it," said he, "did it soon make you think better of me? Did you, on reading it, give any credit to its contents?"

She explained what its effect on her had been, and how gradually all her former prejudices had been removed.

"I knew," said he, "that what I wrote must give you pain, but it was necessary. I hope you have destroyed the letter. There was one part especially, the opening of it, which I should dread your having the power of reading again. I can remember some expressions which might justly make you hate me."

"The letter shall certainly be burnt, if you believe it essential to the preservation of my regard; but, though we have both reason to think my opinions not entirely unalterable, they are not, I hope, quite so easily changed as that implies."

"When I wrote that letter," replied Darcy, "I believed myself perfectly calm and cool, but I am since convinced that it was written in a dreadful bitterness of spirit."

"The letter, perhaps, began in bitterness, but it did not end so. The adieu is charity itself. But think no more of the letter. The feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it ought to be forgotten. You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure."

"I cannot give you credit for any philosophy of the kind. Your retrospections must be so totally void of reproach, that the contentment arising from them is not of philosophy, but, what is much better, of innocence. But with me, it is not so. Painful recollections will intrude which cannot, which ought not, to be repelled. I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was right, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son (for many years an only child), I was spoilt by my parents, who, though good themselves (my father, particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing; to care for none beyond my own family circle; to think meanly of all the rest of the world; to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased."

"Had you then persuaded yourself that I should?"

"Indeed I had. What will you think of my vanity? I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses."

"My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally, I assure you. I never meant to deceive you, but my spirits might often lead me wrong. How you must have hated me after *that* evening?"

"Hate you! I was angry perhaps at first, but my anger soon began to take a proper direction."

"I am almost afraid of asking what you thought of me, when we met at Pemberley. You blamed me for coming?"

"No indeed; I felt nothing but surprise."

"Your surprise could not be greater than *mine* in being noticed by you. My conscience told me that I deserved no extraordinary politeness, and I confess that I did not expect to receive *more* than my due."

"My object then," replied Darcy, "was to show you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to. How soon any other wishes introduced themselves I can hardly tell, but I believe in about half an hour after I had seen you."

He then told her of Georgiana's delight in her acquaintance, and of her disappointment at its sudden interruption; which naturally leading to the cause of that interruption, she soon learnt that his resolution of following her from Derbyshire in quest of her sister had been formed before he quitted the inn, and that his gravity and thoughtfulness there had arisen from no other struggles than what such a purpose must comprehend.

She expressed her gratitude again, but it was too painful a subject to each, to be dwelt on farther.

After walking several miles in a leisurely manner, and too busy to know anything about it, they found at last, on examining their watches, that it was time to be at home.

"What could become of Mr. Bingley and Jane!" was a wonder which introduced the discussion of their affairs. Darcy was delighted with their engagement; his friend had given him the earliest information of it.

"I must ask whether you were surprised?" said Elizabeth.

"Not at all. When I went away, I felt that it would soon happen."

"That is to say, you had given your permission. I guessed as much." And though he exclaimed at the term, she found that it had been pretty much the case.

"On the evening before my going to London," said he, "I made a confession to him, which I believe I ought to have made long ago. I told him of all that had occurred to make my former interference in his affairs absurd and impertinent. His surprise was great. He had never had the slightest suspicion. I told him, moreover, that I believed myself mistaken in supposing, as I had done, that your sister was indifferent to him; and as I could easily perceive that his attachment to her was unabated, I felt no doubt of their happiness together."

Elizabeth could not help smiling at his easy manner of directing his friend.

"Did you speak from your own observation," said she, "when you told him that my sister loved him, or merely from my information last spring?"

"From the former. I had narrowly observed her during the two visits which I had lately made here; and I was convinced of her affection."

"And your assurance of it, I suppose, carried immediate conviction to him."



"It did. Bingley is most unaffectedly modest. His diffidence had prevented his depending on his own judgment in so anxious a case, but his reliance on mine made every thing easy. I was obliged to confess one thing, which for a time, and not unjustly, offended him. I could not allow myself to conceal that your sister had been in town three months last winter, that I had known it, and purposely kept it from him. He was angry. But his anger, I am persuaded, lasted no longer than he remained in any doubt of your sister's sentiments. He has heartily forgiven me now."

Elizabeth longed to observe that Mr. Bingley had been a most delightful friend; so easily guided that his worth was invaluable; but she checked herself. She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin. In anticipating the happiness of Bingley, which of course was to be inferior only to his own, he continued the conversation till they reached the house. In the hall they parted.

## Chapter 59

"My dear Lizzy, where can you have been walking to?" was a question which Elizabeth received from Jane as soon as she entered their room, and from all the others when they sat down to table. She had only to say in reply, that they had wandered about, till she was beyond her own knowledge. She coloured as she spoke; but neither that, nor anything else, awakened a suspicion of the truth.

The evening passed quietly, unmarked by anything extraordinary. The acknowledged lovers talked and laughed, the unacknowledged were silent. Darcy was not of a disposition in which happiness overflows in mirth; and Elizabeth, agitated and confused, rather *knew* that she was happy than *felt* herself to be so; for, besides the immediate embarrassment, there were other evils before her. She anticipated what would be felt in the family when her situation became known; she was aware that no one liked him but Jane; and even feared that with the others it was a dislike which not all his fortune and consequence might do away.

At night she opened her heart to Jane. Though suspicion was very far from Miss Bennet's general habits, she was absolutely incredulous here.

"You are joking, Lizzy. This cannot be!—engaged to Mr. Darcy! No, no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible."

"This is a wretched beginning indeed! My sole dependence was on you; and I am sure nobody else will believe me, if you do not. Yet, indeed, I am in earnest. I speak nothing but the truth. He still loves me, and we are engaged."

Jane looked at her doubtingly. "Oh, Lizzy! it cannot be. I know how much you dislike him."

"You know nothing of the matter. *That* is all to be forgot. Perhaps I did not always love him so well as I do now. But in such cases as these, a good memory is unpardonable. This is the last time I shall ever remember it myself."

Miss Bennet still looked all amazement. Elizabeth again, and more seriously assured her of its truth.

"Good Heaven! can it be really so! Yet now I must believe you," cried Jane. "My dear, dear Lizzy, I would—I do congratulate you—but are you certain? forgive the question—are you quite certain that you can be happy with him?"

"There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already, that we are to be the happiest couple in the world. But are you pleased, Jane? Shall you like to have such a brother?"

"Very, very much. Nothing could give either Bingley or myself more delight. But we considered it, we talked of it as impossible. And do you really love him quite well enough? Oh, Lizzy! do anything rather than marry without affection. Are you quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?"

"Oh, yes! You will only think I feel *more* than I ought to do, when I tell you all."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I must confess that I love him better than I do Bingley. I am afraid you will be angry."

"My dearest sister, now *be* serious. I want to talk very seriously. Let me know every thing that I am to know, without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him?"

"It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley."

Another entreaty that she would be serious, however, produced the desired effect; and she soon satisfied Jane by her solemn assurances of attachment. When convinced on that article, Miss Bennet had nothing further to wish.

"Now I am quite happy," said she, "for you will be as happy as myself. I always had a value for him. Were it for nothing but his love of you, I must always have esteemed him; but now, as Bingley's friend and your husband, there can be only Bingley and yourself more dear to me. But Lizzy, you have been very sly, very reserved with me. How little did you tell me of what passed at Pemberley and Lambton! I owe all that I know of it to another, not to you."

Elizabeth told her the motives of her secrecy. She had been unwilling to mention Bingley; and the unsettled state of her own feelings had made her equally avoid the name of his friend. But now she would no longer conceal from her his share in Lydia's marriage. All was acknowledged, and half the night spent in conversation.

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"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Bennet, as she stood at a window the next morning, "if that disagreeable Mr. Darcy is not coming here again with our dear Bingley! What can he mean by being so tiresome as to be always coming here? I had no notion but he would go a-shooting, or something or other, and not disturb us with his company. What shall we do with him? Lizzy, you must walk out with him again, that he may not be in Bingley's way."

Elizabeth could hardly help laughing at so convenient a proposal; yet was really vexed that her mother should be always giving him such an epithet.

As soon as they entered, Bingley looked at her so expressively, and shook hands with such warmth, as left no doubt of his good information; and he soon afterwards said aloud, "Mrs. Bennet, have you no more lanes hereabouts in which Lizzy may lose her way again to-day?"

"I advise Mr. Darcy, and Lizzy, and Kitty," said Mrs. Bennet, "to walk to Oakham Mount this morning. It is a nice long walk, and Mr. Darcy has never seen the view."

"It may do very well for the others," replied Mr. Bingley; "but I am sure it will be too much for Kitty. Won't it, Kitty?" Kitty owned that she had rather stay at home. Darcy professed a great curiosity to see the view from the Mount, and Elizabeth silently consented. As she went up stairs to get ready, Mrs. Bennet followed her, saying:

"I am quite sorry, Lizzy, that you should be forced to have that disagreeable man all to yourself. But I hope you will not mind it: it is all for Jane's sake, you know; and there is no occasion for talking to him, except just now and then. So, do not put yourself to inconvenience."

During their walk, it was resolved that Mr. Bennet's consent should be asked in the course of the evening. Elizabeth reserved to herself the application for her mother's. She could not determine how her mother would take it; sometimes doubting whether all his wealth and grandeur would be enough to overcome her abhorrence of the man. But whether she were violently set against the match, or violently delighted with it, it was certain that her manner would be equally ill adapted to do credit to her sense; and she could no more bear that Mr. Darcy should hear the first raptures of her joy, than the first vehemence of her disapprobation.

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In the evening, soon after Mr. Bennet withdrew to the library, she saw Mr. Darcy rise also and follow him, and her agitation on seeing it was extreme. She did not fear her father's opposition, but he was going to be made unhappy; and that it should be through her means—that *she*, his favourite child, should be distressing him by her choice, should be filling him with fears and regrets in disposing of her—was a wretched reflection, and she sat in misery till Mr. Darcy appeared again, when, looking at him, she was a little relieved by his smile. In a few minutes he approached the table where she was sitting with Kitty; and, while pretending to admire her work

said in a whisper, "Go to your father, he wants you in the library." She was gone directly.

Her father was walking about the room, looking grave and anxious. "Lizzy," said he, "what are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting this man? Have not you always hated him?"

How earnestly did she then wish that her former opinions had been more reasonable, her expressions more moderate! It would have spared her from explanations and professions which it was exceedingly awkward to give; but they were now necessary, and she assured him, with some confusion, of her attachment to Mr. Darcy.

"Or, in other words, you are determined to have him. He is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages than Jane. But will they make you happy?"

"Have you any other objection," said Elizabeth, "than your belief of my indifference?"

"None at all. We all know him to be a proud, unpleasant sort of man; but this would be nothing if you really liked him."

"I do, I do like him," she replied, with tears in her eyes, "I love him. Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. You do not know what he really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of him in such terms."

"Lizzy," said her father, "I have given him my consent. He is the kind of man, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse anything, which he condescended to ask. I now give it to *you*, if you are resolved on having him. But let me advise you to think better of it. I know your disposition, Lizzy. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about."

Elizabeth, still more affected, was earnest and solemn in her reply; and at length, by repeated assurances that Mr. Darcy was really the object of her choice, by explaining the gradual change which her estimation of him had undergone, relating her absolute certainty that his affection was not the work of a day, but had stood the test of many months' suspense, and enumerating with energy all his good qualities, she did conquer her father's incredulity, and reconcile him to the match.

"Well, my dear," said he, when she ceased speaking, "I have no more to say. If this be the case, he deserves you. I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, to anyone less worthy."

To complete the favourable impression, she then told him what Mr. Darcy had voluntarily done for Lydia. He heard her with astonishment.

"This is an evening of wonders, indeed! And so, Darcy did every thing; made up the match, gave the money, paid the fellow's debts, and got him his commission! So much the better. It will save me a world of trouble and economy. Had it been your uncle's doing, I must and *would* have paid him; but these violent young lovers carry every thing their own way. I shall offer to pay him to-morrow; he will rant and storm about his love for you, and there will be an end of the matter."

He then recollected her embarrassment a few days before, on his reading Mr. Collins's letter; and after laughing at her some time, allowed her at last to go—saying, as she quitted the room, "If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am quite at leisure."

Elizabeth's mind was now relieved from a very heavy weight; and, after half an hour's quiet reflection in her own room, she was able to join the others with tolerable composure. Every thing was too recent for gaiety, but the evening passed tranquilly away; there was no longer anything material to be dreaded, and the comfort of ease and familiarity would come in time.

When her mother went up to her dressing-room at night, she followed her, and made the important communication. Its effect was most extraordinary; for on first hearing it, Mrs. Bennet sat quite still, and unable to utter a syllable. Nor was it under many, many minutes that she could comprehend what she heard; though not in general backward to credit what was for the advantage of her family, or that came in the shape of a lover to any of them. She began at length to recover, to fidget about in her chair, get up, sit down again, wonder, and bless herself.

"Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think! dear me! Mr. Darcy! Who would have thought it! And is it really true? Oh! my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane's is nothing to it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming man!—so handsome! so tall!—Oh, my dear Lizzy! pray apologise for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. Dear, dear Lizzy. A house in town! Every thing that is charming! Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord! What will become of me. I shall go distracted."

This was enough to prove that her approbation need not be doubted: and Elizabeth, rejoicing that such an effusion was heard only by herself, soon went away. But before she had been three minutes in her own room, her mother followed her.

"My dearest child," she cried, "I can think of nothing else! Ten thousand a year, and very likely more! 'Tis as good as a Lord! And a special licence. You must and shall be married by a special licence. But my dearest love, tell me what dish Mr. Darcy is particularly fond of, that I may have it to-morrow."

This was a sad omen of what her mother's behaviour to the gentleman himself might be; and Elizabeth found that, though in the certain possession of his warmest affection, and secure of her relations' consent, there was still something to be wished for. But the morrow passed off much better than she expected; for Mrs. Bennet luckily stood in such awe of her intended son-in-law that she ventured not to speak to him, unless it was in her power to offer him any attention, or mark her deference for his opinion.

Elizabeth had the satisfaction of seeing her father taking pains to get acquainted with him; and Mr. Bennet soon assured her that he was rising every hour in his esteem.

"I admire all my three sons-in-law highly," said he. "Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite; but I think I shall like *your* husband quite as well as Jane's."

## Chapter 60

Elizabeth's spirits soon rising to playfulness again, she wanted Mr. Darcy to account for his having ever fallen in love with her. "How could you begin?" said she. "I can comprehend your going on charmingly, when you had once made a beginning; but what could set you off in the first place?"

"I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew that *I* had begun."

"My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners—my behaviour to *you* was at least always bordering on the uncivil, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?"

"For the liveliness of your mind, I did."

"You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for *your* approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike *them*. Had you not been really amiable, you would have hated me for it; but in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just; and in your heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you. There—I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it; and really, all things considered, I begin to think it perfectly reasonable. To be sure, you knew no actual good of me—but nobody thinks of *that* when they fall in love."

"Was there no good in your affectionate behaviour to Jane while she was ill at Netherfield?"

"Dearest Jane! who could have done less for her? But make a virtue of it by all means. My good qualities are under your protection, and you are to exaggerate them as much as possible; and, in return, it belongs to me to find occasions for teasing and quarrelling with you as often as may be; and I shall begin directly by asking you what made you so unwilling to come to the point at last. What made you so shy of me, when you first called, and afterwards dined here? Why, especially, when you called, did you look as if you did not care about me?"

"Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement."

"But I was embarrassed."

"And so was I."

"You might have talked to me more when you came to dinner."

"A man who had felt less, might."

"How unlucky that you should have a reasonable answer to give, and that I should be so reasonable as to admit it! But I wonder how long you *would* have gone on, if you had been left to yourself. I wonder when you *would* have spoken, if I had not asked you! My resolution of thanking you for your kindness to Lydia had certainly great effect. *Too much*, I am afraid; for what becomes of the moral, if our comfort springs from a breach of promise? for I ought not to have mentioned the subject. This will never do."

"You need not distress yourself. The moral will be perfectly fair. Lady Catherine's unjustifiable endeavours to separate us were the means of removing all my doubts. I am not indebted for my present happiness to your eager desire of expressing your gratitude. I was not in a humour to wait for any opening of yours. My aunt's intelligence had given me hope, and I was determined at once to know every thing."

"Lady Catherine has been of infinite use, which ought to make her happy, for she loves to be of use. But tell me, what did you come down to Netherfield for? Was it merely to ride to Longbourn and be embarrassed? or had you intended any more serious consequence?"

"My real purpose was to see *you*, and to judge, if I could, whether I might ever hope to make you love me. My avowed one, or what I avowed to myself, was to see whether your sister were still partial to Bingley, and if she were, to make the confession to him which I have since made."

"Shall you ever have courage to announce to Lady Catherine what is to befall her?"

"I am more likely to want more time than courage, Elizabeth. But it ought to be done, and if you will give me a sheet of paper, it shall be done directly."

"And if I had not a letter to write myself, I might sit by you and admire the evenness of your writing, as another young lady once did. But I have an aunt, too, who must not be longer neglected."

From an unwillingness to confess how much her intimacy with Mr. Darcy had been over-rated, Elizabeth had never yet answered Mrs. Gardiner's long letter; but now, having *that* to communicate which she knew would be most welcome, she was almost ashamed to find that her uncle and aunt had already lost three days of happiness, and immediately wrote as follows:

"I would have thanked you before, my dear aunt, as I ought to have done, for your long, kind, satisfactory, detail of particulars; but to say the truth, I was too cross to write. You supposed more than really existed. But *now* suppose as much as you choose; give a loose rein to your fancy, indulge your imagination in every possible flight which the subject will afford, and unless you believe me actually married, you cannot greatly err. You must write again very soon, and praise him a great deal more than you did in your last. I thank you, again and again, for not going to the Lakes. How could I be so silly as to wish it! Your idea of the ponies is delightful. We will go round the Park every day. I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps other people have said so before, but not one with such justice. I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh. Mr. Darcy sends you all the love in the world that he can spare from me. You are all to come to Pemberley at Christmas. Yours, etc."

Mr. Darcy's letter to Lady Catherine was in a different style; and still different from either was what Mr. Bennet sent to Mr. Collins, in reply to his last.

"DEAR SIR,

"I must trouble you once more for congratulations. Elizabeth will soon be the wife of Mr. Darcy. Console Lady Catherine as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give.

"Yours sincerely, etc."

Miss Bingley's congratulations to her brother, on his approaching marriage, were all that was affectionate and insincere. She wrote even to Jane on the occasion, to express her delight, and repeat all her former professions of regard. Jane was not deceived, but she was affected; and though feeling no reliance on her, could not help writing her a much kinder answer than she knew was deserved.

The joy which Miss Darcy expressed on receiving similar information, was as sincere as her brother's in sending it. Four sides of paper were insufficient to contain all her delight, and all her earnest desire of being loved by her sister.

Before any answer could arrive from Mr. Collins, or any congratulations to Elizabeth from his wife, the Longbourn family heard that the Collinses were come themselves to Lucas Lodge. The reason of this sudden removal was soon evident. Lady Catherine had been rendered so exceedingly angry by the contents of her nephew's letter, that Charlotte, really rejoicing in the match, was anxious to get away



till the storm was blown over. At such a moment, the arrival of her friend was a sincere pleasure to Elizabeth, though in the course of their meetings she must sometimes think the pleasure dearly bought, when she saw Mr. Darcy exposed to all the parading and obsequious civility of her husband. He bore it, however, with admirable calmness. He could even listen to Sir William Lucas, when he complimented him on carrying away the brightest jewel of the country, and expressed his hopes of their all meeting frequently at St. James's, with very decent composure. If he did shrug his shoulders, it was not till Sir William was out of sight.

Mrs. Phillips's vulgarity was another, and perhaps a greater, tax on his forbearance; and though Mrs. Phillips, as well as her sister, stood in too much awe of him to speak with the familiarity which Bingley's good humour encouraged, yet, whenever she *did* speak, she must be vulgar. Nor was her respect for him, though it made her more quiet, at all likely to make her more elegant. Elizabeth did all she could to shield him from the frequent notice of either, and was ever anxious to keep him to herself, and to those of her family with whom he might converse without mortification; and though the uncomfortable feelings arising from all this took from the season of courtship much of its pleasure, it added to the hope of the future; and she looked forward with delight to the time when they should be removed from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley.

## Chapter 61

Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters. With what delighted pride she afterwards visited Mrs. Bingley, and talked of Mrs. Darcy, may be guessed. I wish I could say, for the sake of her family, that the accomplishment of her earnest desire in the establishment of so many of her children produced so happy an effect as to make her a sensible, amiable, well-informed woman for the rest of her life; though perhaps it was lucky for her husband, who might not have relished domestic felicity in so unusual a form, that she still was occasionally nervous and invariably silly.

Mr. Bennet missed his second daughter exceedingly; his affection for her drew him oftener from home than anything else could do. He delighted in going to Pemberley, especially when he was least expected.

Mr. Bingley and Jane remained at Netherfield only a twelvemonth. So near a vicinity to her mother and Meryton relations was not desirable even to *his* easy temper, or *her* affectionate heart. The darling wish of his sisters was then gratified; he bought

an estate in a neighbouring county to Derbyshire, and Jane and Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other.

Kitty, to her very material advantage, spent the chief of her time with her two elder sisters. In society so superior to what she had generally known, her improvement was great. She was not of so ungovernable a temper as Lydia; and, removed from the influence of Lydia's example, she became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid. From the further disadvantage of Lydia's society she was of course carefully kept, and though Mrs. Wickham frequently invited her to come and stay with her, with the promise of balls and young men, her father would never consent to her going.

Mary was the only daughter who remained at home; and she was necessarily drawn from the pursuit of accomplishments by Mrs. Bennet's being quite unable to sit alone. Mary was obliged to mix more with the world, but she could still moralize over every morning visit; and as she was no longer mortified by comparisons between her sisters' beauty and her own, it was suspected by her father that she submitted to the change without much reluctance.

As for Wickham and Lydia, their characters suffered no revolution from the marriage of her sisters. He bore with philosophy the conviction that Elizabeth must now become acquainted with whatever of his ingratitude and falsehood had before been unknown to her; and in spite of every thing, was not wholly without hope that Darcy might yet be prevailed on to make his fortune. The congratulatory letter which Elizabeth received from Lydia on her marriage, explained to her that, by his wife at least, if not by himself, such a hope was cherished. The letter was to this effect:

"MY DEAR LIZZY,

"I wish you joy. If you love Mr. Darcy half as well as I do my dear Wickham, you must be very happy. It is a great comfort to have you so rich, and when you have nothing else to do, I hope you will think of us. I am sure Wickham would like a place at court very much, and I do not think we shall have quite money enough to live upon without some help. Any place would do, of about three or four hundred a year; but however, do not speak to Mr. Darcy about it, if you had rather not.

"Yours, etc."

As it happened that Elizabeth had *much* rather not, she endeavoured in her answer to put an end to every entreaty and expectation of the kind. Such relief, however, as it was in her power to afford, by the practice of what might be called economy in her own private expences, she frequently sent them. It had always been evident to her that such an income as theirs, under the direction of two persons so extravagant in their wants, and heedless of the future, must be very insufficient to their support; and whenever they changed their quarters, either Jane or herself were sure of being applied to for some little assistance towards discharging their bills. Their manner of living, even when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in

the extreme. They were always moving from place to place in quest of a cheap situation, and always spending more than they ought. His affection for her soon sunk into indifference; hers lasted a little longer; and in spite of her youth and her manners, she retained all the claims to reputation which her marriage had given her.

Though Darcy could never receive *him* at Pemberley, yet, for Elizabeth's sake, he assisted him further in his profession. Lydia was occasionally a visitor there, when her husband was gone to enjoy himself in London or Bath; and with the Bingleys they both of them frequently staid so long, that even Bingley's good humour was overcome, and he proceeded so far as to talk of giving them a hint to be gone.

Miss Bingley was very deeply mortified by Darcy's marriage; but as she thought it advisable to retain the right of visiting at Pemberley, she dropt all her resentment; was fonder than ever of Georgiana, almost as attentive to Darcy as heretofore, and paid off every arrear of civility to Elizabeth.

Pemberley was now Georgiana's home; and the attachment of the sisters was exactly what Darcy had hoped to see. They were able to love each other even as well as they intended. Georgiana had the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth; though at first she often listened with an astonishment bordering on alarm at her lively, sportive, manner of talking to her brother. He, who had always inspired in herself a respect which almost overcame her affection, she now saw the object of open pleasantry. Her mind received knowledge which had never before fallen in her way. By Elizabeth's instructions, she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself.

Lady Catherine was extremely indignant on the marriage of her nephew; and as she gave way to all the genuine frankness of her character in her reply to the letter which announced its arrangement, she sent him language so very abusive, especially of Elizabeth, that for some time all intercourse was at an end. But at length, by Elizabeth's persuasion, he was prevailed on to overlook the offence, and seek a reconciliation; and, after a little further resistance on the part of his aunt, her resentment gave way, either to her affection for him, or her curiosity to see how his wife conducted herself; and she condescended to wait on them at Pemberley, in spite of that pollution which its woods had received, not merely from the presence of such a mistress, but the visits of her uncle and aunt from the city.

With the Gardiners, they were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them.

Charles Dickens  
*David Copperfield*

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#### PREFACE TO 1850 EDITION

I do not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from this Book, in the first sensations of having finished it, to refer to it with the composure which this formal heading would seem to require. My interest in it, is so recent and strong; and my mind is so divided between pleasure and regret--pleasure in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many companions--that I am in danger of wearying the reader whom I love, with personal confidences, and private emotions.

Besides which, all that I could say of the Story, to any purpose, I have endeavoured to say in it.

It would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know, how sorrowfully the pen is laid down at the close of a two-years' imaginative task; or how an Author feels as if he were dismissing some portion of himself into the shadowy world, when a crowd of the creatures of his brain are going from him for ever. Yet, I have nothing else to tell; unless, indeed, I were to confess (which might be of less moment still) that no one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I have believed it in the writing.

Instead of looking back, therefore, I will look forward. I cannot close this Volume more agreeably to myself, than with a hopeful glance towards the time when I shall again put forth my two green leaves once a month, and with a faithful remembrance of the genial sun and showers that have fallen on these leaves of David Copperfield, and made me happy.

London, October, 1850.

#### PREFACE TO THE CHARLES DICKENS EDITION

I REMARKED in the original Preface to this Book, that I did not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from it, in the first sensations of having finished it, to refer to it with the composure which this formal heading would seem to require. My interest in it was so recent and strong, and my mind was so divided between pleasure and regret--pleasure in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many companions--that I was in danger of wearying the reader with personal confidences and private emotions.

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the writing.

So true are these avowals at the present day, that I can now only take the reader into one confidence more. Of all my books, I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is

DAVID COPPERFIELD.

1869

THE PERSONAL HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE OF DAVID COPPERFIELD THE YOUNGER

CHAPTER 1. I AM BORN

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.

In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighbourhood who had taken a



lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender, born towards the small hours on a Friday night.

I need say nothing here, on the first head, because nothing can show better than my history whether that prediction was verified or falsified by the result. On the second branch of the question, I will only remark, that unless I ran through that part of my inheritance while I was still a baby, I have not come into it yet. But I do not at all complain of having been kept out of this property; and if anybody else should be in the present enjoyment of it, he is heartily welcome to keep it.

I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas. Whether sea-going people were short of money about that time, or were short of faith and preferred cork jackets, I don't know; all I know is, that there was but one solitary bidding, and that was from an attorney connected with the bill-broking business, who offered two pounds in cash, and the balance in sherry, but declined to be guaranteed from drowning on any higher bargain. Consequently the advertisement was withdrawn at a dead loss--for as to sherry, my poor dear mother's own sherry was in the market then--and ten years afterwards, the caul was put up in a raffle down in our part of the country, to fifty members at half-a-crown a head, the winner to spend five shillings. I was present myself, and I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of myself being disposed of in that way. The caul was won, I recollect, by an old lady with a hand-basket, who, very reluctantly, produced from it the stipulated five shillings, all in halfpence, and twopence halfpenny short--as it took an immense time and a great waste of arithmetic, to endeavour without any effect to prove to her. It is a fact which will

be long remembered as remarkable down there, that she was never drowned, but died triumphantly in bed, at ninety-two. I have understood that it was, to the last, her proudest boast, that she never had been on the water in her life, except upon a bridge; and that over her tea (to which she was extremely partial) she, to the last, expressed her indignation at the impiety of mariners and others, who had the presumption to go 'meandering' about the world. It was in vain to represent to her that some conveniences, tea perhaps included, resulted from this objectionable practice. She always returned, with greater emphasis and with an instinctive knowledge of the strength of her objection, 'Let us have no meandering.'

Not to meander myself, at present, I will go back to my birth.

I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, or 'there by', as they say in Scotland. I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it. There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were--almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes--bolted and locked against it.

An aunt of my father's, and consequently a great-aunt of mine, of whom I shall have more to relate by and by, was the principal magnate of our family. Miss Trotwood, or Miss Betsey, as my poor mother always called her, when she sufficiently overcame her dread of this formidable personage to mention her at all (which was seldom), had been married to a husband younger than herself, who was very handsome, except in the sense of the homely adage, 'handsome is, that handsome does'--for he

was strongly suspected of having beaten Miss Betsey, and even of having once, on a disputed question of supplies, made some hasty but determined arrangements to throw her out of a two pair of stairs' window. These evidences of an incompatibility of temper induced Miss Betsey to pay him off, and effect a separation by mutual consent. He went to India with his capital, and there, according to a wild legend in our family, he was once seen riding on an elephant, in company with a Baboon; but I think it must have been a Baboo--or a Begum. Anyhow, from India tidings of his death reached home, within ten years. How they affected my aunt, nobody knew; for immediately upon the separation, she took her maiden name again, bought a cottage in a hamlet on the sea-coast a long way off, established herself there as a single woman with one servant, and was understood to live secluded, ever afterwards, in an inflexible retirement.

My father had once been a favourite of hers, I believe; but she was mortally affronted by his marriage, on the ground that my mother was 'a wax doll'. She had never seen my mother, but she knew her to be not yet twenty. My father and Miss Betsey never met again. He was double my mother's age when he married, and of but a delicate constitution. He died a year afterwards, and, as I have said, six months before I came into the world.

This was the state of matters, on the afternoon of, what I may be excused for calling, that eventful and important Friday. I can make no claim therefore to have known, at that time, how matters stood; or to have any remembrance, founded on the evidence of my own senses, of what follows.

My mother was sitting by the fire, but poorly in health, and very low in spirits, looking at it through her tears, and desponding heavily about herself and the fatherless little stranger, who was already welcomed by some grosses of prophetic pins, in a drawer upstairs, to a world not at

all excited on the subject of his arrival; my mother, I say, was sitting by the fire, that bright, windy March afternoon, very timid and sad, and very doubtful of ever coming alive out of the trial that was before her, when, lifting her eyes as she dried them, to the window opposite, she saw a strange lady coming up the garden.

MY mother had a sure foreboding at the second glance, that it was Miss Betsey. The setting sun was glowing on the strange lady, over the garden-fence, and she came walking up to the door with a fell rigidity of figure and composure of countenance that could have belonged to nobody else.

When she reached the house, she gave another proof of her identity. My father had often hinted that she seldom conducted herself like any ordinary Christian; and now, instead of ringing the bell, she came and looked in at that identical window, pressing the end of her nose against the glass to that extent, that my poor dear mother used to say it became perfectly flat and white in a moment.

She gave my mother such a turn, that I have always been convinced I am indebted to Miss Betsey for having been born on a Friday.

My mother had left her chair in her agitation, and gone behind it in the corner. Miss Betsey, looking round the room, slowly and inquiringly, began on the other side, and carried her eyes on, like a Saracen's Head in a Dutch clock, until they reached my mother. Then she made a frown and a gesture to my mother, like one who was accustomed to be obeyed, to come and open the door. My mother went.

'Mrs. David Copperfield, I think,' said Miss Betsey; the emphasis referring, perhaps, to my mother's mourning weeds, and her condition.

'Yes,' said my mother, faintly.

'Miss Trotwood,' said the visitor. 'You have heard of her, I dare say?'

My mother answered she had had that pleasure. And she had a disagreeable consciousness of not appearing to imply that it had been an overpowering pleasure.

'Now you see her,' said Miss Betsey. My mother bent her head, and begged her to walk in.

They went into the parlour my mother had come from, the fire in the best room on the other side of the passage not being lighted--not having been lighted, indeed, since my father's funeral; and when they were both seated, and Miss Betsey said nothing, my mother, after vainly trying to restrain herself, began to cry. 'Oh tut, tut, tut!' said Miss Betsey, in a hurry. 'Don't do that! Come, come!'

My mother couldn't help it notwithstanding, so she cried until she had had her cry out.

'Take off your cap, child,' said Miss Betsey, 'and let me see you.'

My mother was too much afraid of her to refuse compliance with this odd request, if she had any disposition to do so. Therefore she did as she was told, and did it with such nervous hands that her hair (which was luxuriant and beautiful) fell all about her face.

'Why, bless my heart!' exclaimed Miss Betsey. 'You are a very Baby!'

My mother was, no doubt, unusually youthful in appearance even for her years; she hung her head, as if it were her fault, poor thing, and said, sobbing, that indeed she was afraid she was but a childish widow, and would be but a childish mother if she lived. In a short pause which

ensued, she had a fancy that she felt Miss Betsey touch her hair, and that with no ungentle hand; but, looking at her, in her timid hope, she found that lady sitting with the skirt of her dress tucked up, her hands folded on one knee, and her feet upon the fender, frowning at the fire.

'In the name of Heaven,' said Miss Betsey, suddenly, 'why Rookery?'

'Do you mean the house, ma'am?' asked my mother.

'Why Rookery?' said Miss Betsey. 'Cookery would have been more to the purpose, if you had had any practical ideas of life, either of you.'

'The name was Mr. Copperfield's choice,' returned my mother. 'When he bought the house, he liked to think that there were rooks about it.'

The evening wind made such a disturbance just now, among some tall old elm-trees at the bottom of the garden, that neither my mother nor Miss Betsey could forbear glancing that way. As the elms bent to one another, like giants who were whispering secrets, and after a few seconds of such repose, fell into a violent flurry, tossing their wild arms about, as if their late confidences were really too wicked for their peace of mind, some weatherbeaten ragged old rooks'-nests, burdening their higher branches, swung like wrecks upon a stormy sea.

'Where are the birds?' asked Miss Betsey.

'The--?' My mother had been thinking of something else.

'The rooks--what has become of them?' asked Miss Betsey.

'There have not been any since we have lived here,' said my mother. 'We thought--Mr. Copperfield thought--it was quite a large rookery; but the nests were very old ones, and the birds have deserted them a long

while.'

'David Copperfield all over!' cried Miss Betsey. 'David Copperfield from head to foot! Calls a house a rookery when there's not a rook near it, and takes the birds on trust, because he sees the nests!'

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned my mother, 'is dead, and if you dare to speak unkindly of him to me--'

My poor dear mother, I suppose, had some momentary intention of committing an assault and battery upon my aunt, who could easily have settled her with one hand, even if my mother had been in far better training for such an encounter than she was that evening. But it passed with the action of rising from her chair; and she sat down again very meekly, and fainted.

When she came to herself, or when Miss Betsey had restored her, whichever it was, she found the latter standing at the window. The twilight was by this time shading down into darkness; and dimly as they saw each other, they could not have done that without the aid of the fire.

'Well?' said Miss Betsey, coming back to her chair, as if she had only been taking a casual look at the prospect; 'and when do you expect--'

'I am all in a tremble,' faltered my mother. 'I don't know what's the matter. I shall die, I am sure!'

'No, no, no,' said Miss Betsey. 'Have some tea.'

'Oh dear me, dear me, do you think it will do me any good?' cried my mother in a helpless manner.

'Of course it will,' said Miss Betsey. 'It's nothing but fancy. What do you call your girl?'

'I don't know that it will be a girl, yet, ma'am,' said my mother innocently.

'Bless the Baby!' exclaimed Miss Betsey, unconsciously quoting the second sentiment of the pincushion in the drawer upstairs, but applying it to my mother instead of me, 'I don't mean that. I mean your servant-girl.'

'Peggotty,' said my mother.

'Peggotty!' repeated Miss Betsey, with some indignation. 'Do you mean to say, child, that any human being has gone into a Christian church, and got herself named Peggotty?' 'It's her surname,' said my mother, faintly. 'Mr. Copperfield called her by it, because her Christian name was the same as mine.'

'Here! Peggotty!' cried Miss Betsey, opening the parlour door. 'Tea. Your mistress is a little unwell. Don't dawdle.'

Having issued this mandate with as much potentiality as if she had been a recognized authority in the house ever since it had been a house, and having looked out to confront the amazed Peggotty coming along the passage with a candle at the sound of a strange voice, Miss Betsey shut the door again, and sat down as before: with her feet on the fender, the skirt of her dress tucked up, and her hands folded on one knee.

'You were speaking about its being a girl,' said Miss Betsey. 'I have no doubt it will be a girl. I have a presentiment that it must be a girl. Now child, from the moment of the birth of this girl--'



'Perhaps boy,' my mother took the liberty of putting in.

'I tell you I have a presentiment that it must be a girl,' returned Miss Betsey. 'Don't contradict. From the moment of this girl's birth, child, I intend to be her friend. I intend to be her godmother, and I beg you'll call her Betsey Trotwood Copperfield. There must be no mistakes in life with THIS Betsey Trotwood. There must be no trifling with HER affections, poor dear. She must be well brought up, and well guarded from reposing any foolish confidences where they are not deserved. I must make that MY care.'

There was a twitch of Miss Betsey's head, after each of these sentences, as if her own old wrongs were working within her, and she repressed any plainer reference to them by strong constraint. So my mother suspected, at least, as she observed her by the low glimmer of the fire: too much scared by Miss Betsey, too uneasy in herself, and too subdued and bewildered altogether, to observe anything very clearly, or to know what to say.

'And was David good to you, child?' asked Miss Betsey, when she had been silent for a little while, and these motions of her head had gradually ceased. 'Were you comfortable together?'

'We were very happy,' said my mother. 'Mr. Copperfield was only too good to me.'

'What, he spoilt you, I suppose?' returned Miss Betsey.

'For being quite alone and dependent on myself in this rough world again, yes, I fear he did indeed,' sobbed my mother.

'Well! Don't cry!' said Miss Betsey. 'You were not equally matched, child--if any two people can be equally matched--and so I asked the

question. You were an orphan, weren't you?' 'Yes.'

'And a governess?'

'I was nursery-governess in a family where Mr. Copperfield came to visit. Mr. Copperfield was very kind to me, and took a great deal of notice of me, and paid me a good deal of attention, and at last proposed to me. And I accepted him. And so we were married,' said my mother simply.

'Ha! Poor Baby!' mused Miss Betsey, with her frown still bent upon the fire. 'Do you know anything?'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' faltered my mother.

'About keeping house, for instance,' said Miss Betsey.

'Not much, I fear,' returned my mother. 'Not so much as I could wish. But Mr. Copperfield was teaching me--'

('Much he knew about it himself!') said Miss Betsey in a parenthesis. --'And I hope I should have improved, being very anxious to learn, and he very patient to teach me, if the great misfortune of his death'--my mother broke down again here, and could get no farther.

'Well, well!' said Miss Betsey. --'I kept my housekeeping-book regularly, and balanced it with Mr. Copperfield every night,' cried my mother in another burst of distress, and breaking down again.

'Well, well!' said Miss Betsey. 'Don't cry any more.' --'And I am sure we never had a word of difference respecting it, except when Mr. Copperfield objected to my threes and fives being too much like each other, or to my putting curly tails to my sevens and nines,' resumed my

mother in another burst, and breaking down again.

'You'll make yourself ill,' said Miss Betsey, 'and you know that will not be good either for you or for my god-daughter. Come! You mustn't do it!'

This argument had some share in quieting my mother, though her increasing indisposition had a larger one. There was an interval of silence, only broken by Miss Betsey's occasionally ejaculating 'Ha!' as she sat with her feet upon the fender.

'David had bought an annuity for himself with his money, I know,' said she, by and by. 'What did he do for you?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said my mother, answering with some difficulty, 'was so considerate and good as to secure the reversion of a part of it to me.'

'How much?' asked Miss Betsey.

'A hundred and five pounds a year,' said my mother.

'He might have done worse,' said my aunt.

The word was appropriate to the moment. My mother was so much worse that Peggotty, coming in with the teaboard and candles, and seeing at a glance how ill she was,--as Miss Betsey might have done sooner if there had been light enough,--conveyed her upstairs to her own room with all speed; and immediately dispatched Ham Peggotty, her nephew, who had been for some days past secreted in the house, unknown to my mother, as a special messenger in case of emergency, to fetch the nurse and doctor.

Those allied powers were considerably astonished, when they arrived

within a few minutes of each other, to find an unknown lady of portentous appearance, sitting before the fire, with her bonnet tied over her left arm, stopping her ears with jewellers' cotton. Peggotty knowing nothing about her, and my mother saying nothing about her, she was quite a mystery in the parlour; and the fact of her having a magazine of jewellers' cotton in her pocket, and sticking the article in her ears in that way, did not detract from the solemnity of her presence.

The doctor having been upstairs and come down again, and having satisfied himself, I suppose, that there was a probability of this unknown lady and himself having to sit there, face to face, for some hours, laid himself out to be polite and social. He was the meekest of his sex, the mildest of little men. He sidled in and out of a room, to take up the less space. He walked as softly as the Ghost in Hamlet, and more slowly. He carried his head on one side, partly in modest depreciation of himself, partly in modest propitiation of everybody else. It is nothing to say that he hadn't a word to throw at a dog. He couldn't have thrown a word at a mad dog. He might have offered him one gently, or half a one, or a fragment of one; for he spoke as slowly as he walked; but he wouldn't have been rude to him, and he couldn't have been quick with him, for any earthly consideration.

Mr. Chillip, looking mildly at my aunt with his head on one side, and making her a little bow, said, in allusion to the jewellers' cotton, as he softly touched his left ear:

'Some local irritation, ma'am?'

'What!' replied my aunt, pulling the cotton out of one ear like a cork.

Mr. Chillip was so alarmed by her abruptness--as he told my mother afterwards--that it was a mercy he didn't lose his presence of mind. But

he repeated sweetly:

'Some local irritation, ma'am?'

'Nonsense!' replied my aunt, and corked herself again, at one blow.

Mr. Chillip could do nothing after this, but sit and look at her feebly, as she sat and looked at the fire, until he was called upstairs again. After some quarter of an hour's absence, he returned.

'Well?' said my aunt, taking the cotton out of the ear nearest to him.

'Well, ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'we are--we are progressing slowly, ma'am.'

'Ba--a--ah!' said my aunt, with a perfect shake on the contemptuous interjection. And corked herself as before.

Really--really--as Mr. Chillip told my mother, he was almost shocked; speaking in a professional point of view alone, he was almost shocked. But he sat and looked at her, notwithstanding, for nearly two hours, as she sat looking at the fire, until he was again called out. After another absence, he again returned.

'Well?' said my aunt, taking out the cotton on that side again.

'Well, ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'we are--we are progressing slowly, ma'am.'

'Ya--a--ah!' said my aunt. With such a snarl at him, that Mr. Chillip absolutely could not bear it. It was really calculated to break his spirit, he said afterwards. He preferred to go and sit upon the stairs, in the dark and a strong draught, until he was again sent for.

Ham Peggotty, who went to the national school, and was a very dragon at his catechism, and who may therefore be regarded as a credible witness, reported next day, that happening to peep in at the parlour-door an hour after this, he was instantly descried by Miss Betsey, then walking to and fro in a state of agitation, and pounced upon before he could make his escape. That there were now occasional sounds of feet and voices overhead which he inferred the cotton did not exclude, from the circumstance of his evidently being clutched by the lady as a victim on whom to expend her superabundant agitation when the sounds were loudest. That, marching him constantly up and down by the collar (as if he had been taking too much laudanum), she, at those times, shook him, rumbled his hair, made light of his linen, stopped his ears as if she confounded them with her own, and otherwise tousled and maltreated him. This was in part confirmed by his aunt, who saw him at half past twelve o'clock, soon after his release, and affirmed that he was then as red as I was.

The mild Mr. Chillip could not possibly bear malice at such a time, if at any time. He sidled into the parlour as soon as he was at liberty, and said to my aunt in his meekest manner:

'Well, ma'am, I am happy to congratulate you.'

'What upon?' said my aunt, sharply.

Mr. Chillip was fluttered again, by the extreme severity of my aunt's manner; so he made her a little bow and gave her a little smile, to mollify her.

'Mercy on the man, what's he doing!' cried my aunt, impatiently. 'Can't he speak?'

'Be calm, my dear ma'am,' said Mr. Chillip, in his softest accents.

'There is no longer any occasion for uneasiness, ma'am. Be calm.'

It has since been considered almost a miracle that my aunt didn't shake him, and shake what he had to say, out of him. She only shook her own head at him, but in a way that made him quail.

'Well, ma'am,' resumed Mr. Chillip, as soon as he had courage, 'I am happy to congratulate you. All is now over, ma'am, and well over.'

During the five minutes or so that Mr. Chillip devoted to the delivery of this oration, my aunt eyed him narrowly.

'How is she?' said my aunt, folding her arms with her bonnet still tied on one of them.

'Well, ma'am, she will soon be quite comfortable, I hope,' returned Mr. Chillip. 'Quite as comfortable as we can expect a young mother to be, under these melancholy domestic circumstances. There cannot be any objection to your seeing her presently, ma'am. It may do her good.'

'And SHE. How is SHE?' said my aunt, sharply.

Mr. Chillip laid his head a little more on one side, and looked at my aunt like an amiable bird.

'The baby,' said my aunt. 'How is she?'

'Ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'I apprehended you had known. It's a boy.'

My aunt said never a word, but took her bonnet by the strings, in the manner of a sling, aimed a blow at Mr. Chillip's head with it, put it on

bent, walked out, and never came back. She vanished like a discontented fairy; or like one of those supernatural beings, whom it was popularly supposed I was entitled to see; and never came back any more.

No. I lay in my basket, and my mother lay in her bed; but Betsey Trotwood Copperfield was for ever in the land of dreams and shadows, the tremendous region whence I had so lately travelled; and the light upon the window of our room shone out upon the earthly bourne of all such travellers, and the mound above the ashes and the dust that once was he, without whom I had never been.

## CHAPTER 2. I OBSERVE

The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty with no shape at all, and eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples.

I believe I can remember these two at a little distance apart, dwarfed to my sight by stooping down or kneeling on the floor, and I going unsteadily from the one to the other. I have an impression on my mind which I cannot distinguish from actual remembrance, of the touch of Peggotty's forefinger as she used to hold it out to me, and of its being roughened by needlework, like a pocket nutmeg-grater.

This may be fancy, though I think the memory of most of us can go farther back into such times than many of us suppose; just as I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite



wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown men who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it; the rather, as I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness, and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood.

I might have a misgiving that I am 'meandering' in stopping to say this, but that it brings me to remark that I build these conclusions, in part upon my own experience of myself; and if it should appear from anything I may set down in this narrative that I was a child of close observation, or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood, I undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics.

Looking back, as I was saying, into the blank of my infancy, the first objects I can remember as standing out by themselves from a confusion of things, are my mother and Peggotty. What else do I remember? Let me see.

There comes out of the cloud, our house--not new to me, but quite familiar, in its earliest remembrance. On the ground-floor is Peggotty's kitchen, opening into a back yard; with a pigeon-house on a pole, in the centre, without any pigeons in it; a great dog-kennel in a corner, without any dog; and a quantity of fowls that look terribly tall to me, walking about, in a menacing and ferocious manner. There is one cock who gets upon a post to crow, and seems to take particular notice of me as I look at him through the kitchen window, who makes me shiver, he is so fierce. Of the geese outside the side-gate who come waddling after me with their long necks stretched out when I go that way, I dream at night: as a man environed by wild beasts might dream of lions.

Here is a long passage--what an enormous perspective I make of it!--leading from Peggotty's kitchen to the front door. A dark

store-room opens out of it, and that is a place to be run past at night; for I don't know what may be among those tubs and jars and old tea-chests, when there is nobody in there with a dimly-burning light, letting a mouldy air come out of the door, in which there is the smell of soap, pickles, pepper, candles, and coffee, all at one whiff. Then there are the two parlours: the parlour in which we sit of an evening, my mother and I and Peggotty--for Peggotty is quite our companion, when her work is done and we are alone--and the best parlour where we sit on a Sunday; grandly, but not so comfortably. There is something of a doleful air about that room to me, for Peggotty has told me--I don't know when, but apparently ages ago--about my father's funeral, and the company having their black cloaks put on. One Sunday night my mother reads to Peggotty and me in there, how Lazarus was raised up from the dead. And I am so frightened that they are afterwards obliged to take me out of bed, and show me the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest, below the solemn moon.

There is nothing half so green that I know anywhere, as the grass of that churchyard; nothing half so shady as its trees; nothing half so quiet as its tombstones. The sheep are feeding there, when I kneel up, early in the morning, in my little bed in a closet within my mother's room, to look out at it; and I see the red light shining on the sun-dial, and think within myself, 'Is the sun-dial glad, I wonder, that it can tell the time again?'

Here is our pew in the church. What a high-backed pew! With a window near it, out of which our house can be seen, and IS seen many times during the morning's service, by Peggotty, who likes to make herself as sure as she can that it's not being robbed, or is not in flames. But though Peggotty's eye wanders, she is much offended if mine does, and frowns to me, as I stand upon the seat, that I am to look at the clergyman. But I can't always look at him--I know him without that white thing on, and I am afraid of his wondering why I stare so, and perhaps

stopping the service to inquire--and what am I to do? It's a dreadful thing to gape, but I must do something. I look at my mother, but she pretends not to see me. I look at a boy in the aisle, and he makes faces at me. I look at the sunlight coming in at the open door through the porch, and there I see a stray sheep--I don't mean a sinner, but mutton--half making up his mind to come into the church. I feel that if I looked at him any longer, I might be tempted to say something out loud; and what would become of me then! I look up at the monumental tablets on the wall, and try to think of Mr. Bodgers late of this parish, and what the feelings of Mrs. Bodgers must have been, when affliction sore, long time Mr. Bodgers bore, and physicians were in vain. I wonder whether they called in Mr. Chillip, and he was in vain; and if so, how he likes to be reminded of it once a week. I look from Mr. Chillip, in his Sunday neckcloth, to the pulpit; and think what a good place it would be to play in, and what a castle it would make, with another boy coming up the stairs to attack it, and having the velvet cushion with the tassels thrown down on his head. In time my eyes gradually shut up; and, from seeming to hear the clergyman singing a drowsy song in the heat, I hear nothing, until I fall off the seat with a crash, and am taken out, more dead than alive, by Peggotty.

And now I see the outside of our house, with the latticed bedroom-windows standing open to let in the sweet-smelling air, and the ragged old rooks'-nests still dangling in the elm-trees at the bottom of the front garden. Now I am in the garden at the back, beyond the yard where the empty pigeon-house and dog-kennel are--a very preserve of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has ever been since, in any other garden, and where my mother gathers some in a basket, while I stand by, bolting furtive gooseberries, and trying to look unmoved. A great wind rises, and the summer is gone in a moment. We are playing in the winter twilight, dancing about the parlour. When my mother is out of breath and rests

herself in an elbow-chair, I watch her winding her bright curls round her fingers, and straitening her waist, and nobody knows better than I do that she likes to look so well, and is proud of being so pretty.

That is among my very earliest impressions. That, and a sense that we were both a little afraid of Peggotty, and submitted ourselves in most things to her direction, were among the first opinions--if they may be so called--that I ever derived from what I saw.

Peggotty and I were sitting one night by the parlour fire, alone. I had been reading to Peggotty about crocodiles. I must have read very perspicuously, or the poor soul must have been deeply interested, for I remember she had a cloudy impression, after I had done, that they were a sort of vegetable. I was tired of reading, and dead sleepy; but having leave, as a high treat, to sit up until my mother came home from spending the evening at a neighbour's, I would rather have died upon my post (of course) than have gone to bed. I had reached that stage of sleepiness when Peggotty seemed to swell and grow immensely large. I propped my eyelids open with my two forefingers, and looked perseveringly at her as she sat at work; at the little bit of wax-candle she kept for her thread--how old it looked, being so wrinkled in all directions!--at the little house with a thatched roof, where the yard-measure lived; at her work-box with a sliding lid, with a view of St. Paul's Cathedral (with a pink dome) painted on the top; at the brass thimble on her finger; at herself, whom I thought lovely. I felt so sleepy, that I knew if I lost sight of anything for a moment, I was gone.

'Peggotty,' says I, suddenly, 'were you ever married?'

'Lord, Master Davy,' replied Peggotty. 'What's put marriage in your head?'

She answered with such a start, that it quite awoke me. And then she stopped in her work, and looked at me, with her needle drawn out to its thread's length.

'But WERE you ever married, Peggotty?' says I. 'You are a very handsome woman, an't you?'

I thought her in a different style from my mother, certainly; but of another school of beauty, I considered her a perfect example. There was a red velvet footstool in the best parlour, on which my mother had painted a nosegay. The ground-work of that stool, and Peggotty's complexion appeared to me to be one and the same thing. The stool was smooth, and Peggotty was rough, but that made no difference.

'Me handsome, Davy!' said Peggotty. 'Lawk, no, my dear! But what put marriage in your head?'

'I don't know!--You mustn't marry more than one person at a time, may you, Peggotty?'

'Certainly not,' says Peggotty, with the promptest decision.

'But if you marry a person, and the person dies, why then you may marry another person, mayn't you, Peggotty?'

'YOU MAY,' says Peggotty, 'if you choose, my dear. That's a matter of opinion.'

'But what is your opinion, Peggotty?' said I.

I asked her, and looked curiously at her, because she looked so curiously at me.

'My opinion is,' said Peggotty, taking her eyes from me, after a little indecision and going on with her work, 'that I never was married myself, Master Davy, and that I don't expect to be. That's all I know about the subject.'

'You an't cross, I suppose, Peggotty, are you?' said I, after sitting quiet for a minute.

I really thought she was, she had been so short with me; but I was quite mistaken: for she laid aside her work (which was a stocking of her own), and opening her arms wide, took my curly head within them, and gave it a good squeeze. I know it was a good squeeze, because, being very plump, whenever she made any little exertion after she was dressed, some of the buttons on the back of her gown flew off. And I recollect two bursting to the opposite side of the parlour, while she was hugging me.

'Now let me hear some more about the Crorkindills,' said Peggotty, who was not quite right in the name yet, 'for I an't heard half enough.'

I couldn't quite understand why Peggotty looked so queer, or why she was so ready to go back to the crocodiles. However, we returned to those monsters, with fresh wakefulness on my part, and we left their eggs in the sand for the sun to hatch; and we ran away from them, and baffled them by constantly turning, which they were unable to do quickly, on account of their unwieldy make; and we went into the water after them, as natives, and put sharp pieces of timber down their throats; and in short we ran the whole crocodile gauntlet. I did, at least; but I had my doubts of Peggotty, who was thoughtfully sticking her needle into various parts of her face and arms, all the time.

We had exhausted the crocodiles, and begun with the alligators, when the garden-bell rang. We went out to the door; and there was my mother, looking unusually pretty, I thought, and with her a gentleman with

beautiful black hair and whiskers, who had walked home with us from church last Sunday.

As my mother stooped down on the threshold to take me in her arms and kiss me, the gentleman said I was a more highly privileged little fellow than a monarch--or something like that; for my later understanding comes, I am sensible, to my aid here.

'What does that mean?' I asked him, over her shoulder.

He patted me on the head; but somehow, I didn't like him or his deep voice, and I was jealous that his hand should touch my mother's in touching me--which it did. I put it away, as well as I could.

'Oh, Davy!' remonstrated my mother.

'Dear boy!' said the gentleman. 'I cannot wonder at his devotion!'

I never saw such a beautiful colour on my mother's face before. She gently chid me for being rude; and, keeping me close to her shawl, turned to thank the gentleman for taking so much trouble as to bring her home. She put out her hand to him as she spoke, and, as he met it with his own, she glanced, I thought, at me.

'Let us say "good night", my fine boy,' said the gentleman, when he had bent his head--I saw him!--over my mother's little glove.

'Good night!' said I.

'Come! Let us be the best friends in the world!' said the gentleman, laughing. 'Shake hands!'

My right hand was in my mother's left, so I gave him the other.

'Why, that's the Wrong hand, Davy!' laughed the gentleman.

MY mother drew my right hand forward, but I was resolved, for my former reason, not to give it him, and I did not. I gave him the other, and he shook it heartily, and said I was a brave fellow, and went away.

At this minute I see him turn round in the garden, and give us a last look with his ill-omened black eyes, before the door was shut.

Peggotty, who had not said a word or moved a finger, secured the fastenings instantly, and we all went into the parlour. My mother, contrary to her usual habit, instead of coming to the elbow-chair by the fire, remained at the other end of the room, and sat singing to herself. -- 'Hope you have had a pleasant evening, ma'am,' said Peggotty, standing as stiff as a barrel in the centre of the room, with a candlestick in her hand.

'Much obliged to you, Peggotty,' returned my mother, in a cheerful voice, 'I have had a VERY pleasant evening.'

'A stranger or so makes an agreeable change,' suggested Peggotty.

'A very agreeable change, indeed,' returned my mother.

Peggotty continuing to stand motionless in the middle of the room, and my mother resuming her singing, I fell asleep, though I was not so sound asleep but that I could hear voices, without hearing what they said. When I half awoke from this uncomfortable doze, I found Peggotty and my mother both in tears, and both talking.

'Not such a one as this, Mr. Copperfield wouldn't have liked,' said Peggotty. 'That I say, and that I swear!'



'Good Heavens!' cried my mother, 'you'll drive me mad! Was ever any poor girl so ill-used by her servants as I am! Why do I do myself the injustice of calling myself a girl? Have I never been married, Peggotty?'

'God knows you have, ma'am,' returned Peggotty. 'Then, how can you dare,' said my mother--'you know I don't mean how can you dare, Peggotty, but how can you have the heart--to make me so uncomfortable and say such bitter things to me, when you are well aware that I haven't, out of this place, a single friend to turn to?'

'The more's the reason,' returned Peggotty, 'for saying that it won't do. No! That it won't do. No! No price could make it do. No!''--I thought Peggotty would have thrown the candlestick away, she was so emphatic with it.

'How can you be so aggravating,' said my mother, shedding more tears than before, 'as to talk in such an unjust manner! How can you go on as if it was all settled and arranged, Peggotty, when I tell you over and over again, you cruel thing, that beyond the commonest civilities nothing has passed! You talk of admiration. What am I to do? If people are so silly as to indulge the sentiment, is it my fault? What am I to do, I ask you? Would you wish me to shave my head and black my face, or disfigure myself with a burn, or a scald, or something of that sort? I dare say you would, Peggotty. I dare say you'd quite enjoy it.'

Peggotty seemed to take this aspersion very much to heart, I thought.

'And my dear boy,' cried my mother, coming to the elbow-chair in which I was, and caressing me, 'my own little Davy! Is it to be hinted to me that I am wanting in affection for my precious treasure, the dearest little fellow that ever was!'

'Nobody never went and hinted no such a thing,' said Peggotty.

'You did, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'You know you did. What else was it possible to infer from what you said, you unkind creature, when you know as well as I do, that on his account only last quarter I wouldn't buy myself a new parasol, though that old green one is frayed the whole way up, and the fringe is perfectly mangy? You know it is, Peggotty. You can't deny it.' Then, turning affectionately to me, with her cheek against mine, 'Am I a naughty mama to you, Davy? Am I a nasty, cruel, selfish, bad mama? Say I am, my child; say "yes", dear boy, and Peggotty will love you; and Peggotty's love is a great deal better than mine, Davy. I don't love you at all, do I?'

At this, we all fell a-crying together. I think I was the loudest of the party, but I am sure we were all sincere about it. I was quite heart-broken myself, and am afraid that in the first transports of wounded tenderness I called Peggotty a 'Beast'. That honest creature was in deep affliction, I remember, and must have become quite buttonless on the occasion; for a little volley of those explosives went off, when, after having made it up with my mother, she kneeled down by the elbow-chair, and made it up with me.

We went to bed greatly dejected. My sobs kept waking me, for a long time; and when one very strong sob quite hoisted me up in bed, I found my mother sitting on the coverlet, and leaning over me. I fell asleep in her arms, after that, and slept soundly.

Whether it was the following Sunday when I saw the gentleman again, or whether there was any greater lapse of time before he reappeared, I cannot recall. I don't profess to be clear about dates. But there he was, in church, and he walked home with us afterwards. He came in, too, to look at a famous geranium we had, in the parlour-window. It did not

appear to me that he took much notice of it, but before he went he asked my mother to give him a bit of the blossom. She begged him to choose it for himself, but he refused to do that--I could not understand why--so she plucked it for him, and gave it into his hand. He said he would never, never part with it any more; and I thought he must be quite a fool not to know that it would fall to pieces in a day or two.

Peggotty began to be less with us, of an evening, than she had always been. My mother deferred to her very much--more than usual, it occurred to me--and we were all three excellent friends; still we were different from what we used to be, and were not so comfortable among ourselves. Sometimes I fancied that Peggotty perhaps objected to my mother's wearing all the pretty dresses she had in her drawers, or to her going so often to visit at that neighbour's; but I couldn't, to my satisfaction, make out how it was.

Gradually, I became used to seeing the gentleman with the black whiskers. I liked him no better than at first, and had the same uneasy jealousy of him; but if I had any reason for it beyond a child's instinctive dislike, and a general idea that Peggotty and I could make much of my mother without any help, it certainly was not THE reason that I might have found if I had been older. No such thing came into my mind, or near it. I could observe, in little pieces, as it were; but as to making a net of a number of these pieces, and catching anybody in it, that was, as yet, beyond me.

One autumn morning I was with my mother in the front garden, when Mr. Murdstone--I knew him by that name now--came by, on horseback. He reined up his horse to salute my mother, and said he was going to Lowestoft to see some friends who were there with a yacht, and merrily proposed to take me on the saddle before him if I would like the ride.

The air was so clear and pleasant, and the horse seemed to like the

idea of the ride so much himself, as he stood snorting and pawing at the garden-gate, that I had a great desire to go. So I was sent upstairs to Peggotty to be made spruce; and in the meantime Mr. Murdstone dismounted, and, with his horse's bridle drawn over his arm, walked slowly up and down on the outer side of the sweetbriar fence, while my mother walked slowly up and down on the inner to keep him company. I recollect Peggotty and I peeping out at them from my little window; I recollect how closely they seemed to be examining the sweetbriar between them, as they strolled along; and how, from being in a perfectly angelic temper, Peggotty turned cross in a moment, and brushed my hair the wrong way, excessively hard.

Mr. Murdstone and I were soon off, and trotting along on the green turf by the side of the road. He held me quite easily with one arm, and I don't think I was restless usually; but I could not make up my mind to sit in front of him without turning my head sometimes, and looking up in his face. He had that kind of shallow black eye--I want a better word to express an eye that has no depth in it to be looked into--which, when it is abstracted, seems from some peculiarity of light to be disfigured, for a moment at a time, by a cast. Several times when I glanced at him, I observed that appearance with a sort of awe, and wondered what he was thinking about so closely. His hair and whiskers were blacker and thicker, looked at so near, than even I had given them credit for being. A squareness about the lower part of his face, and the dotted indication of the strong black beard he shaved close every day, reminded me of the wax-work that had travelled into our neighbourhood some half-a-year before. This, his regular eyebrows, and the rich white, and black, and brown, of his complexion--confound his complexion, and his memory!--made me think him, in spite of my misgivings, a very handsome man. I have no doubt that my poor dear mother thought him so too.

We went to an hotel by the sea, where two gentlemen were smoking cigars in a room by themselves. Each of them was lying on at least four chairs,

and had a large rough jacket on. In a corner was a heap of coats and boat-cloaks, and a flag, all bundled up together.

They both rolled on to their feet in an untidy sort of manner, when we came in, and said, 'Halloa, Murdstone! We thought you were dead!'

'Not yet,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'And who's this shaver?' said one of the gentlemen, taking hold of me.

'That's Davy,' returned Mr. Murdstone.

'Davy who?' said the gentleman. 'Jones?'

'Copperfield,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'What! Bewitching Mrs. Copperfield's encumbrance?' cried the gentleman.

'The pretty little widow?'

'Quinion,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'take care, if you please. Somebody's sharp.'

'Who is?' asked the gentleman, laughing. I looked up, quickly; being curious to know.

'Only Brooks of Sheffield,' said Mr. Murdstone.

I was quite relieved to find that it was only Brooks of Sheffield; for, at first, I really thought it was I.

There seemed to be something very comical in the reputation of Mr. Brooks of Sheffield, for both the gentlemen laughed heartily when he was mentioned, and Mr. Murdstone was a good deal amused also. After some

laughing, the gentleman whom he had called Quinion, said:

'And what is the opinion of Brooks of Sheffield, in reference to the projected business?'

'Why, I don't know that Brooks understands much about it at present,' replied Mr. Murdstone; 'but he is not generally favourable, I believe.'

There was more laughter at this, and Mr. Quinion said he would ring the bell for some sherry in which to drink to Brooks. This he did; and when the wine came, he made me have a little, with a biscuit, and, before I drank it, stand up and say, 'Confusion to Brooks of Sheffield!' The toast was received with great applause, and such hearty laughter that it made me laugh too; at which they laughed the more. In short, we quite enjoyed ourselves.

We walked about on the cliff after that, and sat on the grass, and looked at things through a telescope--I could make out nothing myself when it was put to my eye, but I pretended I could--and then we came back to the hotel to an early dinner. All the time we were out, the two gentlemen smoked incessantly--which, I thought, if I might judge from the smell of their rough coats, they must have been doing, ever since the coats had first come home from the tailor's. I must not forget that we went on board the yacht, where they all three descended into the cabin, and were busy with some papers. I saw them quite hard at work, when I looked down through the open skylight. They left me, during this time, with a very nice man with a very large head of red hair and a very small shiny hat upon it, who had got a cross-barred shirt or waistcoat on, with 'Skylark' in capital letters across the chest. I thought it was his name; and that as he lived on board ship and hadn't a street door to put his name on, he put it there instead; but when I called him Mr. Skylark, he said it meant the vessel.

I observed all day that Mr. Murdstone was graver and steadier than the two gentlemen. They were very gay and careless. They joked freely with one another, but seldom with him. It appeared to me that he was more clever and cold than they were, and that they regarded him with something of my own feeling. I remarked that, once or twice when Mr. Quinion was talking, he looked at Mr. Murdstone sideways, as if to make sure of his not being displeased; and that once when Mr. Passnidge (the other gentleman) was in high spirits, he trod upon his foot, and gave him a secret caution with his eyes, to observe Mr. Murdstone, who was sitting stern and silent. Nor do I recollect that Mr. Murdstone laughed at all that day, except at the Sheffield joke--and that, by the by, was his own.

We went home early in the evening. It was a very fine evening, and my mother and he had another stroll by the sweetbriar, while I was sent in to get my tea. When he was gone, my mother asked me all about the day I had had, and what they had said and done. I mentioned what they had said about her, and she laughed, and told me they were impudent fellows who talked nonsense--but I knew it pleased her. I knew it quite as well as I know it now. I took the opportunity of asking if she was at all acquainted with Mr. Brooks of Sheffield, but she answered No, only she supposed he must be a manufacturer in the knife and fork way.

Can I say of her face--altered as I have reason to remember it, perished as I know it is--that it is gone, when here it comes before me at this instant, as distinct as any face that I may choose to look on in a crowded street? Can I say of her innocent and girlish beauty, that it faded, and was no more, when its breath falls on my cheek now, as it fell that night? Can I say she ever changed, when my remembrance brings her back to life, thus only; and, truer to its loving youth than I have been, or man ever is, still holds fast what it cherished then?

I write of her just as she was when I had gone to bed after this talk,

and she came to bid me good night. She kneeled down playfully by the side of the bed, and laying her chin upon her hands, and laughing, said:

'What was it they said, Davy? Tell me again. I can't believe it.'

'"Bewitching--"' I began.

My mother put her hands upon my lips to stop me.

'It was never bewitching,' she said, laughing. 'It never could have been bewitching, Davy. Now I know it wasn't!'

'Yes, it was. "Bewitching Mrs. Copperfield",' I repeated stoutly. 'And, "pretty."'

'No, no, it was never pretty. Not pretty,' interposed my mother, laying her fingers on my lips again.

'Yes it was. "Pretty little widow."'

'What foolish, impudent creatures!' cried my mother, laughing and covering her face. 'What ridiculous men! An't they? Davy dear--'

'Well, Ma.'

'Don't tell Peggotty; she might be angry with them. I am dreadfully angry with them myself; but I would rather Peggotty didn't know.'

I promised, of course; and we kissed one another over and over again, and I soon fell fast asleep.

It seems to me, at this distance of time, as if it were the next day when Peggotty broached the striking and adventurous proposition I am



about to mention; but it was probably about two months afterwards.

We were sitting as before, one evening (when my mother was out as before), in company with the stocking and the yard-measure, and the bit of wax, and the box with St. Paul's on the lid, and the crocodile book, when Peggotty, after looking at me several times, and opening her mouth as if she were going to speak, without doing it--which I thought was merely gaping, or I should have been rather alarmed--said coaxingly:

'Master Davy, how should you like to go along with me and spend a fortnight at my brother's at Yarmouth? Wouldn't that be a treat?'

'Is your brother an agreeable man, Peggotty?' I inquired, provisionally.

'Oh, what an agreeable man he is!' cried Peggotty, holding up her hands. 'Then there's the sea; and the boats and ships; and the fishermen; and the beach; and Am to play with--'

Peggotty meant her nephew Ham, mentioned in my first chapter; but she spoke of him as a morsel of English Grammar.

I was flushed by her summary of delights, and replied that it would indeed be a treat, but what would my mother say?

'Why then I'll as good as bet a guinea,' said Peggotty, intent upon my face, 'that she'll let us go. I'll ask her, if you like, as soon as ever she comes home. There now!'

'But what's she to do while we're away?' said I, putting my small elbows on the table to argue the point. 'She can't live by herself.'

If Peggotty were looking for a hole, all of a sudden, in the heel of that stocking, it must have been a very little one indeed, and not worth

darning.

'I say! Peggotty! She can't live by herself, you know.'

'Oh, bless you!' said Peggotty, looking at me again at last. 'Don't you know? She's going to stay for a fortnight with Mrs. Grayper. Mrs. Grayper's going to have a lot of company.'

Oh! If that was it, I was quite ready to go. I waited, in the utmost impatience, until my mother came home from Mrs. Grayper's (for it was that identical neighbour), to ascertain if we could get leave to carry out this great idea. Without being nearly so much surprised as I had expected, my mother entered into it readily; and it was all arranged that night, and my board and lodging during the visit were to be paid for.

The day soon came for our going. It was such an early day that it came soon, even to me, who was in a fever of expectation, and half afraid that an earthquake or a fiery mountain, or some other great convulsion of nature, might interpose to stop the expedition. We were to go in a carrier's cart, which departed in the morning after breakfast. I would have given any money to have been allowed to wrap myself up over-night, and sleep in my hat and boots.

It touches me nearly now, although I tell it lightly, to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what I did leave for ever.

I am glad to recollect that when the carrier's cart was at the gate, and my mother stood there kissing me, a grateful fondness for her and for the old place I had never turned my back upon before, made me cry. I am glad to know that my mother cried too, and that I felt her heart beat against mine.

I am glad to recollect that when the carrier began to move, my mother ran out at the gate, and called to him to stop, that she might kiss me once more. I am glad to dwell upon the earnestness and love with which she lifted up her face to mine, and did so.

As we left her standing in the road, Mr. Murdstone came up to where she was, and seemed to expostulate with her for being so moved. I was looking back round the awning of the cart, and wondered what business it was of his. Peggotty, who was also looking back on the other side, seemed anything but satisfied; as the face she brought back in the cart denoted.

I sat looking at Peggotty for some time, in a reverie on this supposititious case: whether, if she were employed to lose me like the boy in the fairy tale, I should be able to track my way home again by the buttons she would shed.

### CHAPTER 3. I HAVE A CHANGE

The carrier's horse was the laziest horse in the world, I should hope, and shuffled along, with his head down, as if he liked to keep people waiting to whom the packages were directed. I fancied, indeed, that he sometimes chuckled audibly over this reflection, but the carrier said he was only troubled with a cough. The carrier had a way of keeping his head down, like his horse, and of drooping sleepily forward as he drove, with one of his arms on each of his knees. I say 'drove', but it struck me that the cart would have gone to Yarmouth quite as well without him, for the horse did all that; and as to conversation, he had no idea of it but whistling.

Peggotty had a basket of refreshments on her knee, which would have lasted us out handsomely, if we had been going to London by the same conveyance. We ate a good deal, and slept a good deal. Peggotty always went to sleep with her chin upon the handle of the basket, her hold of which never relaxed; and I could not have believed unless I had heard her do it, that one defenceless woman could have snored so much.

We made so many deviations up and down lanes, and were such a long time delivering a bedstead at a public-house, and calling at other places, that I was quite tired, and very glad, when we saw Yarmouth. It looked rather spongy and soppy, I thought, as I carried my eye over the great dull waste that lay across the river; and I could not help wondering, if the world were really as round as my geography book said, how any part of it came to be so flat. But I reflected that Yarmouth might be situated at one of the poles; which would account for it.

As we drew a little nearer, and saw the whole adjacent prospect lying a straight low line under the sky, I hinted to Peggotty that a mound or so might have improved it; and also that if the land had been a little more separated from the sea, and the town and the tide had not been quite so much mixed up, like toast and water, it would have been nicer. But Peggotty said, with greater emphasis than usual, that we must take things as we found them, and that, for her part, she was proud to call herself a Yarmouth Bloater.

When we got into the street (which was strange enough to me) and smelt the fish, and pitch, and oakum, and tar, and saw the sailors walking about, and the carts jingling up and down over the stones, I felt that I had done so busy a place an injustice; and said as much to Peggotty, who heard my expressions of delight with great complacency, and told me it was well known (I suppose to those who had the good fortune to be born Bloaters) that Yarmouth was, upon the whole, the finest place in the

universe.

'Here's my Am!' screamed Peggotty, 'grewed out of knowledge!'

He was waiting for us, in fact, at the public-house; and asked me how I found myself, like an old acquaintance. I did not feel, at first, that I knew him as well as he knew me, because he had never come to our house since the night I was born, and naturally he had the advantage of me. But our intimacy was much advanced by his taking me on his back to carry me home. He was, now, a huge, strong fellow of six feet high, broad in proportion, and round-shouldered; but with a simpering boy's face and curly light hair that gave him quite a sheepish look. He was dressed in a canvas jacket, and a pair of such very stiff trousers that they would have stood quite as well alone, without any legs in them. And you couldn't so properly have said he wore a hat, as that he was covered in a-top, like an old building, with something pitchy.

Ham carrying me on his back and a small box of ours under his arm, and Peggotty carrying another small box of ours, we turned down lanes bestrewn with bits of chips and little hillocks of sand, and went past gas-works, rope-walks, boat-builders' yards, shipwrights' yards, ship-breakers' yards, caulkers' yards, riggers' lofts, smiths' forges, and a great litter of such places, until we came out upon the dull waste I had already seen at a distance; when Ham said,

'Yon's our house, Mas'r Davy!'

I looked in all directions, as far as I could stare over the wilderness, and away at the sea, and away at the river, but no house could I make out. There was a black barge, or some other kind of superannuated boat, not far off, high and dry on the ground, with an iron funnel sticking out of it for a chimney and smoking very cosily; but nothing else in the way of a habitation that was visible to me.

'That's not it?' said I. 'That ship-looking thing?'

'That's it, Mas'r Davy,' returned Ham.

If it had been Aladdin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it. There was a delightful door cut in the side, and it was roofed in, and there were little windows in it; but the wonderful charm of it was, that it was a real boat which had no doubt been upon the water hundreds of times, and which had never been intended to be lived in, on dry land. That was the captivation of it to me. If it had ever been meant to be lived in, I might have thought it small, or inconvenient, or lonely; but never having been designed for any such use, it became a perfect abode.

It was beautifully clean inside, and as tidy as possible. There was a table, and a Dutch clock, and a chest of drawers, and on the chest of drawers there was a tea-tray with a painting on it of a lady with a parasol, taking a walk with a military-looking child who was trundling a hoop. The tray was kept from tumbling down, by a bible; and the tray, if it had tumbled down, would have smashed a quantity of cups and saucers and a teapot that were grouped around the book. On the walls there were some common coloured pictures, framed and glazed, of scripture subjects; such as I have never seen since in the hands of pedlars, without seeing the whole interior of Peggotty's brother's house again, at one view. Abraham in red going to sacrifice Isaac in blue, and Daniel in yellow cast into a den of green lions, were the most prominent of these. Over the little mantelshelf, was a picture of the 'Sarah Jane' lugger, built at Sunderland, with a real little wooden stern stuck on to it; a work of art, combining composition with carpentry, which I considered to be one of the most enviable possessions that the world could afford. There were some hooks in the beams of the ceiling, the use of which I did not divine then; and some lockers and boxes and conveniences of that sort,

which served for seats and eked out the chairs.

All this I saw in the first glance after I crossed the threshold--child-like, according to my theory--and then Peggotty opened a little door and showed me my bedroom. It was the completest and most desirable bedroom ever seen--in the stern of the vessel; with a little window, where the rudder used to go through; a little looking-glass, just the right height for me, nailed against the wall, and framed with oyster-shells; a little bed, which there was just room enough to get into; and a nosegay of seaweed in a blue mug on the table. The walls were whitewashed as white as milk, and the patchwork counterpane made my eyes quite ache with its brightness. One thing I particularly noticed in this delightful house, was the smell of fish; which was so searching, that when I took out my pocket-handkerchief to wipe my nose, I found it smelt exactly as if it had wrapped up a lobster. On my imparting this discovery in confidence to Peggotty, she informed me that her brother dealt in lobsters, crabs, and crawfish; and I afterwards found that a heap of these creatures, in a state of wonderful conglomeration with one another, and never leaving off pinching whatever they laid hold of, were usually to be found in a little wooden outhouse where the pots and kettles were kept.

We were welcomed by a very civil woman in a white apron, whom I had seen curtsying at the door when I was on Ham's back, about a quarter of a mile off. Likewise by a most beautiful little girl (or I thought her so) with a necklace of blue beads on, who wouldn't let me kiss her when I offered to, but ran away and hid herself. By and by, when we had dined in a sumptuous manner off boiled dabs, melted butter, and potatoes, with a chop for me, a hairy man with a very good-natured face came home. As he called Peggotty 'Lass', and gave her a hearty smack on the cheek, I had no doubt, from the general propriety of her conduct, that he was her brother; and so he turned out--being presently introduced to me as Mr. Peggotty, the master of the house.

'Glad to see you, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'You'll find us rough, sir, but you'll find us ready.'

I thanked him, and replied that I was sure I should be happy in such a delightful place.

'How's your Ma, sir?' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Did you leave her pretty jolly?'

I gave Mr. Peggotty to understand that she was as jolly as I could wish, and that she desired her compliments--which was a polite fiction on my part.

'I'm much obleeged to her, I'm sure,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Well, sir, if you can make out here, fur a fortnut, 'long wi' her,' nodding at his sister, 'and Ham, and little Em'ly, we shall be proud of your company.'

Having done the honours of his house in this hospitable manner, Mr. Peggotty went out to wash himself in a kettleful of hot water, remarking that 'cold would never get his muck off'. He soon returned, greatly improved in appearance; but so rubicund, that I couldn't help thinking his face had this in common with the lobsters, crabs, and crawfish,--that it went into the hot water very black, and came out very red.

After tea, when the door was shut and all was made snug (the nights being cold and misty now), it seemed to me the most delicious retreat that the imagination of man could conceive. To hear the wind getting up out at sea, to know that the fog was creeping over the desolate flat outside, and to look at the fire, and think that there was no house near but this one, and this one a boat, was like enchantment. Little Em'ly had overcome her shyness, and was sitting by my side upon the lowest and



least of the lockers, which was just large enough for us two, and just fitted into the chimney corner. Mrs. Peggotty with the white apron, was knitting on the opposite side of the fire. Peggotty at her needlework was as much at home with St. Paul's and the bit of wax-candle, as if they had never known any other roof. Ham, who had been giving me my first lesson in all-fours, was trying to recollect a scheme of telling fortunes with the dirty cards, and was printing off fishy impressions of his thumb on all the cards he turned. Mr. Peggotty was smoking his pipe. I felt it was a time for conversation and confidence.

'Mr. Peggotty!' says I.

'Sir,' says he.

'Did you give your son the name of Ham, because you lived in a sort of ark?'

Mr. Peggotty seemed to think it a deep idea, but answered:

'No, sir. I never giv him no name.'

'Who gave him that name, then?' said I, putting question number two of the catechism to Mr. Peggotty.

'Why, sir, his father giv it him,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'I thought you were his father!'

'My brother Joe was his father,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Dead, Mr. Peggotty?' I hinted, after a respectful pause.

'Drowndead,' said Mr. Peggotty.

I was very much surprised that Mr. Peggotty was not Ham's father, and began to wonder whether I was mistaken about his relationship to anybody else there. I was so curious to know, that I made up my mind to have it out with Mr. Peggotty.

'Little Em'ly,' I said, glancing at her. 'She is your daughter, isn't she, Mr. Peggotty?'

'No, sir. My brother-in-law, Tom, was her father.'

I couldn't help it. '--Dead, Mr. Peggotty?' I hinted, after another respectful silence.

'Drowndead,' said Mr. Peggotty.

I felt the difficulty of resuming the subject, but had not got to the bottom of it yet, and must get to the bottom somehow. So I said:

'Haven't you ANY children, Mr. Peggotty?'

'No, master,' he answered with a short laugh. 'I'm a bachelore.'

'A bachelor!' I said, astonished. 'Why, who's that, Mr. Peggotty?' pointing to the person in the apron who was knitting.

'That's Missis Gummidge,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Gummidge, Mr. Peggotty?'

But at this point Peggotty--I mean my own peculiar Peggotty--made such impressive motions to me not to ask any more questions, that I could only sit and look at all the silent company, until it was time to go to

bed. Then, in the privacy of my own little cabin, she informed me that Ham and Em'ly were an orphan nephew and niece, whom my host had at different times adopted in their childhood, when they were left destitute: and that Mrs. Gummidge was the widow of his partner in a boat, who had died very poor. He was but a poor man himself, said Peggotty, but as good as gold and as true as steel--those were her similes. The only subject, she informed me, on which he ever showed a violent temper or swore an oath, was this generosity of his; and if it were ever referred to, by any one of them, he struck the table a heavy blow with his right hand (had split it on one such occasion), and swore a dreadful oath that he would be 'Gormed' if he didn't cut and run for good, if it was ever mentioned again. It appeared, in answer to my inquiries, that nobody had the least idea of the etymology of this terrible verb passive to be gormed; but that they all regarded it as constituting a most solemn imprecation.

I was very sensible of my entertainer's goodness, and listened to the women's going to bed in another little crib like mine at the opposite end of the boat, and to him and Ham hanging up two hammocks for themselves on the hooks I had noticed in the roof, in a very luxurious state of mind, enhanced by my being sleepy. As slumber gradually stole upon me, I heard the wind howling out at sea and coming on across the flat so fiercely, that I had a lazy apprehension of the great deep rising in the night. But I bethought myself that I was in a boat, after all; and that a man like Mr. Peggotty was not a bad person to have on board if anything did happen.

Nothing happened, however, worse than morning. Almost as soon as it shone upon the oyster-shell frame of my mirror I was out of bed, and out with little Em'ly, picking up stones upon the beach.

'You're quite a sailor, I suppose?' I said to Em'ly. I don't know that I supposed anything of the kind, but I felt it an act of gallantry to

say something; and a shining sail close to us made such a pretty little image of itself, at the moment, in her bright eye, that it came into my head to say this.

'No,' replied Em'ly, shaking her head, 'I'm afraid of the sea.'

'Afraid!' I said, with a becoming air of boldness, and looking very big at the mighty ocean. 'I an't!'

'Ah! but it's cruel,' said Em'ly. 'I have seen it very cruel to some of our men. I have seen it tear a boat as big as our house, all to pieces.'

'I hope it wasn't the boat that--'

'That father was drowned in?' said Em'ly. 'No. Not that one, I never see that boat.'

'Nor him?' I asked her.

Little Em'ly shook her head. 'Not to remember!'

Here was a coincidence! I immediately went into an explanation how I had never seen my own father; and how my mother and I had always lived by ourselves in the happiest state imaginable, and lived so then, and always meant to live so; and how my father's grave was in the churchyard near our house, and shaded by a tree, beneath the boughs of which I had walked and heard the birds sing many a pleasant morning. But there were some differences between Em'ly's orphanhood and mine, it appeared. She had lost her mother before her father; and where her father's grave was no one knew, except that it was somewhere in the depths of the sea.

'Besides,' said Em'ly, as she looked about for shells and pebbles, 'your father was a gentleman and your mother is a lady; and my father was a

fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my uncle Dan is a fisherman.'

'Dan is Mr. Peggotty, is he?' said I.

'Uncle Dan--yonder,' answered Em'ly, nodding at the boat-house.

'Yes. I mean him. He must be very good, I should think?'

'Good?' said Em'ly. 'If I was ever to be a lady, I'd give him a sky-blue coat with diamond buttons, nankeen trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a cocked hat, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money.'

I said I had no doubt that Mr. Peggotty well deserved these treasures. I must acknowledge that I felt it difficult to picture him quite at his ease in the raiment proposed for him by his grateful little niece, and that I was particularly doubtful of the policy of the cocked hat; but I kept these sentiments to myself.

Little Em'ly had stopped and looked up at the sky in her enumeration of these articles, as if they were a glorious vision. We went on again, picking up shells and pebbles.

'You would like to be a lady?' I said.

Emily looked at me, and laughed and nodded 'yes'.

'I should like it very much. We would all be gentlefolks together, then. Me, and uncle, and Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge. We wouldn't mind then, when there comes stormy weather.---Not for our own sakes, I mean. We would for the poor fishermen's, to be sure, and we'd help 'em with money when they come to any hurt.' This seemed to me to be a very satisfactory and therefore not at all improbable picture. I expressed my pleasure in the

contemplation of it, and little Em'ly was emboldened to say, shyly,

'Don't you think you are afraid of the sea, now?'

It was quiet enough to reassure me, but I have no doubt if I had seen a moderately large wave come tumbling in, I should have taken to my heels, with an awful recollection of her drowned relations. However, I said 'No,' and I added, 'You don't seem to be either, though you say you are,'--for she was walking much too near the brink of a sort of old jetty or wooden causeway we had strolled upon, and I was afraid of her falling over.

'I'm not afraid in this way,' said little Em'ly. 'But I wake when it blows, and tremble to think of Uncle Dan and Ham and believe I hear 'em crying out for help. That's why I should like so much to be a lady. But I'm not afraid in this way. Not a bit. Look here!'

She started from my side, and ran along a jagged timber which protruded from the place we stood upon, and overhung the deep water at some height, without the least defence. The incident is so impressed on my remembrance, that if I were a draughtsman I could draw its form here, I dare say, accurately as it was that day, and little Em'ly springing forward to her destruction (as it appeared to me), with a look that I have never forgotten, directed far out to sea.

The light, bold, fluttering little figure turned and came back safe to me, and I soon laughed at my fears, and at the cry I had uttered; fruitlessly in any case, for there was no one near. But there have been times since, in my manhood, many times there have been, when I have thought, Is it possible, among the possibilities of hidden things, that in the sudden rashness of the child and her wild look so far off, there was any merciful attraction of her into danger, any tempting her towards him permitted on the part of her dead father, that her life might have

a chance of ending that day? There has been a time since when I have wondered whether, if the life before her could have been revealed to me at a glance, and so revealed as that a child could fully comprehend it, and if her preservation could have depended on a motion of my hand, I ought to have held it up to save her. There has been a time since--I do not say it lasted long, but it has been--when I have asked myself the question, would it have been better for little Em'ly to have had the waters close above her head that morning in my sight; and when I have answered Yes, it would have been.

This may be premature. I have set it down too soon, perhaps. But let it stand.

We strolled a long way, and loaded ourselves with things that we thought curious, and put some stranded starfish carefully back into the water--I hardly know enough of the race at this moment to be quite certain whether they had reason to feel obliged to us for doing so, or the reverse--and then made our way home to Mr. Peggotty's dwelling. We stopped under the lee of the lobster-outhouse to exchange an innocent kiss, and went in to breakfast glowing with health and pleasure.

'Like two young mavishes,' Mr. Peggotty said. I knew this meant, in our local dialect, like two young thrushes, and received it as a compliment.

Of course I was in love with little Em'ly. I am sure I loved that baby quite as truly, quite as tenderly, with greater purity and more disinterestedness, than can enter into the best love of a later time of life, high and ennobling as it is. I am sure my fancy raised up something round that blue-eyed mite of a child, which etherealized, and made a very angel of her. If, any sunny forenoon, she had spread a little pair of wings and flown away before my eyes, I don't think I should have regarded it as much more than I had had reason to expect.

We used to walk about that dim old flat at Yarmouth in a loving manner, hours and hours. The days sported by us, as if Time had not grown up himself yet, but were a child too, and always at play. I told Em'ly I adored her, and that unless she confessed she adored me I should be reduced to the necessity of killing myself with a sword. She said she did, and I have no doubt she did.

As to any sense of inequality, or youthfulness, or other difficulty in our way, little Em'ly and I had no such trouble, because we had no future. We made no more provision for growing older, than we did for growing younger. We were the admiration of Mrs. Gummidge and Peggotty, who used to whisper of an evening when we sat, lovingly, on our little locker side by side, 'Lor! wasn't it beautiful!' Mr. Peggotty smiled at us from behind his pipe, and Ham grinned all the evening and did nothing else. They had something of the sort of pleasure in us, I suppose, that they might have had in a pretty toy, or a pocket model of the Colosseum.

I soon found out that Mrs. Gummidge did not always make herself so agreeable as she might have been expected to do, under the circumstances of her residence with Mr. Peggotty. Mrs. Gummidge's was rather a fretful disposition, and she whimpered more sometimes than was comfortable for other parties in so small an establishment. I was very sorry for her; but there were moments when it would have been more agreeable, I thought, if Mrs. Gummidge had had a convenient apartment of her own to retire to, and had stopped there until her spirits revived.

Mr. Peggotty went occasionally to a public-house called The Willing Mind. I discovered this, by his being out on the second or third evening of our visit, and by Mrs. Gummidge's looking up at the Dutch clock, between eight and nine, and saying he was there, and that, what was more, she had known in the morning he would go there.

Mrs. Gummidge had been in a low state all day, and had burst into tears



in the forenoon, when the fire smoked. 'I am a lone lorn creetur',' were Mrs. Gummidge's words, when that unpleasant occurrence took place, 'and everythink goes contrary with me.'

'Oh, it'll soon leave off,' said Peggotty--I again mean our Peggotty--'and besides, you know, it's not more disagreeable to you than to us.'

'I feel it more,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

It was a very cold day, with cutting blasts of wind. Mrs. Gummidge's peculiar corner of the fireside seemed to me to be the warmest and snuggest in the place, as her chair was certainly the easiest, but it didn't suit her that day at all. She was constantly complaining of the cold, and of its occasioning a visitation in her back which she called 'the creeps'. At last she shed tears on that subject, and said again that she was 'a lone lorn creetur' and everythink went contrary with her'.

'It is certainly very cold,' said Peggotty. 'Everybody must feel it so.'

'I feel it more than other people,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

So at dinner; when Mrs. Gummidge was always helped immediately after me, to whom the preference was given as a visitor of distinction. The fish were small and bony, and the potatoes were a little burnt. We all acknowledged that we felt this something of a disappointment; but Mrs. Gummidge said she felt it more than we did, and shed tears again, and made that former declaration with great bitterness.

Accordingly, when Mr. Peggotty came home about nine o'clock, this unfortunate Mrs. Gummidge was knitting in her corner, in a very wretched and miserable condition. Peggotty had been working cheerfully. Ham had

been patching up a great pair of waterboots; and I, with little Em'ly by my side, had been reading to them. Mrs. Gummidge had never made any other remark than a forlorn sigh, and had never raised her eyes since tea.

'Well, Mates,' said Mr. Peggotty, taking his seat, 'and how are you?'

We all said something, or looked something, to welcome him, except Mrs. Gummidge, who only shook her head over her knitting.

'What's amiss?' said Mr. Peggotty, with a clap of his hands. 'Cheer up, old Mawther!' (Mr. Peggotty meant old girl.)

Mrs. Gummidge did not appear to be able to cheer up. She took out an old black silk handkerchief and wiped her eyes; but instead of putting it in her pocket, kept it out, and wiped them again, and still kept it out, ready for use.

'What's amiss, dame?' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Nothing,' returned Mrs. Gummidge. 'You've come from The Willing Mind, Dan'l?'

'Why yes, I've took a short spell at The Willing Mind tonight,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'I'm sorry I should drive you there,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

'Drive! I don't want no driving,' returned Mr. Peggotty with an honest laugh. 'I only go too ready.'

'Very ready,' said Mrs. Gummidge, shaking her head, and wiping her eyes.

'Yes, yes, very ready. I am sorry it should be along of me that you're

so ready.'

'Along o' you! It an't along o' you!' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Don't ye believe a bit on it.'

'Yes, yes, it is,' cried Mrs. Gummidge. 'I know what I am. I know that I am a lone lorn creetur', and not only that everythink goes contrary with me, but that I go contrary with everybody. Yes, yes. I feel more than other people do, and I show it more. It's my misfortun'.'

I really couldn't help thinking, as I sat taking in all this, that the misfortune extended to some other members of that family besides Mrs. Gummidge. But Mr. Peggotty made no such retort, only answering with another entreaty to Mrs. Gummidge to cheer up.

'I an't what I could wish myself to be,' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'I am far from it. I know what I am. My troubles has made me contrary. I feel my troubles, and they make me contrary. I wish I didn't feel 'em, but I do. I wish I could be hardened to 'em, but I an't. I make the house uncomfortable. I don't wonder at it. I've made your sister so all day, and Master Davy.'

Here I was suddenly melted, and roared out, 'No, you haven't, Mrs. Gummidge,' in great mental distress.

'It's far from right that I should do it,' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'It an't a fit return. I had better go into the house and die. I am a lone lorn creetur', and had much better not make myself contrary here. If thinks must go contrary with me, and I must go contrary myself, let me go contrary in my parish. Dan'l, I'd better go into the house, and die and be a riddance!'

Mrs. Gummidge retired with these words, and betook herself to bed. When

she was gone, Mr. Peggotty, who had not exhibited a trace of any feeling but the profoundest sympathy, looked round upon us, and nodding his head with a lively expression of that sentiment still animating his face, said in a whisper:

'She's been thinking of the old 'un!'

I did not quite understand what old one Mrs. Gummidge was supposed to have fixed her mind upon, until Peggotty, on seeing me to bed, explained that it was the late Mr. Gummidge; and that her brother always took that for a received truth on such occasions, and that it always had a moving effect upon him. Some time after he was in his hammock that night, I heard him myself repeat to Ham, 'Poor thing! She's been thinking of the old 'un!' And whenever Mrs. Gummidge was overcome in a similar manner during the remainder of our stay (which happened some few times), he always said the same thing in extenuation of the circumstance, and always with the tenderest commiseration.

So the fortnight slipped away, varied by nothing but the variation of the tide, which altered Mr. Peggotty's times of going out and coming in, and altered Ham's engagements also. When the latter was unemployed, he sometimes walked with us to show us the boats and ships, and once or twice he took us for a row. I don't know why one slight set of impressions should be more particularly associated with a place than another, though I believe this obtains with most people, in reference especially to the associations of their childhood. I never hear the name, or read the name, of Yarmouth, but I am reminded of a certain Sunday morning on the beach, the bells ringing for church, little Em'ly leaning on my shoulder, Ham lazily dropping stones into the water, and the sun, away at sea, just breaking through the heavy mist, and showing us the ships, like their own shadows.

At last the day came for going home. I bore up against the separation

from Mr. Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge, but my agony of mind at leaving little Em'ly was piercing. We went arm-in-arm to the public-house where the carrier put up, and I promised, on the road, to write to her. (I redeemed that promise afterwards, in characters larger than those in which apartments are usually announced in manuscript, as being to let.) We were greatly overcome at parting; and if ever, in my life, I have had a void made in my heart, I had one made that day.

Now, all the time I had been on my visit, I had been ungrateful to my home again, and had thought little or nothing about it. But I was no sooner turned towards it, than my reproachful young conscience seemed to point that way with a ready finger; and I felt, all the more for the sinking of my spirits, that it was my nest, and that my mother was my comforter and friend.

This gained upon me as we went along; so that the nearer we drew, the more familiar the objects became that we passed, the more excited I was to get there, and to run into her arms. But Peggotty, instead of sharing in those transports, tried to check them (though very kindly), and looked confused and out of sorts.

Blunderstone Rookery would come, however, in spite of her, when the carrier's horse pleased--and did. How well I recollect it, on a cold grey afternoon, with a dull sky, threatening rain!

The door opened, and I looked, half laughing and half crying in my pleasant agitation, for my mother. It was not she, but a strange servant.

'Why, Peggotty!' I said, ruefully, 'isn't she come home?'

'Yes, yes, Master Davy,' said Peggotty. 'She's come home. Wait a bit, Master Davy, and I'll--I'll tell you something.'

Between her agitation, and her natural awkwardness in getting out of the cart, Peggotty was making a most extraordinary festoon of herself, but I felt too blank and strange to tell her so. When she had got down, she took me by the hand; led me, wondering, into the kitchen; and shut the door.

'Peggotty!' said I, quite frightened. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing's the matter, bless you, Master Davy dear!' she answered, assuming an air of sprightliness.

'Something's the matter, I'm sure. Where's mama?'

'Where's mama, Master Davy?' repeated Peggotty.

'Yes. Why hasn't she come out to the gate, and what have we come in here for? Oh, Peggotty!' My eyes were full, and I felt as if I were going to tumble down.

'Bless the precious boy!' cried Peggotty, taking hold of me. 'What is it? Speak, my pet!'

'Not dead, too! Oh, she's not dead, Peggotty?'

Peggotty cried out No! with an astonishing volume of voice; and then sat down, and began to pant, and said I had given her a turn.

I gave her a hug to take away the turn, or to give her another turn in the right direction, and then stood before her, looking at her in anxious inquiry.

'You see, dear, I should have told you before now,' said Peggotty,

'but I hadn't an opportunity. I ought to have made it, perhaps, but I couldn't azackly'--that was always the substitute for exactly, in Peggotty's militia of words--'bring my mind to it.'

'Go on, Peggotty,' said I, more frightened than before.

'Master Davy,' said Peggotty, untying her bonnet with a shaking hand, and speaking in a breathless sort of way. 'What do you think? You have got a Pa!'

I trembled, and turned white. Something--I don't know what, or how--connected with the grave in the churchyard, and the raising of the dead, seemed to strike me like an unwholesome wind.

'A new one,' said Peggotty.

'A new one?' I repeated.

Peggotty gave a gasp, as if she were swallowing something that was very hard, and, putting out her hand, said:

'Come and see him.'

'I don't want to see him.' --'And your mama,' said Peggotty.

I ceased to draw back, and we went straight to the best parlour, where she left me. On one side of the fire, sat my mother; on the other, Mr. Murdstone. My mother dropped her work, and arose hurriedly, but timidly I thought.

'Now, Clara my dear,' said Mr. Murdstone. 'Recollect! control yourself, always control yourself! Davy boy, how do you do?'

I gave him my hand. After a moment of suspense, I went and kissed my mother: she kissed me, patted me gently on the shoulder, and sat down again to her work. I could not look at her, I could not look at him, I knew quite well that he was looking at us both; and I turned to the window and looked out there, at some shrubs that were drooping their heads in the cold.

As soon as I could creep away, I crept upstairs. My old dear bedroom was changed, and I was to lie a long way off. I rambled downstairs to find anything that was like itself, so altered it all seemed; and roamed into the yard. I very soon started back from there, for the empty dog-kennel was filled up with a great dog--deep mouthed and black-haired like Him--and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprang out to get at me.

#### CHAPTER 4. I FALL INTO DISGRACE

If the room to which my bed was removed were a sentient thing that could give evidence, I might appeal to it at this day--who sleeps there now, I wonder!--to bear witness for me what a heavy heart I carried to it. I went up there, hearing the dog in the yard bark after me all the way while I climbed the stairs; and, looking as blank and strange upon the room as the room looked upon me, sat down with my small hands crossed, and thought.

I thought of the oddest things. Of the shape of the room, of the cracks in the ceiling, of the paper on the walls, of the flaws in the window-glass making ripples and dimples on the prospect, of the washing-stand being rickety on its three legs, and having a discontented something about it, which reminded me of Mrs. Gummidge under the



influence of the old one. I was crying all the time, but, except that I was conscious of being cold and dejected, I am sure I never thought why I cried. At last in my desolation I began to consider that I was dreadfully in love with little Em'ly, and had been torn away from her to come here where no one seemed to want me, or to care about me, half as much as she did. This made such a very miserable piece of business of it, that I rolled myself up in a corner of the counterpane, and cried myself to sleep.

I was awoke by somebody saying 'Here he is!' and uncovering my hot head. My mother and Peggotty had come to look for me, and it was one of them who had done it.

'Davy,' said my mother. 'What's the matter?'

I thought it was very strange that she should ask me, and answered, 'Nothing.' I turned over on my face, I recollect, to hide my trembling lip, which answered her with greater truth. 'Davy,' said my mother. 'Davy, my child!'

I dare say no words she could have uttered would have affected me so much, then, as her calling me her child. I hid my tears in the bedclothes, and pressed her from me with my hand, when she would have raised me up.

'This is your doing, Peggotty, you cruel thing!' said my mother. 'I have no doubt at all about it. How can you reconcile it to your conscience, I wonder, to prejudice my own boy against me, or against anybody who is dear to me? What do you mean by it, Peggotty?'

Poor Peggotty lifted up her hands and eyes, and only answered, in a sort of paraphrase of the grace I usually repeated after dinner, 'Lord forgive you, Mrs. Copperfield, and for what you have said this minute,

may you never be truly sorry!'

'It's enough to distract me,' cried my mother. 'In my honeymoon, too, when my most inveterate enemy might relent, one would think, and not envy me a little peace of mind and happiness. Davy, you naughty boy! Peggotty, you savage creature! Oh, dear me!' cried my mother, turning from one of us to the other, in her pettish wilful manner, 'what a troublesome world this is, when one has the most right to expect it to be as agreeable as possible!'

I felt the touch of a hand that I knew was neither hers nor Peggotty's, and slipped to my feet at the bed-side. It was Mr. Murdstone's hand, and he kept it on my arm as he said:

'What's this? Clara, my love, have you forgotten?--Firmness, my dear!'

'I am very sorry, Edward,' said my mother. 'I meant to be very good, but I am so uncomfortable.'

'Indeed!' he answered. 'That's a bad hearing, so soon, Clara.'

'I say it's very hard I should be made so now,' returned my mother, pouting; 'and it is--very hard--isn't it?'

He drew her to him, whispered in her ear, and kissed her. I knew as well, when I saw my mother's head lean down upon his shoulder, and her arm touch his neck--I knew as well that he could mould her pliant nature into any form he chose, as I know, now, that he did it.

'Go you below, my love,' said Mr. Murdstone. 'David and I will come down, together. My friend,' turning a darkening face on Peggotty, when he had watched my mother out, and dismissed her with a nod and a smile; 'do you know your mistress's name?'

'She has been my mistress a long time, sir,' answered Peggotty, 'I ought to know it.' 'That's true,' he answered. 'But I thought I heard you, as I came upstairs, address her by a name that is not hers. She has taken mine, you know. Will you remember that?'

Peggotty, with some uneasy glances at me, curtsied herself out of the room without replying; seeing, I suppose, that she was expected to go, and had no excuse for remaining. When we two were left alone, he shut the door, and sitting on a chair, and holding me standing before him, looked steadily into my eyes. I felt my own attracted, no less steadily, to his. As I recall our being opposed thus, face to face, I seem again to hear my heart beat fast and high.

'David,' he said, making his lips thin, by pressing them together, 'if I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do?'

'I don't know.'

'I beat him.'

I had answered in a kind of breathless whisper, but I felt, in my silence, that my breath was shorter now.

'I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, "I'll conquer that fellow"; and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I should do it. What is that upon your face?'

'Dirt,' I said.

He knew it was the mark of tears as well as I. But if he had asked the question twenty times, each time with twenty blows, I believe my baby heart would have burst before I would have told him so.

'You have a good deal of intelligence for a little fellow,' he said, with a grave smile that belonged to him, 'and you understood me very well, I see. Wash that face, sir, and come down with me.'

He pointed to the washing-stand, which I had made out to be like Mrs. Gummidge, and motioned me with his head to obey him directly. I had little doubt then, and I have less doubt now, that he would have knocked me down without the least compunction, if I had hesitated.

'Clara, my dear,' he said, when I had done his bidding, and he walked me into the parlour, with his hand still on my arm; 'you will not be made uncomfortable any more, I hope. We shall soon improve our youthful humours.'

God help me, I might have been improved for my whole life, I might have been made another creature perhaps, for life, by a kind word at that season. A word of encouragement and explanation, of pity for my childish ignorance, of welcome home, of reassurance to me that it was home, might have made me dutiful to him in my heart henceforth, instead of in my hypocritical outside, and might have made me respect instead of hate him. I thought my mother was sorry to see me standing in the room so scared and strange, and that, presently, when I stole to a chair, she followed me with her eyes more sorrowfully still--missing, perhaps, some freedom in my childish tread--but the word was not spoken, and the time for it was gone.

We dined alone, we three together. He seemed to be very fond of my mother--I am afraid I liked him none the better for that--and she was very fond of him. I gathered from what they said, that an elder sister of his was coming to stay with them, and that she was expected that evening. I am not certain whether I found out then, or afterwards, that, without being actively concerned in any business, he had some share in,

or some annual charge upon the profits of, a wine-merchant's house in London, with which his family had been connected from his great-grandfather's time, and in which his sister had a similar interest; but I may mention it in this place, whether or no.

After dinner, when we were sitting by the fire, and I was meditating an escape to Peggotty without having the hardihood to slip away, lest it should offend the master of the house, a coach drove up to the garden-gate and he went out to receive the visitor. My mother followed him. I was timidly following her, when she turned round at the parlour door, in the dusk, and taking me in her embrace as she had been used to do, whispered me to love my new father and be obedient to him. She did this hurriedly and secretly, as if it were wrong, but tenderly; and, putting out her hand behind her, held mine in it, until we came near to where he was standing in the garden, where she let mine go, and drew hers through his arm.

It was Miss Murdstone who was arrived, and a gloomy-looking lady she was; dark, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and voice; and with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose, as if, being disabled by the wrongs of her sex from wearing whiskers, she had carried them to that account. She brought with her two uncompromising hard black boxes, with her initials on the lids in hard brass nails. When she paid the coachman she took her money out of a hard steel purse, and she kept the purse in a very jail of a bag which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bite. I had never, at that time, seen such a metallic lady altogether as Miss Murdstone was.

She was brought into the parlour with many tokens of welcome, and there formally recognized my mother as a new and near relation. Then she looked at me, and said:

'Is that your boy, sister-in-law?'

My mother acknowledged me.

'Generally speaking,' said Miss Murdstone, 'I don't like boys. How d'ye do, boy?'

Under these encouraging circumstances, I replied that I was very well, and that I hoped she was the same; with such an indifferent grace, that Miss Murdstone disposed of me in two words:

'Wants manner!'

Having uttered which, with great distinctness, she begged the favour of being shown to her room, which became to me from that time forth a place of awe and dread, wherein the two black boxes were never seen open or known to be left unlocked, and where (for I peeped in once or twice when she was out) numerous little steel fetters and rivets, with which Miss Murdstone embellished herself when she was dressed, generally hung upon the looking-glass in formidable array.

As well as I could make out, she had come for good, and had no intention of ever going again. She began to 'help' my mother next morning, and was in and out of the store-closet all day, putting things to rights, and making havoc in the old arrangements. Almost the first remarkable thing I observed in Miss Murdstone was, her being constantly haunted by a suspicion that the servants had a man secreted somewhere on the premises. Under the influence of this delusion, she dived into the coal-cellar at the most untimely hours, and scarcely ever opened the door of a dark cupboard without clapping it to again, in the belief that she had got him.

Though there was nothing very airy about Miss Murdstone, she was a perfect Lark in point of getting up. She was up (and, as I believe

to this hour, looking for that man) before anybody in the house was stirring. Peggotty gave it as her opinion that she even slept with one eye open; but I could not concur in this idea; for I tried it myself after hearing the suggestion thrown out, and found it couldn't be done.

On the very first morning after her arrival she was up and ringing her bell at cock-crow. When my mother came down to breakfast and was going to make the tea, Miss Murdstone gave her a kind of peck on the cheek, which was her nearest approach to a kiss, and said:

'Now, Clara, my dear, I am come here, you know, to relieve you of all the trouble I can. You're much too pretty and thoughtless'--my mother blushed but laughed, and seemed not to dislike this character--'to have any duties imposed upon you that can be undertaken by me. If you'll be so good as give me your keys, my dear, I'll attend to all this sort of thing in future.'

From that time, Miss Murdstone kept the keys in her own little jail all day, and under her pillow all night, and my mother had no more to do with them than I had.

My mother did not suffer her authority to pass from her without a shadow of protest. One night when Miss Murdstone had been developing certain household plans to her brother, of which he signified his approbation, my mother suddenly began to cry, and said she thought she might have been consulted.

'Clara!' said Mr. Murdstone sternly. 'Clara! I wonder at you.'

'Oh, it's very well to say you wonder, Edward!' cried my mother, 'and it's very well for you to talk about firmness, but you wouldn't like it yourself.'

Firmness, I may observe, was the grand quality on which both Mr. and Miss Murdstone took their stand. However I might have expressed my comprehension of it at that time, if I had been called upon, I nevertheless did clearly comprehend in my own way, that it was another name for tyranny; and for a certain gloomy, arrogant, devil's humour, that was in them both. The creed, as I should state it now, was this. Mr. Murdstone was firm; nobody in his world was to be so firm as Mr. Murdstone; nobody else in his world was to be firm at all, for everybody was to be bent to his firmness. Miss Murdstone was an exception. She might be firm, but only by relationship, and in an inferior and tributary degree. My mother was another exception. She might be firm, and must be; but only in bearing their firmness, and firmly believing there was no other firmness upon earth.

'It's very hard,' said my mother, 'that in my own house--'

'My own house?' repeated Mr. Murdstone. 'Clara!'

'OUR own house, I mean,' faltered my mother, evidently frightened--'I hope you must know what I mean, Edward--it's very hard that in YOUR own house I may not have a word to say about domestic matters. I am sure I managed very well before we were married. There's evidence,' said my mother, sobbing; 'ask Peggotty if I didn't do very well when I wasn't interfered with!'

'Edward,' said Miss Murdstone, 'let there be an end of this. I go tomorrow.'

'Jane Murdstone,' said her brother, 'be silent! How dare you to insinuate that you don't know my character better than your words imply?'

'I am sure,' my poor mother went on, at a grievous disadvantage, and



with many tears, 'I don't want anybody to go. I should be very miserable and unhappy if anybody was to go. I don't ask much. I am not unreasonable. I only want to be consulted sometimes. I am very much obliged to anybody who assists me, and I only want to be consulted as a mere form, sometimes. I thought you were pleased, once, with my being a little inexperienced and girlish, Edward--I am sure you said so--but you seem to hate me for it now, you are so severe.'

'Edward,' said Miss Murdstone, again, 'let there be an end of this. I go tomorrow.'

'Jane Murdstone,' thundered Mr. Murdstone. 'Will you be silent? How dare you?'

Miss Murdstone made a jail-delivery of her pocket-handkerchief, and held it before her eyes.

'Clara,' he continued, looking at my mother, 'you surprise me! You astound me! Yes, I had a satisfaction in the thought of marrying an inexperienced and artless person, and forming her character, and infusing into it some amount of that firmness and decision of which it stood in need. But when Jane Murdstone is kind enough to come to my assistance in this endeavour, and to assume, for my sake, a condition something like a housekeeper's, and when she meets with a base return--'

'Oh, pray, pray, Edward,' cried my mother, 'don't accuse me of being ungrateful. I am sure I am not ungrateful. No one ever said I was before. I have many faults, but not that. Oh, don't, my dear!'

'When Jane Murdstone meets, I say,' he went on, after waiting until my mother was silent, 'with a base return, that feeling of mine is chilled and altered.'

'Don't, my love, say that!' implored my mother very piteously.

'Oh, don't, Edward! I can't bear to hear it. Whatever I am, I am affectionate. I know I am affectionate. I wouldn't say it, if I wasn't sure that I am. Ask Peggotty. I am sure she'll tell you I'm affectionate.'

'There is no extent of mere weakness, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone in reply, 'that can have the least weight with me. You lose breath.'

'Pray let us be friends,' said my mother, 'I couldn't live under coldness or unkindness. I am so sorry. I have a great many defects, I know, and it's very good of you, Edward, with your strength of mind, to endeavour to correct them for me. Jane, I don't object to anything. I should be quite broken-hearted if you thought of leaving--' My mother was too much overcome to go on.

'Jane Murdstone,' said Mr. Murdstone to his sister, 'any harsh words between us are, I hope, uncommon. It is not my fault that so unusual an occurrence has taken place tonight. I was betrayed into it by another. Nor is it your fault. You were betrayed into it by another. Let us both try to forget it. And as this,' he added, after these magnanimous words, 'is not a fit scene for the boy--David, go to bed!'

I could hardly find the door, through the tears that stood in my eyes. I was so sorry for my mother's distress; but I groped my way out, and groped my way up to my room in the dark, without even having the heart to say good night to Peggotty, or to get a candle from her. When her coming up to look for me, an hour or so afterwards, awoke me, she said that my mother had gone to bed poorly, and that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were sitting alone.

Going down next morning rather earlier than usual, I paused outside the parlour door, on hearing my mother's voice. She was very earnestly and

humbly entreating Miss Murdstone's pardon, which that lady granted, and a perfect reconciliation took place. I never knew my mother afterwards to give an opinion on any matter, without first appealing to Miss Murdstone, or without having first ascertained by some sure means, what Miss Murdstone's opinion was; and I never saw Miss Murdstone, when out of temper (she was infirm that way), move her hand towards her bag as if she were going to take out the keys and offer to resign them to my mother, without seeing that my mother was in a terrible fright.

The gloomy taint that was in the Murdstone blood, darkened the Murdstone religion, which was austere and wrathful. I have thought, since, that its assuming that character was a necessary consequence of Mr. Murdstone's firmness, which wouldn't allow him to let anybody off from the utmost weight of the severest penalties he could find any excuse for. Be this as it may, I well remember the tremendous visages with which we used to go to church, and the changed air of the place. Again, the dreaded Sunday comes round, and I file into the old pew first, like a guarded captive brought to a condemned service. Again, Miss Murdstone, in a black velvet gown, that looks as if it had been made out of a pall, follows close upon me; then my mother; then her husband. There is no Peggotty now, as in the old time. Again, I listen to Miss Murdstone mumbling the responses, and emphasizing all the dread words with a cruel relish. Again, I see her dark eyes roll round the church when she says 'miserable sinners', as if she were calling all the congregation names. Again, I catch rare glimpses of my mother, moving her lips timidly between the two, with one of them muttering at each ear like low thunder. Again, I wonder with a sudden fear whether it is likely that our good old clergyman can be wrong, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone right, and that all the angels in Heaven can be destroying angels. Again, if I move a finger or relax a muscle of my face, Miss Murdstone pokes me with her prayer-book, and makes my side ache.

Yes, and again, as we walk home, I note some neighbours looking at my

mother and at me, and whispering. Again, as the three go on arm-in-arm, and I linger behind alone, I follow some of those looks, and wonder if my mother's step be really not so light as I have seen it, and if the gaiety of her beauty be really almost worried away. Again, I wonder whether any of the neighbours call to mind, as I do, how we used to walk home together, she and I; and I wonder stupidly about that, all the dreary dismal day.

There had been some talk on occasions of my going to boarding-school. Mr. and Miss Murdstone had originated it, and my mother had of course agreed with them. Nothing, however, was concluded on the subject yet. In the meantime, I learnt lessons at home. Shall I ever forget those lessons! They were presided over nominally by my mother, but really by Mr. Murdstone and his sister, who were always present, and found them a favourable occasion for giving my mother lessons in that mis-called firmness, which was the bane of both our lives. I believe I was kept at home for that purpose. I had been apt enough to learn, and willing enough, when my mother and I had lived alone together. I can faintly remember learning the alphabet at her knee. To this day, when I look upon the fat black letters in the primer, the puzzling novelty of their shapes, and the easy good-nature of O and Q and S, seem to present themselves again before me as they used to do. But they recall no feeling of disgust or reluctance. On the contrary, I seem to have walked along a path of flowers as far as the crocodile-book, and to have been cheered by the gentleness of my mother's voice and manner all the way. But these solemn lessons which succeeded those, I remember as the death-blow of my peace, and a grievous daily drudgery and misery. They were very long, very numerous, very hard--perfectly unintelligible, some of them, to me--and I was generally as much bewildered by them as I believe my poor mother was herself.

Let me remember how it used to be, and bring one morning back again.

I come into the second-best parlour after breakfast, with my books, and an exercise-book, and a slate. My mother is ready for me at her writing-desk, but not half so ready as Mr. Murdstone in his easy-chair by the window (though he pretends to be reading a book), or as Miss Murdstone, sitting near my mother stringing steel beads. The very sight of these two has such an influence over me, that I begin to feel the words I have been at infinite pains to get into my head, all sliding away, and going I don't know where. I wonder where they do go, by the by?

I hand the first book to my mother. Perhaps it is a grammar, perhaps a history, or geography. I take a last drowning look at the page as I give it into her hand, and start off aloud at a racing pace while I have got it fresh. I trip over a word. Mr. Murdstone looks up. I trip over another word. Miss Murdstone looks up. I redden, tumble over half-a-dozen words, and stop. I think my mother would show me the book if she dared, but she does not dare, and she says softly:

'Oh, Davy, Davy!'

'Now, Clara,' says Mr. Murdstone, 'be firm with the boy. Don't say, "Oh, Davy, Davy!" That's childish. He knows his lesson, or he does not know it.'

'He does NOT know it,' Miss Murdstone interposes awfully.

'I am really afraid he does not,' says my mother.

'Then, you see, Clara,' returns Miss Murdstone, 'you should just give him the book back, and make him know it.'

'Yes, certainly,' says my mother; 'that is what I intend to do, my dear Jane. Now, Davy, try once more, and don't be stupid.'

I obey the first clause of the injunction by trying once more, but am not so successful with the second, for I am very stupid. I tumble down before I get to the old place, at a point where I was all right before, and stop to think. But I can't think about the lesson. I think of the number of yards of net in Miss Murdstone's cap, or of the price of Mr. Murdstone's dressing-gown, or any such ridiculous problem that I have no business with, and don't want to have anything at all to do with. Mr. Murdstone makes a movement of impatience which I have been expecting for a long time. Miss Murdstone does the same. My mother glances submissively at them, shuts the book, and lays it by as an arrear to be worked out when my other tasks are done.

There is a pile of these arrears very soon, and it swells like a rolling snowball. The bigger it gets, the more stupid I get. The case is so hopeless, and I feel that I am wallowing in such a bog of nonsense, that I give up all idea of getting out, and abandon myself to my fate. The despairing way in which my mother and I look at each other, as I blunder on, is truly melancholy. But the greatest effect in these miserable lessons is when my mother (thinking nobody is observing her) tries to give me the cue by the motion of her lips. At that instant, Miss Murdstone, who has been lying in wait for nothing else all along, says in a deep warning voice:

'Clara!'

My mother starts, colours, and smiles faintly. Mr. Murdstone comes out of his chair, takes the book, throws it at me or boxes my ears with it, and turns me out of the room by the shoulders.

Even when the lessons are done, the worst is yet to happen, in the shape of an appalling sum. This is invented for me, and delivered to me orally by Mr. Murdstone, and begins, 'If I go into a cheesemonger's shop, and

buy five thousand double-Gloucester cheeses at fourpence-halfpenny each, present payment'--at which I see Miss Murdstone secretly overjoyed.

I pore over these cheeses without any result or enlightenment until dinner-time, when, having made a Mulatto of myself by getting the dirt of the slate into the pores of my skin, I have a slice of bread to help me out with the cheeses, and am considered in disgrace for the rest of the evening.

It seems to me, at this distance of time, as if my unfortunate studies generally took this course. I could have done very well if I had been without the Murdstones; but the influence of the Murdstones upon me was like the fascination of two snakes on a wretched young bird. Even when I did get through the morning with tolerable credit, there was not much gained but dinner; for Miss Murdstone never could endure to see me untasked, and if I rashly made any show of being unemployed, called her brother's attention to me by saying, 'Clara, my dear, there's nothing like work--give your boy an exercise'; which caused me to be clapped down to some new labour, there and then. As to any recreation with other children of my age, I had very little of that; for the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers (though there WAS a child once set in the midst of the Disciples), and held that they contaminated one another.

The natural result of this treatment, continued, I suppose, for some six months or more, was to make me sullen, dull, and dogged. I was not made the less so by my sense of being daily more and more shut out and alienated from my mother. I believe I should have been almost stupefied but for one circumstance.

It was this. My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the

Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time,--they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii,--and did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it. It is astonishing to me now, how I found time, in the midst of my porings and blunderings over heavier themes, to read those books as I did. It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my favourite characters in them--as I did--and by putting Mr. and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones--which I did too. I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have sustained my own idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch, I verily believe. I had a greedy relish for a few volumes of Voyages and Travels--I forget what, now--that were on those shelves; and for days and days I can remember to have gone about my region of our house, armed with the centre-piece out of an old set of boot-trees--the perfect realization of Captain Somebody, of the Royal British Navy, in danger of being beset by savages, and resolved to sell his life at a great price. The Captain never lost dignity, from having his ears boxed with the Latin Grammar. I did; but the Captain was a Captain and a hero, in despite of all the grammars of all the languages in the world, dead or alive.

This was my only and my constant comfort. When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them. I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I know that Commodore Trunnion held that club



with Mr. Pickle, in the parlour of our little village alehouse.

The reader now understands, as well as I do, what I was when I came to that point of my youthful history to which I am now coming again.

One morning when I went into the parlour with my books, I found my mother looking anxious, Miss Murdstone looking firm, and Mr. Murdstone binding something round the bottom of a cane--a lithe and limber cane, which he left off binding when I came in, and poised and switched in the air.

'I tell you, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'I have been often flogged myself.'

'To be sure; of course,' said Miss Murdstone.

'Certainly, my dear Jane,' faltered my mother, meekly. 'But--but do you think it did Edward good?'

'Do you think it did Edward harm, Clara?' asked Mr. Murdstone, gravely.

'That's the point,' said his sister.

To this my mother returned, 'Certainly, my dear Jane,' and said no more.

I felt apprehensive that I was personally interested in this dialogue, and sought Mr. Murdstone's eye as it lighted on mine.

'Now, David,' he said--and I saw that cast again as he said it--'you must be far more careful today than usual.' He gave the cane another poise, and another switch; and having finished his preparation of it, laid it down beside him, with an impressive look, and took up his book.

This was a good freshener to my presence of mind, as a beginning. I felt the words of my lessons slipping off, not one by one, or line by line, but by the entire page; I tried to lay hold of them; but they seemed, if I may so express it, to have put skates on, and to skim away from me with a smoothness there was no checking.

We began badly, and went on worse. I had come in with an idea of distinguishing myself rather, conceiving that I was very well prepared; but it turned out to be quite a mistake. Book after book was added to the heap of failures, Miss Murdstone being firmly watchful of us all the time. And when we came at last to the five thousand cheeses (canes he made it that day, I remember), my mother burst out crying.

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, in her warning voice.

'I am not quite well, my dear Jane, I think,' said my mother.

I saw him wink, solemnly, at his sister, as he rose and said, taking up the cane:

'Why, Jane, we can hardly expect Clara to bear, with perfect firmness, the worry and torment that David has occasioned her today. That would be stoical. Clara is greatly strengthened and improved, but we can hardly expect so much from her. David, you and I will go upstairs, boy.'

As he took me out at the door, my mother ran towards us. Miss Murdstone said, 'Clara! are you a perfect fool?' and interfered. I saw my mother stop her ears then, and I heard her crying.

He walked me up to my room slowly and gravely--I am certain he had a delight in that formal parade of executing justice--and when we got there, suddenly twisted my head under his arm.

'Mr. Murdstone! Sir!' I cried to him. 'Don't! Pray don't beat me! I have tried to learn, sir, but I can't learn while you and Miss Murdstone are by. I can't indeed!'

'Can't you, indeed, David?' he said. 'We'll try that.'

He had my head as in a vice, but I twined round him somehow, and stopped him for a moment, entreating him not to beat me. It was only a moment that I stopped him, for he cut me heavily an instant afterwards, and in the same instant I caught the hand with which he held me in my mouth, between my teeth, and bit it through. It sets my teeth on edge to think of it.

He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death. Above all the noise we made, I heard them running up the stairs, and crying out--I heard my mother crying out--and Peggotty. Then he was gone; and the door was locked outside; and I was lying, fevered and hot, and torn, and sore, and raging in my puny way, upon the floor.

How well I recollect, when I became quiet, what an unnatural stillness seemed to reign through the whole house! How well I remember, when my smart and passion began to cool, how wicked I began to feel!

I sat listening for a long while, but there was not a sound. I crawled up from the floor, and saw my face in the glass, so swollen, red, and ugly that it almost frightened me. My stripes were sore and stiff, and made me cry afresh, when I moved; but they were nothing to the guilt I felt. It lay heavier on my breast than if I had been a most atrocious criminal, I dare say.

It had begun to grow dark, and I had shut the window (I had been lying, for the most part, with my head upon the sill, by turns crying, dozing, and looking listlessly out), when the key was turned, and Miss Murdstone

came in with some bread and meat, and milk. These she put down upon the table without a word, glaring at me the while with exemplary firmness, and then retired, locking the door after her.

Long after it was dark I sat there, wondering whether anybody else would come. When this appeared improbable for that night, I undressed, and went to bed; and, there, I began to wonder fearfully what would be done to me. Whether it was a criminal act that I had committed? Whether I should be taken into custody, and sent to prison? Whether I was at all in danger of being hanged?

I never shall forget the waking, next morning; the being cheerful and fresh for the first moment, and then the being weighed down by the stale and dismal oppression of remembrance. Miss Murdstone reappeared before I was out of bed; told me, in so many words, that I was free to walk in the garden for half an hour and no longer; and retired, leaving the door open, that I might avail myself of that permission.

I did so, and did so every morning of my imprisonment, which lasted five days. If I could have seen my mother alone, I should have gone down on my knees to her and besought her forgiveness; but I saw no one, Miss Murdstone excepted, during the whole time--except at evening prayers in the parlour; to which I was escorted by Miss Murdstone after everybody else was placed; where I was stationed, a young outlaw, all alone by myself near the door; and whence I was solemnly conducted by my jailer, before any one arose from the devotional posture. I only observed that my mother was as far off from me as she could be, and kept her face another way so that I never saw it; and that Mr. Murdstone's hand was bound up in a large linen wrapper.

The length of those five days I can convey no idea of to any one. They occupy the place of years in my remembrance. The way in which I listened to all the incidents of the house that made themselves audible to me;

the ringing of bells, the opening and shutting of doors, the murmuring of voices, the footsteps on the stairs; to any laughing, whistling, or singing, outside, which seemed more dismal than anything else to me in my solitude and disgrace--the uncertain pace of the hours, especially at night, when I would wake thinking it was morning, and find that the family were not yet gone to bed, and that all the length of night had yet to come--the depressed dreams and nightmares I had--the return of day, noon, afternoon, evening, when the boys played in the churchyard, and I watched them from a distance within the room, being ashamed to show myself at the window lest they should know I was a prisoner--the strange sensation of never hearing myself speak--the fleeting intervals of something like cheerfulness, which came with eating and drinking, and went away with it--the setting in of rain one evening, with a fresh smell, and its coming down faster and faster between me and the church, until it and gathering night seemed to quench me in gloom, and fear, and remorse--all this appears to have gone round and round for years instead of days, it is so vividly and strongly stamped on my remembrance. On the last night of my restraint, I was awakened by hearing my own name spoken in a whisper. I started up in bed, and putting out my arms in the dark, said:

'Is that you, Peggotty?'

There was no immediate answer, but presently I heard my name again, in a tone so very mysterious and awful, that I think I should have gone into a fit, if it had not occurred to me that it must have come through the keyhole.

I groped my way to the door, and putting my own lips to the keyhole, whispered: 'Is that you, Peggotty dear?'

'Yes, my own precious Davy,' she replied. 'Be as soft as a mouse, or the Cat'll hear us.'

I understood this to mean Miss Murdstone, and was sensible of the urgency of the case; her room being close by.

'How's mama, dear Peggotty? Is she very angry with me?'

I could hear Peggotty crying softly on her side of the keyhole, as I was doing on mine, before she answered. 'No. Not very.'

'What is going to be done with me, Peggotty dear? Do you know?'

'School. Near London,' was Peggotty's answer. I was obliged to get her to repeat it, for she spoke it the first time quite down my throat, in consequence of my having forgotten to take my mouth away from the keyhole and put my ear there; and though her words tickled me a good deal, I didn't hear them.

'When, Peggotty?'

'Tomorrow.'

'Is that the reason why Miss Murdstone took the clothes out of my drawers?' which she had done, though I have forgotten to mention it.

'Yes,' said Peggotty. 'Box.'

'Shan't I see mama?'

'Yes,' said Peggotty. 'Morning.'

Then Peggotty fitted her mouth close to the keyhole, and delivered these words through it with as much feeling and earnestness as a keyhole has ever been the medium of communicating, I will venture to assert:

shooting in each broken little sentence in a convulsive little burst of its own.

'Davy, dear. If I ain't been azackly as intimate with you. Lately, as I used to be. It ain't because I don't love you. Just as well and more, my pretty poppet. It's because I thought it better for you. And for someone else besides. Davy, my darling, are you listening? Can you hear?'

'Ye-ye-ye-yes, Peggotty!' I sobbed.

'My own!' said Peggotty, with infinite compassion. 'What I want to say, is. That you must never forget me. For I'll never forget you. And I'll take as much care of your mama, Davy. As ever I took of you. And I won't leave her. The day may come when she'll be glad to lay her poor head. On her stupid, cross old Peggotty's arm again. And I'll write to you, my dear. Though I ain't no scholar. And I'll--I'll--' Peggotty fell to kissing the keyhole, as she couldn't kiss me.

'Thank you, dear Peggotty!' said I. 'Oh, thank you! Thank you! Will you promise me one thing, Peggotty? Will you write and tell Mr. Peggotty and little Em'ly, and Mrs. Gummidge and Ham, that I am not so bad as they might suppose, and that I sent 'em all my love--especially to little Em'ly? Will you, if you please, Peggotty?'

The kind soul promised, and we both of us kissed the keyhole with the greatest affection--I patted it with my hand, I recollect, as if it had been her honest face--and parted. From that night there grew up in my breast a feeling for Peggotty which I cannot very well define. She did not replace my mother; no one could do that; but she came into a vacancy in my heart, which closed upon her, and I felt towards her something I have never felt for any other human being. It was a sort of comical affection, too; and yet if she had died, I cannot think what I should have done, or how I should have acted out the tragedy it would have been

to me.

In the morning Miss Murdstone appeared as usual, and told me I was going to school; which was not altogether such news to me as she supposed. She also informed me that when I was dressed, I was to come downstairs into the parlour, and have my breakfast. There, I found my mother, very pale and with red eyes: into whose arms I ran, and begged her pardon from my suffering soul.

'Oh, Davy!' she said. 'That you could hurt anyone I love! Try to be better, pray to be better! I forgive you; but I am so grieved, Davy, that you should have such bad passions in your heart.'

They had persuaded her that I was a wicked fellow, and she was more sorry for that than for my going away. I felt it sorely. I tried to eat my parting breakfast, but my tears dropped upon my bread-and-butter, and trickled into my tea. I saw my mother look at me sometimes, and then glance at the watchful Miss Murdstone, and then look down, or look away.

'Master Copperfield's box there!' said Miss Murdstone, when wheels were heard at the gate.

I looked for Peggotty, but it was not she; neither she nor Mr. Murdstone appeared. My former acquaintance, the carrier, was at the door. The box was taken out to his cart, and lifted in.

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, in her warning note.

'Ready, my dear Jane,' returned my mother. 'Good-bye, Davy. You are going for your own good. Good-bye, my child. You will come home in the holidays, and be a better boy.'

'Clara!' Miss Murdstone repeated.



'Certainly, my dear Jane,' replied my mother, who was holding me. 'I forgive you, my dear boy. God bless you!'

'Clara!' Miss Murdstone repeated.

Miss Murdstone was good enough to take me out to the cart, and to say on the way that she hoped I would repent, before I came to a bad end; and then I got into the cart, and the lazy horse walked off with it.

#### CHAPTER 5. I AM SENT AWAY FROM HOME

We might have gone about half a mile, and my pocket-handkerchief was quite wet through, when the carrier stopped short. Looking out to ascertain for what, I saw, to MY amazement, Peggotty burst from a hedge and climb into the cart. She took me in both her arms, and squeezed me to her stays until the pressure on my nose was extremely painful, though I never thought of that till afterwards when I found it very tender. Not a single word did Peggotty speak. Releasing one of her arms, she put it down in her pocket to the elbow, and brought out some paper bags of cakes which she crammed into my pockets, and a purse which she put into my hand, but not one word did she say. After another and a final squeeze with both arms, she got down from the cart and ran away; and, my belief is, and has always been, without a solitary button on her gown. I picked up one, of several that were rolling about, and treasured it as a keepsake for a long time.

The carrier looked at me, as if to inquire if she were coming back. I shook my head, and said I thought not. 'Then come up,' said the carrier to the lazy horse; who came up accordingly.

Having by this time cried as much as I possibly could, I began to think it was of no use crying any more, especially as neither Roderick Random, nor that Captain in the Royal British Navy, had ever cried, that I could remember, in trying situations. The carrier, seeing me in this resolution, proposed that my pocket-handkerchief should be spread upon the horse's back to dry. I thanked him, and assented; and particularly small it looked, under those circumstances.

I had now leisure to examine the purse. It was a stiff leather purse, with a snap, and had three bright shillings in it, which Peggotty had evidently polished up with whitening, for my greater delight. But its most precious contents were two half-crowns folded together in a bit of paper, on which was written, in my mother's hand, 'For Davy. With my love.' I was so overcome by this, that I asked the carrier to be so good as to reach me my pocket-handkerchief again; but he said he thought I had better do without it, and I thought I really had, so I wiped my eyes on my sleeve and stopped myself.

For good, too; though, in consequence of my previous emotions, I was still occasionally seized with a stormy sob. After we had jogged on for some little time, I asked the carrier if he was going all the way.

'All the way where?' inquired the carrier.

'There,' I said.

'Where's there?' inquired the carrier.

'Near London,' I said.

'Why that horse,' said the carrier, jerking the rein to point him out, 'would be deader than pork afore he got over half the ground.'

'Are you only going to Yarmouth then?' I asked.

'That's about it,' said the carrier. 'And there I shall take you to the stage-cutch, and the stage-cutch that'll take you to--wherever it is.'

As this was a great deal for the carrier (whose name was Mr. Barkis) to say--he being, as I observed in a former chapter, of a phlegmatic temperament, and not at all conversational--I offered him a cake as a mark of attention, which he ate at one gulp, exactly like an elephant, and which made no more impression on his big face than it would have done on an elephant's.

'Did SHE make 'em, now?' said Mr. Barkis, always leaning forward, in his slouching way, on the footboard of the cart with an arm on each knee.

'Peggotty, do you mean, sir?'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis. 'Her.'

'Yes. She makes all our pastry, and does all our cooking.'

'Do she though?' said Mr. Barkis. He made up his mouth as if to whistle, but he didn't whistle. He sat looking at the horse's ears, as if he saw something new there; and sat so, for a considerable time. By and by, he said:

'No sweethearts, I b'lieve?'

'Sweetmeats did you say, Mr. Barkis?' For I thought he wanted something else to eat, and had pointedly alluded to that description of refreshment.

'Hearts,' said Mr. Barkis. 'Sweet hearts; no person walks with her!'

'With Peggotty?'

'Ah!' he said. 'Her.'

'Oh, no. She never had a sweetheart.'

'Didn't she, though!' said Mr. Barkis.

Again he made up his mouth to whistle, and again he didn't whistle, but sat looking at the horse's ears.

'So she makes,' said Mr. Barkis, after a long interval of reflection, 'all the apple parsties, and doos all the cooking, do she?'

I replied that such was the fact.

'Well. I'll tell you what,' said Mr. Barkis. 'P'raps you might be writin' to her?'

'I shall certainly write to her,' I rejoined.

'Ah!' he said, slowly turning his eyes towards me. 'Well! If you was writin' to her, p'raps you'd recollect to say that Barkis was willin'; would you?'

'That Barkis is willing,' I repeated, innocently. 'Is that all the message?'

'Ye-es,' he said, considering. 'Ye-es. Barkis is willin'.'

'But you will be at Blunderstone again tomorrow, Mr. Barkis,' I said,

faltering a little at the idea of my being far away from it then, and could give your own message so much better.'

As he repudiated this suggestion, however, with a jerk of his head, and once more confirmed his previous request by saying, with profound gravity, 'Barkis is willin'. That's the message,' I readily undertook its transmission. While I was waiting for the coach in the hotel at Yarmouth that very afternoon, I procured a sheet of paper and an inkstand, and wrote a note to Peggotty, which ran thus: 'My dear Peggotty. I have come here safe. Barkis is willing. My love to mama. Yours affectionately. P.S. He says he particularly wants you to know--BARKIS IS WILLING.'

When I had taken this commission on myself prospectively, Mr. Barkis relapsed into perfect silence; and I, feeling quite worn out by all that had happened lately, lay down on a sack in the cart and fell asleep. I slept soundly until we got to Yarmouth; which was so entirely new and strange to me in the inn-yard to which we drove, that I at once abandoned a latent hope I had had of meeting with some of Mr. Peggotty's family there, perhaps even with little Em'ly herself.

The coach was in the yard, shining very much all over, but without any horses to it as yet; and it looked in that state as if nothing was more unlikely than its ever going to London. I was thinking this, and wondering what would ultimately become of my box, which Mr. Barkis had put down on the yard-pavement by the pole (he having driven up the yard to turn his cart), and also what would ultimately become of me, when a lady looked out of a bow-window where some fowls and joints of meat were hanging up, and said:

'Is that the little gentleman from Blunderstone?'

'Yes, ma'am,' I said.

'What name?' inquired the lady.

'Copperfield, ma'am,' I said.

'That won't do,' returned the lady. 'Nobody's dinner is paid for here, in that name.'

'Is it Murdstone, ma'am?' I said.

'If you're Master Murdstone,' said the lady, 'why do you go and give another name, first?'

I explained to the lady how it was, who then rang a bell, and called out, 'William! show the coffee-room!' upon which a waiter came running out of a kitchen on the opposite side of the yard to show it, and seemed a good deal surprised when he was only to show it to me.

It was a large long room with some large maps in it. I doubt if I could have felt much stranger if the maps had been real foreign countries, and I cast away in the middle of them. I felt it was taking a liberty to sit down, with my cap in my hand, on the corner of the chair nearest the door; and when the waiter laid a cloth on purpose for me, and put a set of castors on it, I think I must have turned red all over with modesty.

He brought me some chops, and vegetables, and took the covers off in such a bouncing manner that I was afraid I must have given him some offence. But he greatly relieved my mind by putting a chair for me at the table, and saying, very affably, 'Now, six-foot! come on!'

I thanked him, and took my seat at the board; but found it extremely difficult to handle my knife and fork with anything like dexterity, or to avoid splashing myself with the gravy, while he was standing

opposite, staring so hard, and making me blush in the most dreadful manner every time I caught his eye. After watching me into the second chop, he said:

'There's half a pint of ale for you. Will you have it now?'

I thanked him and said, 'Yes.' Upon which he poured it out of a jug into a large tumbler, and held it up against the light, and made it look beautiful.

'My eye!' he said. 'It seems a good deal, don't it?'

'It does seem a good deal,' I answered with a smile. For it was quite delightful to me, to find him so pleasant. He was a twinkling-eyed, pimple-faced man, with his hair standing upright all over his head; and as he stood with one arm a-kimbo, holding up the glass to the light with the other hand, he looked quite friendly.

'There was a gentleman here, yesterday,' he said--'a stout gentleman, by the name of Topsawyer--perhaps you know him?'

'No,' I said, 'I don't think--'

'In breeches and gaiters, broad-brimmed hat, grey coat, speckled choker,' said the waiter.

'No,' I said bashfully, 'I haven't the pleasure--'

'He came in here,' said the waiter, looking at the light through the tumbler, 'ordered a glass of this ale--WOULD order it--I told him not--drank it, and fell dead. It was too old for him. It oughtn't to be drawn; that's the fact.'

I was very much shocked to hear of this melancholy accident, and said I thought I had better have some water.

'Why you see,' said the waiter, still looking at the light through the tumbler, with one of his eyes shut up, 'our people don't like things being ordered and left. It offends 'em. But I'll drink it, if you like. I'm used to it, and use is everything. I don't think it'll hurt me, if I throw my head back, and take it off quick. Shall I?'

I replied that he would much oblige me by drinking it, if he thought he could do it safely, but by no means otherwise. When he did throw his head back, and take it off quick, I had a horrible fear, I confess, of seeing him meet the fate of the lamented Mr. Topsawyer, and fall lifeless on the carpet. But it didn't hurt him. On the contrary, I thought he seemed the fresher for it.

'What have we got here?' he said, putting a fork into my dish. 'Not chops?'

'Chops,' I said.

'Lord bless my soul!' he exclaimed, 'I didn't know they were chops. Why, a chop's the very thing to take off the bad effects of that beer! Ain't it lucky?'

So he took a chop by the bone in one hand, and a potato in the other, and ate away with a very good appetite, to my extreme satisfaction. He afterwards took another chop, and another potato; and after that, another chop and another potato. When we had done, he brought me a pudding, and having set it before me, seemed to ruminate, and to become absent in his mind for some moments.

'How's the pie?' he said, rousing himself.



'It's a pudding,' I made answer.

'Pudding!' he exclaimed. 'Why, bless me, so it is! What!' looking at it nearer. 'You don't mean to say it's a batter-pudding!'

'Yes, it is indeed.'

'Why, a batter-pudding,' he said, taking up a table-spoon, 'is my favourite pudding! Ain't that lucky? Come on, little 'un, and let's see who'll get most.'

The waiter certainly got most. He entreated me more than once to come in and win, but what with his table-spoon to my tea-spoon, his dispatch to my dispatch, and his appetite to my appetite, I was left far behind at the first mouthful, and had no chance with him. I never saw anyone enjoy a pudding so much, I think; and he laughed, when it was all gone, as if his enjoyment of it lasted still.

Finding him so very friendly and companionable, it was then that I asked for the pen and ink and paper, to write to Peggotty. He not only brought it immediately, but was good enough to look over me while I wrote the letter. When I had finished it, he asked me where I was going to school.

I said, 'Near London,' which was all I knew.

'Oh! my eye!' he said, looking very low-spirited, 'I am sorry for that.'

'Why?' I asked him.

'Oh, Lord!' he said, shaking his head, 'that's the school where they broke the boy's ribs--two ribs--a little boy he was. I should say he was--let me see--how old are you, about?'

I told him between eight and nine.

'That's just his age,' he said. 'He was eight years and six months old when they broke his first rib; eight years and eight months old when they broke his second, and did for him.'

I could not disguise from myself, or from the waiter, that this was an uncomfortable coincidence, and inquired how it was done. His answer was not cheering to my spirits, for it consisted of two dismal words, 'With whopping.'

The blowing of the coach-horn in the yard was a seasonable diversion, which made me get up and hesitatingly inquire, in the mingled pride and diffidence of having a purse (which I took out of my pocket), if there were anything to pay.

'There's a sheet of letter-paper,' he returned. 'Did you ever buy a sheet of letter-paper?'

I could not remember that I ever had.

'It's dear,' he said, 'on account of the duty. Threepence. That's the way we're taxed in this country. There's nothing else, except the waiter. Never mind the ink. I lose by that.'

'What should you--what should I--how much ought I to--what would it be right to pay the waiter, if you please?' I stammered, blushing.

'If I hadn't a family, and that family hadn't the cowpock,' said the waiter, 'I wouldn't take a sixpence. If I didn't support a aged pairint, and a lovely sister,'--here the waiter was greatly agitated--'I wouldn't take a farthing. If I had a good place, and was treated well here, I

should beg acceptance of a trifle, instead of taking of it. But I live on broken wittles--and I sleep on the coals'--here the waiter burst into tears.

I was very much concerned for his misfortunes, and felt that any recognition short of ninepence would be mere brutality and hardness of heart. Therefore I gave him one of my three bright shillings, which he received with much humility and veneration, and spun up with his thumb, directly afterwards, to try the goodness of.

It was a little disconcerting to me, to find, when I was being helped up behind the coach, that I was supposed to have eaten all the dinner without any assistance. I discovered this, from overhearing the lady in the bow-window say to the guard, 'Take care of that child, George, or he'll burst!' and from observing that the women-servants who were about the place came out to look and giggle at me as a young phenomenon. My unfortunate friend the waiter, who had quite recovered his spirits, did not appear to be disturbed by this, but joined in the general admiration without being at all confused. If I had any doubt of him, I suppose this half awakened it; but I am inclined to believe that with the simple confidence of a child, and the natural reliance of a child upon superior years (qualities I am very sorry any children should prematurely change for worldly wisdom), I had no serious mistrust of him on the whole, even then.

I felt it rather hard, I must own, to be made, without deserving it, the subject of jokes between the coachman and guard as to the coach drawing heavy behind, on account of my sitting there, and as to the greater expediency of my travelling by waggon. The story of my supposed appetite getting wind among the outside passengers, they were merry upon it likewise; and asked me whether I was going to be paid for, at school, as two brothers or three, and whether I was contracted for, or went upon the regular terms; with other pleasant questions. But the worst of

it was, that I knew I should be ashamed to eat anything, when an opportunity offered, and that, after a rather light dinner, I should remain hungry all night--for I had left my cakes behind, at the hotel, in my hurry. My apprehensions were realized. When we stopped for supper I couldn't muster courage to take any, though I should have liked it very much, but sat by the fire and said I didn't want anything. This did not save me from more jokes, either; for a husky-voiced gentleman with a rough face, who had been eating out of a sandwich-box nearly all the way, except when he had been drinking out of a bottle, said I was like a boa-constrictor who took enough at one meal to last him a long time; after which, he actually brought a rash out upon himself with boiled beef.

We had started from Yarmouth at three o'clock in the afternoon, and we were due in London about eight next morning. It was Mid-summer weather, and the evening was very pleasant. When we passed through a village, I pictured to myself what the insides of the houses were like, and what the inhabitants were about; and when boys came running after us, and got up behind and swung there for a little way, I wondered whether their fathers were alive, and whether they were happy at home. I had plenty to think of, therefore, besides my mind running continually on the kind of place I was going to--which was an awful speculation. Sometimes, I remember, I resigned myself to thoughts of home and Peggotty; and to endeavouring, in a confused blind way, to recall how I had felt, and what sort of boy I used to be, before I bit Mr. Murdstone: which I couldn't satisfy myself about by any means, I seemed to have bitten him in such a remote antiquity.

The night was not so pleasant as the evening, for it got chilly; and being put between two gentlemen (the rough-faced one and another) to prevent my tumbling off the coach, I was nearly smothered by their falling asleep, and completely blocking me up. They squeezed me so hard sometimes, that I could not help crying out, 'Oh! If you please!'--which

they didn't like at all, because it woke them. Opposite me was an elderly lady in a great fur cloak, who looked in the dark more like a haystack than a lady, she was wrapped up to such a degree. This lady had a basket with her, and she hadn't known what to do with it, for a long time, until she found that on account of my legs being short, it could go underneath me. It cramped and hurt me so, that it made me perfectly miserable; but if I moved in the least, and made a glass that was in the basket rattle against something else (as it was sure to do), she gave me the cruellest poke with her foot, and said, 'Come, don't YOU fidget. YOUR bones are young enough, I'm sure!'

At last the sun rose, and then my companions seemed to sleep easier. The difficulties under which they had laboured all night, and which had found utterance in the most terrific gasps and snorts, are not to be conceived. As the sun got higher, their sleep became lighter, and so they gradually one by one awoke. I recollect being very much surprised by the feint everybody made, then, of not having been to sleep at all, and by the uncommon indignation with which everyone repelled the charge. I labour under the same kind of astonishment to this day, having invariably observed that of all human weaknesses, the one to which our common nature is the least disposed to confess (I cannot imagine why) is the weakness of having gone to sleep in a coach.

What an amazing place London was to me when I saw it in the distance, and how I believed all the adventures of all my favourite heroes to be constantly enacting and re-enacting there, and how I vaguely made it out in my own mind to be fuller of wonders and wickedness than all the cities of the earth, I need not stop here to relate. We approached it by degrees, and got, in due time, to the inn in the Whitechapel district, for which we were bound. I forget whether it was the Blue Bull, or the Blue Boar; but I know it was the Blue Something, and that its likeness was painted up on the back of the coach.

The guard's eye lighted on me as he was getting down, and he said at the booking-office door:

'Is there anybody here for a yoongster booked in the name of Murdstone, from Bloonderstone, Sooffolk, to be left till called for?'

Nobody answered.

'Try Copperfield, if you please, sir,' said I, looking helplessly down.

'Is there anybody here for a yoongster, booked in the name of Murdstone, from Bloonderstone, Sooffolk, but owing to the name of Copperfield, to be left till called for?' said the guard. 'Come! IS there anybody?'

No. There was nobody. I looked anxiously around; but the inquiry made no impression on any of the bystanders, if I except a man in gaiters, with one eye, who suggested that they had better put a brass collar round my neck, and tie me up in the stable.

A ladder was brought, and I got down after the lady, who was like a haystack: not daring to stir, until her basket was removed. The coach was clear of passengers by that time, the luggage was very soon cleared out, the horses had been taken out before the luggage, and now the coach itself was wheeled and backed off by some hostlers, out of the way. Still, nobody appeared, to claim the dusty youngster from Blunderstone, Suffolk.

More solitary than Robinson Crusoe, who had nobody to look at him and see that he was solitary, I went into the booking-office, and, by invitation of the clerk on duty, passed behind the counter, and sat down on the scale at which they weighed the luggage. Here, as I sat looking at the parcels, packages, and books, and inhaling the smell of stables (ever since associated with that morning), a procession of most

tremendous considerations began to march through my mind. Supposing nobody should ever fetch me, how long would they consent to keep me there? Would they keep me long enough to spend seven shillings? Should I sleep at night in one of those wooden bins, with the other luggage, and wash myself at the pump in the yard in the morning; or should I be turned out every night, and expected to come again to be left till called for, when the office opened next day? Supposing there was no mistake in the case, and Mr. Murdstone had devised this plan to get rid of me, what should I do? If they allowed me to remain there until my seven shillings were spent, I couldn't hope to remain there when I began to starve. That would obviously be inconvenient and unpleasant to the customers, besides entailing on the Blue Whatever-it-was, the risk of funeral expenses. If I started off at once, and tried to walk back home, how could I ever find my way, how could I ever hope to walk so far, how could I make sure of anyone but Peggotty, even if I got back? If I found out the nearest proper authorities, and offered myself to go for a soldier, or a sailor, I was such a little fellow that it was most likely they wouldn't take me in. These thoughts, and a hundred other such thoughts, turned me burning hot, and made me giddy with apprehension and dismay. I was in the height of my fever when a man entered and whispered to the clerk, who presently slanted me off the scale, and pushed me over to him, as if I were weighed, bought, delivered, and paid for.

As I went out of the office, hand in hand with this new acquaintance, I stole a look at him. He was a gaunt, sallow young man, with hollow cheeks, and a chin almost as black as Mr. Murdstone's; but there the likeness ended, for his whiskers were shaved off, and his hair, instead of being glossy, was rusty and dry. He was dressed in a suit of black clothes which were rather rusty and dry too, and rather short in the sleeves and legs; and he had a white neck-kerchief on, that was not over-clean. I did not, and do not, suppose that this neck-kerchief was all the linen he wore, but it was all he showed or gave any hint of.

'You're the new boy?' he said. 'Yes, sir,' I said.

I supposed I was. I didn't know.

'I'm one of the masters at Salem House,' he said.

I made him a bow and felt very much overawed. I was so ashamed to allude to a commonplace thing like my box, to a scholar and a master at Salem House, that we had gone some little distance from the yard before I had the hardihood to mention it. We turned back, on my humbly insinuating that it might be useful to me hereafter; and he told the clerk that the carrier had instructions to call for it at noon.

'If you please, sir,' I said, when we had accomplished about the same distance as before, 'is it far?'

'It's down by Blackheath,' he said.

'Is that far, sir?' I diffidently asked.

'It's a good step,' he said. 'We shall go by the stage-coach. It's about six miles.'

I was so faint and tired, that the idea of holding out for six miles more, was too much for me. I took heart to tell him that I had had nothing all night, and that if he would allow me to buy something to eat, I should be very much obliged to him. He appeared surprised at this--I see him stop and look at me now--and after considering for a few moments, said he wanted to call on an old person who lived not far off, and that the best way would be for me to buy some bread, or whatever I liked best that was wholesome, and make my breakfast at her house, where we could get some milk.



Accordingly we looked in at a baker's window, and after I had made a series of proposals to buy everything that was bilious in the shop, and he had rejected them one by one, we decided in favour of a nice little loaf of brown bread, which cost me threepence. Then, at a grocer's shop, we bought an egg and a slice of streaky bacon; which still left what I thought a good deal of change, out of the second of the bright shillings, and made me consider London a very cheap place. These provisions laid in, we went on through a great noise and uproar that confused my weary head beyond description, and over a bridge which, no doubt, was London Bridge (indeed I think he told me so, but I was half asleep), until we came to the poor person's house, which was a part of some alms-houses, as I knew by their look, and by an inscription on a stone over the gate which said they were established for twenty-five poor women.

The Master at Salem House lifted the latch of one of a number of little black doors that were all alike, and had each a little diamond-paned window on one side, and another little diamond--paned window above; and we went into the little house of one of these poor old women, who was blowing a fire to make a little saucepan boil. On seeing the master enter, the old woman stopped with the bellows on her knee, and said something that I thought sounded like 'My Charley!' but on seeing me come in too, she got up, and rubbing her hands made a confused sort of half curtsey.

'Can you cook this young gentleman's breakfast for him, if you please?' said the Master at Salem House.

'Can I?' said the old woman. 'Yes can I, sure!'

'How's Mrs. Fibbitson today?' said the Master, looking at another old woman in a large chair by the fire, who was such a bundle of clothes that I feel grateful to this hour for not having sat upon her by

mistake.

'Ah, she's poorly,' said the first old woman. 'It's one of her bad days. If the fire was to go out, through any accident, I verily believe she'd go out too, and never come to life again.'

As they looked at her, I looked at her also. Although it was a warm day, she seemed to think of nothing but the fire. I fancied she was jealous even of the saucepan on it; and I have reason to know that she took its impressment into the service of boiling my egg and broiling my bacon, in dudgeon; for I saw her, with my own discomfited eyes, shake her fist at me once, when those culinary operations were going on, and no one else was looking. The sun streamed in at the little window, but she sat with her own back and the back of the large chair towards it, screening the fire as if she were sedulously keeping IT warm, instead of it keeping her warm, and watching it in a most distrustful manner. The completion of the preparations for my breakfast, by relieving the fire, gave her such extreme joy that she laughed aloud--and a very unmelodious laugh she had, I must say.

I sat down to my brown loaf, my egg, and my rasher of bacon, with a basin of milk besides, and made a most delicious meal. While I was yet in the full enjoyment of it, the old woman of the house said to the Master:

'Have you got your flute with you?'

'Yes,' he returned.

'Have a blow at it,' said the old woman, coaxingly. 'Do!'

The Master, upon this, put his hand underneath the skirts of his coat, and brought out his flute in three pieces, which he screwed together,

and began immediately to play. My impression is, after many years of consideration, that there never can have been anybody in the world who played worse. He made the most dismal sounds I have ever heard produced by any means, natural or artificial. I don't know what the tunes were--if there were such things in the performance at all, which I doubt--but the influence of the strain upon me was, first, to make me think of all my sorrows until I could hardly keep my tears back; then to take away my appetite; and lastly, to make me so sleepy that I couldn't keep my eyes open. They begin to close again, and I begin to nod, as the recollection rises fresh upon me. Once more the little room, with its open corner cupboard, and its square-backed chairs, and its angular little staircase leading to the room above, and its three peacock's feathers displayed over the mantelpiece--I remember wondering when I first went in, what that peacock would have thought if he had known what his finery was doomed to come to--fades from before me, and I nod, and sleep. The flute becomes inaudible, the wheels of the coach are heard instead, and I am on my journey. The coach jolts, I wake with a start, and the flute has come back again, and the Master at Salem House is sitting with his legs crossed, playing it dolefully, while the old woman of the house looks on delighted. She fades in her turn, and he fades, and all fades, and there is no flute, no Master, no Salem House, no David Copperfield, no anything but heavy sleep.

I dreamed, I thought, that once while he was blowing into this dismal flute, the old woman of the house, who had gone nearer and nearer to him in her ecstatic admiration, leaned over the back of his chair and gave him an affectionate squeeze round the neck, which stopped his playing for a moment. I was in the middle state between sleeping and waking, either then or immediately afterwards; for, as he resumed--it was a real fact that he had stopped playing--I saw and heard the same old woman ask Mrs. Fibbitson if it wasn't delicious (meaning the flute), to which Mrs. Fibbitson replied, 'Ay, ay! yes!' and nodded at the fire: to which, I am persuaded, she gave the credit of the whole performance.

When I seemed to have been dozing a long while, the Master at Salem House unscrewed his flute into the three pieces, put them up as before, and took me away. We found the coach very near at hand, and got upon the roof; but I was so dead sleepy, that when we stopped on the road to take up somebody else, they put me inside where there were no passengers, and where I slept profoundly, until I found the coach going at a footpace up a steep hill among green leaves. Presently, it stopped, and had come to its destination.

A short walk brought us--I mean the Master and me--to Salem House, which was enclosed with a high brick wall, and looked very dull. Over a door in this wall was a board with SALEM HOUSE upon it; and through a grating in this door we were surveyed when we rang the bell by a surly face, which I found, on the door being opened, belonged to a stout man with a bull-neck, a wooden leg, overhanging temples, and his hair cut close all round his head.

'The new boy,' said the Master.

The man with the wooden leg eyed me all over--it didn't take long, for there was not much of me--and locked the gate behind us, and took out the key. We were going up to the house, among some dark heavy trees, when he called after my conductor. 'Hallo!'

We looked back, and he was standing at the door of a little lodge, where he lived, with a pair of boots in his hand.

'Here! The cobbler's been,' he said, 'since you've been out, Mr. Mell, and he says he can't mend 'em any more. He says there ain't a bit of the original boot left, and he wonders you expect it.'

With these words he threw the boots towards Mr. Mell, who went back a

few paces to pick them up, and looked at them (very disconsolately, I was afraid), as we went on together. I observed then, for the first time, that the boots he had on were a good deal the worse for wear, and that his stocking was just breaking out in one place, like a bud.

Salem House was a square brick building with wings; of a bare and unfurnished appearance. All about it was so very quiet, that I said to Mr. Mell I supposed the boys were out; but he seemed surprised at my not knowing that it was holiday-time. That all the boys were at their several homes. That Mr. Creakle, the proprietor, was down by the sea-side with Mrs. and Miss Creakle; and that I was sent in holiday-time as a punishment for my misdoing, all of which he explained to me as we went along.

I gazed upon the schoolroom into which he took me, as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen. I see it now. A long room with three long rows of desks, and six of forms, and bristling all round with pegs for hats and slates. Scraps of old copy-books and exercises litter the dirty floor. Some silkworms' houses, made of the same materials, are scattered over the desks. Two miserable little white mice, left behind by their owner, are running up and down in a fusty castle made of pasteboard and wire, looking in all the corners with their red eyes for anything to eat. A bird, in a cage very little bigger than himself, makes a mournful rattle now and then in hopping on his perch, two inches high, or dropping from it; but neither sings nor chirps. There is a strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books. There could not well be more ink splashed about it, if it had been roofless from its first construction, and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed, and blown ink through the varying seasons of the year.

Mr. Mell having left me while he took his irreparable boots upstairs, I went softly to the upper end of the room, observing all this as I crept

along. Suddenly I came upon a pasteboard placard, beautifully written, which was lying on the desk, and bore these words: 'TAKE CARE OF HIM. HE BITES.'

I got upon the desk immediately, apprehensive of at least a great dog underneath. But, though I looked all round with anxious eyes, I could see nothing of him. I was still engaged in peering about, when Mr. Mell came back, and asked me what I did up there?

'I beg your pardon, sir,' says I, 'if you please, I'm looking for the dog.'

'Dog?' he says. 'What dog?'

'Isn't it a dog, sir?'

'Isn't what a dog?'

'That's to be taken care of, sir; that bites.'

'No, Copperfield,' says he, gravely, 'that's not a dog. That's a boy. My instructions are, Copperfield, to put this placard on your back. I am sorry to make such a beginning with you, but I must do it.' With that he took me down, and tied the placard, which was neatly constructed for the purpose, on my shoulders like a knapsack; and wherever I went, afterwards, I had the consolation of carrying it.

What I suffered from that placard, nobody can imagine. Whether it was possible for people to see me or not, I always fancied that somebody was reading it. It was no relief to turn round and find nobody; for wherever my back was, there I imagined somebody always to be. That cruel man with the wooden leg aggravated my sufferings. He was in authority; and if he ever saw me leaning against a tree, or a wall, or the house, he roared

out from his lodge door in a stupendous voice, 'Hallo, you sir! You Copperfield! Show that badge conspicuous, or I'll report you!' The playground was a bare gravelled yard, open to all the back of the house and the offices; and I knew that the servants read it, and the butcher read it, and the baker read it; that everybody, in a word, who came backwards and forwards to the house, of a morning when I was ordered to walk there, read that I was to be taken care of, for I bit, I recollect that I positively began to have a dread of myself, as a kind of wild boy who did bite.

There was an old door in this playground, on which the boys had a custom of carving their names. It was completely covered with such inscriptions. In my dread of the end of the vacation and their coming back, I could not read a boy's name, without inquiring in what tone and with what emphasis HE would read, 'Take care of him. He bites.' There was one boy--a certain J. Steerforth--who cut his name very deep and very often, who, I conceived, would read it in a rather strong voice, and afterwards pull my hair. There was another boy, one Tommy Traddles, who I dreaded would make game of it, and pretend to be dreadfully frightened of me. There was a third, George Dimple, who I fancied would sing it. I have looked, a little shrinking creature, at that door, until the owners of all the names--there were five-and-forty of them in the school then, Mr. Mell said--seemed to send me to Coventry by general acclamation, and to cry out, each in his own way, 'Take care of him. He bites!'

It was the same with the places at the desks and forms. It was the same with the groves of deserted bedsteads I peeped at, on my way to, and when I was in, my own bed. I remember dreaming night after night, of being with my mother as she used to be, or of going to a party at Mr. Peggotty's, or of travelling outside the stage-coach, or of dining again with my unfortunate friend the waiter, and in all these circumstances making people scream and stare, by the unhappy disclosure that I had

nothing on but my little night-shirt, and that placard.

In the monotony of my life, and in my constant apprehension of the re-opening of the school, it was such an insupportable affliction! I had long tasks every day to do with Mr. Mell; but I did them, there being no Mr. and Miss Murdstone here, and got through them without disgrace. Before, and after them, I walked about--supervised, as I have mentioned, by the man with the wooden leg. How vividly I call to mind the damp about the house, the green cracked flagstones in the court, an old leaky water-butt, and the discoloured trunks of some of the grim trees, which seemed to have dripped more in the rain than other trees, and to have blown less in the sun! At one we dined, Mr. Mell and I, at the upper end of a long bare dining-room, full of deal tables, and smelling of fat. Then, we had more tasks until tea, which Mr. Mell drank out of a blue teacup, and I out of a tin pot. All day long, and until seven or eight in the evening, Mr. Mell, at his own detached desk in the schoolroom, worked hard with pen, ink, ruler, books, and writing-paper, making out the bills (as I found) for last half-year. When he had put up his things for the night he took out his flute, and blew at it, until I almost thought he would gradually blow his whole being into the large hole at the top, and ooze away at the keys.

I picture my small self in the dimly-lighted rooms, sitting with my head upon my hand, listening to the doleful performance of Mr. Mell, and conning tomorrow's lessons. I picture myself with my books shut up, still listening to the doleful performance of Mr. Mell, and listening through it to what used to be at home, and to the blowing of the wind on Yarmouth flats, and feeling very sad and solitary. I picture myself going up to bed, among the unused rooms, and sitting on my bed-side crying for a comfortable word from Peggotty. I picture myself coming downstairs in the morning, and looking through a long ghastly gash of a staircase window at the school-bell hanging on the top of an out-house with a weathercock above it; and dreading the time when it shall ring J.



Steerforth and the rest to work: which is only second, in my foreboding apprehensions, to the time when the man with the wooden leg shall unlock the rusty gate to give admission to the awful Mr. Creakle. I cannot think I was a very dangerous character in any of these aspects, but in all of them I carried the same warning on my back.

Mr. Mell never said much to me, but he was never harsh to me. I suppose we were company to each other, without talking. I forgot to mention that he would talk to himself sometimes, and grin, and clench his fist, and grind his teeth, and pull his hair in an unaccountable manner. But he had these peculiarities: and at first they frightened me, though I soon got used to them.

#### CHAPTER 6. I ENLARGE MY CIRCLE OF ACQUAINTANCE

I HAD led this life about a month, when the man with the wooden leg began to stump about with a mop and a bucket of water, from which I inferred that preparations were making to receive Mr. Creakle and the boys. I was not mistaken; for the mop came into the schoolroom before long, and turned out Mr. Mell and me, who lived where we could, and got on how we could, for some days, during which we were always in the way of two or three young women, who had rarely shown themselves before, and were so continually in the midst of dust that I sneezed almost as much as if Salem House had been a great snuff-box.

One day I was informed by Mr. Mell that Mr. Creakle would be home that evening. In the evening, after tea, I heard that he was come. Before bedtime, I was fetched by the man with the wooden leg to appear before him.

Mr. Creakle's part of the house was a good deal more comfortable than ours, and he had a snug bit of garden that looked pleasant after the dusty playground, which was such a desert in miniature, that I thought no one but a camel, or a dromedary, could have felt at home in it. It seemed to me a bold thing even to take notice that the passage looked comfortable, as I went on my way, trembling, to Mr. Creakle's presence: which so abashed me, when I was ushered into it, that I hardly saw Mrs. Creakle or Miss Creakle (who were both there, in the parlour), or anything but Mr. Creakle, a stout gentleman with a bunch of watch-chain and seals, in an arm-chair, with a tumbler and bottle beside him.

'So!' said Mr. Creakle. 'This is the young gentleman whose teeth are to be filed! Turn him round.'

The wooden-legged man turned me about so as to exhibit the placard; and having afforded time for a full survey of it, turned me about again, with my face to Mr. Creakle, and posted himself at Mr. Creakle's side. Mr. Creakle's face was fiery, and his eyes were small, and deep in his head; he had thick veins in his forehead, a little nose, and a large chin. He was bald on the top of his head; and had some thin wet-looking hair that was just turning grey, brushed across each temple, so that the two sides interlaced on his forehead. But the circumstance about him which impressed me most, was, that he had no voice, but spoke in a whisper. The exertion this cost him, or the consciousness of talking in that feeble way, made his angry face so much more angry, and his thick veins so much thicker, when he spoke, that I am not surprised, on looking back, at this peculiarity striking me as his chief one. 'Now,' said Mr. Creakle. 'What's the report of this boy?'

'There's nothing against him yet,' returned the man with the wooden leg. 'There has been no opportunity.'

I thought Mr. Creakle was disappointed. I thought Mrs. and Miss Creakle

(at whom I now glanced for the first time, and who were, both, thin and quiet) were not disappointed.

'Come here, sir!' said Mr. Creakle, beckoning to me.

'Come here!' said the man with the wooden leg, repeating the gesture.

'I have the happiness of knowing your father-in-law,' whispered Mr. Creakle, taking me by the ear; 'and a worthy man he is, and a man of a strong character. He knows me, and I know him. Do YOU know me? Hey?' said Mr. Creakle, pinching my ear with ferocious playfulness.

'Not yet, sir,' I said, flinching with the pain.

'Not yet? Hey?' repeated Mr. Creakle. 'But you will soon. Hey?'

'You will soon. Hey?' repeated the man with the wooden leg. I afterwards found that he generally acted, with his strong voice, as Mr. Creakle's interpreter to the boys.

I was very much frightened, and said, I hoped so, if he pleased. I felt, all this while, as if my ear were blazing; he pinched it so hard.

'I'll tell you what I am,' whispered Mr. Creakle, letting it go at last, with a screw at parting that brought the water into my eyes. 'I'm a Tartar.'

'A Tartar,' said the man with the wooden leg.

'When I say I'll do a thing, I do it,' said Mr. Creakle; 'and when I say I will have a thing done, I will have it done.'

'--Will have a thing done, I will have it done,' repeated the man with

the wooden leg.

'I am a determined character,' said Mr. Creakle. 'That's what I am. I do my duty. That's what I do. My flesh and blood'--he looked at Mrs. Creakle as he said this--'when it rises against me, is not my flesh and blood. I discard it. Has that fellow'--to the man with the wooden leg--'been here again?'

'No,' was the answer.

'No,' said Mr. Creakle. 'He knows better. He knows me. Let him keep away. I say let him keep away,' said Mr. Creakle, striking his hand upon the table, and looking at Mrs. Creakle, 'for he knows me. Now you have begun to know me too, my young friend, and you may go. Take him away.'

I was very glad to be ordered away, for Mrs. and Miss Creakle were both wiping their eyes, and I felt as uncomfortable for them as I did for myself. But I had a petition on my mind which concerned me so nearly, that I couldn't help saying, though I wondered at my own courage:

'If you please, sir--'

Mr. Creakle whispered, 'Hah! What's this?' and bent his eyes upon me, as if he would have burnt me up with them.

'If you please, sir,' I faltered, 'if I might be allowed (I am very sorry indeed, sir, for what I did) to take this writing off, before the boys come back--'

Whether Mr. Creakle was in earnest, or whether he only did it to frighten me, I don't know, but he made a burst out of his chair, before which I precipitately retreated, without waiting for the escort Of the man with the wooden leg, and never once stopped until I reached my own

bedroom, where, finding I was not pursued, I went to bed, as it was time, and lay quaking, for a couple of hours.

Next morning Mr. Sharp came back. Mr. Sharp was the first master, and superior to Mr. Mell. Mr. Mell took his meals with the boys, but Mr. Sharp dined and supped at Mr. Creakle's table. He was a limp, delicate-looking gentleman, I thought, with a good deal of nose, and a way of carrying his head on one side, as if it were a little too heavy for him. His hair was very smooth and wavy; but I was informed by the very first boy who came back that it was a wig (a second-hand one HE said), and that Mr. Sharp went out every Saturday afternoon to get it curled.

It was no other than Tommy Traddles who gave me this piece of intelligence. He was the first boy who returned. He introduced himself by informing me that I should find his name on the right-hand corner of the gate, over the top-bolt; upon that I said, 'Traddles?' to which he replied, 'The same,' and then he asked me for a full account of myself and family.

It was a happy circumstance for me that Traddles came back first. He enjoyed my placard so much, that he saved me from the embarrassment of either disclosure or concealment, by presenting me to every other boy who came back, great or small, immediately on his arrival, in this form of introduction, 'Look here! Here's a game!' Happily, too, the greater part of the boys came back low-spirited, and were not so boisterous at my expense as I had expected. Some of them certainly did dance about me like wild Indians, and the greater part could not resist the temptation of pretending that I was a dog, and patting and soothing me, lest I should bite, and saying, 'Lie down, sir!' and calling me Towzer. This was naturally confusing, among so many strangers, and cost me some tears, but on the whole it was much better than I had anticipated.

I was not considered as being formally received into the school, however, until J. Steerforth arrived. Before this boy, who was reputed to be a great scholar, and was very good-looking, and at least half-a-dozen years my senior, I was carried as before a magistrate. He inquired, under a shed in the playground, into the particulars of my punishment, and was pleased to express his opinion that it was 'a jolly shame'; for which I became bound to him ever afterwards.

'What money have you got, Copperfield?' he said, walking aside with me when he had disposed of my affair in these terms. I told him seven shillings.

'You had better give it to me to take care of,' he said. 'At least, you can if you like. You needn't if you don't like.'

I hastened to comply with his friendly suggestion, and opening Peggotty's purse, turned it upside down into his hand.

'Do you want to spend anything now?' he asked me.

'No thank you,' I replied.

'You can, if you like, you know,' said Steerforth. 'Say the word.'

'No, thank you, sir,' I repeated.

'Perhaps you'd like to spend a couple of shillings or so, in a bottle of currant wine by and by, up in the bedroom?' said Steerforth. 'You belong to my bedroom, I find.'

It certainly had not occurred to me before, but I said, Yes, I should like that.

'Very good,' said Steerforth. 'You'll be glad to spend another shilling or so, in almond cakes, I dare say?'

I said, Yes, I should like that, too.

'And another shilling or so in biscuits, and another in fruit, eh?' said Steerforth. 'I say, young Copperfield, you're going it!'

I smiled because he smiled, but I was a little troubled in my mind, too.

'Well!' said Steerforth. 'We must make it stretch as far as we can; that's all. I'll do the best in my power for you. I can go out when I like, and I'll smuggle the prog in.' With these words he put the money in his pocket, and kindly told me not to make myself uneasy; he would take care it should be all right. He was as good as his word, if that were all right which I had a secret misgiving was nearly all wrong--for I feared it was a waste of my mother's two half-crowns--though I had preserved the piece of paper they were wrapped in: which was a precious saving. When we went upstairs to bed, he produced the whole seven shillings' worth, and laid it out on my bed in the moonlight, saying:

'There you are, young Copperfield, and a royal spread you've got.'

I couldn't think of doing the honours of the feast, at my time of life, while he was by; my hand shook at the very thought of it. I begged him to do me the favour of presiding; and my request being seconded by the other boys who were in that room, he acceded to it, and sat upon my pillow, handing round the viands--with perfect fairness, I must say--and dispensing the currant wine in a little glass without a foot, which was his own property. As to me, I sat on his left hand, and the rest were grouped about us, on the nearest beds and on the floor.

How well I recollect our sitting there, talking in whispers; or their

talking, and my respectfully listening, I ought rather to say; the moonlight falling a little way into the room, through the window, painting a pale window on the floor, and the greater part of us in shadow, except when Steerforth dipped a match into a phosphorus-box, when he wanted to look for anything on the board, and shed a blue glare over us that was gone directly! A certain mysterious feeling, consequent on the darkness, the secrecy of the revel, and the whisper in which everything was said, steals over me again, and I listen to all they tell me with a vague feeling of solemnity and awe, which makes me glad that they are all so near, and frightens me (though I feign to laugh) when Traddles pretends to see a ghost in the corner.

I heard all kinds of things about the school and all belonging to it. I heard that Mr. Creakle had not preferred his claim to being a Tartar without reason; that he was the sternest and most severe of masters; that he laid about him, right and left, every day of his life, charging in among the boys like a trooper, and slashing away, unmercifully. That he knew nothing himself, but the art of slashing, being more ignorant (J. Steerforth said) than the lowest boy in the school; that he had been, a good many years ago, a small hop-dealer in the Borough, and had taken to the schooling business after being bankrupt in hops, and making away with Mrs. Creakle's money. With a good deal more of that sort, which I wondered how they knew.

I heard that the man with the wooden leg, whose name was Tungay, was an obstinate barbarian who had formerly assisted in the hop business, but had come into the scholastic line with Mr. Creakle, in consequence, as was supposed among the boys, of his having broken his leg in Mr. Creakle's service, and having done a deal of dishonest work for him, and knowing his secrets. I heard that with the single exception of Mr. Creakle, Tungay considered the whole establishment, masters and boys, as his natural enemies, and that the only delight of his life was to be sour and malicious. I heard that Mr. Creakle had a son, who had not been



Tungay's friend, and who, assisting in the school, had once held some remonstrance with his father on an occasion when its discipline was very cruelly exercised, and was supposed, besides, to have protested against his father's usage of his mother. I heard that Mr. Creakle had turned him out of doors, in consequence; and that Mrs. and Miss Creakle had been in a sad way, ever since.

But the greatest wonder that I heard of Mr. Creakle was, there being one boy in the school on whom he never ventured to lay a hand, and that boy being J. Steerforth. Steerforth himself confirmed this when it was stated, and said that he should like to begin to see him do it. On being asked by a mild boy (not me) how he would proceed if he did begin to see him do it, he dipped a match into his phosphorus-box on purpose to shed a glare over his reply, and said he would commence by knocking him down with a blow on the forehead from the seven-and-sixpenny ink-bottle that was always on the mantelpiece. We sat in the dark for some time, breathless.

I heard that Mr. Sharp and Mr. Mell were both supposed to be wretchedly paid; and that when there was hot and cold meat for dinner at Mr. Creakle's table, Mr. Sharp was always expected to say he preferred cold; which was again corroborated by J. Steerforth, the only parlour-boarder. I heard that Mr. Sharp's wig didn't fit him; and that he needn't be so 'bounceable'--somebody else said 'bumptious'--about it, because his own red hair was very plainly to be seen behind.

I heard that one boy, who was a coal-merchant's son, came as a set-off against the coal-bill, and was called, on that account, 'Exchange or Barter'--a name selected from the arithmetic book as expressing this arrangement. I heard that the table beer was a robbery of parents, and the pudding an imposition. I heard that Miss Creakle was regarded by the school in general as being in love with Steerforth; and I am sure, as I sat in the dark, thinking of his nice voice, and his fine face, and his

easy manner, and his curling hair, I thought it very likely. I heard that Mr. Mell was not a bad sort of fellow, but hadn't a sixpence to bless himself with; and that there was no doubt that old Mrs. Mell, his mother, was as poor as job. I thought of my breakfast then, and what had sounded like 'My Charley!' but I was, I am glad to remember, as mute as a mouse about it.

The hearing of all this, and a good deal more, outlasted the banquet some time. The greater part of the guests had gone to bed as soon as the eating and drinking were over; and we, who had remained whispering and listening half-undressed, at last betook ourselves to bed, too.

'Good night, young Copperfield,' said Steerforth. 'I'll take care of you.' 'You're very kind,' I gratefully returned. 'I am very much obliged to you.'

'You haven't got a sister, have you?' said Steerforth, yawning.

'No,' I answered.

'That's a pity,' said Steerforth. 'If you had had one, I should think she would have been a pretty, timid, little, bright-eyed sort of girl. I should have liked to know her. Good night, young Copperfield.'

'Good night, sir,' I replied.

I thought of him very much after I went to bed, and raised myself, I recollect, to look at him where he lay in the moonlight, with his handsome face turned up, and his head reclining easily on his arm. He was a person of great power in my eyes; that was, of course, the reason of my mind running on him. No veiled future dimly glanced upon him in the moonbeams. There was no shadowy picture of his footsteps, in the garden that I dreamed of walking in all night.

## CHAPTER 7. MY 'FIRST HALF' AT SALEM HOUSE

School began in earnest next day. A profound impression was made upon me, I remember, by the roar of voices in the schoolroom suddenly becoming hushed as death when Mr. Creakle entered after breakfast, and stood in the doorway looking round upon us like a giant in a story-book surveying his captives.

Tungay stood at Mr. Creakle's elbow. He had no occasion, I thought, to cry out 'Silence!' so ferociously, for the boys were all struck speechless and motionless.

Mr. Creakle was seen to speak, and Tungay was heard, to this effect.

'Now, boys, this is a new half. Take care what you're about, in this new half. Come fresh up to the lessons, I advise you, for I come fresh up to the punishment. I won't flinch. It will be of no use your rubbing yourselves; you won't rub the marks out that I shall give you. Now get to work, every boy!'

When this dreadful exordium was over, and Tungay had stumped out again, Mr. Creakle came to where I sat, and told me that if I were famous for biting, he was famous for biting, too. He then showed me the cane, and asked me what I thought of THAT, for a tooth? Was it a sharp tooth, hey? Was it a double tooth, hey? Had it a deep prong, hey? Did it bite, hey? Did it bite? At every question he gave me a fleshy cut with it that made me writhe; so I was very soon made free of Salem House (as Steerforth said), and was very soon in tears also.

Not that I mean to say these were special marks of distinction, which only I received. On the contrary, a large majority of the boys (especially the smaller ones) were visited with similar instances of notice, as Mr. Creakle made the round of the schoolroom. Half the establishment was writhing and crying, before the day's work began; and how much of it had writhed and cried before the day's work was over, I am really afraid to recollect, lest I should seem to exaggerate.

I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite. I am confident that he couldn't resist a chubby boy, especially; that there was a fascination in such a subject, which made him restless in his mind, until he had scored and marked him for the day. I was chubby myself, and ought to know. I am sure when I think of the fellow now, my blood rises against him with the disinterested indignation I should feel if I could have known all about him without having ever been in his power; but it rises hotly, because I know him to have been an incapable brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held, than to be Lord High Admiral, or Commander-in-Chief--in either of which capacities it is probable that he would have done infinitely less mischief.

Miserable little propitiators of a remorseless Idol, how abject we were to him! What a launch in life I think it now, on looking back, to be so mean and servile to a man of such parts and pretensions!

Here I sit at the desk again, watching his eye--humbly watching his eye, as he rules a ciphering-book for another victim whose hands have just been flattened by that identical ruler, and who is trying to wipe the sting out with a pocket-handkerchief. I have plenty to do. I don't watch his eye in idleness, but because I am morbidly attracted to it, in a dread desire to know what he will do next, and whether it will be my

turn to suffer, or somebody else's. A lane of small boys beyond me, with the same interest in his eye, watch it too. I think he knows it, though he pretends he don't. He makes dreadful mouths as he rules the ciphering-book; and now he throws his eye sideways down our lane, and we all droop over our books and tremble. A moment afterwards we are again eyeing him. An unhappy culprit, found guilty of imperfect exercise, approaches at his command. The culprit falters excuses, and professes a determination to do better tomorrow. Mr. Creakle cuts a joke before he beats him, and we laugh at it,--miserable little dogs, we laugh, with our visages as white as ashes, and our hearts sinking into our boots.

Here I sit at the desk again, on a drowsy summer afternoon. A buzz and hum go up around me, as if the boys were so many bluebottles. A cloggy sensation of the lukewarm fat of meat is upon me (we dined an hour or two ago), and my head is as heavy as so much lead. I would give the world to go to sleep. I sit with my eye on Mr. Creakle, blinking at him like a young owl; when sleep overpowers me for a minute, he still looms through my slumber, ruling those ciphering-books, until he softly comes behind me and wakes me to plainer perception of him, with a red ridge across my back.

Here I am in the playground, with my eye still fascinated by him, though I can't see him. The window at a little distance from which I know he is having his dinner, stands for him, and I eye that instead. If he shows his face near it, mine assumes an imploring and submissive expression. If he looks out through the glass, the boldest boy (Steerforth excepted) stops in the middle of a shout or yell, and becomes contemplative. One day, Traddles (the most unfortunate boy in the world) breaks that window accidentally, with a ball. I shudder at this moment with the tremendous sensation of seeing it done, and feeling that the ball has bounded on to Mr. Creakle's sacred head.

Poor Traddles! In a tight sky-blue suit that made his arms and legs like

German sausages, or roly-poly puddings, he was the merriest and most miserable of all the boys. He was always being caned--I think he was caned every day that half-year, except one holiday Monday when he was only ruler'd on both hands--and was always going to write to his uncle about it, and never did. After laying his head on the desk for a little while, he would cheer up, somehow, begin to laugh again, and draw skeletons all over his slate, before his eyes were dry. I used at first to wonder what comfort Traddles found in drawing skeletons; and for some time looked upon him as a sort of hermit, who reminded himself by those symbols of mortality that caning couldn't last for ever. But I believe he only did it because they were easy, and didn't want any features.

He was very honourable, Traddles was, and held it as a solemn duty in the boys to stand by one another. He suffered for this on several occasions; and particularly once, when Steerforth laughed in church, and the Beadle thought it was Traddles, and took him out. I see him now, going away in custody, despised by the congregation. He never said who was the real offender, though he smarted for it next day, and was imprisoned so many hours that he came forth with a whole churchyard-full of skeletons swarming all over his Latin Dictionary. But he had his reward. Steerforth said there was nothing of the sneak in Traddles, and we all felt that to be the highest praise. For my part, I could have gone through a good deal (though I was much less brave than Traddles, and nothing like so old) to have won such a recompense.

To see Steerforth walk to church before us, arm-in-arm with Miss Creakle, was one of the great sights of my life. I didn't think Miss Creakle equal to little Em'ly in point of beauty, and I didn't love her (I didn't dare); but I thought her a young lady of extraordinary attractions, and in point of gentility not to be surpassed. When Steerforth, in white trousers, carried her parasol for her, I felt proud to know him; and believed that she could not choose but adore him with all her heart. Mr. Sharp and Mr. Mell were both notable personages in my

eyes; but Steerforth was to them what the sun was to two stars.

Steerforth continued his protection of me, and proved a very useful friend; since nobody dared to annoy one whom he honoured with his countenance. He couldn't--or at all events he didn't--defend me from Mr. Creakle, who was very severe with me; but whenever I had been treated worse than usual, he always told me that I wanted a little of his pluck, and that he wouldn't have stood it himself; which I felt he intended for encouragement, and considered to be very kind of him. There was one advantage, and only one that I know of, in Mr. Creakle's severity. He found my placard in his way when he came up or down behind the form on which I sat, and wanted to make a cut at me in passing; for this reason it was soon taken off, and I saw it no more.

An accidental circumstance cemented the intimacy between Steerforth and me, in a manner that inspired me with great pride and satisfaction, though it sometimes led to inconvenience. It happened on one occasion, when he was doing me the honour of talking to me in the playground, that I hazarded the observation that something or somebody--I forget what now--was like something or somebody in Peregrine Pickle. He said nothing at the time; but when I was going to bed at night, asked me if I had got that book?

I told him no, and explained how it was that I had read it, and all those other books of which I have made mention.

'And do you recollect them?' Steerforth said.

'Oh yes,' I replied; I had a good memory, and I believed I recollected them very well.

'Then I tell you what, young Copperfield,' said Steerforth, 'you shall tell 'em to me. I can't get to sleep very early at night, and I

generally wake rather early in the morning. We'll go over 'em one after another. We'll make some regular Arabian Nights of it.'

I felt extremely flattered by this arrangement, and we commenced carrying it into execution that very evening. What ravages I committed on my favourite authors in the course of my interpretation of them, I am not in a condition to say, and should be very unwilling to know; but I had a profound faith in them, and I had, to the best of my belief, a simple, earnest manner of narrating what I did narrate; and these qualities went a long way.

The drawback was, that I was often sleepy at night, or out of spirits and indisposed to resume the story; and then it was rather hard work, and it must be done; for to disappoint or to displease Steerforth was of course out of the question. In the morning, too, when I felt weary, and should have enjoyed another hour's repose very much, it was a tiresome thing to be roused, like the Sultana Scheherazade, and forced into a long story before the getting-up bell rang; but Steerforth was resolute; and as he explained to me, in return, my sums and exercises, and anything in my tasks that was too hard for me, I was no loser by the transaction. Let me do myself justice, however. I was moved by no interested or selfish motive, nor was I moved by fear of him. I admired and loved him, and his approval was return enough. It was so precious to me that I look back on these trifles, now, with an aching heart.

Steerforth was considerate, too; and showed his consideration, in one particular instance, in an unflinching manner that was a little tantalizing, I suspect, to poor Traddles and the rest. Peggotty's promised letter--what a comfortable letter it was!--arrived before 'the half' was many weeks old; and with it a cake in a perfect nest of oranges, and two bottles of cowslip wine. This treasure, as in duty bound, I laid at the feet of Steerforth, and begged him to dispense.



'Now, I'll tell you what, young Copperfield,' said he: 'the wine shall be kept to wet your whistle when you are story-telling.'

I blushed at the idea, and begged him, in my modesty, not to think of it. But he said he had observed I was sometimes hoarse--a little roopy was his exact expression--and it should be, every drop, devoted to the purpose he had mentioned. Accordingly, it was locked up in his box, and drawn off by himself in a phial, and administered to me through a piece of quill in the cork, when I was supposed to be in want of a restorative. Sometimes, to make it a more sovereign specific, he was so kind as to squeeze orange juice into it, or to stir it up with ginger, or dissolve a peppermint drop in it; and although I cannot assert that the flavour was improved by these experiments, or that it was exactly the compound one would have chosen for a stomachic, the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning, I drank it gratefully and was very sensible of his attention.

We seem, to me, to have been months over Peregrine, and months more over the other stories. The institution never flagged for want of a story, I am certain; and the wine lasted out almost as well as the matter. Poor Traddles--I never think of that boy but with a strange disposition to laugh, and with tears in my eyes--was a sort of chorus, in general; and affected to be convulsed with mirth at the comic parts, and to be overcome with fear when there was any passage of an alarming character in the narrative. This rather put me out, very often. It was a great jest of his, I recollect, to pretend that he couldn't keep his teeth from chattering, whenever mention was made of an Alguazill in connexion with the adventures of Gil Blas; and I remember that when Gil Blas met the captain of the robbers in Madrid, this unlucky joker counterfeited such an ague of terror, that he was overheard by Mr. Creakle, who was prowling about the passage, and handsomely flogged for disorderly conduct in the bedroom. Whatever I had within me that was romantic and dreamy, was encouraged by so much story-telling in the dark; and in that

respect the pursuit may not have been very profitable to me. But the being cherished as a kind of plaything in my room, and the consciousness that this accomplishment of mine was bruited about among the boys, and attracted a good deal of notice to me though I was the youngest there, stimulated me to exertion. In a school carried on by sheer cruelty, whether it is presided over by a dunce or not, there is not likely to be much learnt. I believe our boys were, generally, as ignorant a set as any schoolboys in existence; they were too much troubled and knocked about to learn; they could no more do that to advantage, than any one can do anything to advantage in a life of constant misfortune, torment, and worry. But my little vanity, and Steerforth's help, urged me on somehow; and without saving me from much, if anything, in the way of punishment, made me, for the time I was there, an exception to the general body, insomuch that I did steadily pick up some crumbs of knowledge.

In this I was much assisted by Mr. Mell, who had a liking for me that I am grateful to remember. It always gave me pain to observe that Steerforth treated him with systematic disparagement, and seldom lost an occasion of wounding his feelings, or inducing others to do so. This troubled me the more for a long time, because I had soon told Steerforth, from whom I could no more keep such a secret, than I could keep a cake or any other tangible possession, about the two old women Mr. Mell had taken me to see; and I was always afraid that Steerforth would let it out, and twit him with it.

We little thought, any one of us, I dare say, when I ate my breakfast that first morning, and went to sleep under the shadow of the peacock's feathers to the sound of the flute, what consequences would come of the introduction into those alms-houses of my insignificant person. But the visit had its unforeseen consequences; and of a serious sort, too, in their way.

One day when Mr. Creakle kept the house from indisposition, which naturally diffused a lively joy through the school, there was a good deal of noise in the course of the morning's work. The great relief and satisfaction experienced by the boys made them difficult to manage; and though the dreaded Tungay brought his wooden leg in twice or thrice, and took notes of the principal offenders' names, no great impression was made by it, as they were pretty sure of getting into trouble tomorrow, do what they would, and thought it wise, no doubt, to enjoy themselves today.

It was, properly, a half-holiday; being Saturday. But as the noise in the playground would have disturbed Mr. Creakle, and the weather was not favourable for going out walking, we were ordered into school in the afternoon, and set some lighter tasks than usual, which were made for the occasion. It was the day of the week on which Mr. Sharp went out to get his wig curled; so Mr. Mell, who always did the drudgery, whatever it was, kept school by himself. If I could associate the idea of a bull or a bear with anyone so mild as Mr. Mell, I should think of him, in connexion with that afternoon when the uproar was at its height, as of one of those animals, baited by a thousand dogs. I recall him bending his aching head, supported on his bony hand, over the book on his desk, and wretchedly endeavouring to get on with his tiresome work, amidst an uproar that might have made the Speaker of the House of Commons giddy. Boys started in and out of their places, playing at puss in the corner with other boys; there were laughing boys, singing boys, talking boys, dancing boys, howling boys; boys shuffled with their feet, boys whirled about him, grinning, making faces, mimicking him behind his back and before his eyes; mimicking his poverty, his boots, his coat, his mother, everything belonging to him that they should have had consideration for.

'Silence!' cried Mr. Mell, suddenly rising up, and striking his desk with the book. 'What does this mean! It's impossible to bear it. It's maddening. How can you do it to me, boys?'

It was my book that he struck his desk with; and as I stood beside him, following his eye as it glanced round the room, I saw the boys all stop, some suddenly surprised, some half afraid, and some sorry perhaps.

Steerforth's place was at the bottom of the school, at the opposite end of the long room. He was lounging with his back against the wall, and his hands in his pockets, and looked at Mr. Mell with his mouth shut up as if he were whistling, when Mr. Mell looked at him.

'Silence, Mr. Steerforth!' said Mr. Mell.

'Silence yourself,' said Steerforth, turning red. 'Whom are you talking to?'

'Sit down,' said Mr. Mell.

'Sit down yourself,' said Steerforth, 'and mind your business.'

There was a titter, and some applause; but Mr. Mell was so white, that silence immediately succeeded; and one boy, who had darted out behind him to imitate his mother again, changed his mind, and pretended to want a pen mended.

'If you think, Steerforth,' said Mr. Mell, 'that I am not acquainted with the power you can establish over any mind here'--he laid his hand, without considering what he did (as I supposed), upon my head--'or that I have not observed you, within a few minutes, urging your juniors on to every sort of outrage against me, you are mistaken.'

'I don't give myself the trouble of thinking at all about you,' said Steerforth, coolly; 'so I'm not mistaken, as it happens.'

'And when you make use of your position of favouritism here, sir,' pursued Mr. Mell, with his lip trembling very much, 'to insult a gentleman--'

'A what?--where is he?' said Steerforth.

Here somebody cried out, 'Shame, J. Steerforth! Too bad!' It was Traddles; whom Mr. Mell instantly discomfited by bidding him hold his tongue. --'To insult one who is not fortunate in life, sir, and who never gave you the least offence, and the many reasons for not insulting whom you are old enough and wise enough to understand,' said Mr. Mell, with his lips trembling more and more, 'you commit a mean and base action. You can sit down or stand up as you please, sir. Copperfield, go on.'

'Young Copperfield,' said Steerforth, coming forward up the room, 'stop a bit. I tell you what, Mr. Mell, once for all. When you take the liberty of calling me mean or base, or anything of that sort, you are an impudent beggar. You are always a beggar, you know; but when you do that, you are an impudent beggar.'

I am not clear whether he was going to strike Mr. Mell, or Mr. Mell was going to strike him, or there was any such intention on either side. I saw a rigidity come upon the whole school as if they had been turned into stone, and found Mr. Creakle in the midst of us, with Tungay at his side, and Mrs. and Miss Creakle looking in at the door as if they were frightened. Mr. Mell, with his elbows on his desk and his face in his hands, sat, for some moments, quite still.

'Mr. Mell,' said Mr. Creakle, shaking him by the arm; and his whisper was so audible now, that Tungay felt it unnecessary to repeat his words; 'you have not forgotten yourself, I hope?'

'No, sir, no,' returned the Master, showing his face, and shaking his head, and rubbing his hands in great agitation. 'No, sir. No. I have remembered myself, I--no, Mr. Creakle, I have not forgotten myself, I--I have remembered myself, sir. I--I--could wish you had remembered me a little sooner, Mr. Creakle. It--it--would have been more kind, sir, more just, sir. It would have saved me something, sir.'

Mr. Creakle, looking hard at Mr. Mell, put his hand on Tungay's shoulder, and got his feet upon the form close by, and sat upon the desk. After still looking hard at Mr. Mell from his throne, as he shook his head, and rubbed his hands, and remained in the same state of agitation, Mr. Creakle turned to Steerforth, and said:

'Now, sir, as he don't condescend to tell me, what is this?'

Steerforth evaded the question for a little while; looking in scorn and anger on his opponent, and remaining silent. I could not help thinking even in that interval, I remember, what a noble fellow he was in appearance, and how homely and plain Mr. Mell looked opposed to him.

'What did he mean by talking about favourites, then?' said Steerforth at length.

'Favourites?' repeated Mr. Creakle, with the veins in his forehead swelling quickly. 'Who talked about favourites?'

'He did,' said Steerforth.

'And pray, what did you mean by that, sir?' demanded Mr. Creakle, turning angrily on his assistant.

'I meant, Mr. Creakle,' he returned in a low voice, 'as I said; that no pupil had a right to avail himself of his position of favouritism to

degrade me.'

'To degrade YOU?' said Mr. Creakle. 'My stars! But give me leave to ask you, Mr. What's-your-name'; and here Mr. Creakle folded his arms, cane and all, upon his chest, and made such a knot of his brows that his little eyes were hardly visible below them; 'whether, when you talk about favourites, you showed proper respect to me? To me, sir,' said Mr. Creakle, darting his head at him suddenly, and drawing it back again, 'the principal of this establishment, and your employer.'

'It was not judicious, sir, I am willing to admit,' said Mr. Mell. 'I should not have done so, if I had been cool.'

Here Steerforth struck in.

'Then he said I was mean, and then he said I was base, and then I called him a beggar. If I had been cool, perhaps I shouldn't have called him a beggar. But I did, and I am ready to take the consequences of it.'

Without considering, perhaps, whether there were any consequences to be taken, I felt quite in a glow at this gallant speech. It made an impression on the boys too, for there was a low stir among them, though no one spoke a word.

'I am surprised, Steerforth--although your candour does you honour,' said Mr. Creakle, 'does you honour, certainly--I am surprised, Steerforth, I must say, that you should attach such an epithet to any person employed and paid in Salem House, sir.'

Steerforth gave a short laugh.

'That's not an answer, sir,' said Mr. Creakle, 'to my remark. I expect more than that from you, Steerforth.'

If Mr. Mell looked homely, in my eyes, before the handsome boy, it would be quite impossible to say how homely Mr. Creakle looked. 'Let him deny it,' said Steerforth.

'Deny that he is a beggar, Steerforth?' cried Mr. Creakle. 'Why, where does he go a-begging?'

'If he is not a beggar himself, his near relation's one,' said Steerforth. 'It's all the same.'

He glanced at me, and Mr. Mell's hand gently patted me upon the shoulder. I looked up with a flush upon my face and remorse in my heart, but Mr. Mell's eyes were fixed on Steerforth. He continued to pat me kindly on the shoulder, but he looked at him.

'Since you expect me, Mr. Creakle, to justify myself,' said Steerforth, 'and to say what I mean,--what I have to say is, that his mother lives on charity in an alms-house.'

Mr. Mell still looked at him, and still patted me kindly on the shoulder, and said to himself, in a whisper, if I heard right: 'Yes, I thought so.'

Mr. Creakle turned to his assistant, with a severe frown and laboured politeness:

'Now, you hear what this gentleman says, Mr. Mell. Have the goodness, if you please, to set him right before the assembled school.'

'He is right, sir, without correction,' returned Mr. Mell, in the midst of a dead silence; 'what he has said is true.'



'Be so good then as declare publicly, will you,' said Mr. Creakle, putting his head on one side, and rolling his eyes round the school, 'whether it ever came to my knowledge until this moment?'

'I believe not directly,' he returned.

'Why, you know not,' said Mr. Creakle. 'Don't you, man?'

'I apprehend you never supposed my worldly circumstances to be very good,' replied the assistant. 'You know what my position is, and always has been, here.'

'I apprehend, if you come to that,' said Mr. Creakle, with his veins swelling again bigger than ever, 'that you've been in a wrong position altogether, and mistook this for a charity school. Mr. Mell, we'll part, if you please. The sooner the better.'

'There is no time,' answered Mr. Mell, rising, 'like the present.'

'Sir, to you!' said Mr. Creakle.

'I take my leave of you, Mr. Creakle, and all of you,' said Mr. Mell, glancing round the room, and again patting me gently on the shoulders. 'James Steerforth, the best wish I can leave you is that you may come to be ashamed of what you have done today. At present I would prefer to see you anything rather than a friend, to me, or to anyone in whom I feel an interest.'

Once more he laid his hand upon my shoulder; and then taking his flute and a few books from his desk, and leaving the key in it for his successor, he went out of the school, with his property under his arm. Mr. Creakle then made a speech, through Tungay, in which he thanked Steerforth for asserting (though perhaps too warmly) the independence

and respectability of Salem House; and which he wound up by shaking hands with Steerforth, while we gave three cheers--I did not quite know what for, but I supposed for Steerforth, and so joined in them ardently, though I felt miserable. Mr. Creakle then caned Tommy Traddles for being discovered in tears, instead of cheers, on account of Mr. Mell's departure; and went back to his sofa, or his bed, or wherever he had come from.

We were left to ourselves now, and looked very blank, I recollect, on one another. For myself, I felt so much self-reproach and contrition for my part in what had happened, that nothing would have enabled me to keep back my tears but the fear that Steerforth, who often looked at me, I saw, might think it unfriendly--or, I should rather say, considering our relative ages, and the feeling with which I regarded him, undutiful--if I showed the emotion which distressed me. He was very angry with Traddles, and said he was glad he had caught it.

Poor Traddles, who had passed the stage of lying with his head upon the desk, and was relieving himself as usual with a burst of skeletons, said he didn't care. Mr. Mell was ill-used.

'Who has ill-used him, you girl?' said Steerforth.

'Why, you have,' returned Traddles.

'What have I done?' said Steerforth.

'What have you done?' retorted Traddles. 'Hurt his feelings, and lost him his situation.'

'His feelings?' repeated Steerforth disdainfully. 'His feelings will soon get the better of it, I'll be bound. His feelings are not like yours, Miss Traddles. As to his situation--which was a precious one,

wasn't it?--do you suppose I am not going to write home, and take care that he gets some money? Polly?'

We thought this intention very noble in Steerforth, whose mother was a widow, and rich, and would do almost anything, it was said, that he asked her. We were all extremely glad to see Traddles so put down, and exalted Steerforth to the skies: especially when he told us, as he condescended to do, that what he had done had been done expressly for us, and for our cause; and that he had conferred a great boon upon us by unselfishly doing it. But I must say that when I was going on with a story in the dark that night, Mr. Mell's old flute seemed more than once to sound mournfully in my ears; and that when at last Steerforth was tired, and I lay down in my bed, I fancied it playing so sorrowfully somewhere, that I was quite wretched.

I soon forgot him in the contemplation of Steerforth, who, in an easy amateur way, and without any book (he seemed to me to know everything by heart), took some of his classes until a new master was found. The new master came from a grammar school; and before he entered on his duties, dined in the parlour one day, to be introduced to Steerforth. Steerforth approved of him highly, and told us he was a Brick. Without exactly understanding what learned distinction was meant by this, I respected him greatly for it, and had no doubt whatever of his superior knowledge: though he never took the pains with me--not that I was anybody--that Mr. Mell had taken.

There was only one other event in this half-year, out of the daily school-life, that made an impression upon me which still survives. It survives for many reasons.

One afternoon, when we were all harassed into a state of dire confusion, and Mr. Creakle was laying about him dreadfully, Tungay came in, and called out in his usual strong way: 'Visitors for Copperfield!'

A few words were interchanged between him and Mr. Creakle, as, who the visitors were, and what room they were to be shown into; and then I, who had, according to custom, stood up on the announcement being made, and felt quite faint with astonishment, was told to go by the back stairs and get a clean frill on, before I repaired to the dining-room. These orders I obeyed, in such a flutter and hurry of my young spirits as I had never known before; and when I got to the parlour door, and the thought came into my head that it might be my mother--I had only thought of Mr. or Miss Murdstone until then--I drew back my hand from the lock, and stopped to have a sob before I went in.

At first I saw nobody; but feeling a pressure against the door, I looked round it, and there, to my amazement, were Mr. Peggotty and Ham, ducking at me with their hats, and squeezing one another against the wall. I could not help laughing; but it was much more in the pleasure of seeing them, than at the appearance they made. We shook hands in a very cordial way; and I laughed and laughed, until I pulled out my pocket-handkerchief and wiped my eyes.

Mr. Peggotty (who never shut his mouth once, I remember, during the visit) showed great concern when he saw me do this, and nudged Ham to say something.

'Cheer up, Mas'r Davy bor'!' said Ham, in his simpering way. 'Why, how you have growed!'

'Am I grown?' I said, drying my eyes. I was not crying at anything in particular that I know of; but somehow it made me cry, to see old friends.

'Growed, Mas'r Davy bor'? Ain't he growed!' said Ham.

'Ain't he growed!' said Mr. Peggotty.

They made me laugh again by laughing at each other, and then we all three laughed until I was in danger of crying again.

'Do you know how mama is, Mr. Peggotty?' I said. 'And how my dear, dear, old Peggotty is?'

'Oncommon,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'And little Em'ly, and Mrs. Gummidge?'

'On--common,' said Mr. Peggotty.

There was a silence. Mr. Peggotty, to relieve it, took two prodigious lobsters, and an enormous crab, and a large canvas bag of shrimps, out of his pockets, and piled them up in Ham's arms.

'You see,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'knowing as you was partial to a little relish with your wittles when you was along with us, we took the liberty. The old Mawther biled 'em, she did. Mrs. Gummidge biled 'em. Yes,' said Mr. Peggotty, slowly, who I thought appeared to stick to the subject on account of having no other subject ready, 'Mrs. Gummidge, I do assure you, she biled 'em.'

I expressed my thanks; and Mr. Peggotty, after looking at Ham, who stood smiling sheepishly over the shellfish, without making any attempt to help him, said:

'We come, you see, the wind and tide making in our favour, in one of our Yarmouth lugs to Gravesen'. My sister she wrote to me the name of this here place, and wrote to me as if ever I chanced to come to Gravesen', I was to come over and inquire for Mas'r Davy and give her dooty,

humbly wishing him well and reporting of the fam'ly as they was uncommon toe-be-sure. Little Em'ly, you see, she'll write to my sister when I go back, as I see you and as you was similarly uncommon, and so we make it quite a merry-go-rounder.'

I was obliged to consider a little before I understood what Mr. Peggotty meant by this figure, expressive of a complete circle of intelligence. I then thanked him heartily; and said, with a consciousness of reddening, that I supposed little Em'ly was altered too, since we used to pick up shells and pebbles on the beach?

'She's getting to be a woman, that's wot she's getting to be,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Ask HIM.' He meant Ham, who beamed with delight and assent over the bag of shrimps.

'Her pretty face!' said Mr. Peggotty, with his own shining like a light.

'Her learning!' said Ham.

'Her writing!' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Why it's as black as jet! And so large it is, you might see it anywheres.'

It was perfectly delightful to behold with what enthusiasm Mr. Peggotty became inspired when he thought of his little favourite. He stands before me again, his bluff hairy face irradiating with a joyful love and pride, for which I can find no description. His honest eyes fire up, and sparkle, as if their depths were stirred by something bright. His broad chest heaves with pleasure. His strong loose hands clench themselves, in his earnestness; and he emphasizes what he says with a right arm that shows, in my pigmy view, like a sledge-hammer.

Ham was quite as earnest as he. I dare say they would have said much more about her, if they had not been abashed by the unexpected coming in

of Steerforth, who, seeing me in a corner speaking with two strangers, stopped in a song he was singing, and said: 'I didn't know you were here, young Copperfield!' (for it was not the usual visiting room) and crossed by us on his way out.

I am not sure whether it was in the pride of having such a friend as Steerforth, or in the desire to explain to him how I came to have such a friend as Mr. Peggotty, that I called to him as he was going away. But I said, modestly--Good Heaven, how it all comes back to me this long time afterwards--!

'Don't go, Steerforth, if you please. These are two Yarmouth boatmen--very kind, good people--who are relations of my nurse, and have come from Gravesend to see me.'

'Aye, aye?' said Steerforth, returning. 'I am glad to see them. How are you both?'

There was an ease in his manner--a gay and light manner it was, but not swaggering--which I still believe to have borne a kind of enchantment with it. I still believe him, in virtue of this carriage, his animal spirits, his delightful voice, his handsome face and figure, and, for aught I know, of some inborn power of attraction besides (which I think a few people possess), to have carried a spell with him to which it was a natural weakness to yield, and which not many persons could withstand. I could not but see how pleased they were with him, and how they seemed to open their hearts to him in a moment.

'You must let them know at home, if you please, Mr. Peggotty,' I said, 'when that letter is sent, that Mr. Steerforth is very kind to me, and that I don't know what I should ever do here without him.'

'Nonsense!' said Steerforth, laughing. 'You mustn't tell them anything

of the sort.'

'And if Mr. Steerforth ever comes into Norfolk or Suffolk, Mr. Peggotty,' I said, 'while I am there, you may depend upon it I shall bring him to Yarmouth, if he will let me, to see your house. You never saw such a good house, Steerforth. It's made out of a boat!'

'Made out of a boat, is it?' said Steerforth. 'It's the right sort of a house for such a thorough-built boatman.'

'So 'tis, sir, so 'tis, sir,' said Ham, grinning. 'You're right, young gen'l'm'n! Mas'r Davy bor', gen'l'm'n's right. A thorough-built boatman! Hor, hor! That's what he is, too!'

Mr. Peggotty was no less pleased than his nephew, though his modesty forbade him to claim a personal compliment so vociferously.

'Well, sir,' he said, bowing and chuckling, and tucking in the ends of his neckerchief at his breast: 'I thankee, sir, I thankee! I do my endeavours in my line of life, sir.'

'The best of men can do no more, Mr. Peggotty,' said Steerforth. He had got his name already.

'I'll pound it, it's wot you do yourself, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, 'and wot you do well--right well! I thankee, sir. I'm obleeged to you, sir, for your welcoming manner of me. I'm rough, sir, but I'm ready--least ways, I hope I'm ready, you unnerstand. My house ain't much for to see, sir, but it's hearty at your service if ever you should come along with Mas'r Davy to see it. I'm a reg'lar Dodman, I am,' said Mr. Peggotty, by which he meant snail, and this was in allusion to his being slow to go, for he had attempted to go after every sentence, and had somehow or other come back again; 'but I wish you both



well, and I wish you happy!'

Ham echoed this sentiment, and we parted with them in the heartiest manner. I was almost tempted that evening to tell Steerforth about pretty little Em'ly, but I was too timid of mentioning her name, and too much afraid of his laughing at me. I remember that I thought a good deal, and in an uneasy sort of way, about Mr. Peggotty having said that she was getting on to be a woman; but I decided that was nonsense.

We transported the shellfish, or the 'relish' as Mr. Peggotty had modestly called it, up into our room unobserved, and made a great supper that evening. But Traddles couldn't get happily out of it. He was too unfortunate even to come through a supper like anybody else. He was taken ill in the night--quite prostrate he was--in consequence of Crab; and after being drugged with black draughts and blue pills, to an extent which Dimple (whose father was a doctor) said was enough to undermine a horse's constitution, received a caning and six chapters of Greek Testament for refusing to confess.

The rest of the half-year is a jumble in my recollection of the daily strife and struggle of our lives; of the waning summer and the changing season; of the frosty mornings when we were rung out of bed, and the cold, cold smell of the dark nights when we were rung into bed again; of the evening schoolroom dimly lighted and indifferently warmed, and the morning schoolroom which was nothing but a great shivering-machine; of the alternation of boiled beef with roast beef, and boiled mutton with roast mutton; of clods of bread-and-butter, dog's-eared lesson-books, cracked slates, tear-blotted copy-books, canings, rulerings, hair-cuttings, rainy Sundays, suet-puddings, and a dirty atmosphere of ink, surrounding all.

I well remember though, how the distant idea of the holidays, after seeming for an immense time to be a stationary speck, began to come

towards us, and to grow and grow. How from counting months, we came to weeks, and then to days; and how I then began to be afraid that I should not be sent for and when I learnt from Steerforth that I had been sent for, and was certainly to go home, had dim forebodings that I might break my leg first. How the breaking-up day changed its place fast, at last, from the week after next to next week, this week, the day after tomorrow, tomorrow, today, tonight--when I was inside the Yarmouth mail, and going home.

I had many a broken sleep inside the Yarmouth mail, and many an incoherent dream of all these things. But when I awoke at intervals, the ground outside the window was not the playground of Salem House, and the sound in my ears was not the sound of Mr. Creakle giving it to Traddles, but the sound of the coachman touching up the horses.

#### CHAPTER 8. MY HOLIDAYS. ESPECIALLY ONE HAPPY AFTERNOON

When we arrived before day at the inn where the mail stopped, which was not the inn where my friend the waiter lived, I was shown up to a nice little bedroom, with DOLPHIN painted on the door. Very cold I was, I know, notwithstanding the hot tea they had given me before a large fire downstairs; and very glad I was to turn into the Dolphin's bed, pull the Dolphin's blankets round my head, and go to sleep.

Mr. Barkis the carrier was to call for me in the morning at nine o'clock. I got up at eight, a little giddy from the shortness of my night's rest, and was ready for him before the appointed time. He received me exactly as if not five minutes had elapsed since we were last together, and I had only been into the hotel to get change for sixpence, or something of that sort.

As soon as I and my box were in the cart, and the carrier seated, the lazy horse walked away with us all at his accustomed pace.

'You look very well, Mr. Barkis,' I said, thinking he would like to know it.

Mr. Barkis rubbed his cheek with his cuff, and then looked at his cuff as if he expected to find some of the bloom upon it; but made no other acknowledgement of the compliment.

'I gave your message, Mr. Barkis,' I said: 'I wrote to Peggotty.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis.

Mr. Barkis seemed gruff, and answered drily.

'Wasn't it right, Mr. Barkis?' I asked, after a little hesitation.

'Why, no,' said Mr. Barkis.

'Not the message?'

'The message was right enough, perhaps,' said Mr. Barkis; 'but it come to an end there.'

Not understanding what he meant, I repeated inquisitively: 'Came to an end, Mr. Barkis?'

'Nothing come of it,' he explained, looking at me sideways. 'No answer.'

'There was an answer expected, was there, Mr. Barkis?' said I, opening my eyes. For this was a new light to me.

'When a man says he's willin',' said Mr. Barkis, turning his glance slowly on me again, 'it's as much as to say, that man's a-waitin' for a answer.'

'Well, Mr. Barkis?'

'Well,' said Mr. Barkis, carrying his eyes back to his horse's ears; 'that man's been a-waitin' for a answer ever since.'

'Have you told her so, Mr. Barkis?'

'No--no,' growled Mr. Barkis, reflecting about it. 'I ain't got no call to go and tell her so. I never said six words to her myself, I ain't a-goin' to tell her so.'

'Would you like me to do it, Mr. Barkis?' said I, doubtfully. 'You might tell her, if you would,' said Mr. Barkis, with another slow look at me, 'that Barkis was a-waitin' for a answer. Says you--what name is it?'

'Her name?'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis, with a nod of his head.

'Peggotty.'

'Chrisen name? Or nat'ral name?' said Mr. Barkis.

'Oh, it's not her Christian name. Her Christian name is Clara.'

'Is it though?' said Mr. Barkis.

He seemed to find an immense fund of reflection in this circumstance,

and sat pondering and inwardly whistling for some time.

'Well!' he resumed at length. 'Says you, "Peggotty! Barkis is waitin' for a answer." Says she, perhaps, "Answer to what?" Says you, "To what I told you." "What is that?" says she. "Barkis is willin'," says you.'

This extremely artful suggestion Mr. Barkis accompanied with a nudge of his elbow that gave me quite a stitch in my side. After that, he slouched over his horse in his usual manner; and made no other reference to the subject except, half an hour afterwards, taking a piece of chalk from his pocket, and writing up, inside the tilt of the cart, 'Clara Peggotty'--apparently as a private memorandum.

Ah, what a strange feeling it was to be going home when it was not home, and to find that every object I looked at, reminded me of the happy old home, which was like a dream I could never dream again! The days when my mother and I and Peggotty were all in all to one another, and there was no one to come between us, rose up before me so sorrowfully on the road, that I am not sure I was glad to be there--not sure but that I would rather have remained away, and forgotten it in Steerforth's company. But there I was; and soon I was at our house, where the bare old elm-trees wrung their many hands in the bleak wintry air, and shreds of the old rooks'-nests drifted away upon the wind.

The carrier put my box down at the garden-gate, and left me. I walked along the path towards the house, glancing at the windows, and fearing at every step to see Mr. Murdstone or Miss Murdstone lowering out of one of them. No face appeared, however; and being come to the house, and knowing how to open the door, before dark, without knocking, I went in with a quiet, timid step.

God knows how infantine the memory may have been, that was awakened within me by the sound of my mother's voice in the old parlour, when I

set foot in the hall. She was singing in a low tone. I think I must have lain in her arms, and heard her singing so to me when I was but a baby. The strain was new to me, and yet it was so old that it filled my heart brim-full; like a friend come back from a long absence.

I believed, from the solitary and thoughtful way in which my mother murmured her song, that she was alone. And I went softly into the room. She was sitting by the fire, suckling an infant, whose tiny hand she held against her neck. Her eyes were looking down upon its face, and she sat singing to it. I was so far right, that she had no other companion.

I spoke to her, and she started, and cried out. But seeing me, she called me her dear Davy, her own boy! and coming half across the room to meet me, kneeled down upon the ground and kissed me, and laid my head down on her bosom near the little creature that was nestling there, and put its hand to my lips.

I wish I had died. I wish I had died then, with that feeling in my heart! I should have been more fit for Heaven than I ever have been since.

'He is your brother,' said my mother, fondling me. 'Davy, my pretty boy! My poor child!' Then she kissed me more and more, and clasped me round the neck. This she was doing when Peggotty came running in, and bounced down on the ground beside us, and went mad about us both for a quarter of an hour.

It seemed that I had not been expected so soon, the carrier being much before his usual time. It seemed, too, that Mr. and Miss Murdstone had gone out upon a visit in the neighbourhood, and would not return before night. I had never hoped for this. I had never thought it possible that we three could be together undisturbed, once more; and I felt, for the time, as if the old days were come back.

We dined together by the fireside. Peggotty was in attendance to wait upon us, but my mother wouldn't let her do it, and made her dine with us. I had my own old plate, with a brown view of a man-of-war in full sail upon it, which Peggotty had hoarded somewhere all the time I had been away, and would not have had broken, she said, for a hundred pounds. I had my own old mug with David on it, and my own old little knife and fork that wouldn't cut.

While we were at table, I thought it a favourable occasion to tell Peggotty about Mr. Barkis, who, before I had finished what I had to tell her, began to laugh, and throw her apron over her face.

'Peggotty,' said my mother. 'What's the matter?'

Peggotty only laughed the more, and held her apron tight over her face when my mother tried to pull it away, and sat as if her head were in a bag.

'What are you doing, you stupid creature?' said my mother, laughing.

'Oh, drat the man!' cried Peggotty. 'He wants to marry me.'

'It would be a very good match for you; wouldn't it?' said my mother.

'Oh! I don't know,' said Peggotty. 'Don't ask me. I wouldn't have him if he was made of gold. Nor I wouldn't have anybody.'

'Then, why don't you tell him so, you ridiculous thing?' said my mother.

'Tell him so,' retorted Peggotty, looking out of her apron. 'He has never said a word to me about it. He knows better. If he was to make so bold as say a word to me, I should slap his face.'

Her own was as red as ever I saw it, or any other face, I think; but she only covered it again, for a few moments at a time, when she was taken with a violent fit of laughter; and after two or three of those attacks, went on with her dinner.

I remarked that my mother, though she smiled when Peggotty looked at her, became more serious and thoughtful. I had seen at first that she was changed. Her face was very pretty still, but it looked careworn, and too delicate; and her hand was so thin and white that it seemed to me to be almost transparent. But the change to which I now refer was superadded to this: it was in her manner, which became anxious and fluttered. At last she said, putting out her hand, and laying it affectionately on the hand of her old servant,

'Peggotty, dear, you are not going to be married?'

'Me, ma'am?' returned Peggotty, staring. 'Lord bless you, no!'

'Not just yet?' said my mother, tenderly.

'Never!' cried Peggotty.

My mother took her hand, and said:

'Don't leave me, Peggotty. Stay with me. It will not be for long, perhaps. What should I ever do without you!'

'Me leave you, my precious!' cried Peggotty. 'Not for all the world and his wife. Why, what's put that in your silly little head?'--For Peggotty had been used of old to talk to my mother sometimes like a child.

But my mother made no answer, except to thank her, and Peggotty went



running on in her own fashion.

'Me leave you? I think I see myself. Peggotty go away from you? I should like to catch her at it! No, no, no,' said Peggotty, shaking her head, and folding her arms; 'not she, my dear. It isn't that there ain't some Cats that would be well enough pleased if she did, but they sha'n't be pleased. They shall be aggravated. I'll stay with you till I am a cross cranky old woman. And when I'm too deaf, and too lame, and too blind, and too mumbly for want of teeth, to be of any use at all, even to be found fault with, than I shall go to my Davy, and ask him to take me in.'

'And, Peggotty,' says I, 'I shall be glad to see you, and I'll make you as welcome as a queen.'

'Bless your dear heart!' cried Peggotty. 'I know you will!' And she kissed me beforehand, in grateful acknowledgement of my hospitality. After that, she covered her head up with her apron again and had another laugh about Mr. Barkis. After that, she took the baby out of its little cradle, and nursed it. After that, she cleared the dinner table; after that, came in with another cap on, and her work-box, and the yard-measure, and the bit of wax-candle, all just the same as ever.

We sat round the fire, and talked delightfully. I told them what a hard master Mr. Creakle was, and they pitied me very much. I told them what a fine fellow Steerforth was, and what a patron of mine, and Peggotty said she would walk a score of miles to see him. I took the little baby in my arms when it was awake, and nursed it lovingly. When it was asleep again, I crept close to my mother's side according to my old custom, broken now a long time, and sat with my arms embracing her waist, and my little red cheek on her shoulder, and once more felt her beautiful hair drooping over me--like an angel's wing as I used to think, I recollect--and was very happy indeed.

While I sat thus, looking at the fire, and seeing pictures in the red-hot coals, I almost believed that I had never been away; that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were such pictures, and would vanish when the fire got low; and that there was nothing real in all that I remembered, save my mother, Peggotty, and I.

Peggotty darned away at a stocking as long as she could see, and then sat with it drawn on her left hand like a glove, and her needle in her right, ready to take another stitch whenever there was a blaze. I cannot conceive whose stockings they can have been that Peggotty was always darning, or where such an unfailing supply of stockings in want of darning can have come from. From my earliest infancy she seems to have been always employed in that class of needlework, and never by any chance in any other.

'I wonder,' said Peggotty, who was sometimes seized with a fit of wondering on some most unexpected topic, 'what's become of Davy's great-aunt?' 'Lor, Peggotty!' observed my mother, rousing herself from a reverie, 'what nonsense you talk!'

'Well, but I really do wonder, ma'am,' said Peggotty.

'What can have put such a person in your head?' inquired my mother. 'Is there nobody else in the world to come there?'

'I don't know how it is,' said Peggotty, 'unless it's on account of being stupid, but my head never can pick and choose its people. They come and they go, and they don't come and they don't go, just as they like. I wonder what's become of her?'

'How absurd you are, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'One would suppose you wanted a second visit from her.'

'Lord forbid!' cried Peggotty.

'Well then, don't talk about such uncomfortable things, there's a good soul,' said my mother. 'Miss Betsey is shut up in her cottage by the sea, no doubt, and will remain there. At all events, she is not likely ever to trouble us again.'

'No!' mused Peggotty. 'No, that ain't likely at all.---I wonder, if she was to die, whether she'd leave Davy anything?'

'Good gracious me, Peggotty,' returned my mother, 'what a nonsensical woman you are! when you know that she took offence at the poor dear boy's ever being born at all.'

'I suppose she wouldn't be inclined to forgive him now,' hinted Peggotty.

'Why should she be inclined to forgive him now?' said my mother, rather sharply.

'Now that he's got a brother, I mean,' said Peggotty.

MY mother immediately began to cry, and wondered how Peggotty dared to say such a thing.

'As if this poor little innocent in its cradle had ever done any harm to you or anybody else, you jealous thing!' said she. 'You had much better go and marry Mr. Barkis, the carrier. Why don't you?'

'I should make Miss Murdstone happy, if I was to,' said Peggotty.

'What a bad disposition you have, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'You

are as jealous of Miss Murdstone as it is possible for a ridiculous creature to be. You want to keep the keys yourself, and give out all the things, I suppose? I shouldn't be surprised if you did. When you know that she only does it out of kindness and the best intentions! You know she does, Peggotty--you know it well.'

Peggotty muttered something to the effect of 'Bother the best intentions!' and something else to the effect that there was a little too much of the best intentions going on.

'I know what you mean, you cross thing,' said my mother. 'I understand you, Peggotty, perfectly. You know I do, and I wonder you don't colour up like fire. But one point at a time. Miss Murdstone is the point now, Peggotty, and you sha'n't escape from it. Haven't you heard her say, over and over again, that she thinks I am too thoughtless and too--a--a--'

'Pretty,' suggested Peggotty.

'Well,' returned my mother, half laughing, 'and if she is so silly as to say so, can I be blamed for it?'

'No one says you can,' said Peggotty.

'No, I should hope not, indeed!' returned my mother. 'Haven't you heard her say, over and over again, that on this account she wished to spare me a great deal of trouble, which she thinks I am not suited for, and which I really don't know myself that I AM suited for; and isn't she up early and late, and going to and fro continually--and doesn't she do all sorts of things, and grope into all sorts of places, coal-holes and pantries and I don't know where, that can't be very agreeable--and do you mean to insinuate that there is not a sort of devotion in that?'

'I don't insinuate at all,' said Peggotty.

'You do, Peggotty,' returned my mother. 'You never do anything else, except your work. You are always insinuating. You revel in it. And when you talk of Mr. Murdstone's good intentions--'

'I never talked of 'em,' said Peggotty.

'No, Peggotty,' returned my mother, 'but you insinuated. That's what I told you just now. That's the worst of you. You WILL insinuate. I said, at the moment, that I understood you, and you see I did. When you talk of Mr. Murdstone's good intentions, and pretend to slight them (for I don't believe you really do, in your heart, Peggotty), you must be as well convinced as I am how good they are, and how they actuate him in everything. If he seems to have been at all stern with a certain person, Peggotty--you understand, and so I am sure does Davy, that I am not alluding to anybody present--it is solely because he is satisfied that it is for a certain person's benefit. He naturally loves a certain person, on my account; and acts solely for a certain person's good. He is better able to judge of it than I am; for I very well know that I am a weak, light, girlish creature, and that he is a firm, grave, serious man. And he takes,' said my mother, with the tears which were engendered in her affectionate nature, stealing down her face, 'he takes great pains with me; and I ought to be very thankful to him, and very submissive to him even in my thoughts; and when I am not, Peggotty, I worry and condemn myself, and feel doubtful of my own heart, and don't know what to do.'

Peggotty sat with her chin on the foot of the stocking, looking silently at the fire.

'There, Peggotty,' said my mother, changing her tone, 'don't let us fall out with one another, for I couldn't bear it. You are my true friend, I

know, if I have any in the world. When I call you a ridiculous creature, or a vexatious thing, or anything of that sort, Peggotty, I only mean that you are my true friend, and always have been, ever since the night when Mr. Copperfield first brought me home here, and you came out to the gate to meet me.'

Peggotty was not slow to respond, and ratify the treaty of friendship by giving me one of her best hugs. I think I had some glimpses of the real character of this conversation at the time; but I am sure, now, that the good creature originated it, and took her part in it, merely that my mother might comfort herself with the little contradictory summary in which she had indulged. The design was efficacious; for I remember that my mother seemed more at ease during the rest of the evening, and that Peggotty observed her less.

When we had had our tea, and the ashes were thrown up, and the candles snuffed, I read Peggotty a chapter out of the Crocodile Book, in remembrance of old times--she took it out of her pocket: I don't know whether she had kept it there ever since--and then we talked about Salem House, which brought me round again to Steerforth, who was my great subject. We were very happy; and that evening, as the last of its race, and destined evermore to close that volume of my life, will never pass out of my memory.

It was almost ten o'clock before we heard the sound of wheels. We all got up then; and my mother said hurriedly that, as it was so late, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone approved of early hours for young people, perhaps I had better go to bed. I kissed her, and went upstairs with my candle directly, before they came in. It appeared to my childish fancy, as I ascended to the bedroom where I had been imprisoned, that they brought a cold blast of air into the house which blew away the old familiar feeling like a feather.

I felt uncomfortable about going down to breakfast in the morning, as I had never set eyes on Mr. Murdstone since the day when I committed my memorable offence. However, as it must be done, I went down, after two or three false starts half-way, and as many runs back on tiptoe to my own room, and presented myself in the parlour.

He was standing before the fire with his back to it, while Miss Murdstone made the tea. He looked at me steadily as I entered, but made no sign of recognition whatever. I went up to him, after a moment of confusion, and said: 'I beg your pardon, sir. I am very sorry for what I did, and I hope you will forgive me.'

'I am glad to hear you are sorry, David,' he replied.

The hand he gave me was the hand I had bitten. I could not restrain my eye from resting for an instant on a red spot upon it; but it was not so red as I turned, when I met that sinister expression in his face.

'How do you do, ma'am?' I said to Miss Murdstone.

'Ah, dear me!' sighed Miss Murdstone, giving me the tea-caddy scoop instead of her fingers. 'How long are the holidays?'

'A month, ma'am.'

'Counting from when?'

'From today, ma'am.'

'Oh!' said Miss Murdstone. 'Then here's one day off.'

She kept a calendar of the holidays in this way, and every morning checked a day off in exactly the same manner. She did it gloomily until

she came to ten, but when she got into two figures she became more hopeful, and, as the time advanced, even jocular.

It was on this very first day that I had the misfortune to throw her, though she was not subject to such weakness in general, into a state of violent consternation. I came into the room where she and my mother were sitting; and the baby (who was only a few weeks old) being on my mother's lap, I took it very carefully in my arms. Suddenly Miss Murdstone gave such a scream that I all but dropped it.

'My dear Jane!' cried my mother.

'Good heavens, Clara, do you see?' exclaimed Miss Murdstone.

'See what, my dear Jane?' said my mother; 'where?'

'He's got it!' cried Miss Murdstone. 'The boy has got the baby!'

She was limp with horror; but stiffened herself to make a dart at me, and take it out of my arms. Then, she turned faint; and was so very ill that they were obliged to give her cherry brandy. I was solemnly interdicted by her, on her recovery, from touching my brother any more on any pretence whatever; and my poor mother, who, I could see, wished otherwise, meekly confirmed the interdict, by saying: 'No doubt you are right, my dear Jane.'

On another occasion, when we three were together, this same dear baby--it was truly dear to me, for our mother's sake--was the innocent occasion of Miss Murdstone's going into a passion. My mother, who had been looking at its eyes as it lay upon her lap, said:

'Davy! come here!' and looked at mine.



I saw Miss Murdstone lay her beads down.

'I declare,' said my mother, gently, 'they are exactly alike. I suppose they are mine. I think they are the colour of mine. But they are wonderfully alike.'

'What are you talking about, Clara?' said Miss Murdstone.

'My dear Jane,' faltered my mother, a little abashed by the harsh tone of this inquiry, 'I find that the baby's eyes and Davy's are exactly alike.'

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, rising angrily, 'you are a positive fool sometimes.'

'My dear Jane,' remonstrated my mother.

'A positive fool,' said Miss Murdstone. 'Who else could compare my brother's baby with your boy? They are not at all alike. They are exactly unlike. They are utterly dissimilar in all respects. I hope they will ever remain so. I will not sit here, and hear such comparisons made.' With that she stalked out, and made the door bang after her.

In short, I was not a favourite with Miss Murdstone. In short, I was not a favourite there with anybody, not even with myself; for those who did like me could not show it, and those who did not, showed it so plainly that I had a sensitive consciousness of always appearing constrained, boorish, and dull.

I felt that I made them as uncomfortable as they made me. If I came into the room where they were, and they were talking together and my mother seemed cheerful, an anxious cloud would steal over her face from the moment of my entrance. If Mr. Murdstone were in his best humour, I

checked him. If Miss Murdstone were in her worst, I intensified it. I had perception enough to know that my mother was the victim always; that she was afraid to speak to me or to be kind to me, lest she should give them some offence by her manner of doing so, and receive a lecture afterwards; that she was not only ceaselessly afraid of her own offending, but of my offending, and uneasily watched their looks if I only moved. Therefore I resolved to keep myself as much out of their way as I could; and many a wintry hour did I hear the church clock strike, when I was sitting in my cheerless bedroom, wrapped in my little great-coat, poring over a book.

In the evening, sometimes, I went and sat with Peggotty in the kitchen. There I was comfortable, and not afraid of being myself. But neither of these resources was approved of in the parlour. The tormenting humour which was dominant there stopped them both. I was still held to be necessary to my poor mother's training, and, as one of her trials, could not be suffered to absent myself.

'David,' said Mr. Murdstone, one day after dinner when I was going to leave the room as usual; 'I am sorry to observe that you are of a sullen disposition.'

'As sulky as a bear!' said Miss Murdstone.

I stood still, and hung my head.

'Now, David,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'a sullen obdurate disposition is, of all tempers, the worst.'

'And the boy's is, of all such dispositions that ever I have seen,' remarked his sister, 'the most confirmed and stubborn. I think, my dear Clara, even you must observe it?'

'I beg your pardon, my dear Jane,' said my mother, 'but are you quite sure--I am certain you'll excuse me, my dear Jane--that you understand Davy?'

'I should be somewhat ashamed of myself, Clara,' returned Miss Murdstone, 'if I could not understand the boy, or any boy. I don't profess to be profound; but I do lay claim to common sense.'

'No doubt, my dear Jane,' returned my mother, 'your understanding is very vigorous--'

'Oh dear, no! Pray don't say that, Clara,' interposed Miss Murdstone, angrily.

'But I am sure it is,' resumed my mother; 'and everybody knows it is. I profit so much by it myself, in many ways--at least I ought to--that no one can be more convinced of it than myself; and therefore I speak with great diffidence, my dear Jane, I assure you.'

'We'll say I don't understand the boy, Clara,' returned Miss Murdstone, arranging the little fetters on her wrists. 'We'll agree, if you please, that I don't understand him at all. He is much too deep for me. But perhaps my brother's penetration may enable him to have some insight into his character. And I believe my brother was speaking on the subject when we--not very decently--interrupted him.'

'I think, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone, in a low grave voice, 'that there may be better and more dispassionate judges of such a question than you.'

'Edward,' replied my mother, timidly, 'you are a far better judge of all questions than I pretend to be. Both you and Jane are. I only said--'

'You only said something weak and inconsiderate,' he replied. 'Try not to do it again, my dear Clara, and keep a watch upon yourself.'

MY mother's lips moved, as if she answered 'Yes, my dear Edward,' but she said nothing aloud.

'I was sorry, David, I remarked,' said Mr. Murdstone, turning his head and his eyes stiffly towards me, 'to observe that you are of a sullen disposition. This is not a character that I can suffer to develop itself beneath my eyes without an effort at improvement. You must endeavour, sir, to change it. We must endeavour to change it for you.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' I faltered. 'I have never meant to be sullen since I came back.'

'Don't take refuge in a lie, sir!' he returned so fiercely, that I saw my mother involuntarily put out her trembling hand as if to interpose between us. 'You have withdrawn yourself in your sullenness to your own room. You have kept your own room when you ought to have been here. You know now, once for all, that I require you to be here, and not there. Further, that I require you to bring obedience here. You know me, David. I will have it done.'

Miss Murdstone gave a hoarse chuckle.

'I will have a respectful, prompt, and ready bearing towards myself,' he continued, 'and towards Jane Murdstone, and towards your mother. I will not have this room shunned as if it were infected, at the pleasure of a child. Sit down.'

He ordered me like a dog, and I obeyed like a dog.

'One thing more,' he said. 'I observe that you have an attachment to low

and common company. You are not to associate with servants. The kitchen will not improve you, in the many respects in which you need improvement. Of the woman who abets you, I say nothing--since you, Clara,' addressing my mother in a lower voice, 'from old associations and long-established fancies, have a weakness respecting her which is not yet overcome.'

'A most unaccountable delusion it is!' cried Miss Murdstone.

'I only say,' he resumed, addressing me, 'that I disapprove of your preferring such company as Mistress Peggotty, and that it is to be abandoned. Now, David, you understand me, and you know what will be the consequence if you fail to obey me to the letter.'

I knew well--better perhaps than he thought, as far as my poor mother was concerned--and I obeyed him to the letter. I retreated to my own room no more; I took refuge with Peggotty no more; but sat wearily in the parlour day after day, looking forward to night, and bedtime.

What irksome constraint I underwent, sitting in the same attitude hours upon hours, afraid to move an arm or a leg lest Miss Murdstone should complain (as she did on the least pretence) of my restlessness, and afraid to move an eye lest she should light on some look of dislike or scrutiny that would find new cause for complaint in mine! What intolerable dulness to sit listening to the ticking of the clock; and watching Miss Murdstone's little shiny steel beads as she strung them; and wondering whether she would ever be married, and if so, to what sort of unhappy man; and counting the divisions in the moulding of the chimney-piece; and wandering away, with my eyes, to the ceiling, among the curls and corkscrews in the paper on the wall!

What walks I took alone, down muddy lanes, in the bad winter weather, carrying that parlour, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone in it, everywhere: a

monstrous load that I was obliged to bear, a daymare that there was no possibility of breaking in, a weight that brooded on my wits, and blunted them!

What meals I had in silence and embarrassment, always feeling that there were a knife and fork too many, and that mine; an appetite too many, and that mine; a plate and chair too many, and those mine; a somebody too many, and that I!

What evenings, when the candles came, and I was expected to employ myself, but, not daring to read an entertaining book, pored over some hard-headed, harder-hearted treatise on arithmetic; when the tables of weights and measures set themselves to tunes, as 'Rule Britannia', or 'Away with Melancholy'; when they wouldn't stand still to be learnt, but would go threading my grandmother's needle through my unfortunate head, in at one ear and out at the other! What yawns and dozes I lapsed into, in spite of all my care; what starts I came out of concealed sleeps with; what answers I never got, to little observations that I rarely made; what a blank space I seemed, which everybody overlooked, and yet was in everybody's way; what a heavy relief it was to hear Miss Murdstone hail the first stroke of nine at night, and order me to bed!

Thus the holidays lagged away, until the morning came when Miss Murdstone said: 'Here's the last day off!' and gave me the closing cup of tea of the vacation.

I was not sorry to go. I had lapsed into a stupid state; but I was recovering a little and looking forward to Steerforth, albeit Mr. Creakle loomed behind him. Again Mr. Barkis appeared at the gate, and again Miss Murdstone in her warning voice, said: 'Clara!' when my mother bent over me, to bid me farewell.

I kissed her, and my baby brother, and was very sorry then; but not

sorry to go away, for the gulf between us was there, and the parting was there, every day. And it is not so much the embrace she gave me, that lives in my mind, though it was as fervent as could be, as what followed the embrace.

I was in the carrier's cart when I heard her calling to me. I looked out, and she stood at the garden-gate alone, holding her baby up in her arms for me to see. It was cold still weather; and not a hair of her head, nor a fold of her dress, was stirred, as she looked intently at me, holding up her child.

So I lost her. So I saw her afterwards, in my sleep at school--a silent presence near my bed--looking at me with the same intent face--holding up her baby in her arms.

#### CHAPTER 9. I HAVE A MEMORABLE BIRTHDAY

I PASS over all that happened at school, until the anniversary of my birthday came round in March. Except that Steerforth was more to be admired than ever, I remember nothing. He was going away at the end of the half-year, if not sooner, and was more spirited and independent than before in my eyes, and therefore more engaging than before; but beyond this I remember nothing. The great remembrance by which that time is marked in my mind, seems to have swallowed up all lesser recollections, and to exist alone.

It is even difficult for me to believe that there was a gap of full two months between my return to Salem House and the arrival of that birthday. I can only understand that the fact was so, because I know it must have been so; otherwise I should feel convinced that there was no

interval, and that the one occasion trod upon the other's heels.

How well I recollect the kind of day it was! I smell the fog that hung about the place; I see the hoar frost, ghostly, through it; I feel my rimy hair fall clammy on my cheek; I look along the dim perspective of the schoolroom, with a sputtering candle here and there to light up the foggy morning, and the breath of the boys wreathing and smoking in the raw cold as they blow upon their fingers, and tap their feet upon the floor. It was after breakfast, and we had been summoned in from the playground, when Mr. Sharp entered and said:

'David Copperfield is to go into the parlour.'

I expected a hamper from Peggotty, and brightened at the order. Some of the boys about me put in their claim not to be forgotten in the distribution of the good things, as I got out of my seat with great alacrity.

'Don't hurry, David,' said Mr. Sharp. 'There's time enough, my boy, don't hurry.'

I might have been surprised by the feeling tone in which he spoke, if I had given it a thought; but I gave it none until afterwards. I hurried away to the parlour; and there I found Mr. Creakle, sitting at his breakfast with the cane and a newspaper before him, and Mrs. Creakle with an opened letter in her hand. But no hamper.

'David Copperfield,' said Mrs. Creakle, leading me to a sofa, and sitting down beside me. 'I want to speak to you very particularly. I have something to tell you, my child.'

Mr. Creakle, at whom of course I looked, shook his head without looking at me, and stopped up a sigh with a very large piece of buttered toast.



'You are too young to know how the world changes every day,' said Mrs. Creakle, 'and how the people in it pass away. But we all have to learn it, David; some of us when we are young, some of us when we are old, some of us at all times of our lives.'

I looked at her earnestly.

'When you came away from home at the end of the vacation,' said Mrs. Creakle, after a pause, 'were they all well?' After another pause, 'Was your mama well?'

I trembled without distinctly knowing why, and still looked at her earnestly, making no attempt to answer.

'Because,' said she, 'I grieve to tell you that I hear this morning your mama is very ill.'

A mist rose between Mrs. Creakle and me, and her figure seemed to move in it for an instant. Then I felt the burning tears run down my face, and it was steady again.

'She is very dangerously ill,' she added.

I knew all now.

'She is dead.'

There was no need to tell me so. I had already broken out into a desolate cry, and felt an orphan in the wide world.

She was very kind to me. She kept me there all day, and left me alone sometimes; and I cried, and wore myself to sleep, and awoke and

cried again. When I could cry no more, I began to think; and then the oppression on my breast was heaviest, and my grief a dull pain that there was no ease for.

And yet my thoughts were idle; not intent on the calamity that weighed upon my heart, but idly loitering near it. I thought of our house shut up and hushed. I thought of the little baby, who, Mrs. Creakle said, had been pining away for some time, and who, they believed, would die too. I thought of my father's grave in the churchyard, by our house, and of my mother lying there beneath the tree I knew so well. I stood upon a chair when I was left alone, and looked into the glass to see how red my eyes were, and how sorrowful my face. I considered, after some hours were gone, if my tears were really hard to flow now, as they seemed to be, what, in connexion with my loss, it would affect me most to think of when I drew near home--for I was going home to the funeral. I am sensible of having felt that a dignity attached to me among the rest of the boys, and that I was important in my affliction.

If ever child were stricken with sincere grief, I was. But I remember that this importance was a kind of satisfaction to me, when I walked in the playground that afternoon while the boys were in school. When I saw them glancing at me out of the windows, as they went up to their classes, I felt distinguished, and looked more melancholy, and walked slower. When school was over, and they came out and spoke to me, I felt it rather good in myself not to be proud to any of them, and to take exactly the same notice of them all, as before.

I was to go home next night; not by the mail, but by the heavy night-coach, which was called the Farmer, and was principally used by country-people travelling short intermediate distances upon the road. We had no story-telling that evening, and Traddles insisted on lending me his pillow. I don't know what good he thought it would do me, for I had one of my own: but it was all he had to lend, poor fellow, except a

sheet of letter-paper full of skeletons; and that he gave me at parting, as a soother of my sorrows and a contribution to my peace of mind.

I left Salem House upon the morrow afternoon. I little thought then that I left it, never to return. We travelled very slowly all night, and did not get into Yarmouth before nine or ten o'clock in the morning. I looked out for Mr. Barkis, but he was not there; and instead of him a fat, short-winded, merry-looking, little old man in black, with rusty little bunches of ribbons at the knees of his breeches, black stockings, and a broad-brimmed hat, came puffing up to the coach window, and said:

'Master Copperfield?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Will you come with me, young sir, if you please,' he said, opening the door, 'and I shall have the pleasure of taking you home.'

I put my hand in his, wondering who he was, and we walked away to a shop in a narrow street, on which was written OMER, DRAPER, TAILOR, HABERDASHER, FUNERAL FURNISHER, &c. It was a close and stifling little shop; full of all sorts of clothing, made and unmade, including one window full of beaver-hats and bonnets. We went into a little back-parlour behind the shop, where we found three young women at work on a quantity of black materials, which were heaped upon the table, and little bits and cuttings of which were littered all over the floor. There was a good fire in the room, and a breathless smell of warm black crape--I did not know what the smell was then, but I know now.

The three young women, who appeared to be very industrious and comfortable, raised their heads to look at me, and then went on with their work. Stitch, stitch, stitch. At the same time there came from a workshop across a little yard outside the window, a regular sound

of hammering that kept a kind of tune: RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat, without any variation.

'Well,' said my conductor to one of the three young women. 'How do you get on, Minnie?'

'We shall be ready by the trying-on time,' she replied gaily, without looking up. 'Don't you be afraid, father.'

Mr. Omer took off his broad-brimmed hat, and sat down and panted. He was so fat that he was obliged to pant some time before he could say:

'That's right.'

'Father!' said Minnie, playfully. 'What a porpoise you do grow!'

'Well, I don't know how it is, my dear,' he replied, considering about it. 'I am rather so.'

'You are such a comfortable man, you see,' said Minnie. 'You take things so easy.'

'No use taking 'em otherwise, my dear,' said Mr. Omer.

'No, indeed,' returned his daughter. 'We are all pretty gay here, thank Heaven! Ain't we, father?'

'I hope so, my dear,' said Mr. Omer. 'As I have got my breath now, I think I'll measure this young scholar. Would you walk into the shop, Master Copperfield?'

I preceded Mr. Omer, in compliance with his request; and after showing me a roll of cloth which he said was extra super, and too good mourning

for anything short of parents, he took my various dimensions, and put them down in a book. While he was recording them he called my attention to his stock in trade, and to certain fashions which he said had 'just come up', and to certain other fashions which he said had 'just gone out'.

'And by that sort of thing we very often lose a little mint of money,' said Mr. Omer. 'But fashions are like human beings. They come in, nobody knows when, why, or how; and they go out, nobody knows when, why, or how. Everything is like life, in my opinion, if you look at it in that point of view.'

I was too sorrowful to discuss the question, which would possibly have been beyond me under any circumstances; and Mr. Omer took me back into the parlour, breathing with some difficulty on the way.

He then called down a little break-neck range of steps behind a door: 'Bring up that tea and bread-and-butter!' which, after some time, during which I sat looking about me and thinking, and listening to the stitching in the room and the tune that was being hammered across the yard, appeared on a tray, and turned out to be for me.

'I have been acquainted with you,' said Mr. Omer, after watching me for some minutes, during which I had not made much impression on the breakfast, for the black things destroyed my appetite, 'I have been acquainted with you a long time, my young friend.'

'Have you, sir?'

'All your life,' said Mr. Omer. 'I may say before it. I knew your father before you. He was five foot nine and a half, and he lays in five-and-twen-ty foot of ground.'

'RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat,' across the yard.

'He lays in five and twen-ty foot of ground, if he lays in a fraction,' said Mr. Omer, pleasantly. 'It was either his request or her direction, I forget which.'

'Do you know how my little brother is, sir?' I inquired.

Mr. Omer shook his head.

'RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat.'

'He is in his mother's arms,' said he.

'Oh, poor little fellow! Is he dead?'

'Don't mind it more than you can help,' said Mr. Omer. 'Yes. The baby's dead.'

My wounds broke out afresh at this intelligence. I left the scarcely-tasted breakfast, and went and rested my head on another table, in a corner of the little room, which Minnie hastily cleared, lest I should spot the mourning that was lying there with my tears. She was a pretty, good-natured girl, and put my hair away from my eyes with a soft, kind touch; but she was very cheerful at having nearly finished her work and being in good time, and was so different from me!

Presently the tune left off, and a good-looking young fellow came across the yard into the room. He had a hammer in his hand, and his mouth was full of little nails, which he was obliged to take out before he could speak.

'Well, Joram!' said Mr. Omer. 'How do you get on?'

'All right,' said Joram. 'Done, sir.'

Minnie coloured a little, and the other two girls smiled at one another.

'What! you were at it by candle-light last night, when I was at the club, then? Were you?' said Mr. Omer, shutting up one eye.

'Yes,' said Joram. 'As you said we could make a little trip of it, and go over together, if it was done, Minnie and me--and you.'

'Oh! I thought you were going to leave me out altogether,' said Mr. Omer, laughing till he coughed.

'--As you was so good as to say that,' resumed the young man, 'why I turned to with a will, you see. Will you give me your opinion of it?'

'I will,' said Mr. Omer, rising. 'My dear'; and he stopped and turned to me: 'would you like to see your--'

'No, father,' Minnie interposed.

'I thought it might be agreeable, my dear,' said Mr. Omer. 'But perhaps you're right.'

I can't say how I knew it was my dear, dear mother's coffin that they went to look at. I had never heard one making; I had never seen one that I know of.--but it came into my mind what the noise was, while it was going on; and when the young man entered, I am sure I knew what he had been doing.

The work being now finished, the two girls, whose names I had not heard, brushed the shreds and threads from their dresses, and went into the

shop to put that to rights, and wait for customers. Minnie stayed behind to fold up what they had made, and pack it in two baskets. This she did upon her knees, humming a lively little tune the while. Joram, who I had no doubt was her lover, came in and stole a kiss from her while she was busy (he didn't appear to mind me, at all), and said her father was gone for the chaise, and he must make haste and get himself ready. Then he went out again; and then she put her thimble and scissors in her pocket, and stuck a needle threaded with black thread neatly in the bosom of her gown, and put on her outer clothing smartly, at a little glass behind the door, in which I saw the reflection of her pleased face.

All this I observed, sitting at the table in the corner with my head leaning on my hand, and my thoughts running on very different things. The chaise soon came round to the front of the shop, and the baskets being put in first, I was put in next, and those three followed. I remember it as a kind of half chaise-cart, half pianoforte-van, painted of a sombre colour, and drawn by a black horse with a long tail. There was plenty of room for us all.

I do not think I have ever experienced so strange a feeling in my life (I am wiser now, perhaps) as that of being with them, remembering how they had been employed, and seeing them enjoy the ride. I was not angry with them; I was more afraid of them, as if I were cast away among creatures with whom I had no community of nature. They were very cheerful. The old man sat in front to drive, and the two young people sat behind him, and whenever he spoke to them leaned forward, the one on one side of his chubby face and the other on the other, and made a great deal of him. They would have talked to me too, but I held back, and moped in my corner; scared by their love-making and hilarity, though it was far from boisterous, and almost wondering that no judgement came upon them for their hardness of heart.

So, when they stopped to bait the horse, and ate and drank and enjoyed



themselves, I could touch nothing that they touched, but kept my fast unbroken. So, when we reached home, I dropped out of the chaise behind, as quickly as possible, that I might not be in their company before those solemn windows, looking blindly on me like closed eyes once bright. And oh, how little need I had had to think what would move me to tears when I came back--seeing the window of my mother's room, and next it that which, in the better time, was mine!

I was in Peggotty's arms before I got to the door, and she took me into the house. Her grief burst out when she first saw me; but she controlled it soon, and spoke in whispers, and walked softly, as if the dead could be disturbed. She had not been in bed, I found, for a long time. She sat up at night still, and watched. As long as her poor dear pretty was above the ground, she said, she would never desert her.

Mr. Murdstone took no heed of me when I went into the parlour where he was, but sat by the fireside, weeping silently, and pondering in his elbow-chair. Miss Murdstone, who was busy at her writing-desk, which was covered with letters and papers, gave me her cold finger-nails, and asked me, in an iron whisper, if I had been measured for my mourning.

I said: 'Yes.'

'And your shirts,' said Miss Murdstone; 'have you brought 'em home?'

'Yes, ma'am. I have brought home all my clothes.'

This was all the consolation that her firmness administered to me. I do not doubt that she had a choice pleasure in exhibiting what she called her self-command, and her firmness, and her strength of mind, and her common sense, and the whole diabolical catalogue of her unamiable qualities, on such an occasion. She was particularly proud of her turn for business; and she showed it now in reducing everything to pen and

ink, and being moved by nothing. All the rest of that day, and from morning to night afterwards, she sat at that desk, scratching composedly with a hard pen, speaking in the same imperturbable whisper to everybody; never relaxing a muscle of her face, or softening a tone of her voice, or appearing with an atom of her dress astray.

Her brother took a book sometimes, but never read it that I saw. He would open it and look at it as if he were reading, but would remain for a whole hour without turning the leaf, and then put it down and walk to and fro in the room. I used to sit with folded hands watching him, and counting his footsteps, hour after hour. He very seldom spoke to her, and never to me. He seemed to be the only restless thing, except the clocks, in the whole motionless house.

In these days before the funeral, I saw but little of Peggotty, except that, in passing up or down stairs, I always found her close to the room where my mother and her baby lay, and except that she came to me every night, and sat by my bed's head while I went to sleep. A day or two before the burial--I think it was a day or two before, but I am conscious of confusion in my mind about that heavy time, with nothing to mark its progress--she took me into the room. I only recollect that underneath some white covering on the bed, with a beautiful cleanliness and freshness all around it, there seemed to me to lie embodied the solemn stillness that was in the house; and that when she would have turned the cover gently back, I cried: 'Oh no! oh no!' and held her hand.

If the funeral had been yesterday, I could not recollect it better. The very air of the best parlour, when I went in at the door, the bright condition of the fire, the shining of the wine in the decanters, the patterns of the glasses and plates, the faint sweet smell of cake, the odour of Miss Murdstone's dress, and our black clothes. Mr. Chillip is in the room, and comes to speak to me.

'And how is Master David?' he says, kindly.

I cannot tell him very well. I give him my hand, which he holds in his.

'Dear me!' says Mr. Chillip, meekly smiling, with something shining in his eye. 'Our little friends grow up around us. They grow out of our knowledge, ma'am?' This is to Miss Murdstone, who makes no reply.

'There is a great improvement here, ma'am?' says Mr. Chillip.

Miss Murdstone merely answers with a frown and a formal bend: Mr. Chillip, discomfited, goes into a corner, keeping me with him, and opens his mouth no more.

I remark this, because I remark everything that happens, not because I care about myself, or have done since I came home. And now the bell begins to sound, and Mr. Omer and another come to make us ready. As Peggotty was wont to tell me, long ago, the followers of my father to the same grave were made ready in the same room.

There are Mr. Murdstone, our neighbour Mr. Grayper, Mr. Chillip, and I. When we go out to the door, the Bearers and their load are in the garden; and they move before us down the path, and past the elms, and through the gate, and into the churchyard, where I have so often heard the birds sing on a summer morning.

We stand around the grave. The day seems different to me from every other day, and the light not of the same colour--of a sadder colour. Now there is a solemn hush, which we have brought from home with what is resting in the mould; and while we stand bareheaded, I hear the voice of the clergyman, sounding remote in the open air, and yet distinct and plain, saying: 'I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord!'

Then I hear sobs; and, standing apart among the lookers-on, I see that good and faithful servant, whom of all the people upon earth I love the best, and unto whom my childish heart is certain that the Lord will one day say: 'Well done.'

There are many faces that I know, among the little crowd; faces that I knew in church, when mine was always wondering there; faces that first saw my mother, when she came to the village in her youthful bloom. I do not mind them--I mind nothing but my grief--and yet I see and know them all; and even in the background, far away, see Minnie looking on, and her eye glancing on her sweetheart, who is near me.

It is over, and the earth is filled in, and we turn to come away. Before us stands our house, so pretty and unchanged, so linked in my mind with the young idea of what is gone, that all my sorrow has been nothing to the sorrow it calls forth. But they take me on; and Mr. Chillip talks to me; and when we get home, puts some water to my lips; and when I ask his leave to go up to my room, dismisses me with the gentleness of a woman.

All this, I say, is yesterday's event. Events of later date have floated from me to the shore where all forgotten things will reappear, but this stands like a high rock in the ocean.

I knew that Peggotty would come to me in my room. The Sabbath stillness of the time (the day was so like Sunday! I have forgotten that) was suited to us both. She sat down by my side upon my little bed; and holding my hand, and sometimes putting it to her lips, and sometimes smoothing it with hers, as she might have comforted my little brother, told me, in her way, all that she had to tell concerning what had happened.

'She was never well,' said Peggotty, 'for a long time. She was uncertain in her mind, and not happy. When her baby was born, I thought at first

she would get better, but she was more delicate, and sunk a little every day. She used to like to sit alone before her baby came, and then she cried; but afterwards she used to sing to it--so soft, that I once thought, when I heard her, it was like a voice up in the air, that was rising away.

'I think she got to be more timid, and more frightened-like, of late; and that a hard word was like a blow to her. But she was always the same to me. She never changed to her foolish Peggotty, didn't my sweet girl.'

Here Peggotty stopped, and softly beat upon my hand a little while.

'The last time that I saw her like her own old self, was the night when you came home, my dear. The day you went away, she said to me, "I never shall see my pretty darling again. Something tells me so, that tells the truth, I know."

'She tried to hold up after that; and many a time, when they told her she was thoughtless and light-hearted, made believe to be so; but it was all a bygone then. She never told her husband what she had told me--she was afraid of saying it to anybody else--till one night, a little more than a week before it happened, when she said to him: "My dear, I think I am dying."

'"It's off my mind now, Peggotty," she told me, when I laid her in her bed that night. "He will believe it more and more, poor fellow, every day for a few days to come; and then it will be past. I am very tired. If this is sleep, sit by me while I sleep: don't leave me. God bless both my children! God protect and keep my fatherless boy!"

'I never left her afterwards,' said Peggotty. 'She often talked to them two downstairs--for she loved them; she couldn't bear not to love anyone who was about her--but when they went away from her bed-side, she always

turned to me, as if there was rest where Peggotty was, and never fell asleep in any other way.

'On the last night, in the evening, she kissed me, and said: "If my baby should die too, Peggotty, please let them lay him in my arms, and bury us together." (It was done; for the poor lamb lived but a day beyond her.) "Let my dearest boy go with us to our resting-place," she said, "and tell him that his mother, when she lay here, blessed him not once, but a thousand times."'

Another silence followed this, and another gentle beating on my hand.

'It was pretty far in the night,' said Peggotty, 'when she asked me for some drink; and when she had taken it, gave me such a patient smile, the dear!--so beautiful!

'Daybreak had come, and the sun was rising, when she said to me, how kind and considerate Mr. Copperfield had always been to her, and how he had borne with her, and told her, when she doubted herself, that a loving heart was better and stronger than wisdom, and that he was a happy man in hers. "Peggotty, my dear," she said then, "put me nearer to you," for she was very weak. "Lay your good arm underneath my neck," she said, "and turn me to you, for your face is going far off, and I want it to be near." I put it as she asked; and oh Davy! the time had come when my first parting words to you were true--when she was glad to lay her poor head on her stupid cross old Peggotty's arm--and she died like a child that had gone to sleep!'

Thus ended Peggotty's narration. From the moment of my knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late had vanished from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions, who had been used to wind her bright curls

round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the parlour. What Peggotty had told me now, was so far from bringing me back to the later period, that it rooted the earlier image in my mind. It may be curious, but it is true. In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest.

The mother who lay in the grave, was the mother of my infancy; the little creature in her arms, was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom.

#### CHAPTER 10. I BECOME NEGLECTED, AND AM PROVIDED FOR

The first act of business Miss Murdstone performed when the day of the solemnity was over, and light was freely admitted into the house, was to give Peggotty a month's warning. Much as Peggotty would have disliked such a service, I believe she would have retained it, for my sake, in preference to the best upon earth. She told me we must part, and told me why; and we condoled with one another, in all sincerity.

As to me or my future, not a word was said, or a step taken. Happy they would have been, I dare say, if they could have dismissed me at a month's warning too. I mustered courage once, to ask Miss Murdstone when I was going back to school; and she answered dryly, she believed I was not going back at all. I was told nothing more. I was very anxious to know what was going to be done with me, and so was Peggotty; but neither she nor I could pick up any information on the subject.

There was one change in my condition, which, while it relieved me of a great deal of present uneasiness, might have made me, if I had been capable of considering it closely, yet more uncomfortable about the

future. It was this. The constraint that had been put upon me, was quite abandoned. I was so far from being required to keep my dull post in the parlour, that on several occasions, when I took my seat there, Miss Murdstone frowned to me to go away. I was so far from being warned off from Peggotty's society, that, provided I was not in Mr. Murdstone's, I was never sought out or inquired for. At first I was in daily dread of his taking my education in hand again, or of Miss Murdstone's devoting herself to it; but I soon began to think that such fears were groundless, and that all I had to anticipate was neglect.

I do not conceive that this discovery gave me much pain then. I was still giddy with the shock of my mother's death, and in a kind of stunned state as to all tributary things. I can recollect, indeed, to have speculated, at odd times, on the possibility of my not being taught any more, or cared for any more; and growing up to be a shabby, moody man, lounging an idle life away, about the village; as well as on the feasibility of my getting rid of this picture by going away somewhere, like the hero in a story, to seek my fortune: but these were transient visions, daydreams I sat looking at sometimes, as if they were faintly painted or written on the wall of my room, and which, as they melted away, left the wall blank again.

'Peggotty,' I said in a thoughtful whisper, one evening, when I was warming my hands at the kitchen fire, 'Mr. Murdstone likes me less than he used to. He never liked me much, Peggotty; but he would rather not even see me now, if he can help it.'

'Perhaps it's his sorrow,' said Peggotty, stroking my hair.

'I am sure, Peggotty, I am sorry too. If I believed it was his sorrow, I should not think of it at all. But it's not that; oh, no, it's not that.'



'How do you know it's not that?' said Peggotty, after a silence.

'Oh, his sorrow is another and quite a different thing. He is sorry at this moment, sitting by the fireside with Miss Murdstone; but if I was to go in, Peggotty, he would be something besides.'

'What would he be?' said Peggotty.

'Angry,' I answered, with an involuntary imitation of his dark frown.

'If he was only sorry, he wouldn't look at me as he does. I am only sorry, and it makes me feel kinder.'

Peggotty said nothing for a little while; and I warmed my hands, as silent as she.

'Davy,' she said at length.

'Yes, Peggotty?' 'I have tried, my dear, all ways I could think of--all the ways there are, and all the ways there ain't, in short--to get a suitable service here, in Blunderstone; but there's no such a thing, my love.'

'And what do you mean to do, Peggotty,' says I, wistfully. 'Do you mean to go and seek your fortune?'

'I expect I shall be forced to go to Yarmouth,' replied Peggotty, 'and live there.'

'You might have gone farther off,' I said, brightening a little, 'and been as bad as lost. I shall see you sometimes, my dear old Peggotty, there. You won't be quite at the other end of the world, will you?'

'Contrary ways, please God!' cried Peggotty, with great animation. 'As

long as you are here, my pet, I shall come over every week of my life to see you. One day, every week of my life!'

I felt a great weight taken off my mind by this promise: but even this was not all, for Peggotty went on to say:

'I'm a-going, Davy, you see, to my brother's, first, for another fortnight's visit--just till I have had time to look about me, and get to be something like myself again. Now, I have been thinking that perhaps, as they don't want you here at present, you might be let to go along with me.'

If anything, short of being in a different relation to every one about me, Peggotty excepted, could have given me a sense of pleasure at that time, it would have been this project of all others. The idea of being again surrounded by those honest faces, shining welcome on me; of renewing the peacefulness of the sweet Sunday morning, when the bells were ringing, the stones dropping in the water, and the shadowy ships breaking through the mist; of roaming up and down with little Em'ly, telling her my troubles, and finding charms against them in the shells and pebbles on the beach; made a calm in my heart. It was ruffled next moment, to be sure, by a doubt of Miss Murdstone's giving her consent; but even that was set at rest soon, for she came out to take an evening grope in the store-closet while we were yet in conversation, and Peggotty, with a boldness that amazed me, broached the topic on the spot.

'The boy will be idle there,' said Miss Murdstone, looking into a pickle-jar, 'and idleness is the root of all evil. But, to be sure, he would be idle here--or anywhere, in my opinion.'

Peggotty had an angry answer ready, I could see; but she swallowed it for my sake, and remained silent.

'Humph!' said Miss Murdstone, still keeping her eye on the pickles; 'it is of more importance than anything else--it is of paramount importance--that my brother should not be disturbed or made uncomfortable. I suppose I had better say yes.'

I thanked her, without making any demonstration of joy, lest it should induce her to withdraw her assent. Nor could I help thinking this a prudent course, since she looked at me out of the pickle-jar, with as great an access of sourness as if her black eyes had absorbed its contents. However, the permission was given, and was never retracted; for when the month was out, Peggotty and I were ready to depart.

Mr. Barkis came into the house for Peggotty's boxes. I had never known him to pass the garden-gate before, but on this occasion he came into the house. And he gave me a look as he shouldered the largest box and went out, which I thought had meaning in it, if meaning could ever be said to find its way into Mr. Barkis's visage.

Peggotty was naturally in low spirits at leaving what had been her home so many years, and where the two strong attachments of her life--for my mother and myself--had been formed. She had been walking in the churchyard, too, very early; and she got into the cart, and sat in it with her handkerchief at her eyes.

So long as she remained in this condition, Mr. Barkis gave no sign of life whatever. He sat in his usual place and attitude like a great stuffed figure. But when she began to look about her, and to speak to me, he nodded his head and grinned several times. I have not the least notion at whom, or what he meant by it.

'It's a beautiful day, Mr. Barkis!' I said, as an act of politeness.

'It ain't bad,' said Mr. Barkis, who generally qualified his speech, and rarely committed himself.

'Peggotty is quite comfortable now, Mr. Barkis,' I remarked, for his satisfaction.

'Is she, though?' said Mr. Barkis.

After reflecting about it, with a sagacious air, Mr. Barkis eyed her, and said:

'ARE you pretty comfortable?'

Peggotty laughed, and answered in the affirmative.

'But really and truly, you know. Are you?' growled Mr. Barkis, sliding nearer to her on the seat, and nudging her with his elbow. 'Are you? Really and truly pretty comfortable? Are you? Eh?'

At each of these inquiries Mr. Barkis shuffled nearer to her, and gave her another nudge; so that at last we were all crowded together in the left-hand corner of the cart, and I was so squeezed that I could hardly bear it.

Peggotty calling his attention to my sufferings, Mr. Barkis gave me a little more room at once, and got away by degrees. But I could not help observing that he seemed to think he had hit upon a wonderful expedient for expressing himself in a neat, agreeable, and pointed manner, without the inconvenience of inventing conversation. He manifestly chuckled over it for some time. By and by he turned to Peggotty again, and repeating, 'Are you pretty comfortable though?' bore down upon us as before, until the breath was nearly edged out of my body. By and by he made another descent upon us with the same inquiry, and the same result. At length,

I got up whenever I saw him coming, and standing on the foot-board, pretended to look at the prospect; after which I did very well.

He was so polite as to stop at a public-house, expressly on our account, and entertain us with broiled mutton and beer. Even when Peggotty was in the act of drinking, he was seized with one of those approaches, and almost choked her. But as we drew nearer to the end of our journey, he had more to do and less time for gallantry; and when we got on Yarmouth pavement, we were all too much shaken and jolted, I apprehend, to have any leisure for anything else.

Mr. Peggotty and Ham waited for us at the old place. They received me and Peggotty in an affectionate manner, and shook hands with Mr. Barkis, who, with his hat on the very back of his head, and a shame-faced leer upon his countenance, and pervading his very legs, presented but a vacant appearance, I thought. They each took one of Peggotty's trunks, and we were going away, when Mr. Barkis solemnly made a sign to me with his forefinger to come under an archway.

'I say,' growled Mr. Barkis, 'it was all right.'

I looked up into his face, and answered, with an attempt to be very profound: 'Oh!'

'It didn't come to a end there,' said Mr. Barkis, nodding confidentially. 'It was all right.'

Again I answered, 'Oh!'

'You know who was willin',' said my friend. 'It was Barkis, and Barkis only.'

I nodded assent.

'It's all right,' said Mr. Barkis, shaking hands; 'I'm a friend of your'n. You made it all right, first. It's all right.'

In his attempts to be particularly lucid, Mr. Barkis was so extremely mysterious, that I might have stood looking in his face for an hour, and most assuredly should have got as much information out of it as out of the face of a clock that had stopped, but for Peggotty's calling me away. As we were going along, she asked me what he had said; and I told her he had said it was all right.

'Like his impudence,' said Peggotty, 'but I don't mind that! Davy dear, what should you think if I was to think of being married?'

'Why--I suppose you would like me as much then, Peggotty, as you do now?' I returned, after a little consideration.

Greatly to the astonishment of the passengers in the street, as well as of her relations going on before, the good soul was obliged to stop and embrace me on the spot, with many protestations of her unalterable love.

'Tell me what should you say, darling?' she asked again, when this was over, and we were walking on.

'If you were thinking of being married--to Mr. Barkis, Peggotty?'

'Yes,' said Peggotty.

'I should think it would be a very good thing. For then you know, Peggotty, you would always have the horse and cart to bring you over to see me, and could come for nothing, and be sure of coming.'

'The sense of the dear!' cried Peggotty. 'What I have been thinking

of, this month back! Yes, my precious; and I think I should be more independent altogether, you see; let alone my working with a better heart in my own house, than I could in anybody else's now. I don't know what I might be fit for, now, as a servant to a stranger. And I shall be always near my pretty's resting-place,' said Peggotty, musing, 'and be able to see it when I like; and when I lie down to rest, I may be laid not far off from my darling girl!'

We neither of us said anything for a little while.

'But I wouldn't so much as give it another thought,' said Peggotty, cheerily 'if my Davy was anyways against it--not if I had been asked in church thirty times three times over, and was wearing out the ring in my pocket.'

'Look at me, Peggotty,' I replied; 'and see if I am not really glad, and don't truly wish it!' As indeed I did, with all my heart.

'Well, my life,' said Peggotty, giving me a squeeze, 'I have thought of it night and day, every way I can, and I hope the right way; but I'll think of it again, and speak to my brother about it, and in the meantime we'll keep it to ourselves, Davy, you and me. Barkis is a good plain creature,' said Peggotty, 'and if I tried to do my duty by him, I think it would be my fault if I wasn't--if I wasn't pretty comfortable,' said Peggotty, laughing heartily. This quotation from Mr. Barkis was so appropriate, and tickled us both so much, that we laughed again and again, and were quite in a pleasant humour when we came within view of Mr. Peggotty's cottage.

It looked just the same, except that it may, perhaps, have shrunk a little in my eyes; and Mrs. Gummidge was waiting at the door as if she had stood there ever since. All within was the same, down to the seaweed in the blue mug in my bedroom. I went into the out-house to look about

me; and the very same lobsters, crabs, and crawfish possessed by the same desire to pinch the world in general, appeared to be in the same state of conglomeration in the same old corner.

But there was no little Em'ly to be seen, so I asked Mr. Peggotty where she was.

'She's at school, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, wiping the heat consequent on the portorage of Peggotty's box from his forehead; 'she'll be home,' looking at the Dutch clock, 'in from twenty minutes to half-an-hour's time. We all on us feel the loss of her, bless ye!'

Mrs. Gummidge moaned.

'Cheer up, Mawther!' cried Mr. Peggotty.

'I feel it more than anybody else,' said Mrs. Gummidge; 'I'm a lone lorn creetur', and she used to be a'most the only thing that didn't go contrary with me.'

Mrs. Gummidge, whimpering and shaking her head, applied herself to blowing the fire. Mr. Peggotty, looking round upon us while she was so engaged, said in a low voice, which he shaded with his hand: 'The old 'un!' From this I rightly conjectured that no improvement had taken place since my last visit in the state of Mrs. Gummidge's spirits.

Now, the whole place was, or it should have been, quite as delightful a place as ever; and yet it did not impress me in the same way. I felt rather disappointed with it. Perhaps it was because little Em'ly was not at home. I knew the way by which she would come, and presently found myself strolling along the path to meet her.

A figure appeared in the distance before long, and I soon knew it to be



Em'ly, who was a little creature still in stature, though she was grown. But when she drew nearer, and I saw her blue eyes looking bluer, and her dimpled face looking brighter, and her whole self prettier and gayer, a curious feeling came over me that made me pretend not to know her, and pass by as if I were looking at something a long way off. I have done such a thing since in later life, or I am mistaken.

Little Em'ly didn't care a bit. She saw me well enough; but instead of turning round and calling after me, ran away laughing. This obliged me to run after her, and she ran so fast that we were very near the cottage before I caught her.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' said little Em'ly.

'Why, you knew who it was, Em'ly,' said I.

'And didn't YOU know who it was?' said Em'ly. I was going to kiss her, but she covered her cherry lips with her hands, and said she wasn't a baby now, and ran away, laughing more than ever, into the house.

She seemed to delight in teasing me, which was a change in her I wondered at very much. The tea table was ready, and our little locker was put out in its old place, but instead of coming to sit by me, she went and bestowed her company upon that grumbling Mrs. Gummidge: and on Mr. Peggotty's inquiring why, rumbled her hair all over her face to hide it, and could do nothing but laugh.

'A little puss, it is!' said Mr. Peggotty, patting her with his great hand.

'So sh' is! so sh' is!' cried Ham. 'Mas'r Davy bor', so sh' is!' and he sat and chuckled at her for some time, in a state of mingled admiration and delight, that made his face a burning red.

Little Em'ly was spoiled by them all, in fact; and by no one more than Mr. Peggotty himself, whom she could have coaxed into anything, by only going and laying her cheek against his rough whisker. That was my opinion, at least, when I saw her do it; and I held Mr. Peggotty to be thoroughly in the right. But she was so affectionate and sweet-natured, and had such a pleasant manner of being both sly and shy at once, that she captivated me more than ever.

She was tender-hearted, too; for when, as we sat round the fire after tea, an allusion was made by Mr. Peggotty over his pipe to the loss I had sustained, the tears stood in her eyes, and she looked at me so kindly across the table, that I felt quite thankful to her.

'Ah!' said Mr. Peggotty, taking up her curls, and running them over his hand like water, 'here's another orphan, you see, sir. And here,' said Mr. Peggotty, giving Ham a backhanded knock in the chest, 'is another of 'em, though he don't look much like it.'

'If I had you for my guardian, Mr. Peggotty,' said I, shaking my head, 'I don't think I should FEEL much like it.'

'Well said, Mas'r Davy bor'!' cried Ham, in an ecstasy. 'Hoorah! Well said! Nor more you wouldn't! Hor! Hor!--Here he returned Mr. Peggotty's back-hander, and little Em'ly got up and kissed Mr. Peggotty. 'And how's your friend, sir?' said Mr. Peggotty to me.

'Steerforth?' said I.

'That's the name!' cried Mr. Peggotty, turning to Ham. 'I knowed it was something in our way.'

'You said it was Rudderford,' observed Ham, laughing.

'Well!' retorted Mr. Peggotty. 'And ye steer with a rudder, don't ye? It ain't fur off. How is he, sir?'

'He was very well indeed when I came away, Mr. Peggotty.'

'There's a friend!' said Mr. Peggotty, stretching out his pipe. 'There's a friend, if you talk of friends! Why, Lord love my heart alive, if it ain't a treat to look at him!'

'He is very handsome, is he not?' said I, my heart warming with this praise.

'Handsome!' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'He stands up to you like--like a--why I don't know what he don't stand up to you like. He's so bold!'

'Yes! That's just his character,' said I. 'He's as brave as a lion, and you can't think how frank he is, Mr. Peggotty.'

'And I do suppose, now,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking at me through the smoke of his pipe, 'that in the way of book-larning he'd take the wind out of a'most anything.'

'Yes,' said I, delighted; 'he knows everything. He is astonishingly clever.'

'There's a friend!' murmured Mr. Peggotty, with a grave toss of his head.

'Nothing seems to cost him any trouble,' said I. 'He knows a task if he only looks at it. He is the best cricketer you ever saw. He will give you almost as many men as you like at draughts, and beat you easily.'

Mr. Peggotty gave his head another toss, as much as to say: 'Of course he will.'

'He is such a speaker,' I pursued, 'that he can win anybody over; and I don't know what you'd say if you were to hear him sing, Mr. Peggotty.'

Mr. Peggotty gave his head another toss, as much as to say: 'I have no doubt of it.'

'Then, he's such a generous, fine, noble fellow,' said I, quite carried away by my favourite theme, 'that it's hardly possible to give him as much praise as he deserves. I am sure I can never feel thankful enough for the generosity with which he has protected me, so much younger and lower in the school than himself.'

I was running on, very fast indeed, when my eyes rested on little Em'ly's face, which was bent forward over the table, listening with the deepest attention, her breath held, her blue eyes sparkling like jewels, and the colour mantling in her cheeks. She looked so extraordinarily earnest and pretty, that I stopped in a sort of wonder; and they all observed her at the same time, for as I stopped, they laughed and looked at her.

'Em'ly is like me,' said Peggotty, 'and would like to see him.'

Em'ly was confused by our all observing her, and hung down her head, and her face was covered with blushes. Glancing up presently through her stray curls, and seeing that we were all looking at her still (I am sure I, for one, could have looked at her for hours), she ran away, and kept away till it was nearly bedtime.

I lay down in the old little bed in the stern of the boat, and the wind came moaning on across the flat as it had done before. But I could not

help fancying, now, that it moaned of those who were gone; and instead of thinking that the sea might rise in the night and float the boat away, I thought of the sea that had risen, since I last heard those sounds, and drowned my happy home. I recollect, as the wind and water began to sound fainter in my ears, putting a short clause into my prayers, petitioning that I might grow up to marry little Em'ly, and so dropping lovingly asleep.

The days passed pretty much as they had passed before, except--it was a great exception--that little Em'ly and I seldom wandered on the beach now. She had tasks to learn, and needle-work to do; and was absent during a great part of each day. But I felt that we should not have had those old wanderings, even if it had been otherwise. Wild and full of childish whims as Em'ly was, she was more of a little woman than I had supposed. She seemed to have got a great distance away from me, in little more than a year. She liked me, but she laughed at me, and tormented me; and when I went to meet her, stole home another way, and was laughing at the door when I came back, disappointed. The best times were when she sat quietly at work in the doorway, and I sat on the wooden step at her feet, reading to her. It seems to me, at this hour, that I have never seen such sunlight as on those bright April afternoons; that I have never seen such a sunny little figure as I used to see, sitting in the doorway of the old boat; that I have never beheld such sky, such water, such glorified ships sailing away into golden air.

On the very first evening after our arrival, Mr. Barkis appeared in an exceedingly vacant and awkward condition, and with a bundle of oranges tied up in a handkerchief. As he made no allusion of any kind to this property, he was supposed to have left it behind him by accident when he went away; until Ham, running after him to restore it, came back with the information that it was intended for Peggotty. After that occasion he appeared every evening at exactly the same hour, and always with a little bundle, to which he never alluded, and which he regularly put

behind the door and left there. These offerings of affection were of a most various and eccentric description. Among them I remember a double set of pigs' trotters, a huge pin-cushion, half a bushel or so of apples, a pair of jet earrings, some Spanish onions, a box of dominoes, a canary bird and cage, and a leg of pickled pork.

Mr. Barkis's wooing, as I remember it, was altogether of a peculiar kind. He very seldom said anything; but would sit by the fire in much the same attitude as he sat in his cart, and stare heavily at Peggotty, who was opposite. One night, being, as I suppose, inspired by love, he made a dart at the bit of wax-candle she kept for her thread, and put it in his waistcoat-pocket and carried it off. After that, his great delight was to produce it when it was wanted, sticking to the lining of his pocket, in a partially melted state, and pocket it again when it was done with. He seemed to enjoy himself very much, and not to feel at all called upon to talk. Even when he took Peggotty out for a walk on the flats, he had no uneasiness on that head, I believe; contenting himself with now and then asking her if she was pretty comfortable; and I remember that sometimes, after he was gone, Peggotty would throw her apron over her face, and laugh for half-an-hour. Indeed, we were all more or less amused, except that miserable Mrs. Gummidge, whose courtship would appear to have been of an exactly parallel nature, she was so continually reminded by these transactions of the old one.

At length, when the term of my visit was nearly expired, it was given out that Peggotty and Mr. Barkis were going to make a day's holiday together, and that little Em'ly and I were to accompany them. I had but a broken sleep the night before, in anticipation of the pleasure of a whole day with Em'ly. We were all astir betimes in the morning; and while we were yet at breakfast, Mr. Barkis appeared in the distance, driving a chaise-cart towards the object of his affections.

Peggotty was dressed as usual, in her neat and quiet mourning; but Mr.

Barkis bloomed in a new blue coat, of which the tailor had given him such good measure, that the cuffs would have rendered gloves unnecessary in the coldest weather, while the collar was so high that it pushed his hair up on end on the top of his head. His bright buttons, too, were of the largest size. Rendered complete by drab pantaloons and a buff waistcoat, I thought Mr. Barkis a phenomenon of respectability.

When we were all in a bustle outside the door, I found that Mr. Peggotty was prepared with an old shoe, which was to be thrown after us for luck, and which he offered to Mrs. Gummidge for that purpose.

'No. It had better be done by somebody else, Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'I'm a lone lorn creetur' myself, and everythink that reminds me of creetur's that ain't lone and lorn, goes contrary with me.'

'Come, old gal!' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'Take and heave it.'

'No, Dan'l,' returned Mrs. Gummidge, whimpering and shaking her head. 'If I felt less, I could do more. You don't feel like me, Dan'l; thinks don't go contrary with you, nor you with them; you had better do it yourself.'

But here Peggotty, who had been going about from one to another in a hurried way, kissing everybody, called out from the cart, in which we all were by this time (Em'ly and I on two little chairs, side by side), that Mrs. Gummidge must do it. So Mrs. Gummidge did it; and, I am sorry to relate, cast a damp upon the festive character of our departure, by immediately bursting into tears, and sinking subdued into the arms of Ham, with the declaration that she knowed she was a burden, and had better be carried to the House at once. Which I really thought was a sensible idea, that Ham might have acted on.

Away we went, however, on our holiday excursion; and the first thing

we did was to stop at a church, where Mr. Barkis tied the horse to some rails, and went in with Peggotty, leaving little Em'ly and me alone in the chaise. I took that occasion to put my arm round Em'ly's waist, and propose that as I was going away so very soon now, we should determine to be very affectionate to one another, and very happy, all day. Little Em'ly consenting, and allowing me to kiss her, I became desperate; informing her, I recollect, that I never could love another, and that I was prepared to shed the blood of anybody who should aspire to her affections.

How merry little Em'ly made herself about it! With what a demure assumption of being immensely older and wiser than I, the fairy little woman said I was 'a silly boy'; and then laughed so charmingly that I forgot the pain of being called by that disparaging name, in the pleasure of looking at her.

Mr. Barkis and Peggotty were a good while in the church, but came out at last, and then we drove away into the country. As we were going along, Mr. Barkis turned to me, and said, with a wink,--by the by, I should hardly have thought, before, that he could wink:

'What name was it as I wrote up in the cart?'

'Clara Peggotty,' I answered.

'What name would it be as I should write up now, if there was a tilt here?'

'Clara Peggotty, again?' I suggested.

'Clara Peggotty BARKIS!' he returned, and burst into a roar of laughter that shook the chaise.



In a word, they were married, and had gone into the church for no other purpose. Peggotty was resolved that it should be quietly done; and the clerk had given her away, and there had been no witnesses of the ceremony. She was a little confused when Mr. Barkis made this abrupt announcement of their union, and could not hug me enough in token of her unimpaired affection; but she soon became herself again, and said she was very glad it was over.

We drove to a little inn in a by-road, where we were expected, and where we had a very comfortable dinner, and passed the day with great satisfaction. If Peggotty had been married every day for the last ten years, she could hardly have been more at her ease about it; it made no sort of difference in her: she was just the same as ever, and went out for a stroll with little Em'ly and me before tea, while Mr. Barkis philosophically smoked his pipe, and enjoyed himself, I suppose, with the contemplation of his happiness. If so, it sharpened his appetite; for I distinctly call to mind that, although he had eaten a good deal of pork and greens at dinner, and had finished off with a fowl or two, he was obliged to have cold boiled bacon for tea, and disposed of a large quantity without any emotion.

I have often thought, since, what an odd, innocent, out-of-the-way kind of wedding it must have been! We got into the chaise again soon after dark, and drove cosily back, looking up at the stars, and talking about them. I was their chief exponent, and opened Mr. Barkis's mind to an amazing extent. I told him all I knew, but he would have believed anything I might have taken it into my head to impart to him; for he had a profound veneration for my abilities, and informed his wife in my hearing, on that very occasion, that I was 'a young Roeshus'--by which I think he meant prodigy.

When we had exhausted the subject of the stars, or rather when I had exhausted the mental faculties of Mr. Barkis, little Em'ly and I made a

cloak of an old wrapper, and sat under it for the rest of the journey. Ah, how I loved her! What happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead! Some such picture, with no real world in it, bright with the light of our innocence, and vague as the stars afar off, was in my mind all the way. I am glad to think there were two such guileless hearts at Peggotty's marriage as little Em'ly's and mine. I am glad to think the Loves and Graces took such airy forms in its homely procession.

Well, we came to the old boat again in good time at night; and there Mr. and Mrs. Barkis bade us good-bye, and drove away snugly to their own home. I felt then, for the first time, that I had lost Peggotty. I should have gone to bed with a sore heart indeed under any other roof but that which sheltered little Em'ly's head.

Mr. Peggotty and Ham knew what was in my thoughts as well as I did, and were ready with some supper and their hospitable faces to drive it away. Little Em'ly came and sat beside me on the locker for the only time in all that visit; and it was altogether a wonderful close to a wonderful day.

It was a night tide; and soon after we went to bed, Mr. Peggotty and Ham went out to fish. I felt very brave at being left alone in the solitary house, the protector of Em'ly and Mrs. Gummidge, and only wished that a lion or a serpent, or any ill-disposed monster, would make an attack upon us, that I might destroy him, and cover myself with glory. But as nothing of the sort happened to be walking about on Yarmouth flats that night, I provided the best substitute I could by dreaming of dragons until morning.

With morning came Peggotty; who called to me, as usual, under my window as if Mr. Barkis the carrier had been from first to last a dream too. After breakfast she took me to her own home, and a beautiful little home it was. Of all the moveables in it, I must have been impressed by a certain old bureau of some dark wood in the parlour (the tile-floored kitchen was the general sitting-room), with a retreating top which opened, let down, and became a desk, within which was a large quarto edition of Foxe's Book of Martyrs. This precious volume, of which I do not recollect one word, I immediately discovered and immediately applied myself to; and I never visited the house afterwards, but I kneeled on a chair, opened the casket where this gem was enshrined, spread my arms over the desk, and fell to devouring the book afresh. I was chiefly edified, I am afraid, by the pictures, which were numerous, and represented all kinds of dismal horrors; but the Martyrs and Peggotty's house have been inseparable in my mind ever since, and are now.

I took leave of Mr. Peggotty, and Ham, and Mrs. Gumidge, and little Em'ly, that day; and passed the night at Peggotty's, in a little room in the roof (with the Crocodile Book on a shelf by the bed's head) which was to be always mine, Peggotty said, and should always be kept for me in exactly the same state.

'Young or old, Davy dear, as long as I am alive and have this house over my head,' said Peggotty, 'you shall find it as if I expected you here directly minute. I shall keep it every day, as I used to keep your old little room, my darling; and if you was to go to China, you might think of it as being kept just the same, all the time you were away.'

I felt the truth and constancy of my dear old nurse, with all my heart, and thanked her as well as I could. That was not very well, for she spoke to me thus, with her arms round my neck, in the morning, and I was going home in the morning, and I went home in the morning, with herself

and Mr. Barkis in the cart. They left me at the gate, not easily or lightly; and it was a strange sight to me to see the cart go on, taking Peggotty away, and leaving me under the old elm-trees looking at the house, in which there was no face to look on mine with love or liking any more.

And now I fell into a state of neglect, which I cannot look back upon without compassion. I fell at once into a solitary condition,--apart from all friendly notice, apart from the society of all other boys of my own age, apart from all companionship but my own spiritless thoughts,--which seems to cast its gloom upon this paper as I write.

What would I have given, to have been sent to the hardest school that ever was kept!--to have been taught something, anyhow, anywhere! No such hope dawned upon me. They disliked me; and they sullenly, sternly, steadily, overlooked me. I think Mr. Murdstone's means were straitened at about this time; but it is little to the purpose. He could not bear me; and in putting me from him he tried, as I believe, to put away the notion that I had any claim upon him--and succeeded.

I was not actively ill-used. I was not beaten, or starved; but the wrong that was done to me had no intervals of relenting, and was done in a systematic, passionless manner. Day after day, week after week, month after month, I was coldly neglected. I wonder sometimes, when I think of it, what they would have done if I had been taken with an illness; whether I should have lain down in my lonely room, and languished through it in my usual solitary way, or whether anybody would have helped me out.

When Mr. and Miss Murdstone were at home, I took my meals with them; in their absence, I ate and drank by myself. At all times I lounged about the house and neighbourhood quite disregarded, except that they were jealous of my making any friends: thinking, perhaps, that if I did, I

might complain to someone. For this reason, though Mr. Chillip often asked me to go and see him (he was a widower, having, some years before that, lost a little small light-haired wife, whom I can just remember connecting in my own thoughts with a pale tortoise-shell cat), it was but seldom that I enjoyed the happiness of passing an afternoon in his closet of a surgery; reading some book that was new to me, with the smell of the whole Pharmacopoeia coming up my nose, or pounding something in a mortar under his mild directions.

For the same reason, added no doubt to the old dislike of her, I was seldom allowed to visit Peggotty. Faithful to her promise, she either came to see me, or met me somewhere near, once every week, and never empty-handed; but many and bitter were the disappointments I had, in being refused permission to pay a visit to her at her house. Some few times, however, at long intervals, I was allowed to go there; and then I found out that Mr. Barkis was something of a miser, or as Peggotty dutifully expressed it, was 'a little near', and kept a heap of money in a box under his bed, which he pretended was only full of coats and trousers. In this coffer, his riches hid themselves with such a tenacious modesty, that the smallest instalments could only be tempted out by artifice; so that Peggotty had to prepare a long and elaborate scheme, a very Gunpowder Plot, for every Saturday's expenses.

All this time I was so conscious of the waste of any promise I had given, and of my being utterly neglected, that I should have been perfectly miserable, I have no doubt, but for the old books. They were my only comfort; and I was as true to them as they were to me, and read them over and over I don't know how many times more.

I now approach a period of my life, which I can never lose the remembrance of, while I remember anything: and the recollection of which has often, without my invocation, come before me like a ghost, and haunted happier times.

I had been out, one day, loitering somewhere, in the listless, meditative manner that my way of life engendered, when, turning the corner of a lane near our house, I came upon Mr. Murdstone walking with a gentleman. I was confused, and was going by them, when the gentleman cried:

'What! Brooks!'

'No, sir, David Copperfield,' I said.

'Don't tell me. You are Brooks,' said the gentleman. 'You are Brooks of Sheffield. That's your name.'

At these words, I observed the gentleman more attentively. His laugh coming to my remembrance too, I knew him to be Mr. Quinion, whom I had gone over to Lowestoft with Mr. Murdstone to see, before--it is no matter--I need not recall when.

'And how do you get on, and where are you being educated, Brooks?' said Mr. Quinion.

He had put his hand upon my shoulder, and turned me about, to walk with them. I did not know what to reply, and glanced dubiously at Mr. Murdstone.

'He is at home at present,' said the latter. 'He is not being educated anywhere. I don't know what to do with him. He is a difficult subject.'

That old, double look was on me for a moment; and then his eyes darkened with a frown, as it turned, in its aversion, elsewhere.

'Humph!' said Mr. Quinion, looking at us both, I thought. 'Fine

weather!'

Silence ensued, and I was considering how I could best disengage my shoulder from his hand, and go away, when he said:

'I suppose you are a pretty sharp fellow still? Eh, Brooks?'

'Aye! He is sharp enough,' said Mr. Murdstone, impatiently. 'You had better let him go. He will not thank you for troubling him.'

On this hint, Mr. Quinion released me, and I made the best of my way home. Looking back as I turned into the front garden, I saw Mr. Murdstone leaning against the wicket of the churchyard, and Mr. Quinion talking to him. They were both looking after me, and I felt that they were speaking of me.

Mr. Quinion lay at our house that night. After breakfast, the next morning, I had put my chair away, and was going out of the room, when Mr. Murdstone called me back. He then gravely repaired to another table, where his sister sat herself at her desk. Mr. Quinion, with his hands in his pockets, stood looking out of window; and I stood looking at them all.

'David,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'to the young this is a world for action; not for moping and droning in.' -- 'As you do,' added his sister.

'Jane Murdstone, leave it to me, if you please. I say, David, to the young this is a world for action, and not for moping and droning in. It is especially so for a young boy of your disposition, which requires a great deal of correcting; and to which no greater service can be done than to force it to conform to the ways of the working world, and to bend it and break it.'

'For stubbornness won't do here,' said his sister 'What it wants is, to be crushed. And crushed it must be. Shall be, too!'

He gave her a look, half in remonstrance, half in approval, and went on:

'I suppose you know, David, that I am not rich. At any rate, you know it now. You have received some considerable education already. Education is costly; and even if it were not, and I could afford it, I am of opinion that it would not be at all advantageous to you to be kept at school. What is before you, is a fight with the world; and the sooner you begin it, the better.'

I think it occurred to me that I had already begun it, in my poor way: but it occurs to me now, whether or no.

'You have heard the "counting-house" mentioned sometimes,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'The counting-house, sir?' I repeated. 'Of Murdstone and Grinby, in the wine trade,' he replied.

I suppose I looked uncertain, for he went on hastily:

'You have heard the "counting-house" mentioned, or the business, or the cellars, or the wharf, or something about it.'

'I think I have heard the business mentioned, sir,' I said, remembering what I vaguely knew of his and his sister's resources. 'But I don't know when.'

'It does not matter when,' he returned. 'Mr. Quinion manages that business.'



I glanced at the latter deferentially as he stood looking out of window.

'Mr. Quinion suggests that it gives employment to some other boys, and that he sees no reason why it shouldn't, on the same terms, give employment to you.'

'He having,' Mr. Quinion observed in a low voice, and half turning round, 'no other prospect, Murdstone.'

Mr. Murdstone, with an impatient, even an angry gesture, resumed, without noticing what he had said:

'Those terms are, that you will earn enough for yourself to provide for your eating and drinking, and pocket-money. Your lodging (which I have arranged for) will be paid by me. So will your washing--'

'--Which will be kept down to my estimate,' said his sister.

'Your clothes will be looked after for you, too,' said Mr. Murdstone; 'as you will not be able, yet awhile, to get them for yourself. So you are now going to London, David, with Mr. Quinion, to begin the world on your own account.'

'In short, you are provided for,' observed his sister; 'and will please to do your duty.'

Though I quite understood that the purpose of this announcement was to get rid of me, I have no distinct remembrance whether it pleased or frightened me. My impression is, that I was in a state of confusion about it, and, oscillating between the two points, touched neither. Nor had I much time for the clearing of my thoughts, as Mr. Quinion was to go upon the morrow.

Behold me, on the morrow, in a much-worn little white hat, with a black crape round it for my mother, a black jacket, and a pair of hard, stiff corduroy trousers--which Miss Murdstone considered the best armour for the legs in that fight with the world which was now to come off. Behold me so attired, and with my little worldly all before me in a small trunk, sitting, a lone lorn child (as Mrs. Gummidge might have said), in the post-chaise that was carrying Mr. Quinion to the London coach at Yarmouth! See, how our house and church are lessening in the distance; how the grave beneath the tree is blotted out by intervening objects; how the spire points upwards from my old playground no more, and the sky is empty!

#### CHAPTER 11. I BEGIN LIFE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT, AND DON'T LIKE IT

I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby.

Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse was at the waterside. It was down in Blackfriars. Modern improvements have altered the place; but it was the last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the river, with some stairs at the end, where people took boat. It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of

a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time, with my trembling hand in Mr. Quinion's.

Murdstone and Grinby's trade was among a good many kinds of people, but an important branch of it was the supply of wines and spirits to certain packet ships. I forget now where they chiefly went, but I think there were some among them that made voyages both to the East and West Indies. I know that a great many empty bottles were one of the consequences of this traffic, and that certain men and boys were employed to examine them against the light, and reject those that were flawed, and to rinse and wash them. When the empty bottles ran short, there were labels to be pasted on full ones, or corks to be fitted to them, or seals to be put upon the corks, or finished bottles to be packed in casks. All this work was my work, and of the boys employed upon it I was one.

There were three or four of us, counting me. My working place was established in a corner of the warehouse, where Mr. Quinion could see me, when he chose to stand up on the bottom rail of his stool in the counting-house, and look at me through a window above the desk. Hither, on the first morning of my so auspiciously beginning life on my own account, the oldest of the regular boys was summoned to show me my business. His name was Mick Walker, and he wore a ragged apron and a paper cap. He informed me that his father was a bargeman, and walked, in a black velvet head-dress, in the Lord Mayor's Show. He also informed me that our principal associate would be another boy whom he introduced by the--to me--extraordinary name of Mealy Potatoes. I discovered, however, that this youth had not been christened by that name, but that it had been bestowed upon him in the warehouse, on account of his complexion, which was pale or mealy. Mealy's father was a waterman, who had the

additional distinction of being a fireman, and was engaged as such at one of the large theatres; where some young relation of Mealy's--I think his little sister--did Imps in the Pantomimes.

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth everyday associates with those of my happier childhood--not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. As often as Mick Walker went away in the course of that forenoon, I mingled my tears with the water in which I was washing the bottles; and sobbed as if there were a flaw in my own breast, and it were in danger of bursting.

The counting-house clock was at half past twelve, and there was general preparation for going to dinner, when Mr. Quinion tapped at the counting-house window, and beckoned to me to go in. I went in, and found there a stoutish, middle-aged person, in a brown surtout and black tights and shoes, with no more hair upon his head (which was a large one, and very shining) than there is upon an egg, and with a very extensive face, which he turned full upon me. His clothes were shabby, but he had an imposing shirt-collar on. He carried a jaunty sort of a stick, with a large pair of rusty tassels to it; and a quizzing-glass hung outside his coat,--for ornament, I afterwards found, as he very seldom looked through it, and couldn't see anything when he did.

'This,' said Mr. Quinion, in allusion to myself, 'is he.'

'This,' said the stranger, with a certain condescending roll in his

voice, and a certain indescribable air of doing something genteel, which impressed me very much, 'is Master Copperfield. I hope I see you well, sir?'

I said I was very well, and hoped he was. I was sufficiently ill at ease, Heaven knows; but it was not in my nature to complain much at that time of my life, so I said I was very well, and hoped he was.

'I am,' said the stranger, 'thank Heaven, quite well. I have received a letter from Mr. Murdstone, in which he mentions that he would desire me to receive into an apartment in the rear of my house, which is at present unoccupied--and is, in short, to be let as a--in short,' said the stranger, with a smile and in a burst of confidence, 'as a bedroom--the young beginner whom I have now the pleasure to--' and the stranger waved his hand, and settled his chin in his shirt-collar.

'This is Mr. Micawber,' said Mr. Quinion to me.

'Ahem!' said the stranger, 'that is my name.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said Mr. Quinion, 'is known to Mr. Murdstone. He takes orders for us on commission, when he can get any. He has been written to by Mr. Murdstone, on the subject of your lodgings, and he will receive you as a lodger.'

'My address,' said Mr. Micawber, 'is Windsor Terrace, City Road. I--in short,' said Mr. Micawber, with the same genteel air, and in another burst of confidence--'I live there.'

I made him a bow.

'Under the impression,' said Mr. Micawber, 'that your peregrinations in this metropolis have not as yet been extensive, and that you might have

some difficulty in penetrating the arcana of the Modern Babylon in the direction of the City Road,--in short,' said Mr. Micawber, in another burst of confidence, 'that you might lose yourself--I shall be happy to call this evening, and install you in the knowledge of the nearest way.'

I thanked him with all my heart, for it was friendly in him to offer to take that trouble.

'At what hour,' said Mr. Micawber, 'shall I--'

'At about eight,' said Mr. Quinion.

'At about eight,' said Mr. Micawber. 'I beg to wish you good day, Mr. Quinion. I will intrude no longer.'

So he put on his hat, and went out with his cane under his arm: very upright, and humming a tune when he was clear of the counting-house.

Mr. Quinion then formally engaged me to be as useful as I could in the warehouse of Murdstone and Grinby, at a salary, I think, of six shillings a week. I am not clear whether it was six or seven. I am inclined to believe, from my uncertainty on this head, that it was six at first and seven afterwards. He paid me a week down (from his own pocket, I believe), and I gave Mealy sixpence out of it to get my trunk carried to Windsor Terrace that night: it being too heavy for my strength, small as it was. I paid sixpence more for my dinner, which was a meat pie and a turn at a neighbouring pump; and passed the hour which was allowed for that meal, in walking about the streets.

At the appointed time in the evening, Mr. Micawber reappeared. I washed my hands and face, to do the greater honour to his gentility, and we walked to our house, as I suppose I must now call it, together; Mr. Micawber impressing the name of streets, and the shapes of corner houses

upon me, as we went along, that I might find my way back, easily, in the morning.

Arrived at this house in Windsor Terrace (which I noticed was shabby like himself, but also, like himself, made all the show it could), he presented me to Mrs. Micawber, a thin and faded lady, not at all young, who was sitting in the parlour (the first floor was altogether unfurnished, and the blinds were kept down to delude the neighbours), with a baby at her breast. This baby was one of twins; and I may remark here that I hardly ever, in all my experience of the family, saw both the twins detached from Mrs. Micawber at the same time. One of them was always taking refreshment.

There were two other children; Master Micawber, aged about four, and Miss Micawber, aged about three. These, and a dark-complexioned young woman, with a habit of snorting, who was servant to the family, and informed me, before half an hour had expired, that she was 'a Orfling', and came from St. Luke's workhouse, in the neighbourhood, completed the establishment. My room was at the top of the house, at the back: a close chamber; stencilled all over with an ornament which my young imagination represented as a blue muffin; and very scantily furnished.

'I never thought,' said Mrs. Micawber, when she came up, twin and all, to show me the apartment, and sat down to take breath, 'before I was married, when I lived with papa and mama, that I should ever find it necessary to take a lodger. But Mr. Micawber being in difficulties, all considerations of private feeling must give way.'

I said: 'Yes, ma'am.'

'Mr. Micawber's difficulties are almost overwhelming just at present,' said Mrs. Micawber; 'and whether it is possible to bring him through them, I don't know. When I lived at home with papa and mama, I really

should have hardly understood what the word meant, in the sense in which I now employ it, but experientia does it,--as papa used to say.'

I cannot satisfy myself whether she told me that Mr. Micawber had been an officer in the Marines, or whether I have imagined it. I only know that I believe to this hour that he WAS in the Marines once upon a time, without knowing why. He was a sort of town traveller for a number of miscellaneous houses, now; but made little or nothing of it, I am afraid.

'If Mr. Micawber's creditors will not give him time,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'they must take the consequences; and the sooner they bring it to an issue the better. Blood cannot be obtained from a stone, neither can anything on account be obtained at present (not to mention law expenses) from Mr. Micawber.'

I never can quite understand whether my precocious self-dependence confused Mrs. Micawber in reference to my age, or whether she was so full of the subject that she would have talked about it to the very twins if there had been nobody else to communicate with, but this was the strain in which she began, and she went on accordingly all the time I knew her.

Poor Mrs. Micawber! She said she had tried to exert herself, and so, I have no doubt, she had. The centre of the street door was perfectly covered with a great brass-plate, on which was engraved 'Mrs. Micawber's Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies': but I never found that any young lady had ever been to school there; or that any young lady ever came, or proposed to come; or that the least preparation was ever made to receive any young lady. The only visitors I ever saw, or heard of, were creditors. THEY used to come at all hours, and some of them were quite ferocious. One dirty-faced man, I think he was a boot-maker, used to edge himself into the passage as early as seven o'clock in the



morning, and call up the stairs to Mr. Micawber--'Come! You ain't out yet, you know. Pay us, will you? Don't hide, you know; that's mean. I wouldn't be mean if I was you. Pay us, will you? You just pay us, d'ye hear? Come!' Receiving no answer to these taunts, he would mount in his wrath to the words 'swindlers' and 'robbers'; and these being ineffectual too, would sometimes go to the extremity of crossing the street, and roaring up at the windows of the second floor, where he knew Mr. Micawber was. At these times, Mr. Micawber would be transported with grief and mortification, even to the length (as I was once made aware by a scream from his wife) of making motions at himself with a razor; but within half-an-hour afterwards, he would polish up his shoes with extraordinary pains, and go out, humming a tune with a greater air of gentility than ever. Mrs. Micawber was quite as elastic. I have known her to be thrown into fainting fits by the king's taxes at three o'clock, and to eat lamb chops, breaded, and drink warm ale (paid for with two tea-spoons that had gone to the pawnbroker's) at four. On one occasion, when an execution had just been put in, coming home through some chance as early as six o'clock, I saw her lying (of course with a twin) under the grate in a swoon, with her hair all torn about her face; but I never knew her more cheerful than she was, that very same night, over a veal cutlet before the kitchen fire, telling me stories about her papa and mama, and the company they used to keep.

In this house, and with this family, I passed my leisure time. My own exclusive breakfast of a penny loaf and a pennyworth of milk, I provided myself. I kept another small loaf, and a modicum of cheese, on a particular shelf of a particular cupboard, to make my supper on when I came back at night. This made a hole in the six or seven shillings, I know well; and I was out at the warehouse all day, and had to support myself on that money all the week. From Monday morning until Saturday night, I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from anyone, that I can call to mind, as I hope to go to heaven!

I was so young and childish, and so little qualified--how could I be otherwise?--to undertake the whole charge of my own existence, that often, in going to Murdstone and Grinby's, of a morning, I could not resist the stale pastry put out for sale at half-price at the pastrycooks' doors, and spent in that the money I should have kept for my dinner. Then, I went without my dinner, or bought a roll or a slice of pudding. I remember two pudding shops, between which I was divided, according to my finances. One was in a court close to St. Martin's Church--at the back of the church,--which is now removed altogether. The pudding at that shop was made of currants, and was rather a special pudding, but was dear, twopennyworth not being larger than a pennyworth of more ordinary pudding. A good shop for the latter was in the Strand--somewhere in that part which has been rebuilt since. It was a stout pale pudding, heavy and flabby, and with great flat raisins in it, stuck in whole at wide distances apart. It came up hot at about my time every day, and many a day did I dine off it. When I dined regularly and handsomely, I had a saveloy and a penny loaf, or a fourpenny plate of red beef from a cook's shop; or a plate of bread and cheese and a glass of beer, from a miserable old public-house opposite our place of business, called the Lion, or the Lion and something else that I have forgotten. Once, I remember carrying my own bread (which I had brought from home in the morning) under my arm, wrapped in a piece of paper, like a book, and going to a famous alamode beef-house near Drury Lane, and ordering a 'small plate' of that delicacy to eat with it. What the waiter thought of such a strange little apparition coming in all alone, I don't know; but I can see him now, staring at me as I ate my dinner, and bringing up the other waiter to look. I gave him a halfpenny for himself, and I wish he hadn't taken it.

We had half-an-hour, I think, for tea. When I had money enough, I used to get half-a-pint of ready-made coffee and a slice of bread and butter. When I had none, I used to look at a venison shop in Fleet Street; or

I have strolled, at such a time, as far as Covent Garden Market, and stared at the pineapples. I was fond of wandering about the Adelphi, because it was a mysterious place, with those dark arches. I see myself emerging one evening from some of these arches, on a little public-house close to the river, with an open space before it, where some coal-heavers were dancing; to look at whom I sat down upon a bench. I wonder what they thought of me!

I was such a child, and so little, that frequently when I went into the bar of a strange public-house for a glass of ale or porter, to moisten what I had had for dinner, they were afraid to give it me. I remember one hot evening I went into the bar of a public-house, and said to the landlord: 'What is your best--your very best--ale a glass?' For it was a special occasion. I don't know what. It may have been my birthday.

'Twopence-halfpenny,' says the landlord, 'is the price of the Genuine Stunning ale.'

'Then,' says I, producing the money, 'just draw me a glass of the Genuine Stunning, if you please, with a good head to it.'

The landlord looked at me in return over the bar, from head to foot, with a strange smile on his face; and instead of drawing the beer, looked round the screen and said something to his wife. She came out from behind it, with her work in her hand, and joined him in surveying me. Here we stand, all three, before me now. The landlord in his shirt-sleeves, leaning against the bar window-frame; his wife looking over the little half-door; and I, in some confusion, looking up at them from outside the partition. They asked me a good many questions; as, what my name was, how old I was, where I lived, how I was employed, and how I came there. To all of which, that I might commit nobody, I invented, I am afraid, appropriate answers. They served me with the ale, though I suspect it was not the Genuine Stunning; and the landlord's

wife, opening the little half-door of the bar, and bending down, gave me my money back, and gave me a kiss that was half admiring and half compassionate, but all womanly and good, I am sure.

I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources or the difficulties of my life. I know that if a shilling were given me by Mr. Quinion at any time, I spent it in a dinner or a tea. I know that I worked, from morning until night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.

Yet I held some station at Murdstone and Grinby's too. Besides that Mr. Quinion did what a careless man so occupied, and dealing with a thing so anomalous, could, to treat me as one upon a different footing from the rest, I never said, to man or boy, how it was that I came to be there, or gave the least indication of being sorry that I was there. That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell. But I kept my own counsel, and I did my work. I knew from the first, that, if I could not do my work as well as any of the rest, I could not hold myself above slight and contempt. I soon became at least as expeditious and as skilful as either of the other boys. Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manner were different enough from theirs to place a space between us. They and the men generally spoke of me as 'the little gent', or 'the young Suffolker.' A certain man named Gregory, who was foreman of the packers, and another named Tipp, who was the carman, and wore a red jacket, used to address me sometimes as 'David': but I think it was mostly when we were very confidential, and when I had made some efforts to entertain them, over our work, with some results of the old readings; which were fast perishing out of my remembrance. Mealy Potatoes uprose once, and

rebelled against my being so distinguished; but Mick Walker settled him in no time.

My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless, and abandoned, as such, altogether. I am solemnly convinced that I never for one hour was reconciled to it, or was otherwise than miserably unhappy; but I bore it; and even to Peggotty, partly for the love of her and partly for shame, never in any letter (though many passed between us) revealed the truth.

Mr. Micawber's difficulties were an addition to the distressed state of my mind. In my forlorn state I became quite attached to the family, and used to walk about, busy with Mrs. Micawber's calculations of ways and means, and heavy with the weight of Mr. Micawber's debts. On a Saturday night, which was my grand treat,--partly because it was a great thing to walk home with six or seven shillings in my pocket, looking into the shops and thinking what such a sum would buy, and partly because I went home early,--Mrs. Micawber would make the most heart-rending confidences to me; also on a Sunday morning, when I mixed the portion of tea or coffee I had bought over-night, in a little shaving-pot, and sat late at my breakfast. It was nothing at all unusual for Mr. Micawber to sob violently at the beginning of one of these Saturday night conversations, and sing about Jack's delight being his lovely Nan, towards the end of it. I have known him come home to supper with a flood of tears, and a declaration that nothing was now left but a jail; and go to bed making a calculation of the expense of putting bow-windows to the house, 'in case anything turned up', which was his favourite expression. And Mrs. Micawber was just the same.

A curious equality of friendship, originating, I suppose, in our respective circumstances, sprung up between me and these people, notwithstanding the ludicrous disparity in our years. But I never allowed myself to be prevailed upon to accept any invitation to eat and

drink with them out of their stock (knowing that they got on badly with the butcher and baker, and had often not too much for themselves), until Mrs. Micawber took me into her entire confidence. This she did one evening as follows:

'Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'I make no stranger of you, and therefore do not hesitate to say that Mr. Micawber's difficulties are coming to a crisis.'

It made me very miserable to hear it, and I looked at Mrs. Micawber's red eyes with the utmost sympathy.

'With the exception of the heel of a Dutch cheese--which is not adapted to the wants of a young family'--said Mrs. Micawber, 'there is really not a scrap of anything in the larder. I was accustomed to speak of the larder when I lived with papa and mama, and I use the word almost unconsciously. What I mean to express is, that there is nothing to eat in the house.'

'Dear me!' I said, in great concern.

I had two or three shillings of my week's money in my pocket--from which I presume that it must have been on a Wednesday night when we held this conversation--and I hastily produced them, and with heartfelt emotion begged Mrs. Micawber to accept of them as a loan. But that lady, kissing me, and making me put them back in my pocket, replied that she couldn't think of it.

'No, my dear Master Copperfield,' said she, 'far be it from my thoughts! But you have a discretion beyond your years, and can render me another kind of service, if you will; and a service I will thankfully accept of.'

I begged Mrs. Micawber to name it.

'I have parted with the plate myself,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'Six tea, two salt, and a pair of sugars, I have at different times borrowed money on, in secret, with my own hands. But the twins are a great tie; and to me, with my recollections, of papa and mama, these transactions are very painful. There are still a few trifles that we could part with. Mr. Micawber's feelings would never allow him to dispose of them; and Clickett'--this was the girl from the workhouse--'being of a vulgar mind, would take painful liberties if so much confidence was reposed in her. Master Copperfield, if I might ask you--'

I understood Mrs. Micawber now, and begged her to make use of me to any extent. I began to dispose of the more portable articles of property that very evening; and went out on a similar expedition almost every morning, before I went to Murdstone and Grinby's.

Mr. Micawber had a few books on a little chiffonier, which he called the library; and those went first. I carried them, one after another, to a bookstall in the City Road--one part of which, near our house, was almost all bookstalls and bird shops then--and sold them for whatever they would bring. The keeper of this bookstall, who lived in a little house behind it, used to get tipsy every night, and to be violently scolded by his wife every morning. More than once, when I went there early, I had audience of him in a turn-up bedstead, with a cut in his forehead or a black eye, bearing witness to his excesses over-night (I am afraid he was quarrelsome in his drink), and he, with a shaking hand, endeavouring to find the needful shillings in one or other of the pockets of his clothes, which lay upon the floor, while his wife, with a baby in her arms and her shoes down at heel, never left off rating him. Sometimes he had lost his money, and then he would ask me to call again; but his wife had always got some--had taken his, I dare say, while he was drunk--and secretly completed the bargain on the stairs, as we went

down together. At the pawnbroker's shop, too, I began to be very well known. The principal gentleman who officiated behind the counter, took a good deal of notice of me; and often got me, I recollect, to decline a Latin noun or adjective, or to conjugate a Latin verb, in his ear, while he transacted my business. After all these occasions Mrs. Micawber made a little treat, which was generally a supper; and there was a peculiar relish in these meals which I well remember.

At last Mr. Micawber's difficulties came to a crisis, and he was arrested early one morning, and carried over to the King's Bench Prison in the Borough. He told me, as he went out of the house, that the God of day had now gone down upon him--and I really thought his heart was broken and mine too. But I heard, afterwards, that he was seen to play a lively game at skittles, before noon.

On the first Sunday after he was taken there, I was to go and see him, and have dinner with him. I was to ask my way to such a place, and just short of that place I should see such another place, and just short of that I should see a yard, which I was to cross, and keep straight on until I saw a turnkey. All this I did; and when at last I did see a turnkey (poor little fellow that I was!), and thought how, when Roderick Random was in a debtors' prison, there was a man there with nothing on him but an old rug, the turnkey swam before my dimmed eyes and my beating heart.

Mr. Micawber was waiting for me within the gate, and we went up to his room (top story but one), and cried very much. He solemnly conjured me, I remember, to take warning by his fate; and to observe that if a man had twenty pounds a-year for his income, and spent nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, he would be happy, but that if he spent twenty pounds one he would be miserable. After which he borrowed a shilling of me for porter, gave me a written order on Mrs. Micawber for the amount, and put away his pocket-handkerchief, and cheered up.



We sat before a little fire, with two bricks put within the rusted grate, one on each side, to prevent its burning too many coals; until another debtor, who shared the room with Mr. Micawber, came in from the bakehouse with the loin of mutton which was our joint-stock repast. Then I was sent up to 'Captain Hopkins' in the room overhead, with Mr. Micawber's compliments, and I was his young friend, and would Captain Hopkins lend me a knife and fork.

Captain Hopkins lent me the knife and fork, with his compliments to Mr. Micawber. There was a very dirty lady in his little room, and two wan girls, his daughters, with shock heads of hair. I thought it was better to borrow Captain Hopkins's knife and fork, than Captain Hopkins's comb. The Captain himself was in the last extremity of shabbiness, with large whiskers, and an old, old brown great-coat with no other coat below it. I saw his bed rolled up in a corner; and what plates and dishes and pots he had, on a shelf; and I divined (God knows how) that though the two girls with the shock heads of hair were Captain Hopkins's children, the dirty lady was not married to Captain Hopkins. My timid station on his threshold was not occupied more than a couple of minutes at most; but I came down again with all this in my knowledge, as surely as the knife and fork were in my hand.

There was something gipsy-like and agreeable in the dinner, after all. I took back Captain Hopkins's knife and fork early in the afternoon, and went home to comfort Mrs. Micawber with an account of my visit. She fainted when she saw me return, and made a little jug of egg-hot afterwards to console us while we talked it over.

I don't know how the household furniture came to be sold for the family benefit, or who sold it, except that I did not. Sold it was, however, and carried away in a van; except the bed, a few chairs, and the kitchen table. With these possessions we encamped, as it were, in the two

parlours of the emptied house in Windsor Terrace; Mrs. Micawber, the children, the Orfling, and myself; and lived in those rooms night and day. I have no idea for how long, though it seems to me for a long time. At last Mrs. Micawber resolved to move into the prison, where Mr. Micawber had now secured a room to himself. So I took the key of the house to the landlord, who was very glad to get it; and the beds were sent over to the King's Bench, except mine, for which a little room was hired outside the walls in the neighbourhood of that Institution, very much to my satisfaction, since the Micawbers and I had become too used to one another, in our troubles, to part. The Orfling was likewise accommodated with an inexpensive lodging in the same neighbourhood. Mine was a quiet back-garret with a sloping roof, commanding a pleasant prospect of a timberyard; and when I took possession of it, with the reflection that Mr. Micawber's troubles had come to a crisis at last, I thought it quite a paradise.

All this time I was working at Murdstone and Grinby's in the same common way, and with the same common companions, and with the same sense of unmerited degradation as at first. But I never, happily for me no doubt, made a single acquaintance, or spoke to any of the many boys whom I saw daily in going to the warehouse, in coming from it, and in prowling about the streets at meal-times. I led the same secretly unhappy life; but I led it in the same lonely, self-reliant manner. The only changes I am conscious of are, firstly, that I had grown more shabby, and secondly, that I was now relieved of much of the weight of Mr. and Mrs. Micawber's cares; for some relatives or friends had engaged to help them at their present pass, and they lived more comfortably in the prison than they had lived for a long while out of it. I used to breakfast with them now, in virtue of some arrangement, of which I have forgotten the details. I forget, too, at what hour the gates were opened in the morning, admitting of my going in; but I know that I was often up at six o'clock, and that my favourite lounging-place in the interval was old London Bridge, where I was wont to sit in one of the stone recesses,

watching the people going by, or to look over the balustrades at the sun shining in the water, and lighting up the golden flame on the top of the Monument. The Orfling met me here sometimes, to be told some astonishing fictions respecting the wharves and the Tower; of which I can say no more than that I hope I believed them myself. In the evening I used to go back to the prison, and walk up and down the parade with Mr. Micawber; or play casino with Mrs. Micawber, and hear reminiscences of her papa and mama. Whether Mr. Murdstone knew where I was, I am unable to say. I never told them at Murdstone and Grinby's.

Mr. Micawber's affairs, although past their crisis, were very much involved by reason of a certain 'Deed', of which I used to hear a great deal, and which I suppose, now, to have been some former composition with his creditors, though I was so far from being clear about it then, that I am conscious of having confounded it with those demoniacal parchments which are held to have, once upon a time, obtained to a great extent in Germany. At last this document appeared to be got out of the way, somehow; at all events it ceased to be the rock-ahead it had been; and Mrs. Micawber informed me that 'her family' had decided that Mr. Micawber should apply for his release under the Insolvent Debtors Act, which would set him free, she expected, in about six weeks.

'And then,' said Mr. Micawber, who was present, 'I have no doubt I shall, please Heaven, begin to be beforehand with the world, and to live in a perfectly new manner, if--in short, if anything turns up.'

By way of going in for anything that might be on the cards, I call to mind that Mr. Micawber, about this time, composed a petition to the House of Commons, praying for an alteration in the law of imprisonment for debt. I set down this remembrance here, because it is an instance to myself of the manner in which I fitted my old books to my altered life, and made stories for myself, out of the streets, and out of men and women; and how some main points in the character I shall unconsciously

develop, I suppose, in writing my life, were gradually forming all this while.

There was a club in the prison, in which Mr. Micawber, as a gentleman, was a great authority. Mr. Micawber had stated his idea of this petition to the club, and the club had strongly approved of the same. Wherefore Mr. Micawber (who was a thoroughly good-natured man, and as active a creature about everything but his own affairs as ever existed, and never so happy as when he was busy about something that could never be of any profit to him) set to work at the petition, invented it, engrossed it on an immense sheet of paper, spread it out on a table, and appointed a time for all the club, and all within the walls if they chose, to come up to his room and sign it.

When I heard of this approaching ceremony, I was so anxious to see them all come in, one after another, though I knew the greater part of them already, and they me, that I got an hour's leave of absence from Murdstone and Grinby's, and established myself in a corner for that purpose. As many of the principal members of the club as could be got into the small room without filling it, supported Mr. Micawber in front of the petition, while my old friend Captain Hopkins (who had washed himself, to do honour to so solemn an occasion) stationed himself close to it, to read it to all who were unacquainted with its contents. The door was then thrown open, and the general population began to come in, in a long file: several waiting outside, while one entered, affixed his signature, and went out. To everybody in succession, Captain Hopkins said: 'Have you read it?'--'No.'---'Would you like to hear it read?' If he weakly showed the least disposition to hear it, Captain Hopkins, in a loud sonorous voice, gave him every word of it. The Captain would have read it twenty thousand times, if twenty thousand people would have heard him, one by one. I remember a certain luscious roll he gave to such phrases as 'The people's representatives in Parliament assembled,' 'Your petitioners therefore humbly approach your honourable house,' 'His

gracious Majesty's unfortunate subjects,' as if the words were something real in his mouth, and delicious to taste; Mr. Micawber, meanwhile, listening with a little of an author's vanity, and contemplating (not severely) the spikes on the opposite wall.

As I walked to and fro daily between Southwark and Blackfriars, and lounged about at meal-times in obscure streets, the stones of which may, for anything I know, be worn at this moment by my childish feet, I wonder how many of these people were wanting in the crowd that used to come filing before me in review again, to the echo of Captain Hopkins's voice! When my thoughts go back, now, to that slow agony of my youth, I wonder how much of the histories I invented for such people hangs like a mist of fancy over well-remembered facts! When I tread the old ground, I do not wonder that I seem to see and pity, going on before me, an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and sordid things!

## CHAPTER 12. LIKING LIFE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT NO BETTER, I FORM A GREAT RESOLUTION

In due time, Mr. Micawber's petition was ripe for hearing; and that gentleman was ordered to be discharged under the Act, to my great joy. His creditors were not implacable; and Mrs. Micawber informed me that even the revengeful boot-maker had declared in open court that he bore him no malice, but that when money was owing to him he liked to be paid. He said he thought it was human nature.

Mr Micawber returned to the King's Bench when his case was over, as some fees were to be settled, and some formalities observed, before he could be actually released. The club received him with transport, and held an harmonic meeting that evening in his honour; while Mrs. Micawber

and I had a lamb's fry in private, surrounded by the sleeping family.

'On such an occasion I will give you, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'in a little more flip,' for we had been having some already, 'the memory of my papa and mama.'

'Are they dead, ma'am?' I inquired, after drinking the toast in a wine-glass.

'My mama departed this life,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'before Mr. Micawber's difficulties commenced, or at least before they became pressing. My papa lived to bail Mr. Micawber several times, and then expired, regretted by a numerous circle.'

Mrs. Micawber shook her head, and dropped a pious tear upon the twin who happened to be in hand.

As I could hardly hope for a more favourable opportunity of putting a question in which I had a near interest, I said to Mrs. Micawber:

'May I ask, ma'am, what you and Mr. Micawber intend to do, now that Mr. Micawber is out of his difficulties, and at liberty? Have you settled yet?'

'My family,' said Mrs. Micawber, who always said those two words with an air, though I never could discover who came under the denomination, 'my family are of opinion that Mr. Micawber should quit London, and exert his talents in the country. Mr. Micawber is a man of great talent, Master Copperfield.'

I said I was sure of that.

'Of great talent,' repeated Mrs. Micawber. 'My family are of opinion,

that, with a little interest, something might be done for a man of his ability in the Custom House. The influence of my family being local, it is their wish that Mr. Micawber should go down to Plymouth. They think it indispensable that he should be upon the spot.'

'That he may be ready?' I suggested.

'Exactly,' returned Mrs. Micawber. 'That he may be ready--in case of anything turning up.'

'And do you go too, ma'am?'

The events of the day, in combination with the twins, if not with the flip, had made Mrs. Micawber hysterical, and she shed tears as she replied:

'I never will desert Mr. Micawber. Mr. Micawber may have concealed his difficulties from me in the first instance, but his sanguine temper may have led him to expect that he would overcome them. The pearl necklace and bracelets which I inherited from mama, have been disposed of for less than half their value; and the set of coral, which was the wedding gift of my papa, has been actually thrown away for nothing. But I never will desert Mr. Micawber. No!' cried Mrs. Micawber, more affected than before, 'I never will do it! It's of no use asking me!'

I felt quite uncomfortable--as if Mrs. Micawber supposed I had asked her to do anything of the sort!--and sat looking at her in alarm.

'Mr. Micawber has his faults. I do not deny that he is improvident. I do not deny that he has kept me in the dark as to his resources and his liabilities both,' she went on, looking at the wall; 'but I never will desert Mr. Micawber!'

Mrs. Micawber having now raised her voice into a perfect scream, I was so frightened that I ran off to the club-room, and disturbed Mr. Micawber in the act of presiding at a long table, and leading the chorus of

Gee up, Dobbin,  
 Gee ho, Dobbin,  
 Gee up, Dobbin,  
 Gee up, and gee ho--o--o!

with the tidings that Mrs. Micawber was in an alarming state, upon which he immediately burst into tears, and came away with me with his waistcoat full of the heads and tails of shrimps, of which he had been partaking.

'Emma, my angel!' cried Mr. Micawber, running into the room; 'what is the matter?'

'I never will desert you, Micawber!' she exclaimed.

'My life!' said Mr. Micawber, taking her in his arms. 'I am perfectly aware of it.'

'He is the parent of my children! He is the father of my twins! He is the husband of my affections,' cried Mrs. Micawber, struggling; 'and I ne--ver--will--desert Mr. Micawber!'

Mr. Micawber was so deeply affected by this proof of her devotion (as to me, I was dissolved in tears), that he hung over her in a passionate manner, imploring her to look up, and to be calm. But the more he asked Mrs. Micawber to look up, the more she fixed her eyes on nothing; and the more he asked her to compose herself, the more she wouldn't. Consequently Mr. Micawber was soon so overcome, that he mingled his



tears with hers and mine; until he begged me to do him the favour of taking a chair on the staircase, while he got her into bed. I would have taken my leave for the night, but he would not hear of my doing that until the strangers' bell should ring. So I sat at the staircase window, until he came out with another chair and joined me.

'How is Mrs. Micawber now, sir?' I said.

'Very low,' said Mr. Micawber, shaking his head; 'reaction. Ah, this has been a dreadful day! We stand alone now--everything is gone from us!'

Mr. Micawber pressed my hand, and groaned, and afterwards shed tears. I was greatly touched, and disappointed too, for I had expected that we should be quite gay on this happy and long-looked-for occasion. But Mr. and Mrs. Micawber were so used to their old difficulties, I think, that they felt quite shipwrecked when they came to consider that they were released from them. All their elasticity was departed, and I never saw them half so wretched as on this night; insomuch that when the bell rang, and Mr. Micawber walked with me to the lodge, and parted from me there with a blessing, I felt quite afraid to leave him by himself, he was so profoundly miserable.

But through all the confusion and lowness of spirits in which we had been, so unexpectedly to me, involved, I plainly discerned that Mr. and Mrs. Micawber and their family were going away from London, and that a parting between us was near at hand. It was in my walk home that night, and in the sleepless hours which followed when I lay in bed, that the thought first occurred to me--though I don't know how it came into my head--which afterwards shaped itself into a settled resolution.

I had grown to be so accustomed to the Micawbers, and had been so intimate with them in their distresses, and was so utterly friendless without them, that the prospect of being thrown upon some new shift for

a lodging, and going once more among unknown people, was like being that moment turned adrift into my present life, with such a knowledge of it ready made as experience had given me. All the sensitive feelings it wounded so cruelly, all the shame and misery it kept alive within my breast, became more poignant as I thought of this; and I determined that the life was unendurable.

That there was no hope of escape from it, unless the escape was my own act, I knew quite well. I rarely heard from Miss Murdstone, and never from Mr. Murdstone: but two or three parcels of made or mended clothes had come up for me, consigned to Mr. Quinion, and in each there was a scrap of paper to the effect that J. M. trusted D. C. was applying himself to business, and devoting himself wholly to his duties--not the least hint of my ever being anything else than the common drudge into which I was fast settling down.

The very next day showed me, while my mind was in the first agitation of what it had conceived, that Mrs. Micawber had not spoken of their going away without warrant. They took a lodging in the house where I lived, for a week; at the expiration of which time they were to start for Plymouth. Mr. Micawber himself came down to the counting-house, in the afternoon, to tell Mr. Quinion that he must relinquish me on the day of his departure, and to give me a high character, which I am sure I deserved. And Mr. Quinion, calling in Tipp the carman, who was a married man, and had a room to let, quartered me prospectively on him--by our mutual consent, as he had every reason to think; for I said nothing, though my resolution was now taken.

I passed my evenings with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, during the remaining term of our residence under the same roof; and I think we became fonder of one another as the time went on. On the last Sunday, they invited me to dinner; and we had a loin of pork and apple sauce, and a pudding. I had bought a spotted wooden horse over-night as a parting gift to little

Wilkins Micawber--that was the boy--and a doll for little Emma. I had also bestowed a shilling on the Orfling, who was about to be disbanded.

We had a very pleasant day, though we were all in a tender state about our approaching separation.

'I shall never, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'revert to the period when Mr. Micawber was in difficulties, without thinking of you. Your conduct has always been of the most delicate and obliging description. You have never been a lodger. You have been a friend.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber; 'Copperfield,' for so he had been accustomed to call me, of late, 'has a heart to feel for the distresses of his fellow-creatures when they are behind a cloud, and a head to plan, and a hand to--in short, a general ability to dispose of such available property as could be made away with.'

I expressed my sense of this commendation, and said I was very sorry we were going to lose one another.

'My dear young friend,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I am older than you; a man of some experience in life, and--and of some experience, in short, in difficulties, generally speaking. At present, and until something turns up (which I am, I may say, hourly expecting), I have nothing to bestow but advice. Still my advice is so far worth taking, that--in short, that I have never taken it myself, and am the'--here Mr. Micawber, who had been beaming and smiling, all over his head and face, up to the present moment, checked himself and frowned--'the miserable wretch you behold.'

'My dear Micawber!' urged his wife.

'I say,' returned Mr. Micawber, quite forgetting himself, and smiling again, 'the miserable wretch you behold. My advice is, never do tomorrow

what you can do today. Procrastination is the thief of time. Collar him!'

'My poor papa's maxim,' Mrs. Micawber observed.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, 'your papa was very well in his way, and Heaven forbid that I should disparage him. Take him for all in all, we ne'er shall--in short, make the acquaintance, probably, of anybody else possessing, at his time of life, the same legs for gaiters, and able to read the same description of print, without spectacles. But he applied that maxim to our marriage, my dear; and that was so far prematurely entered into, in consequence, that I never recovered the expense.' Mr. Micawber looked aside at Mrs. Micawber, and added: 'Not that I am sorry for it. Quite the contrary, my love.' After which, he was grave for a minute or so.

'My other piece of advice, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you know. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered, the god of day goes down upon the dreary scene, and--and in short you are for ever floored. As I am!'

To make his example the more impressive, Mr. Micawber drank a glass of punch with an air of great enjoyment and satisfaction, and whistled the College Hornpipe.

I did not fail to assure him that I would store these precepts in my mind, though indeed I had no need to do so, for, at the time, they affected me visibly. Next morning I met the whole family at the coach office, and saw them, with a desolate heart, take their places outside, at the back.

'Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'God bless you! I never can forget all that, you know, and I never would if I could.'

'Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'farewell! Every happiness and prosperity! If, in the progress of revolving years, I could persuade myself that my blighted destiny had been a warning to you, I should feel that I had not occupied another man's place in existence altogether in vain. In case of anything turning up (of which I am rather confident), I shall be extremely happy if it should be in my power to improve your prospects.'

I think, as Mrs. Micawber sat at the back of the coach, with the children, and I stood in the road looking wistfully at them, a mist cleared from her eyes, and she saw what a little creature I really was. I think so, because she beckoned to me to climb up, with quite a new and motherly expression in her face, and put her arm round my neck, and gave me just such a kiss as she might have given to her own boy. I had barely time to get down again before the coach started, and I could hardly see the family for the handkerchiefs they waved. It was gone in a minute. The Orfling and I stood looking vacantly at each other in the middle of the road, and then shook hands and said good-bye; she going back, I suppose, to St. Luke's workhouse, as I went to begin my weary day at Murdstone and Grinby's.

But with no intention of passing many more weary days there. No. I had resolved to run away.---To go, by some means or other, down into the country, to the only relation I had in the world, and tell my story to my aunt, Miss Betsey. I have already observed that I don't know how this desperate idea came into my brain. But, once there, it remained there; and hardened into a purpose than which I have never entertained a more determined purpose in my life. I am far from sure that I believed there was anything hopeful in it, but my mind was thoroughly made up that it must be carried into execution.

Again, and again, and a hundred times again, since the night when the thought had first occurred to me and banished sleep, I had gone over that old story of my poor mother's about my birth, which it had been one of my great delights in the old time to hear her tell, and which I knew by heart. My aunt walked into that story, and walked out of it, a dread and awful personage; but there was one little trait in her behaviour which I liked to dwell on, and which gave me some faint shadow of encouragement. I could not forget how my mother had thought that she felt her touch her pretty hair with no ungentle hand; and though it might have been altogether my mother's fancy, and might have had no foundation whatever in fact, I made a little picture, out of it, of my terrible aunt relenting towards the girlish beauty that I recollected so well and loved so much, which softened the whole narrative. It is very possible that it had been in my mind a long time, and had gradually engendered my determination.

As I did not even know where Miss Betsey lived, I wrote a long letter to Peggotty, and asked her, incidentally, if she remembered; pretending that I had heard of such a lady living at a certain place I named at random, and had a curiosity to know if it were the same. In the course of that letter, I told Peggotty that I had a particular occasion for half a guinea; and that if she could lend me that sum until I could repay it, I should be very much obliged to her, and would tell her afterwards what I had wanted it for.

Peggotty's answer soon arrived, and was, as usual, full of affectionate devotion. She enclosed the half guinea (I was afraid she must have had a world of trouble to get it out of Mr. Barkis's box), and told me that Miss Betsey lived near Dover, but whether at Dover itself, at Hythe, Sandgate, or Folkestone, she could not say. One of our men, however, informing me on my asking him about these places, that they were all close together, I deemed this enough for my object, and resolved to set

out at the end of that week.

Being a very honest little creature, and unwilling to disgrace the memory I was going to leave behind me at Murdstone and Grinby's, I considered myself bound to remain until Saturday night; and, as I had been paid a week's wages in advance when I first came there, not to present myself in the counting-house at the usual hour, to receive my stipend. For this express reason, I had borrowed the half-guinea, that I might not be without a fund for my travelling-expenses. Accordingly, when the Saturday night came, and we were all waiting in the warehouse to be paid, and Tipp the carman, who always took precedence, went in first to draw his money, I shook Mick Walker by the hand; asked him, when it came to his turn to be paid, to say to Mr. Quinion that I had gone to move my box to Tipp's; and, bidding a last good night to Mealy Potatoes, ran away.

My box was at my old lodging, over the water, and I had written a direction for it on the back of one of our address cards that we nailed on the casks: 'Master David, to be left till called for, at the Coach Office, Dover.' This I had in my pocket ready to put on the box, after I should have got it out of the house; and as I went towards my lodging, I looked about me for someone who would help me to carry it to the booking-office.

There was a long-legged young man with a very little empty donkey-cart, standing near the Obelisk, in the Blackfriars Road, whose eye I caught as I was going by, and who, addressing me as 'Sixpenn'orth of bad ha'pence,' hoped 'I should know him agin to swear to'--in allusion, I have no doubt, to my staring at him. I stopped to assure him that I had not done so in bad manners, but uncertain whether he might or might not like a job.

'Wot job?' said the long-legged young man.

'To move a box,' I answered.

'Wot box?' said the long-legged young man.

I told him mine, which was down that street there, and which I wanted him to take to the Dover coach office for sixpence.

'Done with you for a tanner!' said the long-legged young man, and directly got upon his cart, which was nothing but a large wooden tray on wheels, and rattled away at such a rate, that it was as much as I could do to keep pace with the donkey.

There was a defiant manner about this young man, and particularly about the way in which he chewed straw as he spoke to me, that I did not much like; as the bargain was made, however, I took him upstairs to the room I was leaving, and we brought the box down, and put it on his cart. Now, I was unwilling to put the direction-card on there, lest any of my landlord's family should fathom what I was doing, and detain me; so I said to the young man that I would be glad if he would stop for a minute, when he came to the dead-wall of the King's Bench prison. The words were no sooner out of my mouth, than he rattled away as if he, my box, the cart, and the donkey, were all equally mad; and I was quite out of breath with running and calling after him, when I caught him at the place appointed.

Being much flushed and excited, I tumbled my half-guinea out of my pocket in pulling the card out. I put it in my mouth for safety, and though my hands trembled a good deal, had just tied the card on very much to my satisfaction, when I felt myself violently chucked under the chin by the long-legged young man, and saw my half-guinea fly out of my mouth into his hand.



'Wot!' said the young man, seizing me by my jacket collar, with a frightful grin. 'This is a pollis case, is it? You're a-going to bolt, are you? Come to the pollis, you young warmin, come to the pollis!'

'You give me my money back, if you please,' said I, very much frightened; 'and leave me alone.'

'Come to the pollis!' said the young man. 'You shall prove it yourn to the pollis.'

'Give me my box and money, will you,' I cried, bursting into tears.

The young man still replied: 'Come to the pollis!' and was dragging me against the donkey in a violent manner, as if there were any affinity between that animal and a magistrate, when he changed his mind, jumped into the cart, sat upon my box, and, exclaiming that he would drive to the pollis straight, rattled away harder than ever.

I ran after him as fast as I could, but I had no breath to call out with, and should not have dared to call out, now, if I had. I narrowly escaped being run over, twenty times at least, in half a mile. Now I lost him, now I saw him, now I lost him, now I was cut at with a whip, now shouted at, now down in the mud, now up again, now running into somebody's arms, now running headlong at a post. At length, confused by fright and heat, and doubting whether half London might not by this time be turning out for my apprehension, I left the young man to go where he would with my box and money; and, panting and crying, but never stopping, faced about for Greenwich, which I had understood was on the Dover Road: taking very little more out of the world, towards the retreat of my aunt, Miss Betsey, than I had brought into it, on the night when my arrival gave her so much umbrage.

## CHAPTER 13. THE SEQUEL OF MY RESOLUTION

For anything I know, I may have had some wild idea of running all the way to Dover, when I gave up the pursuit of the young man with the donkey-cart, and started for Greenwich. My scattered senses were soon collected as to that point, if I had; for I came to a stop in the Kent Road, at a terrace with a piece of water before it, and a great foolish image in the middle, blowing a dry shell. Here I sat down on a doorstep, quite spent and exhausted with the efforts I had already made, and with hardly breath enough to cry for the loss of my box and half-guinea.

It was by this time dark; I heard the clocks strike ten, as I sat resting. But it was a summer night, fortunately, and fine weather. When I had recovered my breath, and had got rid of a stifling sensation in my throat, I rose up and went on. In the midst of my distress, I had no notion of going back. I doubt if I should have had any, though there had been a Swiss snow-drift in the Kent Road.

But my standing possessed of only three-halfpence in the world (and I am sure I wonder how they came to be left in my pocket on a Saturday night!) troubled me none the less because I went on. I began to picture to myself, as a scrap of newspaper intelligence, my being found dead in a day or two, under some hedge; and I trudged on miserably, though as fast as I could, until I happened to pass a little shop, where it was written up that ladies' and gentlemen's wardrobes were bought, and that the best price was given for rags, bones, and kitchen-stuff. The master of this shop was sitting at the door in his shirt-sleeves, smoking; and as there were a great many coats and pairs of trousers dangling from the low ceiling, and only two feeble candles burning inside to show what they were, I fancied that he looked like a man of a revengeful disposition, who had hung all his enemies, and was enjoying himself.

My late experiences with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber suggested to me that here might be a means of keeping off the wolf for a little while. I went up the next by-street, took off my waistcoat, rolled it neatly under my arm, and came back to the shop door.

'If you please, sir,' I said, 'I am to sell this for a fair price.'

Mr. Dolloby--Dolloby was the name over the shop door, at least--took the waistcoat, stood his pipe on its head, against the door-post, went into the shop, followed by me, snuffed the two candles with his fingers, spread the waistcoat on the counter, and looked at it there, held it up against the light, and looked at it there, and ultimately said:

'What do you call a price, now, for this here little weskit?'

'Oh! you know best, sir,' I returned modestly.

'I can't be buyer and seller too,' said Mr. Dolloby. 'Put a price on this here little weskit.'

'Would eighteenpence be?'--I hinted, after some hesitation.

Mr. Dolloby rolled it up again, and gave it me back. 'I should rob my family,' he said, 'if I was to offer ninepence for it.'

This was a disagreeable way of putting the business; because it imposed upon me, a perfect stranger, the unpleasantness of asking Mr. Dolloby to rob his family on my account. My circumstances being so very pressing, however, I said I would take ninepence for it, if he pleased. Mr. Dolloby, not without some grumbling, gave ninepence. I wished him good night, and walked out of the shop the richer by that sum, and the poorer by a waistcoat. But when I buttoned my jacket, that was not much.

Indeed, I foresaw pretty clearly that my jacket would go next, and that I should have to make the best of my way to Dover in a shirt and a pair of trousers, and might deem myself lucky if I got there even in that trim. But my mind did not run so much on this as might be supposed. Beyond a general impression of the distance before me, and of the young man with the donkey-cart having used me cruelly, I think I had no very urgent sense of my difficulties when I once again set off with my ninepence in my pocket.

A plan had occurred to me for passing the night, which I was going to carry into execution. This was, to lie behind the wall at the back of my old school, in a corner where there used to be a haystack. I imagined it would be a kind of company to have the boys, and the bedroom where I used to tell the stories, so near me: although the boys would know nothing of my being there, and the bedroom would yield me no shelter.

I had had a hard day's work, and was pretty well jaded when I came climbing out, at last, upon the level of Blackheath. It cost me some trouble to find out Salem House; but I found it, and I found a haystack in the corner, and I lay down by it; having first walked round the wall, and looked up at the windows, and seen that all was dark and silent within. Never shall I forget the lonely sensation of first lying down, without a roof above my head!

Sleep came upon me as it came on many other outcasts, against whom house-doors were locked, and house-dogs barked, that night--and I dreamed of lying on my old school-bed, talking to the boys in my room; and found myself sitting upright, with Steerforth's name upon my lips, looking wildly at the stars that were glistening and glimmering above me. When I remembered where I was at that untimely hour, a feeling stole upon me that made me get up, afraid of I don't know what, and walk about. But the fainter glimmering of the stars, and the pale light in the sky where the day was coming, reassured me: and my eyes being very

heavy, I lay down again and slept--though with a knowledge in my sleep that it was cold--until the warm beams of the sun, and the ringing of the getting-up bell at Salem House, awoke me. If I could have hoped that Steerforth was there, I would have lurked about until he came out alone; but I knew he must have left long since. Traddles still remained, perhaps, but it was very doubtful; and I had not sufficient confidence in his discretion or good luck, however strong my reliance was on his good nature, to wish to trust him with my situation. So I crept away from the wall as Mr. Creakle's boys were getting up, and struck into the long dusty track which I had first known to be the Dover Road when I was one of them, and when I little expected that any eyes would ever see me the wayfarer I was now, upon it.

What a different Sunday morning from the old Sunday morning at Yarmouth! In due time I heard the church-bells ringing, as I plodded on; and I met people who were going to church; and I passed a church or two where the congregation were inside, and the sound of singing came out into the sunshine, while the beadle sat and cooled himself in the shade of the porch, or stood beneath the yew-tree, with his hand to his forehead, glowering at me going by. But the peace and rest of the old Sunday morning were on everything, except me. That was the difference. I felt quite wicked in my dirt and dust, with my tangled hair. But for the quiet picture I had conjured up, of my mother in her youth and beauty, weeping by the fire, and my aunt relenting to her, I hardly think I should have had the courage to go on until next day. But it always went before me, and I followed.

I got, that Sunday, through three-and-twenty miles on the straight road, though not very easily, for I was new to that kind of toil. I see myself, as evening closes in, coming over the bridge at Rochester, footsore and tired, and eating bread that I had bought for supper. One or two little houses, with the notice, 'Lodgings for Travellers', hanging out, had tempted me; but I was afraid of spending the few pence

I had, and was even more afraid of the vicious looks of the trampers I had met or overtaken. I sought no shelter, therefore, but the sky; and toiling into Chatham,--which, in that night's aspect, is a mere dream of chalk, and drawbridges, and mastless ships in a muddy river, roofed like Noah's arks,--crept, at last, upon a sort of grass-grown battery overhanging a lane, where a sentry was walking to and fro. Here I lay down, near a cannon; and, happy in the society of the sentry's footsteps, though he knew no more of my being above him than the boys at Salem House had known of my lying by the wall, slept soundly until morning.

Very stiff and sore of foot I was in the morning, and quite dazed by the beating of drums and marching of troops, which seemed to hem me in on every side when I went down towards the long narrow street. Feeling that I could go but a very little way that day, if I were to reserve any strength for getting to my journey's end, I resolved to make the sale of my jacket its principal business. Accordingly, I took the jacket off, that I might learn to do without it; and carrying it under my arm, began a tour of inspection of the various slop-shops.

It was a likely place to sell a jacket in; for the dealers in second-hand clothes were numerous, and were, generally speaking, on the look-out for customers at their shop doors. But as most of them had, hanging up among their stock, an officer's coat or two, epaulettes and all, I was rendered timid by the costly nature of their dealings, and walked about for a long time without offering my merchandise to anyone.

This modesty of mine directed my attention to the marine-store shops, and such shops as Mr. Dolloby's, in preference to the regular dealers. At last I found one that I thought looked promising, at the corner of a dirty lane, ending in an enclosure full of stinging-nettles, against the palings of which some second-hand sailors' clothes, that seemed to have overflowed the shop, were fluttering among some cots, and rusty guns,

and oilskin hats, and certain trays full of so many old rusty keys of so many sizes that they seemed various enough to open all the doors in the world.

Into this shop, which was low and small, and which was darkened rather than lighted by a little window, overhung with clothes, and was descended into by some steps, I went with a palpitating heart; which was not relieved when an ugly old man, with the lower part of his face all covered with a stubbly grey beard, rushed out of a dirty den behind it, and seized me by the hair of my head. He was a dreadful old man to look at, in a filthy flannel waistcoat, and smelling terribly of rum. His bedstead, covered with a tumbled and ragged piece of patchwork, was in the den he had come from, where another little window showed a prospect of more stinging-nettles, and a lame donkey.

'Oh, what do you want?' grinned this old man, in a fierce, monotonous whine. 'Oh, my eyes and limbs, what do you want? Oh, my lungs and liver, what do you want? Oh, goroo, goroo!'

I was so much dismayed by these words, and particularly by the repetition of the last unknown one, which was a kind of rattle in his throat, that I could make no answer; hereupon the old man, still holding me by the hair, repeated:

'Oh, what do you want? Oh, my eyes and limbs, what do you want? Oh, my lungs and liver, what do you want? Oh, goroo!'--which he screwed out of himself, with an energy that made his eyes start in his head.

'I wanted to know,' I said, trembling, 'if you would buy a jacket.'

'Oh, let's see the jacket!' cried the old man. 'Oh, my heart on fire, show the jacket to us! Oh, my eyes and limbs, bring the jacket out!'

With that he took his trembling hands, which were like the claws of a great bird, out of my hair; and put on a pair of spectacles, not at all ornamental to his inflamed eyes.

'Oh, how much for the jacket?' cried the old man, after examining it.

'Oh--goroo!--how much for the jacket?'

'Half-a-crown,' I answered, recovering myself.

'Oh, my lungs and liver,' cried the old man, 'no! Oh, my eyes, no! Oh, my limbs, no! Eighteenpence. Goroo!'

Every time he uttered this ejaculation, his eyes seemed to be in danger of starting out; and every sentence he spoke, he delivered in a sort of tune, always exactly the same, and more like a gust of wind, which begins low, mounts up high, and falls again, than any other comparison I can find for it.

'Well,' said I, glad to have closed the bargain, 'I'll take eighteenpence.'

'Oh, my liver!' cried the old man, throwing the jacket on a shelf. 'Get out of the shop! Oh, my lungs, get out of the shop! Oh, my eyes and limbs--goroo!--don't ask for money; make it an exchange.' I never was so frightened in my life, before or since; but I told him humbly that I wanted money, and that nothing else was of any use to me, but that I would wait for it, as he desired, outside, and had no wish to hurry him. So I went outside, and sat down in the shade in a corner. And I sat there so many hours, that the shade became sunlight, and the sunlight became shade again, and still I sat there waiting for the money.

There never was such another drunken madman in that line of business, I hope. That he was well known in the neighbourhood, and enjoyed the



reputation of having sold himself to the devil, I soon understood from the visits he received from the boys, who continually came skirmishing about the shop, shouting that legend, and calling to him to bring out his gold. 'You ain't poor, you know, Charley, as you pretend. Bring out your gold. Bring out some of the gold you sold yourself to the devil for. Come! It's in the lining of the mattress, Charley. Rip it open and let's have some!' This, and many offers to lend him a knife for the purpose, exasperated him to such a degree, that the whole day was a succession of rushes on his part, and flights on the part of the boys. Sometimes in his rage he would take me for one of them, and come at me, mouthing as if he were going to tear me in pieces; then, remembering me, just in time, would dive into the shop, and lie upon his bed, as I thought from the sound of his voice, yelling in a frantic way, to his own windy tune, the 'Death of Nelson'; with an Oh! before every line, and innumerable Goroos interspersed. As if this were not bad enough for me, the boys, connecting me with the establishment, on account of the patience and perseverance with which I sat outside, half-dressed, pelted me, and used me very ill all day.

He made many attempts to induce me to consent to an exchange; at one time coming out with a fishing-rod, at another with a fiddle, at another with a cocked hat, at another with a flute. But I resisted all these overtures, and sat there in desperation; each time asking him, with tears in my eyes, for my money or my jacket. At last he began to pay me in halfpence at a time; and was full two hours getting by easy stages to a shilling.

'Oh, my eyes and limbs!' he then cried, peeping hideously out of the shop, after a long pause, 'will you go for twopence more?'

'I can't,' I said; 'I shall be starved.'

'Oh, my lungs and liver, will you go for threepence?'

'I would go for nothing, if I could,' I said, 'but I want the money badly.'

'Oh, go-roo!' (it is really impossible to express how he twisted this ejaculation out of himself, as he peeped round the door-post at me, showing nothing but his crafty old head); 'will you go for fourpence?'

I was so faint and weary that I closed with this offer; and taking the money out of his claw, not without trembling, went away more hungry and thirsty than I had ever been, a little before sunset. But at an expense of threepence I soon refreshed myself completely; and, being in better spirits then, limped seven miles upon my road.

My bed at night was under another haystack, where I rested comfortably, after having washed my blistered feet in a stream, and dressed them as well as I was able, with some cool leaves. When I took the road again next morning, I found that it lay through a succession of hop-grounds and orchards. It was sufficiently late in the year for the orchards to be ruddy with ripe apples; and in a few places the hop-pickers were already at work. I thought it all extremely beautiful, and made up my mind to sleep among the hops that night: imagining some cheerful companionship in the long perspectives of poles, with the graceful leaves twining round them.

The trampers were worse than ever that day, and inspired me with a dread that is yet quite fresh in my mind. Some of them were most ferocious-looking ruffians, who stared at me as I went by; and stopped, perhaps, and called after me to come back and speak to them, and when I took to my heels, stoned me. I recollect one young fellow--a tinker, I suppose, from his wallet and brazier--who had a woman with him, and who faced about and stared at me thus; and then roared to me in such a tremendous voice to come back, that I halted and looked round.

'Come here, when you're called,' said the tinker, 'or I'll rip your young body open.'

I thought it best to go back. As I drew nearer to them, trying to propitiate the tinker by my looks, I observed that the woman had a black eye.

'Where are you going?' said the tinker, gripping the bosom of my shirt with his blackened hand.

'I am going to Dover,' I said.

'Where do you come from?' asked the tinker, giving his hand another turn in my shirt, to hold me more securely.

'I come from London,' I said.

'What lay are you upon?' asked the tinker. 'Are you a prig?'

'N-no,' I said.

'Ain't you, by G--? If you make a brag of your honesty to me,' said the tinker, 'I'll knock your brains out.'

With his disengaged hand he made a menace of striking me, and then looked at me from head to foot.

'Have you got the price of a pint of beer about you?' said the tinker. 'If you have, out with it, afore I take it away!'

I should certainly have produced it, but that I met the woman's look, and saw her very slightly shake her head, and form 'No!' with her lips.

'I am very poor,' I said, attempting to smile, 'and have got no money.'

'Why, what do you mean?' said the tinker, looking so sternly at me, that I almost feared he saw the money in my pocket.

'Sir!' I stammered.

'What do you mean,' said the tinker, 'by wearing my brother's silk handkerchief! Give it over here!' And he had mine off my neck in a moment, and tossed it to the woman.

The woman burst into a fit of laughter, as if she thought this a joke, and tossed it back to me, nodded once, as slightly as before, and made the word 'Go!' with her lips. Before I could obey, however, the tinker seized the handkerchief out of my hand with a roughness that threw me away like a feather, and putting it loosely round his own neck, turned upon the woman with an oath, and knocked her down. I never shall forget seeing her fall backward on the hard road, and lie there with her bonnet tumbled off, and her hair all whitened in the dust; nor, when I looked back from a distance, seeing her sitting on the pathway, which was a bank by the roadside, wiping the blood from her face with a corner of her shawl, while he went on ahead.

This adventure frightened me so, that, afterwards, when I saw any of these people coming, I turned back until I could find a hiding-place, where I remained until they had gone out of sight; which happened so often, that I was very seriously delayed. But under this difficulty, as under all the other difficulties of my journey, I seemed to be sustained and led on by my fanciful picture of my mother in her youth, before I came into the world. It always kept me company. It was there, among the hops, when I lay down to sleep; it was with me on my waking in the morning; it went before me all day. I have associated it, ever since,

with the sunny street of Canterbury, dozing as it were in the hot light; and with the sight of its old houses and gateways, and the stately, grey Cathedral, with the rooks sailing round the towers. When I came, at last, upon the bare, wide downs near Dover, it relieved the solitary aspect of the scene with hope; and not until I reached that first great aim of my journey, and actually set foot in the town itself, on the sixth day of my flight, did it desert me. But then, strange to say, when I stood with my ragged shoes, and my dusty, sunburnt, half-clothed figure, in the place so long desired, it seemed to vanish like a dream, and to leave me helpless and dispirited.

I inquired about my aunt among the boatmen first, and received various answers. One said she lived in the South Foreland Light, and had singed her whiskers by doing so; another, that she was made fast to the great buoy outside the harbour, and could only be visited at half-tide; a third, that she was locked up in Maidstone jail for child-stealing; a fourth, that she was seen to mount a broom in the last high wind, and make direct for Calais. The fly-drivers, among whom I inquired next, were equally jocular and equally disrespectful; and the shopkeepers, not liking my appearance, generally replied, without hearing what I had to say, that they had got nothing for me. I felt more miserable and destitute than I had done at any period of my running away. My money was all gone, I had nothing left to dispose of; I was hungry, thirsty, and worn out; and seemed as distant from my end as if I had remained in London.

The morning had worn away in these inquiries, and I was sitting on the step of an empty shop at a street corner, near the market-place, deliberating upon wandering towards those other places which had been mentioned, when a fly-driver, coming by with his carriage, dropped a horsecloth. Something good-natured in the man's face, as I handed it up, encouraged me to ask him if he could tell me where Miss Trotwood lived; though I had asked the question so often, that it almost died upon my

lips.

'Trotwood,' said he. 'Let me see. I know the name, too. Old lady?'

'Yes,' I said, 'rather.'

'Pretty stiff in the back?' said he, making himself upright.

'Yes,' I said. 'I should think it very likely.'

'Carries a bag?' said he--'bag with a good deal of room in it--is gruffish, and comes down upon you, sharp?'

My heart sank within me as I acknowledged the undoubted accuracy of this description.

'Why then, I tell you what,' said he. 'If you go up there,' pointing with his whip towards the heights, 'and keep right on till you come to some houses facing the sea, I think you'll hear of her. My opinion is she won't stand anything, so here's a penny for you.'

I accepted the gift thankfully, and bought a loaf with it. Dispatching this refreshment by the way, I went in the direction my friend had indicated, and walked on a good distance without coming to the houses he had mentioned. At length I saw some before me; and approaching them, went into a little shop (it was what we used to call a general shop, at home), and inquired if they could have the goodness to tell me where Miss Trotwood lived. I addressed myself to a man behind the counter, who was weighing some rice for a young woman; but the latter, taking the inquiry to herself, turned round quickly.

'My mistress?' she said. 'What do you want with her, boy?'

'I want,' I replied, 'to speak to her, if you please.'

'To beg of her, you mean,' retorted the damsel.

'No,' I said, 'indeed.' But suddenly remembering that in truth I came for no other purpose, I held my peace in confusion, and felt my face burn.

MY aunt's handmaid, as I supposed she was from what she had said, put her rice in a little basket and walked out of the shop; telling me that I could follow her, if I wanted to know where Miss Trotwood lived. I needed no second permission; though I was by this time in such a state of consternation and agitation, that my legs shook under me. I followed the young woman, and we soon came to a very neat little cottage with cheerful bow-windows: in front of it, a small square gravelled court or garden full of flowers, carefully tended, and smelling deliciously.

'This is Miss Trotwood's,' said the young woman. 'Now you know; and that's all I have got to say.' With which words she hurried into the house, as if to shake off the responsibility of my appearance; and left me standing at the garden-gate, looking disconsolately over the top of it towards the parlour window, where a muslin curtain partly undrawn in the middle, a large round green screen or fan fastened on to the windowsill, a small table, and a great chair, suggested to me that my aunt might be at that moment seated in awful state.

My shoes were by this time in a woeful condition. The soles had shed themselves bit by bit, and the upper leathers had broken and burst until the very shape and form of shoes had departed from them. My hat (which had served me for a night-cap, too) was so crushed and bent, that no old battered handleless saucepan on a dunghill need have been ashamed to vie with it. My shirt and trousers, stained with heat, dew, grass, and the Kentish soil on which I had slept--and torn besides--might have

frightened the birds from my aunt's garden, as I stood at the gate. My hair had known no comb or brush since I left London. My face, neck, and hands, from unaccustomed exposure to the air and sun, were burnt to a berry-brown. From head to foot I was powdered almost as white with chalk and dust, as if I had come out of a lime-kiln. In this plight, and with a strong consciousness of it, I waited to introduce myself to, and make my first impression on, my formidable aunt.

The unbroken stillness of the parlour window leading me to infer, after a while, that she was not there, I lifted up my eyes to the window above it, where I saw a florid, pleasant-looking gentleman, with a grey head, who shut up one eye in a grotesque manner, nodded his head at me several times, shook it at me as often, laughed, and went away.

I had been discomposed enough before; but I was so much the more discomposed by this unexpected behaviour, that I was on the point of slinking off, to think how I had best proceed, when there came out of the house a lady with her handkerchief tied over her cap, and a pair of gardening gloves on her hands, wearing a gardening pocket like a toll-man's apron, and carrying a great knife. I knew her immediately to be Miss Betsey, for she came stalking out of the house exactly as my poor mother had so often described her stalking up our garden at Blunderstone Rookery.

'Go away!' said Miss Betsey, shaking her head, and making a distant chop in the air with her knife. 'Go along! No boys here!'

I watched her, with my heart at my lips, as she marched to a corner of her garden, and stooped to dig up some little root there. Then, without a scrap of courage, but with a great deal of desperation, I went softly in and stood beside her, touching her with my finger.

'If you please, ma'am,' I began.



She started and looked up.

'If you please, aunt.'

'EH?' exclaimed Miss Betsey, in a tone of amazement I have never heard approached.

'If you please, aunt, I am your nephew.'

'Oh, Lord!' said my aunt. And sat flat down in the garden-path.

'I am David Copperfield, of Blunderstone, in Suffolk--where you came, on the night when I was born, and saw my dear mama. I have been very unhappy since she died. I have been slighted, and taught nothing, and thrown upon myself, and put to work not fit for me. It made me run away to you. I was robbed at first setting out, and have walked all the way, and have never slept in a bed since I began the journey.' Here my self-support gave way all at once; and with a movement of my hands, intended to show her my ragged state, and call it to witness that I had suffered something, I broke into a passion of crying, which I suppose had been pent up within me all the week.

My aunt, with every sort of expression but wonder discharged from her countenance, sat on the gravel, staring at me, until I began to cry; when she got up in a great hurry, collared me, and took me into the parlour. Her first proceeding there was to unlock a tall press, bring out several bottles, and pour some of the contents of each into my mouth. I think they must have been taken out at random, for I am sure I tasted aniseed water, anchovy sauce, and salad dressing. When she had administered these restoratives, as I was still quite hysterical, and unable to control my sobs, she put me on the sofa, with a shawl under my head, and the handkerchief from her own head under my feet, lest I

should sully the cover; and then, sitting herself down behind the green fan or screen I have already mentioned, so that I could not see her face, ejaculated at intervals, 'Mercy on us!' letting those exclamations off like minute guns.

After a time she rang the bell. 'Janet,' said my aunt, when her servant came in. 'Go upstairs, give my compliments to Mr. Dick, and say I wish to speak to him.'

Janet looked a little surprised to see me lying stiffly on the sofa (I was afraid to move lest it should be displeasing to my aunt), but went on her errand. My aunt, with her hands behind her, walked up and down the room, until the gentleman who had squinted at me from the upper window came in laughing.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'don't be a fool, because nobody can be more discreet than you can, when you choose. We all know that. So don't be a fool, whatever you are.'

The gentleman was serious immediately, and looked at me, I thought, as if he would entreat me to say nothing about the window.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'you have heard me mention David Copperfield? Now don't pretend not to have a memory, because you and I know better.'

'David Copperfield?' said Mr. Dick, who did not appear to me to remember much about it. 'David Copperfield? Oh yes, to be sure. David, certainly.'

'Well,' said my aunt, 'this is his boy--his son. He would be as like his father as it's possible to be, if he was not so like his mother, too.'

'His son?' said Mr. Dick. 'David's son? Indeed!'

'Yes,' pursued my aunt, 'and he has done a pretty piece of business. He has run away. Ah! His sister, Betsey Trotwood, never would have run away.' My aunt shook her head firmly, confident in the character and behaviour of the girl who never was born.

'Oh! you think she wouldn't have run away?' said Mr. Dick.

'Bless and save the man,' exclaimed my aunt, sharply, 'how he talks! Don't I know she wouldn't? She would have lived with her god-mother, and we should have been devoted to one another. Where, in the name of wonder, should his sister, Betsey Trotwood, have run from, or to?'

'Nowhere,' said Mr. Dick.

'Well then,' returned my aunt, softened by the reply, 'how can you pretend to be wool-gathering, Dick, when you are as sharp as a surgeon's lancet? Now, here you see young David Copperfield, and the question I put to you is, what shall I do with him?'

'What shall you do with him?' said Mr. Dick, feebly, scratching his head. 'Oh! do with him?'

'Yes,' said my aunt, with a grave look, and her forefinger held up. 'Come! I want some very sound advice.'

'Why, if I was you,' said Mr. Dick, considering, and looking vacantly at me, 'I should--' The contemplation of me seemed to inspire him with a sudden idea, and he added, briskly, 'I should wash him!'

'Janet,' said my aunt, turning round with a quiet triumph, which I did not then understand, 'Mr. Dick sets us all right. Heat the bath!'

Although I was deeply interested in this dialogue, I could not help observing my aunt, Mr. Dick, and Janet, while it was in progress, and completing a survey I had already been engaged in making of the room.

MY aunt was a tall, hard-featured lady, but by no means ill-looking. There was an inflexibility in her face, in her voice, in her gait and carriage, amply sufficient to account for the effect she had made upon a gentle creature like my mother; but her features were rather handsome than otherwise, though unbending and austere. I particularly noticed that she had a very quick, bright eye. Her hair, which was grey, was arranged in two plain divisions, under what I believe would be called a mob-cap; I mean a cap, much more common then than now, with side-pieces fastening under the chin. Her dress was of a lavender colour, and perfectly neat; but scantily made, as if she desired to be as little encumbered as possible. I remember that I thought it, in form, more like a riding-habit with the superfluous skirt cut off, than anything else. She wore at her side a gentleman's gold watch, if I might judge from its size and make, with an appropriate chain and seals; she had some linen at her throat not unlike a shirt-collar, and things at her wrists like little shirt-wristbands.

Mr. Dick, as I have already said, was grey-headed, and florid: I should have said all about him, in saying so, had not his head been curiously bowed--not by age; it reminded me of one of Mr. Creakle's boys' heads after a beating--and his grey eyes prominent and large, with a strange kind of watery brightness in them that made me, in combination with his vacant manner, his submission to my aunt, and his childish delight when she praised him, suspect him of being a little mad; though, if he were mad, how he came to be there puzzled me extremely. He was dressed like any other ordinary gentleman, in a loose grey morning coat and waistcoat, and white trousers; and had his watch in his fob, and his money in his pockets: which he rattled as if he were very proud of it.

Janet was a pretty blooming girl, of about nineteen or twenty, and a perfect picture of neatness. Though I made no further observation of her at the moment, I may mention here what I did not discover until afterwards, namely, that she was one of a series of proteges whom my aunt had taken into her service expressly to educate in a renouncement of mankind, and who had generally completed their abjuration by marrying the baker.

The room was as neat as Janet or my aunt. As I laid down my pen, a moment since, to think of it, the air from the sea came blowing in again, mixed with the perfume of the flowers; and I saw the old-fashioned furniture brightly rubbed and polished, my aunt's inviolable chair and table by the round green fan in the bow-window, the drugget-covered carpet, the cat, the kettle-holder, the two canaries, the old china, the punchbowl full of dried rose-leaves, the tall press guarding all sorts of bottles and pots, and, wonderfully out of keeping with the rest, my dusty self upon the sofa, taking note of everything.

Janet had gone away to get the bath ready, when my aunt, to my great alarm, became in one moment rigid with indignation, and had hardly voice to cry out, 'Janet! Donkeys!'

Upon which, Janet came running up the stairs as if the house were in flames, darted out on a little piece of green in front, and warned off two saddle-donkeys, lady-ridden, that had presumed to set hoof upon it; while my aunt, rushing out of the house, seized the bridle of a third animal laden with a bestriding child, turned him, led him forth from those sacred precincts, and boxed the ears of the unlucky urchin in attendance who had dared to profane that hallowed ground.

To this hour I don't know whether my aunt had any lawful right of way over that patch of green; but she had settled it in her own mind that she had, and it was all the same to her. The one great outrage of her

life, demanding to be constantly avenged, was the passage of a donkey over that immaculate spot. In whatever occupation she was engaged, however interesting to her the conversation in which she was taking part, a donkey turned the current of her ideas in a moment, and she was upon him straight. Jugs of water, and watering-pots, were kept in secret places ready to be discharged on the offending boys; sticks were laid in ambush behind the door; sallies were made at all hours; and incessant war prevailed. Perhaps this was an agreeable excitement to the donkey-boys; or perhaps the more sagacious of the donkeys, understanding how the case stood, delighted with constitutional obstinacy in coming that way. I only know that there were three alarms before the bath was ready; and that on the occasion of the last and most desperate of all, I saw my aunt engage, single-handed, with a sandy-headed lad of fifteen, and bump his sandy head against her own gate, before he seemed to comprehend what was the matter. These interruptions were of the more ridiculous to me, because she was giving me broth out of a table-spoon at the time (having firmly persuaded herself that I was actually starving, and must receive nourishment at first in very small quantities), and, while my mouth was yet open to receive the spoon, she would put it back into the basin, cry 'Janet! Donkeys!' and go out to the assault.

The bath was a great comfort. For I began to be sensible of acute pains in my limbs from lying out in the fields, and was now so tired and low that I could hardly keep myself awake for five minutes together. When I had bathed, they (I mean my aunt and Janet) enrobed me in a shirt and a pair of trousers belonging to Mr. Dick, and tied me up in two or three great shawls. What sort of bundle I looked like, I don't know, but I felt a very hot one. Feeling also very faint and drowsy, I soon lay down on the sofa again and fell asleep.

It might have been a dream, originating in the fancy which had occupied my mind so long, but I awoke with the impression that my aunt had come

and bent over me, and had put my hair away from my face, and laid my head more comfortably, and had then stood looking at me. The words, 'Pretty fellow,' or 'Poor fellow,' seemed to be in my ears, too; but certainly there was nothing else, when I awoke, to lead me to believe that they had been uttered by my aunt, who sat in the bow-window gazing at the sea from behind the green fan, which was mounted on a kind of swivel, and turned any way.

We dined soon after I awoke, off a roast fowl and a pudding; I sitting at table, not unlike a trussed bird myself, and moving my arms with considerable difficulty. But as my aunt had swathed me up, I made no complaint of being inconvenienced. All this time I was deeply anxious to know what she was going to do with me; but she took her dinner in profound silence, except when she occasionally fixed her eyes on me sitting opposite, and said, 'Mercy upon us!' which did not by any means relieve my anxiety.

The cloth being drawn, and some sherry put upon the table (of which I had a glass), my aunt sent up for Mr. Dick again, who joined us, and looked as wise as he could when she requested him to attend to my story, which she elicited from me, gradually, by a course of questions. During my recital, she kept her eyes on Mr. Dick, who I thought would have gone to sleep but for that, and who, whensoever he lapsed into a smile, was checked by a frown from my aunt.

'Whatever possessed that poor unfortunate Baby, that she must go and be married again,' said my aunt, when I had finished, 'I can't conceive.'

'Perhaps she fell in love with her second husband,' Mr. Dick suggested.

'Fell in love!' repeated my aunt. 'What do you mean? What business had she to do it?'

'Perhaps,' Mr. Dick simpered, after thinking a little, 'she did it for pleasure.'

'Pleasure, indeed!' replied my aunt. 'A mighty pleasure for the poor Baby to fix her simple faith upon any dog of a fellow, certain to ill-use her in some way or other. What did she propose to herself, I should like to know! She had had one husband. She had seen David Copperfield out of the world, who was always running after wax dolls from his cradle. She had got a baby--oh, there were a pair of babies when she gave birth to this child sitting here, that Friday night!--and what more did she want?'

Mr. Dick secretly shook his head at me, as if he thought there was no getting over this.

'She couldn't even have a baby like anybody else,' said my aunt. 'Where was this child's sister, Betsey Trotwood? Not forthcoming. Don't tell me!'

Mr. Dick seemed quite frightened.

'That little man of a doctor, with his head on one side,' said my aunt, 'Jellips, or whatever his name was, what was he about? All he could do, was to say to me, like a robin redbreast--as he is--"It's a boy." A boy! Yah, the imbecility of the whole set of 'em!'

The heartiness of the ejaculation startled Mr. Dick exceedingly; and me, too, if I am to tell the truth.

'And then, as if this was not enough, and she had not stood sufficiently in the light of this child's sister, Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt, 'she marries a second time--goes and marries a Murderer--or a man with a name like it--and stands in THIS child's light! And the natural



consequence is, as anybody but a baby might have foreseen, that he prowls and wanders. He's as like Cain before he was grown up, as he can be.'

Mr. Dick looked hard at me, as if to identify me in this character.

'And then there's that woman with the Pagan name,' said my aunt, 'that Peggotty, she goes and gets married next. Because she has not seen enough of the evil attending such things, she goes and gets married next, as the child relates. I only hope,' said my aunt, shaking her head, 'that her husband is one of those Poker husbands who abound in the newspapers, and will beat her well with one.'

I could not bear to hear my old nurse so decried, and made the subject of such a wish. I told my aunt that indeed she was mistaken. That Peggotty was the best, the truest, the most faithful, most devoted, and most self-denying friend and servant in the world; who had ever loved me dearly, who had ever loved my mother dearly; who had held my mother's dying head upon her arm, on whose face my mother had imprinted her last grateful kiss. And my remembrance of them both, choking me, I broke down as I was trying to say that her home was my home, and that all she had was mine, and that I would have gone to her for shelter, but for her humble station, which made me fear that I might bring some trouble on her--I broke down, I say, as I was trying to say so, and laid my face in my hands upon the table.

'Well, well!' said my aunt, 'the child is right to stand by those who have stood by him--Janet! Donkeys!'

I thoroughly believe that but for those unfortunate donkeys, we should have come to a good understanding; for my aunt had laid her hand on my shoulder, and the impulse was upon me, thus emboldened, to embrace her and beseech her protection. But the interruption, and the disorder she

was thrown into by the struggle outside, put an end to all softer ideas for the present, and kept my aunt indignantly declaiming to Mr. Dick about her determination to appeal for redress to the laws of her country, and to bring actions for trespass against the whole donkey proprietorship of Dover, until tea-time.

After tea, we sat at the window--on the look-out, as I imagined, from my aunt's sharp expression of face, for more invaders--until dusk, when Janet set candles, and a backgammon-board, on the table, and pulled down the blinds.

'Now, Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, with her grave look, and her forefinger up as before, 'I am going to ask you another question. Look at this child.'

'David's son?' said Mr. Dick, with an attentive, puzzled face.

'Exactly so,' returned my aunt. 'What would you do with him, now?'

'Do with David's son?' said Mr. Dick.

'Ay,' replied my aunt, 'with David's son.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Dick. 'Yes. Do with--I should put him to bed.'

'Janet!' cried my aunt, with the same complacent triumph that I had remarked before. 'Mr. Dick sets us all right. If the bed is ready, we'll take him up to it.'

Janet reporting it to be quite ready, I was taken up to it; kindly, but in some sort like a prisoner; my aunt going in front and Janet bringing up the rear. The only circumstance which gave me any new hope, was my aunt's stopping on the stairs to inquire about a smell of fire that was

prevalent there; and janet's replying that she had been making tinder down in the kitchen, of my old shirt. But there were no other clothes in my room than the odd heap of things I wore; and when I was left there, with a little taper which my aunt forewarned me would burn exactly five minutes, I heard them lock my door on the outside. Turning these things over in my mind I deemed it possible that my aunt, who could know nothing of me, might suspect I had a habit of running away, and took precautions, on that account, to have me in safe keeping.

The room was a pleasant one, at the top of the house, overlooking the sea, on which the moon was shining brilliantly. After I had said my prayers, and the candle had burnt out, I remember how I still sat looking at the moonlight on the water, as if I could hope to read my fortune in it, as in a bright book; or to see my mother with her child, coming from Heaven, along that shining path, to look upon me as she had looked when I last saw her sweet face. I remember how the solemn feeling with which at length I turned my eyes away, yielded to the sensation of gratitude and rest which the sight of the white-curtained bed--and how much more the lying softly down upon it, nestling in the snow-white sheets!--inspired. I remember how I thought of all the solitary places under the night sky where I had slept, and how I prayed that I never might be houseless any more, and never might forget the houseless. I remember how I seemed to float, then, down the melancholy glory of that track upon the sea, away into the world of dreams.

#### CHAPTER 14. MY AUNT MAKES UP HER MIND ABOUT ME

On going down in the morning, I found my aunt musing so profoundly over the breakfast table, with her elbow on the tray, that the contents of the urn had overflowed the teapot and were laying the whole table-cloth

under water, when my entrance put her meditations to flight. I felt sure that I had been the subject of her reflections, and was more than ever anxious to know her intentions towards me. Yet I dared not express my anxiety, lest it should give her offence.

My eyes, however, not being so much under control as my tongue, were attracted towards my aunt very often during breakfast. I never could look at her for a few moments together but I found her looking at me--in an odd thoughtful manner, as if I were an immense way off, instead of being on the other side of the small round table. When she had finished her breakfast, my aunt very deliberately leaned back in her chair, knitted her brows, folded her arms, and contemplated me at her leisure, with such a fixedness of attention that I was quite overpowered by embarrassment. Not having as yet finished my own breakfast, I attempted to hide my confusion by proceeding with it; but my knife tumbled over my fork, my fork tripped up my knife, I chipped bits of bacon a surprising height into the air instead of cutting them for my own eating, and choked myself with my tea, which persisted in going the wrong way instead of the right one, until I gave in altogether, and sat blushing under my aunt's close scrutiny.

'Hallo!' said my aunt, after a long time.

I looked up, and met her sharp bright glance respectfully.

'I have written to him,' said my aunt.

'To--?'

'To your father-in-law,' said my aunt. 'I have sent him a letter that I'll trouble him to attend to, or he and I will fall out, I can tell him!'

'Does he know where I am, aunt?' I inquired, alarmed.

'I have told him,' said my aunt, with a nod.

'Shall I--be--given up to him?' I faltered.

'I don't know,' said my aunt. 'We shall see.'

'Oh! I can't think what I shall do,' I exclaimed, 'if I have to go back to Mr. Murdstone!'

'I don't know anything about it,' said my aunt, shaking her head. 'I can't say, I am sure. We shall see.'

My spirits sank under these words, and I became very downcast and heavy of heart. My aunt, without appearing to take much heed of me, put on a coarse apron with a bib, which she took out of the press; washed up the teacups with her own hands; and, when everything was washed and set in the tray again, and the cloth folded and put on the top of the whole, rang for Janet to remove it. She next swept up the crumbs with a little broom (putting on a pair of gloves first), until there did not appear to be one microscopic speck left on the carpet; next dusted and arranged the room, which was dusted and arranged to a hair's breadth already. When all these tasks were performed to her satisfaction, she took off the gloves and apron, folded them up, put them in the particular corner of the press from which they had been taken, brought out her work-box to her own table in the open window, and sat down, with the green fan between her and the light, to work.

'I wish you'd go upstairs,' said my aunt, as she threaded her needle, 'and give my compliments to Mr. Dick, and I'll be glad to know how he gets on with his Memorial.'

I rose with all alacrity, to acquit myself of this commission.

'I suppose,' said my aunt, eyeing me as narrowly as she had eyed the needle in threading it, 'you think Mr. Dick a short name, eh?'

'I thought it was rather a short name, yesterday,' I confessed.

'You are not to suppose that he hasn't got a longer name, if he chose to use it,' said my aunt, with a loftier air. 'Babley--Mr. Richard Babley--that's the gentleman's true name.'

I was going to suggest, with a modest sense of my youth and the familiarity I had been already guilty of, that I had better give him the full benefit of that name, when my aunt went on to say:

'But don't you call him by it, whatever you do. He can't bear his name. That's a peculiarity of his. Though I don't know that it's much of a peculiarity, either; for he has been ill-used enough, by some that bear it, to have a mortal antipathy for it, Heaven knows. Mr. Dick is his name here, and everywhere else, now--if he ever went anywhere else, which he don't. So take care, child, you don't call him anything BUT Mr. Dick.'

I promised to obey, and went upstairs with my message; thinking, as I went, that if Mr. Dick had been working at his Memorial long, at the same rate as I had seen him working at it, through the open door, when I came down, he was probably getting on very well indeed. I found him still driving at it with a long pen, and his head almost laid upon the paper. He was so intent upon it, that I had ample leisure to observe the large paper kite in a corner, the confusion of bundles of manuscript, the number of pens, and, above all, the quantity of ink (which he seemed to have in, in half-gallon jars by the dozen), before he observed my being present.

'Ha! Phoebus!' said Mr. Dick, laying down his pen. 'How does the world go? I'll tell you what,' he added, in a lower tone, 'I shouldn't wish it to be mentioned, but it's a--' here he beckoned to me, and put his lips close to my ear--'it's a mad world. Mad as Bedlam, boy!' said Mr. Dick, taking snuff from a round box on the table, and laughing heartily.

Without presuming to give my opinion on this question, I delivered my message.

'Well,' said Mr. Dick, in answer, 'my compliments to her, and I--I believe I have made a start. I think I have made a start,' said Mr. Dick, passing his hand among his grey hair, and casting anything but a confident look at his manuscript. 'You have been to school?'

'Yes, sir,' I answered; 'for a short time.'

'Do you recollect the date,' said Mr. Dick, looking earnestly at me, and taking up his pen to note it down, 'when King Charles the First had his head cut off?' I said I believed it happened in the year sixteen hundred and forty-nine.

'Well,' returned Mr. Dick, scratching his ear with his pen, and looking dubiously at me. 'So the books say; but I don't see how that can be. Because, if it was so long ago, how could the people about him have made that mistake of putting some of the trouble out of his head, after it was taken off, into mine?'

I was very much surprised by the inquiry; but could give no information on this point.

'It's very strange,' said Mr. Dick, with a despondent look upon his papers, and with his hand among his hair again, 'that I never can get

that quite right. I never can make that perfectly clear. But no matter, no matter!' he said cheerfully, and rousing himself, 'there's time enough! My compliments to Miss Trotwood, I am getting on very well indeed.'

I was going away, when he directed my attention to the kite.

'What do you think of that for a kite?' he said.

I answered that it was a beautiful one. I should think it must have been as much as seven feet high.

'I made it. We'll go and fly it, you and I,' said Mr. Dick. 'Do you see this?'

He showed me that it was covered with manuscript, very closely and laboriously written; but so plainly, that as I looked along the lines, I thought I saw some allusion to King Charles the First's head again, in one or two places.

'There's plenty of string,' said Mr. Dick, 'and when it flies high, it takes the facts a long way. That's my manner of diffusing 'em. I don't know where they may come down. It's according to circumstances, and the wind, and so forth; but I take my chance of that.'

His face was so very mild and pleasant, and had something so reverend in it, though it was hale and hearty, that I was not sure but that he was having a good-humoured jest with me. So I laughed, and he laughed, and we parted the best friends possible.

'Well, child,' said my aunt, when I went downstairs. 'And what of Mr. Dick, this morning?'



I informed her that he sent his compliments, and was getting on very well indeed.

'What do you think of him?' said my aunt.

I had some shadowy idea of endeavouring to evade the question, by replying that I thought him a very nice gentleman; but my aunt was not to be so put off, for she laid her work down in her lap, and said, folding her hands upon it:

'Come! Your sister Betsey Trotwood would have told me what she thought of anyone, directly. Be as like your sister as you can, and speak out!'

'Is he--is Mr. Dick--I ask because I don't know, aunt--is he at all out of his mind, then?' I stammered; for I felt I was on dangerous ground.

'Not a morsel,' said my aunt.

'Oh, indeed!' I observed faintly.

'If there is anything in the world,' said my aunt, with great decision and force of manner, 'that Mr. Dick is not, it's that.'

I had nothing better to offer, than another timid, 'Oh, indeed!'

'He has been CALLED mad,' said my aunt. 'I have a selfish pleasure in saying he has been called mad, or I should not have had the benefit of his society and advice for these last ten years and upwards--in fact, ever since your sister, Betsey Trotwood, disappointed me.'

'So long as that?' I said.

'And nice people they were, who had the audacity to call him mad,'

pursued my aunt. 'Mr. Dick is a sort of distant connexion of mine--it doesn't matter how; I needn't enter into that. If it hadn't been for me, his own brother would have shut him up for life. That's all.'

I am afraid it was hypocritical in me, but seeing that my aunt felt strongly on the subject, I tried to look as if I felt strongly too.

'A proud fool!' said my aunt. 'Because his brother was a little eccentric--though he is not half so eccentric as a good many people--he didn't like to have him visible about his house, and sent him away to some private asylum-place: though he had been left to his particular care by their deceased father, who thought him almost a natural. And a wise man he must have been to think so! Mad himself, no doubt.'

Again, as my aunt looked quite convinced, I endeavoured to look quite convinced also.

'So I stepped in,' said my aunt, 'and made him an offer. I said, "Your brother's sane--a great deal more sane than you are, or ever will be, it is to be hoped. Let him have his little income, and come and live with me. I am not afraid of him, I am not proud, I am ready to take care of him, and shall not ill-treat him as some people (besides the asylum-folks) have done." After a good deal of squabbling,' said my aunt, 'I got him; and he has been here ever since. He is the most friendly and amenable creature in existence; and as for advice!--But nobody knows what that man's mind is, except myself.'

My aunt smoothed her dress and shook her head, as if she smoothed defiance of the whole world out of the one, and shook it out of the other.

'He had a favourite sister,' said my aunt, 'a good creature, and very kind to him. But she did what they all do--took a husband. And HE did

what they all do--made her wretched. It had such an effect upon the mind of Mr. Dick (that's not madness, I hope!) that, combined with his fear of his brother, and his sense of his unkindness, it threw him into a fever. That was before he came to me, but the recollection of it is oppressive to him even now. Did he say anything to you about King Charles the First, child?'

'Yes, aunt.'

'Ah!' said my aunt, rubbing her nose as if she were a little vexed.

'That's his allegorical way of expressing it. He connects his illness with great disturbance and agitation, naturally, and that's the figure, or the simile, or whatever it's called, which he chooses to use. And why shouldn't he, if he thinks proper!'

I said: 'Certainly, aunt.'

'It's not a business-like way of speaking,' said my aunt, 'nor a worldly way. I am aware of that; and that's the reason why I insist upon it, that there shan't be a word about it in his Memorial.'

'Is it a Memorial about his own history that he is writing, aunt?'

'Yes, child,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose again. 'He is memorializing the Lord Chancellor, or the Lord Somebody or other--one of those people, at all events, who are paid to be memorialized--about his affairs. I suppose it will go in, one of these days. He hasn't been able to draw it up yet, without introducing that mode of expressing himself; but it don't signify; it keeps him employed.'

In fact, I found out afterwards that Mr. Dick had been for upwards of ten years endeavouring to keep King Charles the First out of the Memorial; but he had been constantly getting into it, and was there now.

'I say again,' said my aunt, 'nobody knows what that man's mind is except myself; and he's the most amenable and friendly creature in existence. If he likes to fly a kite sometimes, what of that! Franklin used to fly a kite. He was a Quaker, or something of that sort, if I am not mistaken. And a Quaker flying a kite is a much more ridiculous object than anybody else.'

If I could have supposed that my aunt had recounted these particulars for my especial behoof, and as a piece of confidence in me, I should have felt very much distinguished, and should have augured favourably from such a mark of her good opinion. But I could hardly help observing that she had launched into them, chiefly because the question was raised in her own mind, and with very little reference to me, though she had addressed herself to me in the absence of anybody else.

At the same time, I must say that the generosity of her championship of poor harmless Mr. Dick, not only inspired my young breast with some selfish hope for myself, but warmed it unselfishly towards her. I believe that I began to know that there was something about my aunt, notwithstanding her many eccentricities and odd humours, to be honoured and trusted in. Though she was just as sharp that day as on the day before, and was in and out about the donkeys just as often, and was thrown into a tremendous state of indignation, when a young man, going by, ogled Janet at a window (which was one of the gravest misdemeanours that could be committed against my aunt's dignity), she seemed to me to command more of my respect, if not less of my fear.

The anxiety I underwent, in the interval which necessarily elapsed before a reply could be received to her letter to Mr. Murdstone, was extreme; but I made an endeavour to suppress it, and to be as agreeable as I could in a quiet way, both to my aunt and Mr. Dick. The latter and I would have gone out to fly the great kite; but that I had still no

other clothes than the anything but ornamental garments with which I had been decorated on the first day, and which confined me to the house, except for an hour after dark, when my aunt, for my health's sake, paraded me up and down on the cliff outside, before going to bed. At length the reply from Mr. Murdstone came, and my aunt informed me, to my infinite terror, that he was coming to speak to her herself on the next day. On the next day, still bundled up in my curious habiliments, I sat counting the time, flushed and heated by the conflict of sinking hopes and rising fears within me; and waiting to be startled by the sight of the gloomy face, whose non-arrival startled me every minute.

MY aunt was a little more imperious and stern than usual, but I observed no other token of her preparing herself to receive the visitor so much dreaded by me. She sat at work in the window, and I sat by, with my thoughts running astray on all possible and impossible results of Mr. Murdstone's visit, until pretty late in the afternoon. Our dinner had been indefinitely postponed; but it was growing so late, that my aunt had ordered it to be got ready, when she gave a sudden alarm of donkeys, and to my consternation and amazement, I beheld Miss Murdstone, on a side-saddle, ride deliberately over the sacred piece of green, and stop in front of the house, looking about her.

'Go along with you!' cried my aunt, shaking her head and her fist at the window. 'You have no business there. How dare you trespass? Go along! Oh! you bold-faced thing!'

MY aunt was so exasperated by the coolness with which Miss Murdstone looked about her, that I really believe she was motionless, and unable for the moment to dart out according to custom. I seized the opportunity to inform her who it was; and that the gentleman now coming near the offender (for the way up was very steep, and he had dropped behind), was Mr. Murdstone himself.

'I don't care who it is!' cried my aunt, still shaking her head and gesticulating anything but welcome from the bow-window. 'I won't be trespassed upon. I won't allow it. Go away! Janet, turn him round. Lead him off!' and I saw, from behind my aunt, a sort of hurried battle-piece, in which the donkey stood resisting everybody, with all his four legs planted different ways, while Janet tried to pull him round by the bridle, Mr. Murdstone tried to lead him on, Miss Murdstone struck at Janet with a parasol, and several boys, who had come to see the engagement, shouted vigorously. But my aunt, suddenly descrying among them the young malefactor who was the donkey's guardian, and who was one of the most inveterate offenders against her, though hardly in his teens, rushed out to the scene of action, pounced upon him, captured him, dragged him, with his jacket over his head, and his heels grinding the ground, into the garden, and, calling upon Janet to fetch the constables and justices, that he might be taken, tried, and executed on the spot, held him at bay there. This part of the business, however, did not last long; for the young rascal, being expert at a variety of feints and dodges, of which my aunt had no conception, soon went whooping away, leaving some deep impressions of his nailed boots in the flower-beds, and taking his donkey in triumph with him.

Miss Murdstone, during the latter portion of the contest, had dismounted, and was now waiting with her brother at the bottom of the steps, until my aunt should be at leisure to receive them. My aunt, a little ruffled by the combat, marched past them into the house, with great dignity, and took no notice of their presence, until they were announced by Janet.

'Shall I go away, aunt?' I asked, trembling.

'No, sir,' said my aunt. 'Certainly not!' With which she pushed me into a corner near her, and fenced me in with a chair, as if it were a prison or a bar of justice. This position I continued to occupy during the

whole interview, and from it I now saw Mr. and Miss Murdstone enter the room.

'Oh!' said my aunt, 'I was not aware at first to whom I had the pleasure of objecting. But I don't allow anybody to ride over that turf. I make no exceptions. I don't allow anybody to do it.'

'Your regulation is rather awkward to strangers,' said Miss Murdstone.

'Is it!' said my aunt.

Mr. Murdstone seemed afraid of a renewal of hostilities, and interposing began:

'Miss Trotwood!'

'I beg your pardon,' observed my aunt with a keen look. 'You are the Mr. Murdstone who married the widow of my late nephew, David Copperfield, of Blunderstone Rookery!--Though why Rookery, I don't know!'

'I am,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'You'll excuse my saying, sir,' returned my aunt, 'that I think it would have been a much better and happier thing if you had left that poor child alone.'

'I so far agree with what Miss Trotwood has remarked,' observed Miss Murdstone, bridling, 'that I consider our lamented Clara to have been, in all essential respects, a mere child.'

'It is a comfort to you and me, ma'am,' said my aunt, 'who are getting on in life, and are not likely to be made unhappy by our personal attractions, that nobody can say the same of us.'

'No doubt!' returned Miss Murdstone, though, I thought, not with a very ready or gracious assent. 'And it certainly might have been, as you say, a better and happier thing for my brother if he had never entered into such a marriage. I have always been of that opinion.'

'I have no doubt you have,' said my aunt. 'Janet,' ringing the bell, 'my compliments to Mr. Dick, and beg him to come down.'

Until he came, my aunt sat perfectly upright and stiff, frowning at the wall. When he came, my aunt performed the ceremony of introduction.

'Mr. Dick. An old and intimate friend. On whose judgement,' said my aunt, with emphasis, as an admonition to Mr. Dick, who was biting his forefinger and looking rather foolish, 'I rely.'

Mr. Dick took his finger out of his mouth, on this hint, and stood among the group, with a grave and attentive expression of face.

My aunt inclined her head to Mr. Murdstone, who went on:

'Miss Trotwood: on the receipt of your letter, I considered it an act of greater justice to myself, and perhaps of more respect to you-'

'Thank you,' said my aunt, still eyeing him keenly. 'You needn't mind me.'

'To answer it in person, however inconvenient the journey,' pursued Mr. Murdstone, 'rather than by letter. This unhappy boy who has run away from his friends and his occupation--'

'And whose appearance,' interposed his sister, directing general attention to me in my indefinable costume, 'is perfectly scandalous and



disgraceful.'

'Jane Murdstone,' said her brother, 'have the goodness not to interrupt me. This unhappy boy, Miss Trotwood, has been the occasion of much domestic trouble and uneasiness; both during the lifetime of my late dear wife, and since. He has a sullen, rebellious spirit; a violent temper; and an untoward, intractable disposition. Both my sister and myself have endeavoured to correct his vices, but ineffectually. And I have felt--we both have felt, I may say; my sister being fully in my confidence--that it is right you should receive this grave and dispassionate assurance from our lips.'

'It can hardly be necessary for me to confirm anything stated by my brother,' said Miss Murdstone; 'but I beg to observe, that, of all the boys in the world, I believe this is the worst boy.'

'Strong!' said my aunt, shortly.

'But not at all too strong for the facts,' returned Miss Murdstone.

'Ha!' said my aunt. 'Well, sir?'

'I have my own opinions,' resumed Mr. Murdstone, whose face darkened more and more, the more he and my aunt observed each other, which they did very narrowly, 'as to the best mode of bringing him up; they are founded, in part, on my knowledge of him, and in part on my knowledge of my own means and resources. I am responsible for them to myself, I act upon them, and I say no more about them. It is enough that I place this boy under the eye of a friend of my own, in a respectable business; that it does not please him; that he runs away from it; makes himself a common vagabond about the country; and comes here, in rags, to appeal to you, Miss Trotwood. I wish to set before you, honourably, the exact consequences--so far as they are within my knowledge--of your abetting

him in this appeal.'

'But about the respectable business first,' said my aunt. 'If he had been your own boy, you would have put him to it, just the same, I suppose?'

'If he had been my brother's own boy,' returned Miss Murdstone, striking in, 'his character, I trust, would have been altogether different.'

'Or if the poor child, his mother, had been alive, he would still have gone into the respectable business, would he?' said my aunt.

'I believe,' said Mr. Murdstone, with an inclination of his head, 'that Clara would have disputed nothing which myself and my sister Jane Murdstone were agreed was for the best.'

Miss Murdstone confirmed this with an audible murmur.

'Humph!' said my aunt. 'Unfortunate baby!'

Mr. Dick, who had been rattling his money all this time, was rattling it so loudly now, that my aunt felt it necessary to check him with a look, before saying:

'The poor child's annuity died with her?'

'Died with her,' replied Mr. Murdstone.

'And there was no settlement of the little property--the house and garden--the what's-its-name Rookery without any rooks in it--upon her boy?'

'It had been left to her, unconditionally, by her first husband,'

Mr. Murdstone began, when my aunt caught him up with the greatest irascibility and impatience.

'Good Lord, man, there's no occasion to say that. Left to her unconditionally! I think I see David Copperfield looking forward to any condition of any sort or kind, though it stared him point-blank in the face! Of course it was left to her unconditionally. But when she married again--when she took that most disastrous step of marrying you, in short,' said my aunt, 'to be plain--did no one put in a word for the boy at that time?'

'My late wife loved her second husband, ma'am,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'and trusted implicitly in him.'

'Your late wife, sir, was a most unworldly, most unhappy, most unfortunate baby,' returned my aunt, shaking her head at him. 'That's what she was. And now, what have you got to say next?'

'Merely this, Miss Trotwood,' he returned. 'I am here to take David back--to take him back unconditionally, to dispose of him as I think proper, and to deal with him as I think right. I am not here to make any promise, or give any pledge to anybody. You may possibly have some idea, Miss Trotwood, of abetting him in his running away, and in his complaints to you. Your manner, which I must say does not seem intended to propitiate, induces me to think it possible. Now I must caution you that if you abet him once, you abet him for good and all; if you step in between him and me, now, you must step in, Miss Trotwood, for ever. I cannot trifle, or be trifled with. I am here, for the first and last time, to take him away. Is he ready to go? If he is not--and you tell me he is not; on any pretence; it is indifferent to me what--my doors are shut against him henceforth, and yours, I take it for granted, are open to him.'

To this address, my aunt had listened with the closest attention, sitting perfectly upright, with her hands folded on one knee, and looking grimly on the speaker. When he had finished, she turned her eyes so as to command Miss Murdstone, without otherwise disturbing her attitude, and said:

'Well, ma'am, have YOU got anything to remark?'

'Indeed, Miss Trotwood,' said Miss Murdstone, 'all that I could say has been so well said by my brother, and all that I know to be the fact has been so plainly stated by him, that I have nothing to add except my thanks for your politeness. For your very great politeness, I am sure,' said Miss Murdstone; with an irony which no more affected my aunt, than it discomposed the cannon I had slept by at Chatham.

'And what does the boy say?' said my aunt. 'Are you ready to go, David?'

I answered no, and entreated her not to let me go. I said that neither Mr. nor Miss Murdstone had ever liked me, or had ever been kind to me. That they had made my mama, who always loved me dearly, unhappy about me, and that I knew it well, and that Peggotty knew it. I said that I had been more miserable than I thought anybody could believe, who only knew how young I was. And I begged and prayed my aunt--I forget in what terms now, but I remember that they affected me very much then--to befriend and protect me, for my father's sake.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'what shall I do with this child?'

Mr. Dick considered, hesitated, brightened, and rejoined, 'Have him measured for a suit of clothes directly.'

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt triumphantly, 'give me your hand, for your common sense is invaluable.' Having shaken it with great cordiality, she

pulled me towards her and said to Mr. Murdstone:

'You can go when you like; I'll take my chance with the boy. If he's all you say he is, at least I can do as much for him then, as you have done. But I don't believe a word of it.'

'Miss Trotwood,' rejoined Mr. Murdstone, shrugging his shoulders, as he rose, 'if you were a gentleman--'

'Bah! Stuff and nonsense!' said my aunt. 'Don't talk to me!'

'How exquisitely polite!' exclaimed Miss Murdstone, rising.

'Overpowering, really!'

'Do you think I don't know,' said my aunt, turning a deaf ear to the sister, and continuing to address the brother, and to shake her head at him with infinite expression, 'what kind of life you must have led that poor, unhappy, misdirected baby? Do you think I don't know what a woeful day it was for the soft little creature when you first came in her way--smirking and making great eyes at her, I'll be bound, as if you couldn't say boh! to a goose!'

'I never heard anything so elegant!' said Miss Murdstone.

'Do you think I can't understand you as well as if I had seen you,' pursued my aunt, 'now that I DO see and hear you--which, I tell you candidly, is anything but a pleasure to me? Oh yes, bless us! who so smooth and silky as Mr. Murdstone at first! The poor, benighted innocent had never seen such a man. He was made of sweetness. He worshipped her. He doted on her boy--tenderly doted on him! He was to be another father to him, and they were all to live together in a garden of roses, weren't they? Ugh! Get along with you, do!' said my aunt.

'I never heard anything like this person in my life!' exclaimed Miss Murdstone.

'And when you had made sure of the poor little fool,' said my aunt--'God forgive me that I should call her so, and she gone where YOU won't go in a hurry--because you had not done wrong enough to her and hers, you must begin to train her, must you? begin to break her, like a poor caged bird, and wear her deluded life away, in teaching her to sing YOUR notes?'

'This is either insanity or intoxication,' said Miss Murdstone, in a perfect agony at not being able to turn the current of my aunt's address towards herself; 'and my suspicion is that it's intoxication.'

Miss Betsey, without taking the least notice of the interruption, continued to address herself to Mr. Murdstone as if there had been no such thing.

'Mr. Murdstone,' she said, shaking her finger at him, 'you were a tyrant to the simple baby, and you broke her heart. She was a loving baby--I know that; I knew it, years before you ever saw her--and through the best part of her weakness you gave her the wounds she died of. There is the truth for your comfort, however you like it. And you and your instruments may make the most of it.'

'Allow me to inquire, Miss Trotwood,' interposed Miss Murdstone, 'whom you are pleased to call, in a choice of words in which I am not experienced, my brother's instruments?'

'It was clear enough, as I have told you, years before YOU ever saw her--and why, in the mysterious dispensations of Providence, you ever did see her, is more than humanity can comprehend--it was clear enough that the poor soft little thing would marry somebody, at some time or

other; but I did hope it wouldn't have been as bad as it has turned out. That was the time, Mr. Murdstone, when she gave birth to her boy here,' said my aunt; 'to the poor child you sometimes tormented her through afterwards, which is a disagreeable remembrance and makes the sight of him odious now. Aye, aye! you needn't wince!' said my aunt. 'I know it's true without that.'

He had stood by the door, all this while, observant of her with a smile upon his face, though his black eyebrows were heavily contracted. I remarked now, that, though the smile was on his face still, his colour had gone in a moment, and he seemed to breathe as if he had been running.

'Good day, sir,' said my aunt, 'and good-bye! Good day to you, too, ma'am,' said my aunt, turning suddenly upon his sister. 'Let me see you ride a donkey over my green again, and as sure as you have a head upon your shoulders, I'll knock your bonnet off, and tread upon it!'

It would require a painter, and no common painter too, to depict my aunt's face as she delivered herself of this very unexpected sentiment, and Miss Murdstone's face as she heard it. But the manner of the speech, no less than the matter, was so fiery, that Miss Murdstone, without a word in answer, discreetly put her arm through her brother's, and walked haughtily out of the cottage; my aunt remaining in the window looking after them; prepared, I have no doubt, in case of the donkey's reappearance, to carry her threat into instant execution.

No attempt at defiance being made, however, her face gradually relaxed, and became so pleasant, that I was emboldened to kiss and thank her; which I did with great heartiness, and with both my arms clasped round her neck. I then shook hands with Mr. Dick, who shook hands with me a great many times, and hailed this happy close of the proceedings with repeated bursts of laughter.

'You'll consider yourself guardian, jointly with me, of this child, Mr. Dick,' said my aunt.

'I shall be delighted,' said Mr. Dick, 'to be the guardian of David's son.'

'Very good,' returned my aunt, 'that's settled. I have been thinking, do you know, Mr. Dick, that I might call him Trotwood?'

'Certainly, certainly. Call him Trotwood, certainly,' said Mr. Dick. 'David's son's Trotwood.'

'Trotwood Copperfield, you mean,' returned my aunt.

'Yes, to be sure. Yes. Trotwood Copperfield,' said Mr. Dick, a little abashed.

My aunt took so kindly to the notion, that some ready-made clothes, which were purchased for me that afternoon, were marked 'Trotwood Copperfield', in her own handwriting, and in indelible marking-ink, before I put them on; and it was settled that all the other clothes which were ordered to be made for me (a complete outfit was bespoke that afternoon) should be marked in the same way.

Thus I began my new life, in a new name, and with everything new about me. Now that the state of doubt was over, I felt, for many days, like one in a dream. I never thought that I had a curious couple of guardians, in my aunt and Mr. Dick. I never thought of anything about myself, distinctly. The two things clearest in my mind were, that a remoteness had come upon the old Blunderstone life--which seemed to lie in the haze of an immeasurable distance; and that a curtain had for ever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby's. No one has ever raised that



curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly. The remembrance of that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of hope, that I have never had the courage even to examine how long I was doomed to lead it. Whether it lasted for a year, or more, or less, I do not know. I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there I leave it.

#### CHAPTER 15. I MAKE ANOTHER BEGINNING

Mr. Dick and I soon became the best of friends, and very often, when his day's work was done, went out together to fly the great kite. Every day of his life he had a long sitting at the Memorial, which never made the least progress, however hard he laboured, for King Charles the First always strayed into it, sooner or later, and then it was thrown aside, and another one begun. The patience and hope with which he bore these perpetual disappointments, the mild perception he had that there was something wrong about King Charles the First, the feeble efforts he made to keep him out, and the certainty with which he came in, and tumbled the Memorial out of all shape, made a deep impression on me. What Mr. Dick supposed would come of the Memorial, if it were completed; where he thought it was to go, or what he thought it was to do; he knew no more than anybody else, I believe. Nor was it at all necessary that he should trouble himself with such questions, for if anything were certain under the sun, it was certain that the Memorial never would be finished. It was quite an affecting sight, I used to think, to see him with the kite when it was up a great height in the air. What he had told me, in his room, about his belief in its disseminating the statements pasted on it, which were nothing but old leaves of abortive Memorials, might have been a fancy with him sometimes; but not when he was out, looking up at

the kite in the sky, and feeling it pull and tug at his hand. He never looked so serene as he did then. I used to fancy, as I sat by him of an evening, on a green slope, and saw him watch the kite high in the quiet air, that it lifted his mind out of its confusion, and bore it (such was my boyish thought) into the skies. As he wound the string in and it came lower and lower down out of the beautiful light, until it fluttered to the ground, and lay there like a dead thing, he seemed to wake gradually out of a dream; and I remember to have seen him take it up, and look about him in a lost way, as if they had both come down together, so that I pitied him with all my heart.

While I advanced in friendship and intimacy with Mr. Dick, I did not go backward in the favour of his staunch friend, my aunt. She took so kindly to me, that, in the course of a few weeks, she shortened my adopted name of Trotwood into Trot; and even encouraged me to hope, that if I went on as I had begun, I might take equal rank in her affections with my sister Betsey Trotwood.

'Trot,' said my aunt one evening, when the backgammon-board was placed as usual for herself and Mr. Dick, 'we must not forget your education.'

This was my only subject of anxiety, and I felt quite delighted by her referring to it.

'Should you like to go to school at Canterbury?' said my aunt.

I replied that I should like it very much, as it was so near her.

'Good,' said my aunt. 'Should you like to go tomorrow?'

Being already no stranger to the general rapidity of my aunt's evolutions, I was not surprised by the suddenness of the proposal, and said: 'Yes.'

'Good,' said my aunt again. 'Janet, hire the grey pony and chaise tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, and pack up Master Trotwood's clothes tonight.'

I was greatly elated by these orders; but my heart smote me for my selfishness, when I witnessed their effect on Mr. Dick, who was so low-spirited at the prospect of our separation, and played so ill in consequence, that my aunt, after giving him several admonitory raps on the knuckles with her dice-box, shut up the board, and declined to play with him any more. But, on hearing from my aunt that I should sometimes come over on a Saturday, and that he could sometimes come and see me on a Wednesday, he revived; and vowed to make another kite for those occasions, of proportions greatly surpassing the present one. In the morning he was downhearted again, and would have sustained himself by giving me all the money he had in his possession, gold and silver too, if my aunt had not interposed, and limited the gift to five shillings, which, at his earnest petition, were afterwards increased to ten. We parted at the garden-gate in a most affectionate manner, and Mr. Dick did not go into the house until my aunt had driven me out of sight of it.

My aunt, who was perfectly indifferent to public opinion, drove the grey pony through Dover in a masterly manner; sitting high and stiff like a state coachman, keeping a steady eye upon him wherever he went, and making a point of not letting him have his own way in any respect. When we came into the country road, she permitted him to relax a little, however; and looking at me down in a valley of cushion by her side, asked me whether I was happy?

'Very happy indeed, thank you, aunt,' I said.

She was much gratified; and both her hands being occupied, patted me on

the head with her whip.

'Is it a large school, aunt?' I asked.

'Why, I don't know,' said my aunt. 'We are going to Mr. Wickfield's first.'

'Does he keep a school?' I asked.

'No, Trot,' said my aunt. 'He keeps an office.'

I asked for no more information about Mr. Wickfield, as she offered none, and we conversed on other subjects until we came to Canterbury, where, as it was market-day, my aunt had a great opportunity of insinuating the grey pony among carts, baskets, vegetables, and huckster's goods. The hair-breadth turns and twists we made, drew down upon us a variety of speeches from the people standing about, which were not always complimentary; but my aunt drove on with perfect indifference, and I dare say would have taken her own way with as much coolness through an enemy's country.

At length we stopped before a very old house bulging out over the road; a house with long low lattice-windows bulging out still farther, and beams with carved heads on the ends bulging out too, so that I fancied the whole house was leaning forward, trying to see who was passing on the narrow pavement below. It was quite spotless in its cleanliness. The old-fashioned brass knocker on the low arched door, ornamented with carved garlands of fruit and flowers, twinkled like a star; the two stone steps descending to the door were as white as if they had been covered with fair linen; and all the angles and corners, and carvings and mouldings, and quaint little panes of glass, and quainter little windows, though as old as the hills, were as pure as any snow that ever fell upon the hills.

When the pony-chaise stopped at the door, and my eyes were intent upon the house, I saw a cadaverous face appear at a small window on the ground floor (in a little round tower that formed one side of the house), and quickly disappear. The low arched door then opened, and the face came out. It was quite as cadaverous as it had looked in the window, though in the grain of it there was that tinge of red which is sometimes to be observed in the skins of red-haired people. It belonged to a red-haired person--a youth of fifteen, as I take it now, but looking much older--whose hair was cropped as close as the closest stubble; who had hardly any eyebrows, and no eyelashes, and eyes of a red-brown, so unsheltered and unshaded, that I remember wondering how he went to sleep. He was high-shouldered and bony; dressed in decent black, with a white wisp of a neckcloth; buttoned up to the throat; and had a long, lank, skeleton hand, which particularly attracted my attention, as he stood at the pony's head, rubbing his chin with it, and looking up at us in the chaise.

'Is Mr. Wickfield at home, Uriah Heep?' said my aunt.

'Mr. Wickfield's at home, ma'am,' said Uriah Heep, 'if you'll please to walk in there'--pointing with his long hand to the room he meant.

We got out; and leaving him to hold the pony, went into a long low parlour looking towards the street, from the window of which I caught a glimpse, as I went in, of Uriah Heep breathing into the pony's nostrils, and immediately covering them with his hand, as if he were putting some spell upon him. Opposite to the tall old chimney-piece were two portraits: one of a gentleman with grey hair (though not by any means an old man) and black eyebrows, who was looking over some papers tied together with red tape; the other, of a lady, with a very placid and sweet expression of face, who was looking at me.

I believe I was turning about in search of Uriah's picture, when, a door at the farther end of the room opening, a gentleman entered, at sight of whom I turned to the first-mentioned portrait again, to make quite sure that it had not come out of its frame. But it was stationary; and as the gentleman advanced into the light, I saw that he was some years older than when he had had his picture painted.

'Miss Betsey Trotwood,' said the gentleman, 'pray walk in. I was engaged for a moment, but you'll excuse my being busy. You know my motive. I have but one in life.'

Miss Betsey thanked him, and we went into his room, which was furnished as an office, with books, papers, tin boxes, and so forth. It looked into a garden, and had an iron safe let into the wall; so immediately over the mantelshelf, that I wondered, as I sat down, how the sweeps got round it when they swept the chimney.

'Well, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield; for I soon found that it was he, and that he was a lawyer, and steward of the estates of a rich gentleman of the county; 'what wind blows you here? Not an ill wind, I hope?'

'No,' replied my aunt. 'I have not come for any law.'

'That's right, ma'am,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'You had better come for anything else.' His hair was quite white now, though his eyebrows were still black. He had a very agreeable face, and, I thought, was handsome. There was a certain richness in his complexion, which I had been long accustomed, under Peggotty's tuition, to connect with port wine; and I fancied it was in his voice too, and referred his growing corpulency to the same cause. He was very cleanly dressed, in a blue coat, striped waistcoat, and nankeen trousers; and his fine frilled shirt and cambric neckcloth looked unusually soft and white, reminding my strolling fancy

(I call to mind) of the plumage on the breast of a swan.

'This is my nephew,' said my aunt.

'Wasn't aware you had one, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield.

'My grand-nephew, that is to say,' observed my aunt.

'Wasn't aware you had a grand-nephew, I give you my word,' said Mr. Wickfield.

'I have adopted him,' said my aunt, with a wave of her hand, importing that his knowledge and his ignorance were all one to her, 'and I have brought him here, to put to a school where he may be thoroughly well taught, and well treated. Now tell me where that school is, and what it is, and all about it.'

'Before I can advise you properly,' said Mr. Wickfield--'the old question, you know. What's your motive in this?'

'Deuce take the man!' exclaimed my aunt. 'Always fishing for motives, when they're on the surface! Why, to make the child happy and useful.'

'It must be a mixed motive, I think,' said Mr. Wickfield, shaking his head and smiling incredulously.

'A mixed fiddlestick,' returned my aunt. 'You claim to have one plain motive in all you do yourself. You don't suppose, I hope, that you are the only plain dealer in the world?'

'Ay, but I have only one motive in life, Miss Trotwood,' he rejoined, smiling. 'Other people have dozens, scores, hundreds. I have only one. There's the difference. However, that's beside the question. The best

school? Whatever the motive, you want the best?'

My aunt nodded assent.

'At the best we have,' said Mr. Wickfield, considering, 'your nephew couldn't board just now.'

'But he could board somewhere else, I suppose?' suggested my aunt.

Mr. Wickfield thought I could. After a little discussion, he proposed to take my aunt to the school, that she might see it and judge for herself; also, to take her, with the same object, to two or three houses where he thought I could be boarded. My aunt embracing the proposal, we were all three going out together, when he stopped and said:

'Our little friend here might have some motive, perhaps, for objecting to the arrangements. I think we had better leave him behind?'

My aunt seemed disposed to contest the point; but to facilitate matters I said I would gladly remain behind, if they pleased; and returned into Mr. Wickfield's office, where I sat down again, in the chair I had first occupied, to await their return.

It so happened that this chair was opposite a narrow passage, which ended in the little circular room where I had seen Uriah Heep's pale face looking out of the window. Uriah, having taken the pony to a neighbouring stable, was at work at a desk in this room, which had a brass frame on the top to hang paper upon, and on which the writing he was making a copy of was then hanging. Though his face was towards me, I thought, for some time, the writing being between us, that he could not see me; but looking that way more attentively, it made me uncomfortable to observe that, every now and then, his sleepless eyes would come below the writing, like two red suns, and stealthily stare at me for I dare



say a whole minute at a time, during which his pen went, or pretended to go, as cleverly as ever. I made several attempts to get out of their way--such as standing on a chair to look at a map on the other side of the room, and poring over the columns of a Kentish newspaper--but they always attracted me back again; and whenever I looked towards those two red suns, I was sure to find them, either just rising or just setting.

At length, much to my relief, my aunt and Mr. Wickfield came back, after a pretty long absence. They were not so successful as I could have wished; for though the advantages of the school were undeniable, my aunt had not approved of any of the boarding-houses proposed for me.

'It's very unfortunate,' said my aunt. 'I don't know what to do, Trot.'

'It does happen unfortunately,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'But I'll tell you what you can do, Miss Trotwood.'

'What's that?' inquired my aunt.

'Leave your nephew here, for the present. He's a quiet fellow. He won't disturb me at all. It's a capital house for study. As quiet as a monastery, and almost as roomy. Leave him here.'

My aunt evidently liked the offer, though she was delicate of accepting it. So did I. 'Come, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'This is the way out of the difficulty. It's only a temporary arrangement, you know. If it don't act well, or don't quite accord with our mutual convenience, he can easily go to the right-about. There will be time to find some better place for him in the meanwhile. You had better determine to leave him here for the present!'

'I am very much obliged to you,' said my aunt; 'and so is he, I see; but--'

'Come! I know what you mean,' cried Mr. Wickfield. 'You shall not be oppressed by the receipt of favours, Miss Trotwood. You may pay for him, if you like. We won't be hard about terms, but you shall pay if you will.'

'On that understanding,' said my aunt, 'though it doesn't lessen the real obligation, I shall be very glad to leave him.'

'Then come and see my little housekeeper,' said Mr. Wickfield.

We accordingly went up a wonderful old staircase; with a balustrade so broad that we might have gone up that, almost as easily; and into a shady old drawing-room, lighted by some three or four of the quaint windows I had looked up at from the street: which had old oak seats in them, that seemed to have come of the same trees as the shining oak floor, and the great beams in the ceiling. It was a prettily furnished room, with a piano and some lively furniture in red and green, and some flowers. It seemed to be all old nooks and corners; and in every nook and corner there was some queer little table, or cupboard, or bookcase, or seat, or something or other, that made me think there was not such another good corner in the room; until I looked at the next one, and found it equal to it, if not better. On everything there was the same air of retirement and cleanliness that marked the house outside.

Mr. Wickfield tapped at a door in a corner of the panelled wall, and a girl of about my own age came quickly out and kissed him. On her face, I saw immediately the placid and sweet expression of the lady whose picture had looked at me downstairs. It seemed to my imagination as if the portrait had grown womanly, and the original remained a child. Although her face was quite bright and happy, there was a tranquillity about it, and about her--a quiet, good, calm spirit--that I never have forgotten; that I shall never forget. This was his little housekeeper,

his daughter Agnes, Mr. Wickfield said. When I heard how he said it, and saw how he held her hand, I guessed what the one motive of his life was.

She had a little basket-trifle hanging at her side, with keys in it; and she looked as staid and as discreet a housekeeper as the old house could have. She listened to her father as he told her about me, with a pleasant face; and when he had concluded, proposed to my aunt that we should go upstairs and see my room. We all went together, she before us: and a glorious old room it was, with more oak beams, and diamond panes; and the broad balustrade going all the way up to it.

I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards.

My aunt was as happy as I was, in the arrangement made for me; and we went down to the drawing-room again, well pleased and gratified. As she would not hear of staying to dinner, lest she should by any chance fail to arrive at home with the grey pony before dark; and as I apprehend Mr. Wickfield knew her too well to argue any point with her; some lunch was provided for her there, and Agnes went back to her governess, and Mr. Wickfield to his office. So we were left to take leave of one another without any restraint.

She told me that everything would be arranged for me by Mr. Wickfield, and that I should want for nothing, and gave me the kindest words and the best advice.

'Trot,' said my aunt in conclusion, 'be a credit to yourself, to me, and Mr. Dick, and Heaven be with you!'

I was greatly overcome, and could only thank her, again and again, and send my love to Mr. Dick.

'Never,' said my aunt, 'be mean in anything; never be false; never be cruel. Avoid those three vices, Trot, and I can always be hopeful of you.'

I promised, as well as I could, that I would not abuse her kindness or forget her admonition.

'The pony's at the door,' said my aunt, 'and I am off! Stay here.' With these words she embraced me hastily, and went out of the room, shutting the door after her. At first I was startled by so abrupt a departure, and almost feared I had displeased her; but when I looked into the street, and saw how dejectedly she got into the chaise, and drove away without looking up, I understood her better and did not do her that injustice.

By five o'clock, which was Mr. Wickfield's dinner-hour, I had mustered up my spirits again, and was ready for my knife and fork. The cloth was only laid for us two; but Agnes was waiting in the drawing-room before dinner, went down with her father, and sat opposite to him at table. I doubted whether he could have dined without her.

We did not stay there, after dinner, but came upstairs into the drawing-room again: in one snug corner of which, Agnes set glasses for her father, and a decanter of port wine. I thought he would have missed its usual flavour, if it had been put there for him by any other hands.

There he sat, taking his wine, and taking a good deal of it, for two hours; while Agnes played on the piano, worked, and talked to him and me. He was, for the most part, gay and cheerful with us; but sometimes

his eyes rested on her, and he fell into a brooding state, and was silent. She always observed this quickly, I thought, and always roused him with a question or caress. Then he came out of his meditation, and drank more wine.

Agnes made the tea, and presided over it; and the time passed away after it, as after dinner, until she went to bed; when her father took her in his arms and kissed her, and, she being gone, ordered candles in his office. Then I went to bed too.

But in the course of the evening I had rambled down to the door, and a little way along the street, that I might have another peep at the old houses, and the grey Cathedral; and might think of my coming through that old city on my journey, and of my passing the very house I lived in, without knowing it. As I came back, I saw Uriah Heep shutting up the office; and feeling friendly towards everybody, went in and spoke to him, and at parting, gave him my hand. But oh, what a clammy hand his was! as ghostly to the touch as to the sight! I rubbed mine afterwards, to warm it, AND TO RUB HIS OFF.

It was such an uncomfortable hand, that, when I went to my room, it was still cold and wet upon my memory. Leaning out of the window, and seeing one of the faces on the beam-ends looking at me sideways, I fancied it was Uriah Heep got up there somehow, and shut him out in a hurry.

#### CHAPTER 16. I AM A NEW BOY IN MORE SENSES THAN ONE

Next morning, after breakfast, I entered on school life again. I went, accompanied by Mr. Wickfield, to the scene of my future studies--a grave building in a courtyard, with a learned air about it that seemed very

well suited to the stray rooks and jackdaws who came down from the Cathedral towers to walk with a clerkly bearing on the grass-plot--and was introduced to my new master, Doctor Strong.

Doctor Strong looked almost as rusty, to my thinking, as the tall iron rails and gates outside the house; and almost as stiff and heavy as the great stone urns that flanked them, and were set up, on the top of the red-brick wall, at regular distances all round the court, like sublimated skittles, for Time to play at. He was in his library (I mean Doctor Strong was), with his clothes not particularly well brushed, and his hair not particularly well combed; his knee-smalls unbraced; his long black gaiters unbuttoned; and his shoes yawning like two caverns on the hearth-rug. Turning upon me a lustreless eye, that reminded me of a long-forgotten blind old horse who once used to crop the grass, and tumble over the graves, in Blunderstone churchyard, he said he was glad to see me: and then he gave me his hand; which I didn't know what to do with, as it did nothing for itself.

But, sitting at work, not far from Doctor Strong, was a very pretty young lady--whom he called Annie, and who was his daughter, I supposed--who got me out of my difficulty by kneeling down to put Doctor Strong's shoes on, and button his gaiters, which she did with great cheerfulness and quickness. When she had finished, and we were going out to the schoolroom, I was much surprised to hear Mr. Wickfield, in bidding her good morning, address her as 'Mrs. Strong'; and I was wondering could she be Doctor Strong's son's wife, or could she be Mrs. Doctor Strong, when Doctor Strong himself unconsciously enlightened me.

'By the by, Wickfield,' he said, stopping in a passage with his hand on my shoulder; 'you have not found any suitable provision for my wife's cousin yet?'

'No,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'No. Not yet.'

'I could wish it done as soon as it can be done, Wickfield,' said Doctor Strong, 'for Jack Maldon is needy, and idle; and of those two bad things, worse things sometimes come. What does Doctor Watts say,' he added, looking at me, and moving his head to the time of his quotation, '"Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do."'

'Egad, Doctor,' returned Mr. Wickfield, 'if Doctor Watts knew mankind, he might have written, with as much truth, "Satan finds some mischief still, for busy hands to do." The busy people achieve their full share of mischief in the world, you may rely upon it. What have the people been about, who have been the busiest in getting money, and in getting power, this century or two? No mischief?'

'Jack Maldon will never be very busy in getting either, I expect,' said Doctor Strong, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

'Perhaps not,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'and you bring me back to the question, with an apology for digressing. No, I have not been able to dispose of Mr. Jack Maldon yet. I believe,' he said this with some hesitation, 'I penetrate your motive, and it makes the thing more difficult.'

'My motive,' returned Doctor Strong, 'is to make some suitable provision for a cousin, and an old playfellow, of Annie's.'

'Yes, I know,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'at home or abroad.'

'Aye!' replied the Doctor, apparently wondering why he emphasized those words so much. 'At home or abroad.'

'Your own expression, you know,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Or abroad.'

'Surely,' the Doctor answered. 'Surely. One or other.'

'One or other? Have you no choice?' asked Mr. Wickfield.

'No,' returned the Doctor.

'No?' with astonishment.

'Not the least.'

'No motive,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'for meaning abroad, and not at home?'

'No,' returned the Doctor.

'I am bound to believe you, and of course I do believe you,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'It might have simplified my office very much, if I had known it before. But I confess I entertained another impression.'

Doctor Strong regarded him with a puzzled and doubting look, which almost immediately subsided into a smile that gave me great encouragement; for it was full of amiability and sweetness, and there was a simplicity in it, and indeed in his whole manner, when the studious, pondering frost upon it was got through, very attractive and hopeful to a young scholar like me. Repeating 'no', and 'not the least', and other short assurances to the same purport, Doctor Strong jogged on before us, at a queer, uneven pace; and we followed: Mr. Wickfield, looking grave, I observed, and shaking his head to himself, without knowing that I saw him.

The schoolroom was a pretty large hall, on the quietest side of the house, confronted by the stately stare of some half-dozen of the great urns, and commanding a peep of an old secluded garden belonging to the Doctor, where the peaches were ripening on the sunny south wall. There



were two great aloes, in tubs, on the turf outside the windows; the broad hard leaves of which plant (looking as if they were made of painted tin) have ever since, by association, been symbolical to me of silence and retirement. About five-and-twenty boys were studiously engaged at their books when we went in, but they rose to give the Doctor good morning, and remained standing when they saw Mr. Wickfield and me.

'A new boy, young gentlemen,' said the Doctor; 'Trotwood Copperfield.'

One Adams, who was the head-boy, then stepped out of his place and welcomed me. He looked like a young clergyman, in his white cravat, but he was very affable and good-humoured; and he showed me my place, and presented me to the masters, in a gentlemanly way that would have put me at my ease, if anything could.

It seemed to me so long, however, since I had been among such boys, or among any companions of my own age, except Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes, that I felt as strange as ever I have done in my life. I was so conscious of having passed through scenes of which they could have no knowledge, and of having acquired experiences foreign to my age, appearance, and condition as one of them, that I half believed it was an imposture to come there as an ordinary little schoolboy. I had become, in the Murdstone and Grinby time, however short or long it may have been, so unused to the sports and games of boys, that I knew I was awkward and inexperienced in the commonest things belonging to them. Whatever I had learnt, had so slipped away from me in the sordid cares of my life from day to night, that now, when I was examined about what I knew, I knew nothing, and was put into the lowest form of the school. But, troubled as I was, by my want of boyish skill, and of book-learning too, I was made infinitely more uncomfortable by the consideration, that, in what I did know, I was much farther removed from my companions than in what I did not. My mind ran upon what they would think, if they knew of my familiar acquaintance with the King's Bench Prison? Was there

anything about me which would reveal my proceedings in connexion with the Micawber family--all those pawnings, and sellings, and suppers--in spite of myself? Suppose some of the boys had seen me coming through Canterbury, wayworn and ragged, and should find me out? What would they say, who made so light of money, if they could know how I had scraped my halfpence together, for the purchase of my daily saveloy and beer, or my slices of pudding? How would it affect them, who were so innocent of London life, and London streets, to discover how knowing I was (and was ashamed to be) in some of the meanest phases of both? All this ran in my head so much, on that first day at Doctor Strong's, that I felt distrustful of my slightest look and gesture; shrunk within myself whensoever I was approached by one of my new schoolfellows; and hurried off the minute school was over, afraid of committing myself in my response to any friendly notice or advance.

But there was such an influence in Mr. Wickfield's old house, that when I knocked at it, with my new school-books under my arm, I began to feel my uneasiness softening away. As I went up to my airy old room, the grave shadow of the staircase seemed to fall upon my doubts and fears, and to make the past more indistinct. I sat there, sturdily conning my books, until dinner-time (we were out of school for good at three); and went down, hopeful of becoming a passable sort of boy yet.

Agnes was in the drawing-room, waiting for her father, who was detained by someone in his office. She met me with her pleasant smile, and asked me how I liked the school. I told her I should like it very much, I hoped; but I was a little strange to it at first.

'You have never been to school,' I said, 'have you?' 'Oh yes! Every day.'

'Ah, but you mean here, at your own home?'

'Papa couldn't spare me to go anywhere else,' she answered, smiling and shaking her head. 'His housekeeper must be in his house, you know.'

'He is very fond of you, I am sure,' I said.

She nodded 'Yes,' and went to the door to listen for his coming up, that she might meet him on the stairs. But, as he was not there, she came back again.

'Mama has been dead ever since I was born,' she said, in her quiet way. 'I only know her picture, downstairs. I saw you looking at it yesterday. Did you think whose it was?'

I told her yes, because it was so like herself.

'Papa says so, too,' said Agnes, pleased. 'Hark! That's papa now!'

Her bright calm face lighted up with pleasure as she went to meet him, and as they came in, hand in hand. He greeted me cordially; and told me I should certainly be happy under Doctor Strong, who was one of the gentlest of men.

'There may be some, perhaps--I don't know that there are--who abuse his kindness,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Never be one of those, Trotwood, in anything. He is the least suspicious of mankind; and whether that's a merit, or whether it's a blemish, it deserves consideration in all dealings with the Doctor, great or small.'

He spoke, I thought, as if he were weary, or dissatisfied with something; but I did not pursue the question in my mind, for dinner was just then announced, and we went down and took the same seats as before.

We had scarcely done so, when Uriah Heep put in his red head and his

lank hand at the door, and said:

'Here's Mr. Maldon begs the favour of a word, sir.'

'I am but this moment quit of Mr. Maldon,' said his master.

'Yes, sir,' returned Uriah; 'but Mr. Maldon has come back, and he begs the favour of a word.'

As he held the door open with his hand, Uriah looked at me, and looked at Agnes, and looked at the dishes, and looked at the plates, and looked at every object in the room, I thought,--yet seemed to look at nothing; he made such an appearance all the while of keeping his red eyes dutifully on his master. 'I beg your pardon. It's only to say, on reflection,' observed a voice behind Uriah, as Uriah's head was pushed away, and the speaker's substituted--'pray excuse me for this intrusion--that as it seems I have no choice in the matter, the sooner I go abroad the better. My cousin Annie did say, when we talked of it, that she liked to have her friends within reach rather than to have them banished, and the old Doctor--'

'Doctor Strong, was that?' Mr. Wickfield interposed, gravely.

'Doctor Strong, of course,' returned the other; 'I call him the old Doctor; it's all the same, you know.'

'I don't know,' returned Mr. Wickfield.

'Well, Doctor Strong,' said the other--'Doctor Strong was of the same mind, I believed. But as it appears from the course you take with me he has changed his mind, why there's no more to be said, except that the sooner I am off, the better. Therefore, I thought I'd come back and say, that the sooner I am off the better. When a plunge is to be made into

the water, it's of no use lingering on the bank.'

'There shall be as little lingering as possible, in your case, Mr. Maldon, you may depend upon it,' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Thank'ee,' said the other. 'Much obliged. I don't want to look a gift-horse in the mouth, which is not a gracious thing to do; otherwise, I dare say, my cousin Annie could easily arrange it in her own way. I suppose Annie would only have to say to the old Doctor--'

'Meaning that Mrs. Strong would only have to say to her husband--do I follow you?' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Quite so,' returned the other, '--would only have to say, that she wanted such and such a thing to be so and so; and it would be so and so, as a matter of course.'

'And why as a matter of course, Mr. Maldon?' asked Mr. Wickfield, sedately eating his dinner.

'Why, because Annie's a charming young girl, and the old Doctor--Doctor Strong, I mean--is not quite a charming young boy,' said Mr. Jack Maldon, laughing. 'No offence to anybody, Mr. Wickfield. I only mean that I suppose some compensation is fair and reasonable in that sort of marriage.'

'Compensation to the lady, sir?' asked Mr. Wickfield gravely.

'To the lady, sir,' Mr. Jack Maldon answered, laughing. But appearing to remark that Mr. Wickfield went on with his dinner in the same sedate, immovable manner, and that there was no hope of making him relax a muscle of his face, he added: 'However, I have said what I came to say, and, with another apology for this intrusion, I may take myself off. Of

course I shall observe your directions, in considering the matter as one to be arranged between you and me solely, and not to be referred to, up at the Doctor's.'

'Have you dined?' asked Mr. Wickfield, with a motion of his hand towards the table.

'Thank'ee. I am going to dine,' said Mr. Maldon, 'with my cousin Annie. Good-bye!'

Mr. Wickfield, without rising, looked after him thoughtfully as he went out. He was rather a shallow sort of young gentleman, I thought, with a handsome face, a rapid utterance, and a confident, bold air. And this was the first I ever saw of Mr. Jack Maldon; whom I had not expected to see so soon, when I heard the Doctor speak of him that morning.

When we had dined, we went upstairs again, where everything went on exactly as on the previous day. Agnes set the glasses and decanters in the same corner, and Mr. Wickfield sat down to drink, and drank a good deal. Agnes played the piano to him, sat by him, and worked and talked, and played some games at dominoes with me. In good time she made tea; and afterwards, when I brought down my books, looked into them, and showed me what she knew of them (which was no slight matter, though she said it was), and what was the best way to learn and understand them. I see her, with her modest, orderly, placid manner, and I hear her beautiful calm voice, as I write these words. The influence for all good, which she came to exercise over me at a later time, begins already to descend upon my breast. I love little Em'ly, and I don't love Agnes--no, not at all in that way--but I feel that there are goodness, peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the coloured window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on everything around.

The time having come for her withdrawal for the night, and she having left us, I gave Mr. Wickfield my hand, preparatory to going away myself. But he checked me and said: 'Should you like to stay with us, Trotwood, or to go elsewhere?'

'To stay,' I answered, quickly.

'You are sure?'

'If you please. If I may!'

'Why, it's but a dull life that we lead here, boy, I am afraid,' he said.

'Not more dull for me than Agnes, sir. Not dull at all!'

'Than Agnes,' he repeated, walking slowly to the great chimney-piece, and leaning against it. 'Than Agnes!'

He had drank wine that evening (or I fancied it), until his eyes were bloodshot. Not that I could see them now, for they were cast down, and shaded by his hand; but I had noticed them a little while before.

'Now I wonder,' he muttered, 'whether my Agnes tires of me. When should I ever tire of her! But that's different, that's quite different.'

He was musing, not speaking to me; so I remained quiet.

'A dull old house,' he said, 'and a monotonous life; but I must have her near me. I must keep her near me. If the thought that I may die and leave my darling, or that my darling may die and leave me, comes like a spectre, to distress my happiest hours, and is only to be drowned in--'

He did not supply the word; but pacing slowly to the place where he had sat, and mechanically going through the action of pouring wine from the empty decanter, set it down and paced back again.

'If it is miserable to bear, when she is here,' he said, 'what would it be, and she away? No, no, no. I cannot try that.'

He leaned against the chimney-piece, brooding so long that I could not decide whether to run the risk of disturbing him by going, or to remain quietly where I was, until he should come out of his reverie. At length he aroused himself, and looked about the room until his eyes encountered mine.

'Stay with us, Trotwood, eh?' he said in his usual manner, and as if he were answering something I had just said. 'I am glad of it. You are company to us both. It is wholesome to have you here. Wholesome for me, wholesome for Agnes, wholesome perhaps for all of us.'

'I am sure it is for me, sir,' I said. 'I am so glad to be here.'

'That's a fine fellow!' said Mr. Wickfield. 'As long as you are glad to be here, you shall stay here.' He shook hands with me upon it, and clapped me on the back; and told me that when I had anything to do at night after Agnes had left us, or when I wished to read for my own pleasure, I was free to come down to his room, if he were there and if I desired it for company's sake, and to sit with him. I thanked him for his consideration; and, as he went down soon afterwards, and I was not tired, went down too, with a book in my hand, to avail myself, for half-an-hour, of his permission.

But, seeing a light in the little round office, and immediately feeling myself attracted towards Uriah Heep, who had a sort of fascination for me, I went in there instead. I found Uriah reading a great fat book,



with such demonstrative attention, that his lank forefinger followed up every line as he read, and made clammy tracks along the page (or so I fully believed) like a snail.

'You are working late tonight, Uriah,' says I.

'Yes, Master Copperfield,' says Uriah.

As I was getting on the stool opposite, to talk to him more conveniently, I observed that he had not such a thing as a smile about him, and that he could only widen his mouth and make two hard creases down his cheeks, one on each side, to stand for one.

'I am not doing office-work, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah.

'What work, then?' I asked.

'I am improving my legal knowledge, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'I am going through Tidd's Practice. Oh, what a writer Mr. Tidd is, Master Copperfield!'

My stool was such a tower of observation, that as I watched him reading on again, after this rapturous exclamation, and following up the lines with his forefinger, I observed that his nostrils, which were thin and pointed, with sharp dints in them, had a singular and most uncomfortable way of expanding and contracting themselves--that they seemed to twinkle instead of his eyes, which hardly ever twinkled at all.

'I suppose you are quite a great lawyer?' I said, after looking at him for some time.

'Me, Master Copperfield?' said Uriah. 'Oh, no! I'm a very umble person.'

It was no fancy of mine about his hands, I observed; for he frequently ground the palms against each other as if to squeeze them dry and warm, besides often wiping them, in a stealthy way, on his pocket-handkerchief.

'I am well aware that I am the umblest person going,' said Uriah Heep, modestly; 'let the other be where he may. My mother is likewise a very umble person. We live in a numble abode, Master Copperfield, but have much to be thankful for. My father's former calling was umble. He was a sexton.'

'What is he now?' I asked.

'He is a partaker of glory at present, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah Heep. 'But we have much to be thankful for. How much have I to be thankful for in living with Mr. Wickfield!'

I asked Uriah if he had been with Mr. Wickfield long?

'I have been with him, going on four year, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah; shutting up his book, after carefully marking the place where he had left off. 'Since a year after my father's death. How much have I to be thankful for, in that! How much have I to be thankful for, in Mr. Wickfield's kind intention to give me my articles, which would otherwise not lay within the umble means of mother and self!'

'Then, when your articted time is over, you'll be a regular lawyer, I suppose?' said I.

'With the blessing of Providence, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah.

'Perhaps you'll be a partner in Mr. Wickfield's business, one of these days,' I said, to make myself agreeable; 'and it will be Wickfield and

Heep, or Heep late Wickfield.'

'Oh no, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, shaking his head, 'I am much too umble for that!'

He certainly did look uncommonly like the carved face on the beam outside my window, as he sat, in his humility, eyeing me sideways, with his mouth widened, and the creases in his cheeks.

'Mr. Wickfield is a most excellent man, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'If you have known him long, you know it, I am sure, much better than I can inform you.'

I replied that I was certain he was; but that I had not known him long myself, though he was a friend of my aunt's.

'Oh, indeed, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'Your aunt is a sweet lady, Master Copperfield!'

He had a way of writhing when he wanted to express enthusiasm, which was very ugly; and which diverted my attention from the compliment he had paid my relation, to the snaky twistings of his throat and body.

'A sweet lady, Master Copperfield!' said Uriah Heep. 'She has a great admiration for Miss Agnes, Master Copperfield, I believe?'

I said, 'Yes,' boldly; not that I knew anything about it, Heaven forgive me!

'I hope you have, too, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'But I am sure you must have.'

'Everybody must have,' I returned.

'Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah Heep, 'for that remark! It is so true! Umble as I am, I know it is so true! Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield!' He writhed himself quite off his stool in the excitement of his feelings, and, being off, began to make arrangements for going home.

'Mother will be expecting me,' he said, referring to a pale, inexpressive-faced watch in his pocket, 'and getting uneasy; for though we are very umble, Master Copperfield, we are much attached to one another. If you would come and see us, any afternoon, and take a cup of tea at our lowly dwelling, mother would be as proud of your company as I should be.'

I said I should be glad to come.

'Thank you, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, putting his book away upon the shelf--'I suppose you stop here, some time, Master Copperfield?'

I said I was going to be brought up there, I believed, as long as I remained at school.

'Oh, indeed!' exclaimed Uriah. 'I should think YOU would come into the business at last, Master Copperfield!'

I protested that I had no views of that sort, and that no such scheme was entertained in my behalf by anybody; but Uriah insisted on blandly replying to all my assurances, 'Oh, yes, Master Copperfield, I should think you would, indeed!' and, 'Oh, indeed, Master Copperfield, I should think you would, certainly!' over and over again. Being, at last, ready to leave the office for the night, he asked me if it would suit my convenience to have the light put out; and on my answering 'Yes,'

instantly extinguished it. After shaking hands with me--his hand felt like a fish, in the dark--he opened the door into the street a very little, and crept out, and shut it, leaving me to grope my way back into the house: which cost me some trouble and a fall over his stool. This was the proximate cause, I suppose, of my dreaming about him, for what appeared to me to be half the night; and dreaming, among other things, that he had launched Mr. Peggotty's house on a piratical expedition, with a black flag at the masthead, bearing the inscription 'Tidd's Practice', under which diabolical ensign he was carrying me and little Em'ly to the Spanish Main, to be drowned.

I got a little the better of my uneasiness when I went to school next day, and a good deal the better next day, and so shook it off by degrees, that in less than a fortnight I was quite at home, and happy, among my new companions. I was awkward enough in their games, and backward enough in their studies; but custom would improve me in the first respect, I hoped, and hard work in the second. Accordingly, I went to work very hard, both in play and in earnest, and gained great commendation. And, in a very little while, the Murdstone and Grinby life became so strange to me that I hardly believed in it, while my present life grew so familiar, that I seemed to have been leading it a long time.

Doctor Strong's was an excellent school; as different from Mr. Creakle's as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered, and on a sound system; with an appeal, in everything, to the honour and good faith of the boys, and an avowed intention to rely on their possession of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which worked wonders. We all felt that we had a part in the management of the place, and in sustaining its character and dignity. Hence, we soon became warmly attached to it--I am sure I did for one, and I never knew, in all my time, of any other boy being otherwise--and learnt with a good will, desiring to do it credit. We had noble games out of hours, and

plenty of liberty; but even then, as I remember, we were well spoken of in the town, and rarely did any disgrace, by our appearance or manner, to the reputation of Doctor Strong and Doctor Strong's boys.

Some of the higher scholars boarded in the Doctor's house, and through them I learned, at second hand, some particulars of the Doctor's history--as, how he had not yet been married twelve months to the beautiful young lady I had seen in the study, whom he had married for love; for she had not a sixpence, and had a world of poor relations (so our fellows said) ready to swarm the Doctor out of house and home. Also, how the Doctor's cogitating manner was attributable to his being always engaged in looking out for Greek roots; which, in my innocence and ignorance, I supposed to be a botanical furor on the Doctor's part, especially as he always looked at the ground when he walked about, until I understood that they were roots of words, with a view to a new Dictionary which he had in contemplation. Adams, our head-boy, who had a turn for mathematics, had made a calculation, I was informed, of the time this Dictionary would take in completing, on the Doctor's plan, and at the Doctor's rate of going. He considered that it might be done in one thousand six hundred and forty-nine years, counting from the Doctor's last, or sixty-second, birthday.

But the Doctor himself was the idol of the whole school: and it must have been a badly composed school if he had been anything else, for he was the kindest of men; with a simple faith in him that might have touched the stone hearts of the very urns upon the wall. As he walked up and down that part of the courtyard which was at the side of the house, with the stray rooks and jackdaws looking after him with their heads cocked slyly, as if they knew how much more knowing they were in worldly affairs than he, if any sort of vagabond could only get near enough to his creaking shoes to attract his attention to one sentence of a tale of distress, that vagabond was made for the next two days. It was so notorious in the house, that the masters and head-boys took pains to cut

these marauders off at angles, and to get out of windows, and turn them out of the courtyard, before they could make the Doctor aware of their presence; which was sometimes happily effected within a few yards of him, without his knowing anything of the matter, as he jogged to and fro. Outside his own domain, and unprotected, he was a very sheep for the shearers. He would have taken his gaiters off his legs, to give away. In fact, there was a story current among us (I have no idea, and never had, on what authority, but I have believed it for so many years that I feel quite certain it is true), that on a frosty day, one winter-time, he actually did bestow his gaiters on a beggar-woman, who occasioned some scandal in the neighbourhood by exhibiting a fine infant from door to door, wrapped in those garments, which were universally recognized, being as well known in the vicinity as the Cathedral. The legend added that the only person who did not identify them was the Doctor himself, who, when they were shortly afterwards displayed at the door of a little second-hand shop of no very good repute, where such things were taken in exchange for gin, was more than once observed to handle them approvingly, as if admiring some curious novelty in the pattern, and considering them an improvement on his own.

It was very pleasant to see the Doctor with his pretty young wife. He had a fatherly, benignant way of showing his fondness for her, which seemed in itself to express a good man. I often saw them walking in the garden where the peaches were, and I sometimes had a nearer observation of them in the study or the parlour. She appeared to me to take great care of the Doctor, and to like him very much, though I never thought her vitally interested in the Dictionary: some cumbrous fragments of which work the Doctor always carried in his pockets, and in the lining of his hat, and generally seemed to be expounding to her as they walked about.

I saw a good deal of Mrs. Strong, both because she had taken a liking for me on the morning of my introduction to the Doctor, and was always

afterwards kind to me, and interested in me; and because she was very fond of Agnes, and was often backwards and forwards at our house. There was a curious constraint between her and Mr. Wickfield, I thought (of whom she seemed to be afraid), that never wore off. When she came there of an evening, she always shrunk from accepting his escort home, and ran away with me instead. And sometimes, as we were running gaily across the Cathedral yard together, expecting to meet nobody, we would meet Mr. Jack Maldon, who was always surprised to see us.

Mrs. Strong's mama was a lady I took great delight in. Her name was Mrs. Markleham; but our boys used to call her the Old Soldier, on account of her generalship, and the skill with which she marshalled great forces of relations against the Doctor. She was a little, sharp-eyed woman, who used to wear, when she was dressed, one unchangeable cap, ornamented with some artificial flowers, and two artificial butterflies supposed to be hovering above the flowers. There was a superstition among us that this cap had come from France, and could only originate in the workmanship of that ingenious nation: but all I certainly know about it, is, that it always made its appearance of an evening, wheresoever Mrs. Markleham made HER appearance; that it was carried about to friendly meetings in a Hindoo basket; that the butterflies had the gift of trembling constantly; and that they improved the shining hours at Doctor Strong's expense, like busy bees.

I observed the Old Soldier--not to adopt the name disrespectfully--to pretty good advantage, on a night which is made memorable to me by something else I shall relate. It was the night of a little party at the Doctor's, which was given on the occasion of Mr. Jack Maldon's departure for India, whither he was going as a cadet, or something of that kind: Mr. Wickfield having at length arranged the business. It happened to be the Doctor's birthday, too. We had had a holiday, had made presents to him in the morning, had made a speech to him through the head-boy, and had cheered him until we were hoarse, and until he had shed tears. And



now, in the evening, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and I, went to have tea with him in his private capacity.

Mr. Jack Maldon was there, before us. Mrs. Strong, dressed in white, with cherry-coloured ribbons, was playing the piano, when we went in; and he was leaning over her to turn the leaves. The clear red and white of her complexion was not so blooming and flower-like as usual, I thought, when she turned round; but she looked very pretty, Wonderfully pretty.

'I have forgotten, Doctor,' said Mrs. Strong's mama, when we were seated, 'to pay you the compliments of the day--though they are, as you may suppose, very far from being mere compliments in my case. Allow me to wish you many happy returns.'

'I thank you, ma'am,' replied the Doctor.

'Many, many, many, happy returns,' said the Old Soldier. 'Not only for your own sake, but for Annie's, and John Maldon's, and many other people's. It seems but yesterday to me, John, when you were a little creature, a head shorter than Master Copperfield, making baby love to Annie behind the gooseberry bushes in the back-garden.'

'My dear mama,' said Mrs. Strong, 'never mind that now.'

'Annie, don't be absurd,' returned her mother. 'If you are to blush to hear of such things now you are an old married woman, when are you not to blush to hear of them?'

'Old?' exclaimed Mr. Jack Maldon. 'Annie? Come!'

'Yes, John,' returned the Soldier. 'Virtually, an old married woman. Although not old by years--for when did you ever hear me say, or who has

ever heard me say, that a girl of twenty was old by years!--your cousin is the wife of the Doctor, and, as such, what I have described her. It is well for you, John, that your cousin is the wife of the Doctor. You have found in him an influential and kind friend, who will be kinder yet, I venture to predict, if you deserve it. I have no false pride. I never hesitate to admit, frankly, that there are some members of our family who want a friend. You were one yourself, before your cousin's influence raised up one for you.'

The Doctor, in the goodness of his heart, waved his hand as if to make light of it, and save Mr. Jack Maldon from any further reminder. But Mrs. Markleham changed her chair for one next the Doctor's, and putting her fan on his coat-sleeve, said:

'No, really, my dear Doctor, you must excuse me if I appear to dwell on this rather, because I feel so very strongly. I call it quite my monomania, it is such a subject of mine. You are a blessing to us. You really are a Boon, you know.'

'Nonsense, nonsense,' said the Doctor.

'No, no, I beg your pardon,' retorted the Old Soldier. 'With nobody present, but our dear and confidential friend Mr. Wickfield, I cannot consent to be put down. I shall begin to assert the privileges of a mother-in-law, if you go on like that, and scold you. I am perfectly honest and outspoken. What I am saying, is what I said when you first overpowered me with surprise--you remember how surprised I was?--by proposing for Annie. Not that there was anything so very much out of the way, in the mere fact of the proposal--it would be ridiculous to say that!--but because, you having known her poor father, and having known her from a baby six months old, I hadn't thought of you in such a light at all, or indeed as a marrying man in any way,--simply that, you know.'

'Aye, aye,' returned the Doctor, good-humouredly. 'Never mind.'

'But I DO mind,' said the Old Soldier, laying her fan upon his lips. 'I mind very much. I recall these things that I may be contradicted if I am wrong. Well! Then I spoke to Annie, and I told her what had happened. I said, "My dear, here's Doctor Strong has positively been and made you the subject of a handsome declaration and an offer." Did I press it in the least? No. I said, "Now, Annie, tell me the truth this moment; is your heart free?" "Mama," she said crying, "I am extremely young"--which was perfectly true--"and I hardly know if I have a heart at all." "Then, my dear," I said, "you may rely upon it, it's free. At all events, my love," said I, "Doctor Strong is in an agitated state of mind, and must be answered. He cannot be kept in his present state of suspense." "Mama," said Annie, still crying, "would he be unhappy without me? If he would, I honour and respect him so much, that I think I will have him." So it was settled. And then, and not till then, I said to Annie, "Annie, Doctor Strong will not only be your husband, but he will represent your late father: he will represent the head of our family, he will represent the wisdom and station, and I may say the means, of our family; and will be, in short, a Boon to it." I used the word at the time, and I have used it again, today. If I have any merit it is consistency.'

The daughter had sat quite silent and still during this speech, with her eyes fixed on the ground; her cousin standing near her, and looking on the ground too. She now said very softly, in a trembling voice:

'Mama, I hope you have finished?' 'No, my dear Annie,' returned the Old Soldier, 'I have not quite finished. Since you ask me, my love, I reply that I have not. I complain that you really are a little unnatural towards your own family; and, as it is of no use complaining to you. I mean to complain to your husband. Now, my dear Doctor, do look at that silly wife of yours.'

As the Doctor turned his kind face, with its smile of simplicity and gentleness, towards her, she drooped her head more. I noticed that Mr. Wickfield looked at her steadily.

'When I happened to say to that naughty thing, the other day,' pursued her mother, shaking her head and her fan at her, playfully, 'that there was a family circumstance she might mention to you--indeed, I think, was bound to mention--she said, that to mention it was to ask a favour; and that, as you were too generous, and as for her to ask was always to have, she wouldn't.'

'Annie, my dear,' said the Doctor. 'That was wrong. It robbed me of a pleasure.'

'Almost the very words I said to her!' exclaimed her mother. 'Now really, another time, when I know what she would tell you but for this reason, and won't, I have a great mind, my dear Doctor, to tell you myself.'

'I shall be glad if you will,' returned the Doctor.

'Shall I?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, then, I will!' said the Old Soldier. 'That's a bargain.' And having, I suppose, carried her point, she tapped the Doctor's hand several times with her fan (which she kissed first), and returned triumphantly to her former station.

Some more company coming in, among whom were the two masters and Adams, the talk became general; and it naturally turned on Mr. Jack Maldon, and his voyage, and the country he was going to, and his various plans and

prospects. He was to leave that night, after supper, in a post-chaise, for Gravesend; where the ship, in which he was to make the voyage, lay; and was to be gone--unless he came home on leave, or for his health--I don't know how many years. I recollect it was settled by general consent that India was quite a misrepresented country, and had nothing objectionable in it, but a tiger or two, and a little heat in the warm part of the day. For my own part, I looked on Mr. Jack Maldon as a modern Sindbad, and pictured him the bosom friend of all the Rajahs in the East, sitting under canopies, smoking curly golden pipes--a mile long, if they could be straightened out.

Mrs. Strong was a very pretty singer: as I knew, who often heard her singing by herself. But, whether she was afraid of singing before people, or was out of voice that evening, it was certain that she couldn't sing at all. She tried a duet, once, with her cousin Maldon, but could not so much as begin; and afterwards, when she tried to sing by herself, although she began sweetly, her voice died away on a sudden, and left her quite distressed, with her head hanging down over the keys. The good Doctor said she was nervous, and, to relieve her, proposed a round game at cards; of which he knew as much as of the art of playing the trombone. But I remarked that the Old Soldier took him into custody directly, for her partner; and instructed him, as the first preliminary of initiation, to give her all the silver he had in his pocket.

We had a merry game, not made the less merry by the Doctor's mistakes, of which he committed an innumerable quantity, in spite of the watchfulness of the butterflies, and to their great aggravation. Mrs. Strong had declined to play, on the ground of not feeling very well; and her cousin Maldon had excused himself because he had some packing to do. When he had done it, however, he returned, and they sat together, talking, on the sofa. From time to time she came and looked over the Doctor's hand, and told him what to play. She was very pale, as she bent over him, and I thought her finger trembled as she pointed out

the cards; but the Doctor was quite happy in her attention, and took no notice of this, if it were so.

At supper, we were hardly so gay. Everyone appeared to feel that a parting of that sort was an awkward thing, and that the nearer it approached, the more awkward it was. Mr. Jack Maldon tried to be very talkative, but was not at his ease, and made matters worse. And they were not improved, as it appeared to me, by the Old Soldier: who continually recalled passages of Mr. Jack Maldon's youth.

The Doctor, however, who felt, I am sure, that he was making everybody happy, was well pleased, and had no suspicion but that we were all at the utmost height of enjoyment.

'Annie, my dear,' said he, looking at his watch, and filling his glass, 'it is past your cousin Jack's time, and we must not detain him, since time and tide--both concerned in this case--wait for no man. Mr. Jack Maldon, you have a long voyage, and a strange country, before you; but many men have had both, and many men will have both, to the end of time. The winds you are going to tempt, have wafted thousands upon thousands to fortune, and brought thousands upon thousands happily back.'

'It's an affecting thing,' said Mrs. Markleham--'however it's viewed, it's affecting, to see a fine young man one has known from an infant, going away to the other end of the world, leaving all he knows behind, and not knowing what's before him. A young man really well deserves constant support and patronage,' looking at the Doctor, 'who makes such sacrifices.'

'Time will go fast with you, Mr. Jack Maldon,' pursued the Doctor, 'and fast with all of us. Some of us can hardly expect, perhaps, in the natural course of things, to greet you on your return. The next best thing is to hope to do it, and that's my case. I shall not weary you

with good advice. You have long had a good model before you, in your cousin Annie. Imitate her virtues as nearly as you can.'

Mrs. Markleham fanned herself, and shook her head.

'Farewell, Mr. Jack,' said the Doctor, standing up; on which we all stood up. 'A prosperous voyage out, a thriving career abroad, and a happy return home!'

We all drank the toast, and all shook hands with Mr. Jack Maldon; after which he hastily took leave of the ladies who were there, and hurried to the door, where he was received, as he got into the chaise, with a tremendous broadside of cheers discharged by our boys, who had assembled on the lawn for the purpose. Running in among them to swell the ranks, I was very near the chaise when it rolled away; and I had a lively impression made upon me, in the midst of the noise and dust, of having seen Mr. Jack Maldon rattle past with an agitated face, and something cherry-coloured in his hand.

After another broadside for the Doctor, and another for the Doctor's wife, the boys dispersed, and I went back into the house, where I found the guests all standing in a group about the Doctor, discussing how Mr. Jack Maldon had gone away, and how he had borne it, and how he had felt it, and all the rest of it. In the midst of these remarks, Mrs. Markleham cried: 'Where's Annie?'

No Annie was there; and when they called to her, no Annie replied. But all pressing out of the room, in a crowd, to see what was the matter, we found her lying on the hall floor. There was great alarm at first, until it was found that she was in a swoon, and that the swoon was yielding to the usual means of recovery; when the Doctor, who had lifted her head upon his knee, put her curls aside with his hand, and said, looking around:

'Poor Annie! She's so faithful and tender-hearted! It's the parting from her old playfellow and friend--her favourite cousin--that has done this. Ah! It's a pity! I am very sorry!'

When she opened her eyes, and saw where she was, and that we were all standing about her, she arose with assistance: turning her head, as she did so, to lay it on the Doctor's shoulder--or to hide it, I don't know which. We went into the drawing-room, to leave her with the Doctor and her mother; but she said, it seemed, that she was better than she had been since morning, and that she would rather be brought among us; so they brought her in, looking very white and weak, I thought, and sat her on a sofa.

'Annie, my dear,' said her mother, doing something to her dress. 'See here! You have lost a bow. Will anybody be so good as find a ribbon; a cherry-coloured ribbon?'

It was the one she had worn at her bosom. We all looked for it; I myself looked everywhere, I am certain--but nobody could find it.

'Do you recollect where you had it last, Annie?' said her mother.

I wondered how I could have thought she looked white, or anything but burning red, when she answered that she had had it safe, a little while ago, she thought, but it was not worth looking for.

Nevertheless, it was looked for again, and still not found. She entreated that there might be no more searching; but it was still sought for, in a desultory way, until she was quite well, and the company took their departure.

We walked very slowly home, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and I--Agnes and I



admiring the moonlight, and Mr. Wickfield scarcely raising his eyes from the ground. When we, at last, reached our own door, Agnes discovered that she had left her little reticule behind. Delighted to be of any service to her, I ran back to fetch it.

I went into the supper-room where it had been left, which was deserted and dark. But a door of communication between that and the Doctor's study, where there was a light, being open, I passed on there, to say what I wanted, and to get a candle.

The Doctor was sitting in his easy-chair by the fireside, and his young wife was on a stool at his feet. The Doctor, with a complacent smile, was reading aloud some manuscript explanation or statement of a theory out of that interminable Dictionary, and she was looking up at him. But with such a face as I never saw. It was so beautiful in its form, it was so ashy pale, it was so fixed in its abstraction, it was so full of a wild, sleep-walking, dreamy horror of I don't know what. The eyes were wide open, and her brown hair fell in two rich clusters on her shoulders, and on her white dress, disordered by the want of the lost ribbon. Distinctly as I recollect her look, I cannot say of what it was expressive, I cannot even say of what it is expressive to me now, rising again before my older judgement. Penitence, humiliation, shame, pride, love, and trustfulness--I see them all; and in them all, I see that horror of I don't know what.

My entrance, and my saying what I wanted, roused her. It disturbed the Doctor too, for when I went back to replace the candle I had taken from the table, he was patting her head, in his fatherly way, and saying he was a merciless drone to let her tempt him into reading on; and he would have her go to bed.

But she asked him, in a rapid, urgent manner, to let her stay--to let her feel assured (I heard her murmur some broken words to this effect)

that she was in his confidence that night. And, as she turned again towards him, after glancing at me as I left the room and went out at the door, I saw her cross her hands upon his knee, and look up at him with the same face, something quieted, as he resumed his reading.

It made a great impression on me, and I remembered it a long time afterwards; as I shall have occasion to narrate when the time comes.

#### CHAPTER 17. SOMEBODY TURNS UP

It has not occurred to me to mention Peggotty since I ran away; but, of course, I wrote her a letter almost as soon as I was housed at Dover, and another, and a longer letter, containing all particulars fully related, when my aunt took me formally under her protection. On my being settled at Doctor Strong's I wrote to her again, detailing my happy condition and prospects. I never could have derived anything like the pleasure from spending the money Mr. Dick had given me, that I felt in sending a gold half-guinea to Peggotty, per post, enclosed in this last letter, to discharge the sum I had borrowed of her: in which epistle, not before, I mentioned about the young man with the donkey-cart.

To these communications Peggotty replied as promptly, if not as concisely, as a merchant's clerk. Her utmost powers of expression (which were certainly not great in ink) were exhausted in the attempt to write what she felt on the subject of my journey. Four sides of incoherent and interjectional beginnings of sentences, that had no end, except blots, were inadequate to afford her any relief. But the blots were more expressive to me than the best composition; for they showed me that Peggotty had been crying all over the paper, and what could I have desired more?

I made out, without much difficulty, that she could not take quite kindly to my aunt yet. The notice was too short after so long a prepossession the other way. We never knew a person, she wrote; but to think that Miss Betsey should seem to be so different from what she had been thought to be, was a Moral!--that was her word. She was evidently still afraid of Miss Betsey, for she sent her grateful duty to her but timidly; and she was evidently afraid of me, too, and entertained the probability of my running away again soon: if I might judge from the repeated hints she threw out, that the coach-fare to Yarmouth was always to be had of her for the asking.

She gave me one piece of intelligence which affected me very much, namely, that there had been a sale of the furniture at our old home, and that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were gone away, and the house was shut up, to be let or sold. God knows I had no part in it while they remained there, but it pained me to think of the dear old place as altogether abandoned; of the weeds growing tall in the garden, and the fallen leaves lying thick and wet upon the paths. I imagined how the winds of winter would howl round it, how the cold rain would beat upon the window-glass, how the moon would make ghosts on the walls of the empty rooms, watching their solitude all night. I thought afresh of the grave in the churchyard, underneath the tree: and it seemed as if the house were dead too, now, and all connected with my father and mother were faded away.

There was no other news in Peggotty's letters. Mr. Barkis was an excellent husband, she said, though still a little near; but we all had our faults, and she had plenty (though I am sure I don't know what they were); and he sent his duty, and my little bedroom was always ready for me. Mr. Peggotty was well, and Ham was well, and Mrs.. Gummidge was but poorly, and little Em'ly wouldn't send her love, but said that Peggotty might send it, if she liked.

All this intelligence I dutifully imparted to my aunt, only reserving to myself the mention of little Em'ly, to whom I instinctively felt that she would not very tenderly incline. While I was yet new at Doctor Strong's, she made several excursions over to Canterbury to see me, and always at unseasonable hours: with the view, I suppose, of taking me by surprise. But, finding me well employed, and bearing a good character, and hearing on all hands that I rose fast in the school, she soon discontinued these visits. I saw her on a Saturday, every third or fourth week, when I went over to Dover for a treat; and I saw Mr. Dick every alternate Wednesday, when he arrived by stage-coach at noon, to stay until next morning.

On these occasions Mr. Dick never travelled without a leathern writing-desk, containing a supply of stationery and the Memorial; in relation to which document he had a notion that time was beginning to press now, and that it really must be got out of hand.

Mr. Dick was very partial to gingerbread. To render his visits the more agreeable, my aunt had instructed me to open a credit for him at a cake shop, which was hampered with the stipulation that he should not be served with more than one shilling's-worth in the course of any one day. This, and the reference of all his little bills at the county inn where he slept, to my aunt, before they were paid, induced me to suspect that he was only allowed to rattle his money, and not to spend it. I found on further investigation that this was so, or at least there was an agreement between him and my aunt that he should account to her for all his disbursements. As he had no idea of deceiving her, and always desired to please her, he was thus made chary of launching into expense. On this point, as well as on all other possible points, Mr. Dick was convinced that my aunt was the wisest and most wonderful of women; as he repeatedly told me with infinite secrecy, and always in a whisper.

'Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, with an air of mystery, after imparting this confidence to me, one Wednesday; 'who's the man that hides near our house and frightens her?'

'Frightens my aunt, sir?'

Mr. Dick nodded. 'I thought nothing would have frightened her,' he said, 'for she's--' here he whispered softly, 'don't mention it--the wisest and most wonderful of women.' Having said which, he drew back, to observe the effect which this description of her made upon me.

'The first time he came,' said Mr. Dick, 'was--let me see--sixteen hundred and forty-nine was the date of King Charles's execution. I think you said sixteen hundred and forty-nine?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I don't know how it can be,' said Mr. Dick, sorely puzzled and shaking his head. 'I don't think I am as old as that.'

'Was it in that year that the man appeared, sir?' I asked.

'Why, really' said Mr. Dick, 'I don't see how it can have been in that year, Trotwood. Did you get that date out of history?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I suppose history never lies, does it?' said Mr. Dick, with a gleam of hope.

'Oh dear, no, sir!' I replied, most decisively. I was ingenuous and young, and I thought so.

'I can't make it out,' said Mr. Dick, shaking his head. 'There's something wrong, somewhere. However, it was very soon after the mistake was made of putting some of the trouble out of King Charles's head into my head, that the man first came. I was walking out with Miss Trotwood after tea, just at dark, and there he was, close to our house.'

'Walking about?' I inquired.

'Walking about?' repeated Mr. Dick. 'Let me see, I must recollect a bit. N-no, no; he was not walking about.'

I asked, as the shortest way to get at it, what he WAS doing.

'Well, he wasn't there at all,' said Mr. Dick, 'until he came up behind her, and whispered. Then she turned round and fainted, and I stood still and looked at him, and he walked away; but that he should have been hiding ever since (in the ground or somewhere), is the most extraordinary thing!'

'HAS he been hiding ever since?' I asked.

'To be sure he has,' retorted Mr. Dick, nodding his head gravely. 'Never came out, till last night! We were walking last night, and he came up behind her again, and I knew him again.'

'And did he frighten my aunt again?'

'All of a shiver,' said Mr. Dick, counterfeiting that affection and making his teeth chatter. 'Held by the palings. Cried. But, Trotwood, come here,' getting me close to him, that he might whisper very softly; 'why did she give him money, boy, in the moonlight?'

'He was a beggar, perhaps.'

Mr. Dick shook his head, as utterly renouncing the suggestion; and having replied a great many times, and with great confidence, 'No beggar, no beggar, no beggar, sir!' went on to say, that from his window he had afterwards, and late at night, seen my aunt give this person money outside the garden rails in the moonlight, who then slunk away--into the ground again, as he thought probable--and was seen no more: while my aunt came hurriedly and secretly back into the house, and had, even that morning, been quite different from her usual self; which preyed on Mr. Dick's mind.

I had not the least belief, in the outset of this story, that the unknown was anything but a delusion of Mr. Dick's, and one of the line of that ill-fated Prince who occasioned him so much difficulty; but after some reflection I began to entertain the question whether an attempt, or threat of an attempt, might have been twice made to take poor Mr. Dick himself from under my aunt's protection, and whether my aunt, the strength of whose kind feeling towards him I knew from herself, might have been induced to pay a price for his peace and quiet. As I was already much attached to Mr. Dick, and very solicitous for his welfare, my fears favoured this supposition; and for a long time his Wednesday hardly ever came round, without my entertaining a misgiving that he would not be on the coach-box as usual. There he always appeared, however, grey-headed, laughing, and happy; and he never had anything more to tell of the man who could frighten my aunt.

These Wednesdays were the happiest days of Mr. Dick's life; they were far from being the least happy of mine. He soon became known to every boy in the school; and though he never took an active part in any game but kite-flying, was as deeply interested in all our sports as anyone among us. How often have I seen him, intent upon a match at marbles or pegtop, looking on with a face of unutterable interest, and hardly breathing at the critical times! How often, at hare and hounds, have

I seen him mounted on a little knoll, cheering the whole field on to action, and waving his hat above his grey head, oblivious of King Charles the Martyr's head, and all belonging to it! How many a summer hour have I known to be but blissful minutes to him in the cricket-field! How many winter days have I seen him, standing blue-nosed, in the snow and east wind, looking at the boys going down the long slide, and clapping his worsted gloves in rapture!

He was an universal favourite, and his ingenuity in little things was transcendent. He could cut oranges into such devices as none of us had an idea of. He could make a boat out of anything, from a skewer upwards. He could turn cramp-bones into chessmen; fashion Roman chariots from old court cards; make spoked wheels out of cotton reels, and bird-cages of old wire. But he was greatest of all, perhaps, in the articles of string and straw; with which we were all persuaded he could do anything that could be done by hands.

Mr. Dick's renown was not long confined to us. After a few Wednesdays, Doctor Strong himself made some inquiries of me about him, and I told him all my aunt had told me; which interested the Doctor so much that he requested, on the occasion of his next visit, to be presented to him. This ceremony I performed; and the Doctor begging Mr. Dick, whensoever he should not find me at the coach office, to come on there, and rest himself until our morning's work was over, it soon passed into a custom for Mr. Dick to come on as a matter of course, and, if we were a little late, as often happened on a Wednesday, to walk about the courtyard, waiting for me. Here he made the acquaintance of the Doctor's beautiful young wife (paler than formerly, all this time; more rarely seen by me or anyone, I think; and not so gay, but not less beautiful), and so became more and more familiar by degrees, until, at last, he would come into the school and wait. He always sat in a particular corner, on a particular stool, which was called 'Dick', after him; here he would sit, with his grey head bent forward, attentively listening to whatever might



be going on, with a profound veneration for the learning he had never been able to acquire.

This veneration Mr. Dick extended to the Doctor, whom he thought the most subtle and accomplished philosopher of any age. It was long before Mr. Dick ever spoke to him otherwise than bareheaded; and even when he and the Doctor had struck up quite a friendship, and would walk together by the hour, on that side of the courtyard which was known among us as The Doctor's Walk, Mr. Dick would pull off his hat at intervals to show his respect for wisdom and knowledge. How it ever came about that the Doctor began to read out scraps of the famous Dictionary, in these walks, I never knew; perhaps he felt it all the same, at first, as reading to himself. However, it passed into a custom too; and Mr. Dick, listening with a face shining with pride and pleasure, in his heart of hearts believed the Dictionary to be the most delightful book in the world.

As I think of them going up and down before those schoolroom windows--the Doctor reading with his complacent smile, an occasional flourish of the manuscript, or grave motion of his head; and Mr. Dick listening, enchained by interest, with his poor wits calmly wandering God knows where, upon the wings of hard words--I think of it as one of the pleasantest things, in a quiet way, that I have ever seen. I feel as if they might go walking to and fro for ever, and the world might somehow be the better for it--as if a thousand things it makes a noise about, were not one half so good for it, or me.

Agnes was one of Mr. Dick's friends, very soon; and in often coming to the house, he made acquaintance with Uriah. The friendship between himself and me increased continually, and it was maintained on this odd footing: that, while Mr. Dick came professedly to look after me as my guardian, he always consulted me in any little matter of doubt that arose, and invariably guided himself by my advice; not only having a

high respect for my native sagacity, but considering that I inherited a good deal from my aunt.

One Thursday morning, when I was about to walk with Mr. Dick from the hotel to the coach office before going back to school (for we had an hour's school before breakfast), I met Uriah in the street, who reminded me of the promise I had made to take tea with himself and his mother: adding, with a writhe, 'But I didn't expect you to keep it, Master Copperfield, we're so very umble.'

I really had not yet been able to make up my mind whether I liked Uriah or detested him; and I was very doubtful about it still, as I stood looking him in the face in the street. But I felt it quite an affront to be supposed proud, and said I only wanted to be asked.

'Oh, if that's all, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'and it really isn't our umbleness that prevents you, will you come this evening? But if it is our umbleness, I hope you won't mind owing to it, Master Copperfield; for we are well aware of our condition.'

I said I would mention it to Mr. Wickfield, and if he approved, as I had no doubt he would, I would come with pleasure. So, at six o'clock that evening, which was one of the early office evenings, I announced myself as ready, to Uriah.

'Mother will be proud, indeed,' he said, as we walked away together. 'Or she would be proud, if it wasn't sinful, Master Copperfield.'

'Yet you didn't mind supposing I was proud this morning,' I returned.

'Oh dear, no, Master Copperfield!' returned Uriah. 'Oh, believe me, no! Such a thought never came into my head! I shouldn't have deemed it at all proud if you had thought US too umble for you. Because we are so

very umble.'

'Have you been studying much law lately?' I asked, to change the subject.

'Oh, Master Copperfield,' he said, with an air of self-denial, 'my reading is hardly to be called study. I have passed an hour or two in the evening, sometimes, with Mr. Tidd.'

'Rather hard, I suppose?' said I. 'He is hard to me sometimes,' returned Uriah. 'But I don't know what he might be to a gifted person.'

After beating a little tune on his chin as he walked on, with the two forefingers of his skeleton right hand, he added:

'There are expressions, you see, Master Copperfield--Latin words and terms--in Mr. Tidd, that are trying to a reader of my umble attainments.'

'Would you like to be taught Latin?' I said briskly. 'I will teach it you with pleasure, as I learn it.'

'Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield,' he answered, shaking his head. 'I am sure it's very kind of you to make the offer, but I am much too umble to accept it.'

'What nonsense, Uriah!'

'Oh, indeed you must excuse me, Master Copperfield! I am greatly obliged, and I should like it of all things, I assure you; but I am far too umble. There are people enough to tread upon me in my lowly state, without my doing outrage to their feelings by possessing learning. Learning ain't for me. A person like myself had better not aspire. If he

is to get on in life, he must get on umbly, Master Copperfield!'

I never saw his mouth so wide, or the creases in his cheeks so deep, as when he delivered himself of these sentiments: shaking his head all the time, and writhing modestly.

'I think you are wrong, Uriah,' I said. 'I dare say there are several things that I could teach you, if you would like to learn them.'

'Oh, I don't doubt that, Master Copperfield,' he answered; 'not in the least. But not being umble yourself, you don't judge well, perhaps, for them that are. I won't provoke my betters with knowledge, thank you. I'm much too umble. Here is my umble dwelling, Master Copperfield!'

We entered a low, old-fashioned room, walked straight into from the street, and found there Mrs. Heep, who was the dead image of Uriah, only short. She received me with the utmost humility, and apologized to me for giving her son a kiss, observing that, lowly as they were, they had their natural affections, which they hoped would give no offence to anyone. It was a perfectly decent room, half parlour and half kitchen, but not at all a snug room. The tea-things were set upon the table, and the kettle was boiling on the hob. There was a chest of drawers with an escritoire top, for Uriah to read or write at of an evening; there was Uriah's blue bag lying down and vomiting papers; there was a company of Uriah's books commanded by Mr. Tidd; there was a corner cupboard: and there were the usual articles of furniture. I don't remember that any individual object had a bare, pinched, spare look; but I do remember that the whole place had.

It was perhaps a part of Mrs. Heep's humility, that she still wore weeds. Notwithstanding the lapse of time that had occurred since Mr. Heep's decease, she still wore weeds. I think there was some compromise in the cap; but otherwise she was as weedy as in the early days of her

mourning.

'This is a day to be remembered, my Uriah, I am sure,' said Mrs. Heep, making the tea, 'when Master Copperfield pays us a visit.'

'I said you'd think so, mother,' said Uriah.

'If I could have wished father to remain among us for any reason,' said Mrs. Heep, 'it would have been, that he might have known his company this afternoon.'

I felt embarrassed by these compliments; but I was sensible, too, of being entertained as an honoured guest, and I thought Mrs. Heep an agreeable woman.

'My Uriah,' said Mrs. Heep, 'has looked forward to this, sir, a long while. He had his fears that our umbleness stood in the way, and I joined in them myself. Umble we are, umble we have been, umble we shall ever be,' said Mrs. Heep.

'I am sure you have no occasion to be so, ma'am,' I said, 'unless you like.'

'Thank you, sir,' retorted Mrs. Heep. 'We know our station and are thankful in it.'

I found that Mrs. Heep gradually got nearer to me, and that Uriah gradually got opposite to me, and that they respectfully plied me with the choicest of the eatables on the table. There was nothing particularly choice there, to be sure; but I took the will for the deed, and felt that they were very attentive. Presently they began to talk about aunts, and then I told them about mine; and about fathers and mothers, and then I told them about mine; and then Mrs. Heep began to

talk about fathers-in-law, and then I began to tell her about mine--but stopped, because my aunt had advised me to observe a silence on that subject. A tender young cork, however, would have had no more chance against a pair of corkscrews, or a tender young tooth against a pair of dentists, or a little shuttlecock against two battledores, than I had against Uriah and Mrs. Heep. They did just what they liked with me; and wormed things out of me that I had no desire to tell, with a certainty I blush to think of, the more especially, as in my juvenile frankness, I took some credit to myself for being so confidential and felt that I was quite the patron of my two respectful entertainers.

They were very fond of one another: that was certain. I take it, that had its effect upon me, as a touch of nature; but the skill with which the one followed up whatever the other said, was a touch of art which I was still less proof against. When there was nothing more to be got out of me about myself (for on the Murdstone and Grinby life, and on my journey, I was dumb), they began about Mr. Wickfield and Agnes. Uriah threw the ball to Mrs. Heep, Mrs. Heep caught it and threw it back to Uriah, Uriah kept it up a little while, then sent it back to Mrs. Heep, and so they went on tossing it about until I had no idea who had got it, and was quite bewildered. The ball itself was always changing too. Now it was Mr. Wickfield, now Agnes, now the excellence of Mr. Wickfield, now my admiration of Agnes; now the extent of Mr. Wickfield's business and resources, now our domestic life after dinner; now, the wine that Mr. Wickfield took, the reason why he took it, and the pity that it was he took so much; now one thing, now another, then everything at once; and all the time, without appearing to speak very often, or to do anything but sometimes encourage them a little, for fear they should be overcome by their humility and the honour of my company, I found myself perpetually letting out something or other that I had no business to let out and seeing the effect of it in the twinkling of Uriah's dinted nostrils.

I had begun to be a little uncomfortable, and to wish myself well out of the visit, when a figure coming down the street passed the door--it stood open to air the room, which was warm, the weather being close for the time of year--came back again, looked in, and walked in, exclaiming loudly, 'Copperfield! Is it possible?'

It was Mr. Micawber! It was Mr. Micawber, with his eye-glass, and his walking-stick, and his shirt-collar, and his genteel air, and the condescending roll in his voice, all complete!

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, putting out his hand, 'this is indeed a meeting which is calculated to impress the mind with a sense of the instability and uncertainty of all human--in short, it is a most extraordinary meeting. Walking along the street, reflecting upon the probability of something turning up (of which I am at present rather sanguine), I find a young but valued friend turn up, who is connected with the most eventful period of my life; I may say, with the turning-point of my existence. Copperfield, my dear fellow, how do you do?'

I cannot say--I really cannot say--that I was glad to see Mr. Micawber there; but I was glad to see him too, and shook hands with him, heartily, inquiring how Mrs. Micawber was.

'Thank you,' said Mr. Micawber, waving his hand as of old, and settling his chin in his shirt-collar. 'She is tolerably convalescent. The twins no longer derive their sustenance from Nature's founts--in short,' said Mr. Micawber, in one of his bursts of confidence, 'they are weaned--and Mrs. Micawber is, at present, my travelling companion. She will be rejoiced, Copperfield, to renew her acquaintance with one who has proved himself in all respects a worthy minister at the sacred altar of friendship.'

I said I should be delighted to see her.

'You are very good,' said Mr. Micawber.

Mr. Micawber then smiled, settled his chin again, and looked about him.

'I have discovered my friend Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber genteelly, and without addressing himself particularly to anyone, 'not in solitude, but partaking of a social meal in company with a widow lady, and one who is apparently her offspring--in short,' said Mr. Micawber, in another of his bursts of confidence, 'her son. I shall esteem it an honour to be presented.'

I could do no less, under these circumstances, than make Mr. Micawber known to Uriah Heep and his mother; which I accordingly did. As they abased themselves before him, Mr. Micawber took a seat, and waved his hand in his most courtly manner.

'Any friend of my friend Copperfield's,' said Mr. Micawber, 'has a personal claim upon myself.'

'We are too umble, sir,' said Mrs. Heep, 'my son and me, to be the friends of Master Copperfield. He has been so good as take his tea with us, and we are thankful to him for his company, also to you, sir, for your notice.'

'Ma'am,' returned Mr. Micawber, with a bow, 'you are very obliging: and what are you doing, Copperfield? Still in the wine trade?'

I was excessively anxious to get Mr. Micawber away; and replied, with my hat in my hand, and a very red face, I have no doubt, that I was a pupil at Doctor Strong's.



'A pupil?' said Mr. Micawber, raising his eyebrows. 'I am extremely happy to hear it. Although a mind like my friend Copperfield's'--to Uriah and Mrs. Heep--'does not require that cultivation which, without his knowledge of men and things, it would require, still it is a rich soil teeming with latent vegetation--in short,' said Mr. Micawber, smiling, in another burst of confidence, 'it is an intellect capable of getting up the classics to any extent.'

Uriah, with his long hands slowly twining over one another, made a ghastly writhe from the waist upwards, to express his concurrence in this estimation of me.

'Shall we go and see Mrs. Micawber, sir?' I said, to get Mr. Micawber away.

'If you will do her that favour, Copperfield,' replied Mr. Micawber, rising. 'I have no scruple in saying, in the presence of our friends here, that I am a man who has, for some years, contended against the pressure of pecuniary difficulties.' I knew he was certain to say something of this kind; he always would be so boastful about his difficulties. 'Sometimes I have risen superior to my difficulties. Sometimes my difficulties have--in short, have floored me. There have been times when I have administered a succession of facers to them; there have been times when they have been too many for me, and I have given in, and said to Mrs. Micawber, in the words of Cato, "Plato, thou reasonest well. It's all up now. I can show fight no more." But at no time of my life,' said Mr. Micawber, 'have I enjoyed a higher degree of satisfaction than in pouring my griefs (if I may describe difficulties, chiefly arising out of warrants of attorney and promissory notes at two and four months, by that word) into the bosom of my friend Copperfield.'

Mr. Micawber closed this handsome tribute by saying, 'Mr. Heep! Good evening. Mrs. Heep! Your servant,' and then walking out with me in his

most fashionable manner, making a good deal of noise on the pavement with his shoes, and humming a tune as we went.

It was a little inn where Mr. Micawber put up, and he occupied a little room in it, partitioned off from the commercial room, and strongly flavoured with tobacco-smoke. I think it was over the kitchen, because a warm greasy smell appeared to come up through the chinks in the floor, and there was a flabby perspiration on the walls. I know it was near the bar, on account of the smell of spirits and jingling of glasses. Here, recumbent on a small sofa, underneath a picture of a race-horse, with her head close to the fire, and her feet pushing the mustard off the dumb-waiter at the other end of the room, was Mrs. Micawber, to whom Mr. Micawber entered first, saying, 'My dear, allow me to introduce to you a pupil of Doctor Strong's.'

I noticed, by the by, that although Mr. Micawber was just as much confused as ever about my age and standing, he always remembered, as a genteel thing, that I was a pupil of Doctor Strong's.

Mrs. Micawber was amazed, but very glad to see me. I was very glad to see her too, and, after an affectionate greeting on both sides, sat down on the small sofa near her.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, 'if you will mention to Copperfield what our present position is, which I have no doubt he will like to know, I will go and look at the paper the while, and see whether anything turns up among the advertisements.'

'I thought you were at Plymouth, ma'am,' I said to Mrs. Micawber, as he went out.

'My dear Master Copperfield,' she replied, 'we went to Plymouth.'

'To be on the spot,' I hinted.

'Just so,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'To be on the spot. But, the truth is, talent is not wanted in the Custom House. The local influence of my family was quite unavailing to obtain any employment in that department, for a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities. They would rather NOT have a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities. He would only show the deficiency of the others. Apart from which,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'I will not disguise from you, my dear Master Copperfield, that when that branch of my family which is settled in Plymouth, became aware that Mr. Micawber was accompanied by myself, and by little Wilkins and his sister, and by the twins, they did not receive him with that ardour which he might have expected, being so newly released from captivity. In fact,' said Mrs. Micawber, lowering her voice,--'this is between ourselves--our reception was cool.'

'Dear me!' I said.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'It is truly painful to contemplate mankind in such an aspect, Master Copperfield, but our reception was, decidedly, cool. There is no doubt about it. In fact, that branch of my family which is settled in Plymouth became quite personal to Mr. Micawber, before we had been there a week.'

I said, and thought, that they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

'Still, so it was,' continued Mrs. Micawber. 'Under such circumstances, what could a man of Mr. Micawber's spirit do? But one obvious course was left. To borrow, of that branch of my family, the money to return to London, and to return at any sacrifice.'

'Then you all came back again, ma'am?' I said.

'We all came back again,' replied Mrs. Micawber. 'Since then, I have consulted other branches of my family on the course which it is most expedient for Mr. Micawber to take--for I maintain that he must take some course, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, argumentatively. 'It is clear that a family of six, not including a domestic, cannot live upon air.'

'Certainly, ma'am,' said I.

'The opinion of those other branches of my family,' pursued Mrs. Micawber, 'is, that Mr. Micawber should immediately turn his attention to coals.'

'To what, ma'am?'

'To coals,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'To the coal trade. Mr. Micawber was induced to think, on inquiry, that there might be an opening for a man of his talent in the Medway Coal Trade. Then, as Mr. Micawber very properly said, the first step to be taken clearly was, to come and see the Medway. Which we came and saw. I say "we", Master Copperfield; for I never will,' said Mrs. Micawber with emotion, 'I never will desert Mr. Micawber.'

I murmured my admiration and approbation.

'We came,' repeated Mrs. Micawber, 'and saw the Medway. My opinion of the coal trade on that river is, that it may require talent, but that it certainly requires capital. Talent, Mr. Micawber has; capital, Mr. Micawber has not. We saw, I think, the greater part of the Medway; and that is my individual conclusion. Being so near here, Mr. Micawber was of opinion that it would be rash not to come on, and see the Cathedral. Firstly, on account of its being so well worth seeing, and our never having seen it; and secondly, on account of the great probability of

something turning up in a cathedral town. We have been here,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'three days. Nothing has, as yet, turned up; and it may not surprise you, my dear Master Copperfield, so much as it would a stranger, to know that we are at present waiting for a remittance from London, to discharge our pecuniary obligations at this hotel. Until the arrival of that remittance,' said Mrs. Micawber with much feeling, 'I am cut off from my home (I allude to lodgings in Pentonville), from my boy and girl, and from my twins.'

I felt the utmost sympathy for Mr. and Mrs. Micawber in this anxious extremity, and said as much to Mr. Micawber, who now returned: adding that I only wished I had money enough, to lend them the amount they needed. Mr. Micawber's answer expressed the disturbance of his mind. He said, shaking hands with me, 'Copperfield, you are a true friend; but when the worst comes to the worst, no man is without a friend who is possessed of shaving materials.' At this dreadful hint Mrs. Micawber threw her arms round Mr. Micawber's neck and entreated him to be calm. He wept; but so far recovered, almost immediately, as to ring the bell for the waiter, and bespeak a hot kidney pudding and a plate of shrimps for breakfast in the morning.

When I took my leave of them, they both pressed me so much to come and dine before they went away, that I could not refuse. But, as I knew I could not come next day, when I should have a good deal to prepare in the evening, Mr. Micawber arranged that he would call at Doctor Strong's in the course of the morning (having a presentiment that the remittance would arrive by that post), and propose the day after, if it would suit me better. Accordingly I was called out of school next forenoon, and found Mr. Micawber in the parlour; who had called to say that the dinner would take place as proposed. When I asked him if the remittance had come, he pressed my hand and departed.

As I was looking out of window that same evening, it surprised me, and

made me rather uneasy, to see Mr. Micawber and Uriah Heep walk past, arm in arm: Uriah humbly sensible of the honour that was done him, and Mr. Micawber taking a bland delight in extending his patronage to Uriah. But I was still more surprised, when I went to the little hotel next day at the appointed dinner-hour, which was four o'clock, to find, from what Mr. Micawber said, that he had gone home with Uriah, and had drunk brandy-and-water at Mrs. Heep's.

'And I'll tell you what, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'your friend Heep is a young fellow who might be attorney-general. If I had known that young man, at the period when my difficulties came to a crisis, all I can say is, that I believe my creditors would have been a great deal better managed than they were.'

I hardly understood how this could have been, seeing that Mr. Micawber had paid them nothing at all as it was; but I did not like to ask. Neither did I like to say, that I hoped he had not been too communicative to Uriah; or to inquire if they had talked much about me. I was afraid of hurting Mr. Micawber's feelings, or, at all events, Mrs. Micawber's, she being very sensitive; but I was uncomfortable about it, too, and often thought about it afterwards.

We had a beautiful little dinner. Quite an elegant dish of fish; the kidney-end of a loin of veal, roasted; fried sausage-meat; a partridge, and a pudding. There was wine, and there was strong ale; and after dinner Mrs. Micawber made us a bowl of hot punch with her own hands.

Mr. Micawber was uncommonly convivial. I never saw him such good company. He made his face shine with the punch, so that it looked as if it had been varnished all over. He got cheerfully sentimental about the town, and proposed success to it; observing that Mrs. Micawber and himself had been made extremely snug and comfortable there and that he never should forget the agreeable hours they had passed in Canterbury.

He proposed me afterwards; and he, and Mrs. Micawber, and I, took a review of our past acquaintance, in the course of which we sold the property all over again. Then I proposed Mrs. Micawber: or, at least, said, modestly, 'If you'll allow me, Mrs. Micawber, I shall now have the pleasure of drinking your health, ma'am.' On which Mr. Micawber delivered an eulogium on Mrs. Micawber's character, and said she had ever been his guide, philosopher, and friend, and that he would recommend me, when I came to a marrying time of life, to marry such another woman, if such another woman could be found.

As the punch disappeared, Mr. Micawber became still more friendly and convivial. Mrs. Micawber's spirits becoming elevated, too, we sang 'Auld Lang Syne'. When we came to 'Here's a hand, my trusty frere', we all joined hands round the table; and when we declared we would 'take a right gude Willie Waught', and hadn't the least idea what it meant, we were really affected.

In a word, I never saw anybody so thoroughly jovial as Mr. Micawber was, down to the very last moment of the evening, when I took a hearty farewell of himself and his amiable wife. Consequently, I was not prepared, at seven o'clock next morning, to receive the following communication, dated half past nine in the evening; a quarter of an hour after I had left him:--

'My DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

'The die is cast--all is over. Hiding the ravages of care with a sickly mask of mirth, I have not informed you, this evening, that there is no hope of the remittance! Under these circumstances, alike humiliating to endure, humiliating to contemplate, and humiliating to relate, I have discharged the pecuniary liability contracted at this establishment, by giving a note of hand, made payable fourteen days after date, at my residence, Pentonville, London. When it becomes due, it will not be

taken up. The result is destruction. The bolt is impending, and the tree must fall.

'Let the wretched man who now addresses you, my dear Copperfield, be a beacon to you through life. He writes with that intention, and in that hope. If he could think himself of so much use, one gleam of day might, by possibility, penetrate into the cheerless dungeon of his remaining existence--though his longevity is, at present (to say the least of it), extremely problematical.

'This is the last communication, my dear Copperfield, you will ever receive

'From

'The

'Beggared Outcast,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

I was so shocked by the contents of this heart-rending letter, that I ran off directly towards the little hotel with the intention of taking it on my way to Doctor Strong's, and trying to soothe Mr. Micawber with a word of comfort. But, half-way there, I met the London coach with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber up behind; Mr. Micawber, the very picture of tranquil enjoyment, smiling at Mrs. Micawber's conversation, eating walnuts out of a paper bag, with a bottle sticking out of his breast pocket. As they did not see me, I thought it best, all things considered, not to see them. So, with a great weight taken off my mind, I turned into a by-street that was the nearest way to school, and felt, upon the whole, relieved that they were gone; though I still liked them very much,



nevertheless.

## CHAPTER 18. A RETROSPECT

My school-days! The silent gliding on of my existence--the unseen, unfelt progress of my life--from childhood up to youth! Let me think, as I look back upon that flowing water, now a dry channel overgrown with leaves, whether there are any marks along its course, by which I can remember how it ran.

A moment, and I occupy my place in the Cathedral, where we all went together, every Sunday morning, assembling first at school for that purpose. The earthy smell, the sunless air, the sensation of the world being shut out, the resounding of the organ through the black and white arched galleries and aisles, are wings that take me back, and hold me hovering above those days, in a half-sleeping and half-waking dream.

I am not the last boy in the school. I have risen in a few months, over several heads. But the first boy seems to me a mighty creature, dwelling afar off, whose giddy height is unattainable. Agnes says 'No,' but I say 'Yes,' and tell her that she little thinks what stores of knowledge have been mastered by the wonderful Being, at whose place she thinks I, even I, weak aspirant, may arrive in time. He is not my private friend and public patron, as Steerforth was, but I hold him in a reverential respect. I chiefly wonder what he'll be, when he leaves Doctor Strong's, and what mankind will do to maintain any place against him.

But who is this that breaks upon me? This is Miss Shepherd, whom I love.

Miss Shepherd is a boarder at the Misses Nettingalls' establishment. I

adore Miss Shepherd. She is a little girl, in a spencer, with a round face and curly flaxen hair. The Misses Nettingalls' young ladies come to the Cathedral too. I cannot look upon my book, for I must look upon Miss Shepherd. When the choristers chaunt, I hear Miss Shepherd. In the service I mentally insert Miss Shepherd's name--I put her in among the Royal Family. At home, in my own room, I am sometimes moved to cry out, 'Oh, Miss Shepherd!' in a transport of love.

For some time, I am doubtful of Miss Shepherd's feelings, but, at length, Fate being propitious, we meet at the dancing-school. I have Miss Shepherd for my partner. I touch Miss Shepherd's glove, and feel a thrill go up the right arm of my jacket, and come out at my hair. I say nothing to Miss Shepherd, but we understand each other. Miss Shepherd and myself live but to be united.

Why do I secretly give Miss Shepherd twelve Brazil nuts for a present, I wonder? They are not expressive of affection, they are difficult to pack into a parcel of any regular shape, they are hard to crack, even in room doors, and they are oily when cracked; yet I feel that they are appropriate to Miss Shepherd. Soft, seedy biscuits, also, I bestow upon Miss Shepherd; and oranges innumerable. Once, I kiss Miss Shepherd in the cloak-room. Ecstasy! What are my agony and indignation next day, when I hear a flying rumour that the Misses Nettingall have stood Miss Shepherd in the stocks for turning in her toes!

Miss Shepherd being the one pervading theme and vision of my life, how do I ever come to break with her? I can't conceive. And yet a coolness grows between Miss Shepherd and myself. Whispers reach me of Miss Shepherd having said she wished I wouldn't stare so, and having avowed a preference for Master Jones--for Jones! a boy of no merit whatever! The gulf between me and Miss Shepherd widens. At last, one day, I meet the Misses Nettingalls' establishment out walking. Miss Shepherd makes a face as she goes by, and laughs to her companion. All is over. The

devotion of a life--it seems a life, it is all the same--is at an end; Miss Shepherd comes out of the morning service, and the Royal Family know her no more.

I am higher in the school, and no one breaks my peace. I am not at all polite, now, to the Misses Nettingalls' young ladies, and shouldn't dote on any of them, if they were twice as many and twenty times as beautiful. I think the dancing-school a tiresome affair, and wonder why the girls can't dance by themselves and leave us alone. I am growing great in Latin verses, and neglect the laces of my boots. Doctor Strong refers to me in public as a promising young scholar. Mr. Dick is wild with joy, and my aunt remits me a guinea by the next post.

The shade of a young butcher rises, like the apparition of an armed head in Macbeth. Who is this young butcher? He is the terror of the youth of Canterbury. There is a vague belief abroad, that the beef suet with which he anoints his hair gives him unnatural strength, and that he is a match for a man. He is a broad-faced, bull-necked, young butcher, with rough red cheeks, an ill-conditioned mind, and an injurious tongue. His main use of this tongue, is, to disparage Doctor Strong's young gentlemen. He says, publicly, that if they want anything he'll give it 'em. He names individuals among them (myself included), whom he could undertake to settle with one hand, and the other tied behind him. He waylays the smaller boys to punch their unprotected heads, and calls challenges after me in the open streets. For these sufficient reasons I resolve to fight the butcher.

It is a summer evening, down in a green hollow, at the corner of a wall. I meet the butcher by appointment. I am attended by a select body of our boys; the butcher, by two other butchers, a young publican, and a sweep. The preliminaries are adjusted, and the butcher and myself stand face to face. In a moment the butcher lights ten thousand candles out of my left eyebrow. In another moment, I don't know where the wall is, or where

I am, or where anybody is. I hardly know which is myself and which the butcher, we are always in such a tangle and tussle, knocking about upon the trodden grass. Sometimes I see the butcher, bloody but confident; sometimes I see nothing, and sit gasping on my second's knee; sometimes I go in at the butcher madly, and cut my knuckles open against his face, without appearing to discompose him at all. At last I awake, very queer about the head, as from a giddy sleep, and see the butcher walking off, congratulated by the two other butchers and the sweep and publican, and putting on his coat as he goes; from which I augur, justly, that the victory is his.

I am taken home in a sad plight, and I have beef-steaks put to my eyes, and am rubbed with vinegar and brandy, and find a great puffy place bursting out on my upper lip, which swells immoderately. For three or four days I remain at home, a very ill-looking subject, with a green shade over my eyes; and I should be very dull, but that Agnes is a sister to me, and condoles with me, and reads to me, and makes the time light and happy. Agnes has my confidence completely, always; I tell her all about the butcher, and the wrongs he has heaped upon me; she thinks I couldn't have done otherwise than fight the butcher, while she shrinks and trembles at my having fought him.

Time has stolen on unobserved, for Adams is not the head-boy in the days that are come now, nor has he been this many and many a day. Adams has left the school so long, that when he comes back, on a visit to Doctor Strong, there are not many there, besides myself, who know him. Adams is going to be called to the bar almost directly, and is to be an advocate, and to wear a wig. I am surprised to find him a meeker man than I had thought, and less imposing in appearance. He has not staggered the world yet, either; for it goes on (as well as I can make out) pretty much the same as if he had never joined it.

A blank, through which the warriors of poetry and history march on in

stately hosts that seem to have no end--and what comes next! I am the head-boy, now! I look down on the line of boys below me, with a condescending interest in such of them as bring to my mind the boy I was myself, when I first came there. That little fellow seems to be no part of me; I remember him as something left behind upon the road of life--as something I have passed, rather than have actually been--and almost think of him as of someone else.

And the little girl I saw on that first day at Mr. Wickfield's, where is she? Gone also. In her stead, the perfect likeness of the picture, a child likeness no more, moves about the house; and Agnes--my sweet sister, as I call her in my thoughts, my counsellor and friend, the better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good, self-denying influence--is quite a woman.

What other changes have come upon me, besides the changes in my growth and looks, and in the knowledge I have garnered all this while? I wear a gold watch and chain, a ring upon my little finger, and a long-tailed coat; and I use a great deal of bear's grease--which, taken in conjunction with the ring, looks bad. Am I in love again? I am. I worship the eldest Miss Larkins.

The eldest Miss Larkins is not a little girl. She is a tall, dark, black-eyed, fine figure of a woman. The eldest Miss Larkins is not a chicken; for the youngest Miss Larkins is not that, and the eldest must be three or four years older. Perhaps the eldest Miss Larkins may be about thirty. My passion for her is beyond all bounds.

The eldest Miss Larkins knows officers. It is an awful thing to bear. I see them speaking to her in the street. I see them cross the way to meet her, when her bonnet (she has a bright taste in bonnets) is seen coming down the pavement, accompanied by her sister's bonnet. She laughs and talks, and seems to like it. I spend a good deal of my own spare time in

walking up and down to meet her. If I can bow to her once in the day (I know her to bow to, knowing Mr. Larkins), I am happier. I deserve a bow now and then. The raging agonies I suffer on the night of the Race Ball, where I know the eldest Miss Larkins will be dancing with the military, ought to have some compensation, if there be even-handed justice in the world.

My passion takes away my appetite, and makes me wear my newest silk neckerchief continually. I have no relief but in putting on my best clothes, and having my boots cleaned over and over again. I seem, then, to be worthier of the eldest Miss Larkins. Everything that belongs to her, or is connected with her, is precious to me. Mr. Larkins (a gruff old gentleman with a double chin, and one of his eyes immovable in his head) is fraught with interest to me. When I can't meet his daughter, I go where I am likely to meet him. To say 'How do you do, Mr. Larkins? Are the young ladies and all the family quite well?' seems so pointed, that I blush.

I think continually about my age. Say I am seventeen, and say that seventeen is young for the eldest Miss Larkins, what of that? Besides, I shall be one-and-twenty in no time almost. I regularly take walks outside Mr. Larkins's house in the evening, though it cuts me to the heart to see the officers go in, or to hear them up in the drawing-room, where the eldest Miss Larkins plays the harp. I even walk, on two or three occasions, in a sickly, spoony manner, round and round the house after the family are gone to bed, wondering which is the eldest Miss Larkins's chamber (and pitching, I dare say now, on Mr. Larkins's instead); wishing that a fire would burst out; that the assembled crowd would stand appalled; that I, dashing through them with a ladder, might rear it against her window, save her in my arms, go back for something she had left behind, and perish in the flames. For I am generally disinterested in my love, and think I could be content to make a figure before Miss Larkins, and expire.

Generally, but not always. Sometimes brighter visions rise before me. When I dress (the occupation of two hours), for a great ball given at the Larkins's (the anticipation of three weeks), I indulge my fancy with pleasing images. I picture myself taking courage to make a declaration to Miss Larkins. I picture Miss Larkins sinking her head upon my shoulder, and saying, 'Oh, Mr. Copperfield, can I believe my ears!' I picture Mr. Larkins waiting on me next morning, and saying, 'My dear Copperfield, my daughter has told me all. Youth is no objection. Here are twenty thousand pounds. Be happy!' I picture my aunt relenting, and blessing us; and Mr. Dick and Doctor Strong being present at the marriage ceremony. I am a sensible fellow, I believe--I believe, on looking back, I mean--and modest I am sure; but all this goes on notwithstanding. I repair to the enchanted house, where there are lights, chattering, music, flowers, officers (I am sorry to see), and the eldest Miss Larkins, a blaze of beauty. She is dressed in blue, with blue flowers in her hair--forget-me-nots--as if SHE had any need to wear forget-me-nots. It is the first really grown-up party that I have ever been invited to, and I am a little uncomfortable; for I appear not to belong to anybody, and nobody appears to have anything to say to me, except Mr. Larkins, who asks me how my schoolfellows are, which he needn't do, as I have not come there to be insulted.

But after I have stood in the doorway for some time, and feasted my eyes upon the goddess of my heart, she approaches me--she, the eldest Miss Larkins!--and asks me pleasantly, if I dance?

I stammer, with a bow, 'With you, Miss Larkins.'

'With no one else?' inquires Miss Larkins.

'I should have no pleasure in dancing with anyone else.'

Miss Larkins laughs and blushes (or I think she blushes), and says,  
'Next time but one, I shall be very glad.'

The time arrives. 'It is a waltz, I think,' Miss Larkins doubtfully observes, when I present myself. 'Do you waltz? If not, Captain Bailey--'

But I do waltz (pretty well, too, as it happens), and I take Miss Larkins out. I take her sternly from the side of Captain Bailey. He is wretched, I have no doubt; but he is nothing to me. I have been wretched, too. I waltz with the eldest Miss Larkins! I don't know where, among whom, or how long. I only know that I swim about in space, with a blue angel, in a state of blissful delirium, until I find myself alone with her in a little room, resting on a sofa. She admires a flower (pink camellia japonica, price half-a-crown), in my button-hole. I give it her, and say:

'I ask an inestimable price for it, Miss Larkins.'

'Indeed! What is that?' returns Miss Larkins.

'A flower of yours, that I may treasure it as a miser does gold.'

'You're a bold boy,' says Miss Larkins. 'There.'

She gives it me, not displeased; and I put it to my lips, and then into my breast. Miss Larkins, laughing, draws her hand through my arm, and says, 'Now take me back to Captain Bailey.'

I am lost in the recollection of this delicious interview, and the waltz, when she comes to me again, with a plain elderly gentleman who has been playing whist all night, upon her arm, and says:



'Oh! here is my bold friend! Mr. Chestle wants to know you, Mr. Copperfield.'

I feel at once that he is a friend of the family, and am much gratified.

'I admire your taste, sir,' says Mr. Chestle. 'It does you credit. I suppose you don't take much interest in hops; but I am a pretty large grower myself; and if you ever like to come over to our neighbourhood--neighbourhood of Ashford--and take a run about our place,--we shall be glad for you to stop as long as you like.'

I thank Mr. Chestle warmly, and shake hands. I think I am in a happy dream. I waltz with the eldest Miss Larkins once again. She says I waltz so well! I go home in a state of unspeakable bliss, and waltz in imagination, all night long, with my arm round the blue waist of my dear divinity. For some days afterwards, I am lost in rapturous reflections; but I neither see her in the street, nor when I call. I am imperfectly consoled for this disappointment by the sacred pledge, the perished flower.

'Trotwood,' says Agnes, one day after dinner. 'Who do you think is going to be married tomorrow? Someone you admire.'

'Not you, I suppose, Agnes?'

'Not me!' raising her cheerful face from the music she is copying. 'Do you hear him, Papa?--The eldest Miss Larkins.'

'To--to Captain Bailey?' I have just enough power to ask.

'No; to no Captain. To Mr. Chestle, a hop-grower.'

I am terribly dejected for about a week or two. I take off my ring, I

wear my worst clothes, I use no bear's grease, and I frequently lament over the late Miss Larkins's faded flower. Being, by that time, rather tired of this kind of life, and having received new provocation from the butcher, I throw the flower away, go out with the butcher, and gloriously defeat him.

This, and the resumption of my ring, as well as of the bear's grease in moderation, are the last marks I can discern, now, in my progress to seventeen.

#### CHAPTER 19. I LOOK ABOUT ME, AND MAKE A DISCOVERY

I am doubtful whether I was at heart glad or sorry, when my school-days drew to an end, and the time came for my leaving Doctor Strong's. I had been very happy there, I had a great attachment for the Doctor, and I was eminent and distinguished in that little world. For these reasons I was sorry to go; but for other reasons, unsubstantial enough, I was glad. Misty ideas of being a young man at my own disposal, of the importance attaching to a young man at his own disposal, of the wonderful things to be seen and done by that magnificent animal, and the wonderful effects he could not fail to make upon society, lured me away. So powerful were these visionary considerations in my boyish mind, that I seem, according to my present way of thinking, to have left school without natural regret. The separation has not made the impression on me, that other separations have. I try in vain to recall how I felt about it, and what its circumstances were; but it is not momentous in my recollection. I suppose the opening prospect confused me. I know that my juvenile experiences went for little or nothing then; and that life was more like a great fairy story, which I was just about to begin to read, than anything else.

MY aunt and I had held many grave deliberations on the calling to which I should be devoted. For a year or more I had endeavoured to find a satisfactory answer to her often-repeated question, 'What I would like to be?' But I had no particular liking, that I could discover, for anything. If I could have been inspired with a knowledge of the science of navigation, taken the command of a fast-sailing expedition, and gone round the world on a triumphant voyage of discovery, I think I might have considered myself completely suited. But, in the absence of any such miraculous provision, my desire was to apply myself to some pursuit that would not lie too heavily upon her purse; and to do my duty in it, whatever it might be.

Mr. Dick had regularly assisted at our councils, with a meditative and sage demeanour. He never made a suggestion but once; and on that occasion (I don't know what put it in his head), he suddenly proposed that I should be 'a Brazier'. My aunt received this proposal so very ungraciously, that he never ventured on a second; but ever afterwards confined himself to looking watchfully at her for her suggestions, and rattling his money.

'Trot, I tell you what, my dear,' said my aunt, one morning in the Christmas season when I left school: 'as this knotty point is still unsettled, and as we must not make a mistake in our decision if we can help it, I think we had better take a little breathing-time. In the meanwhile, you must try to look at it from a new point of view, and not as a schoolboy.'

'I will, aunt.'

'It has occurred to me,' pursued my aunt, 'that a little change, and a glimpse of life out of doors, may be useful in helping you to know your own mind, and form a cooler judgement. Suppose you were to go down into

the old part of the country again, for instance, and see that--that out-of-the-way woman with the savagest of names,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose, for she could never thoroughly forgive Peggotty for being so called.

'Of all things in the world, aunt, I should like it best!'

'Well,' said my aunt, 'that's lucky, for I should like it too. But it's natural and rational that you should like it. And I am very well persuaded that whatever you do, Trot, will always be natural and rational.'

'I hope so, aunt.'

'Your sister, Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt, 'would have been as natural and rational a girl as ever breathed. You'll be worthy of her, won't you?'

'I hope I shall be worthy of YOU, aunt. That will be enough for me.'

'It's a mercy that poor dear baby of a mother of yours didn't live,' said my aunt, looking at me approvingly, 'or she'd have been so vain of her boy by this time, that her soft little head would have been completely turned, if there was anything of it left to turn.' (My aunt always excused any weakness of her own in my behalf, by transferring it in this way to my poor mother.) 'Bless me, Trotwood, how you do remind me of her!'

'Pleasantly, I hope, aunt?' said I.

'He's as like her, Dick,' said my aunt, emphatically, 'he's as like her, as she was that afternoon before she began to fret--bless my heart, he's as like her, as he can look at me out of his two eyes!'

'Is he indeed?' said Mr. Dick.

'And he's like David, too,' said my aunt, decisively.

'He is very like David!' said Mr. Dick.

'But what I want you to be, Trot,' resumed my aunt, '--I don't mean physically, but morally; you are very well physically--is, a firm fellow. A fine firm fellow, with a will of your own. With resolution,' said my aunt, shaking her cap at me, and clenching her hand. 'With determination. With character, Trot--with strength of character that is not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody, or by anything. That's what I want you to be. That's what your father and mother might both have been, Heaven knows, and been the better for it.'

I intimated that I hoped I should be what she described.

'That you may begin, in a small way, to have a reliance upon yourself, and to act for yourself,' said my aunt, 'I shall send you upon your trip, alone. I did think, once, of Mr. Dick's going with you; but, on second thoughts, I shall keep him to take care of me.'

Mr. Dick, for a moment, looked a little disappointed; until the honour and dignity of having to take care of the most wonderful woman in the world, restored the sunshine to his face.

'Besides,' said my aunt, 'there's the Memorial--'

'Oh, certainly,' said Mr. Dick, in a hurry, 'I intend, Trotwood, to get that done immediately--it really must be done immediately! And then it will go in, you know--and then--' said Mr. Dick, after checking himself, and pausing a long time, 'there'll be a pretty kettle of fish!'

In pursuance of my aunt's kind scheme, I was shortly afterwards fitted out with a handsome purse of money, and a portmanteau, and tenderly dismissed upon my expedition. At parting, my aunt gave me some good advice, and a good many kisses; and said that as her object was that I should look about me, and should think a little, she would recommend me to stay a few days in London, if I liked it, either on my way down into Suffolk, or in coming back. In a word, I was at liberty to do what I would, for three weeks or a month; and no other conditions were imposed upon my freedom than the before-mentioned thinking and looking about me, and a pledge to write three times a week and faithfully report myself.

I went to Canterbury first, that I might take leave of Agnes and Mr. Wickfield (my old room in whose house I had not yet relinquished), and also of the good Doctor. Agnes was very glad to see me, and told me that the house had not been like itself since I had left it.

'I am sure I am not like myself when I am away,' said I. 'I seem to want my right hand, when I miss you. Though that's not saying much; for there's no head in my right hand, and no heart. Everyone who knows you, consults with you, and is guided by you, Agnes.'

'Everyone who knows me, spoils me, I believe,' she answered, smiling.

'No. It's because you are like no one else. You are so good, and so sweet-tempered. You have such a gentle nature, and you are always right.'

'You talk,' said Agnes, breaking into a pleasant laugh, as she sat at work, 'as if I were the late Miss Larkins.'

'Come! It's not fair to abuse my confidence,' I answered, reddening at the recollection of my blue enslaver. 'But I shall confide in you, just

the same, Agnes. I can never grow out of that. Whenever I fall into trouble, or fall in love, I shall always tell you, if you'll let me--even when I come to fall in love in earnest.'

'Why, you have always been in earnest!' said Agnes, laughing again.

'Oh! that was as a child, or a schoolboy,' said I, laughing in my turn, not without being a little shame-faced. 'Times are altering now, and I suppose I shall be in a terrible state of earnestness one day or other. My wonder is, that you are not in earnest yourself, by this time, Agnes.'

Agnes laughed again, and shook her head.

'Oh, I know you are not!' said I, 'because if you had been you would have told me. Or at least'--for I saw a faint blush in her face, 'you would have let me find it out for myself. But there is no one that I know of, who deserves to love you, Agnes. Someone of a nobler character, and more worthy altogether than anyone I have ever seen here, must rise up, before I give my consent. In the time to come, I shall have a wary eye on all admirers; and shall exact a great deal from the successful one, I assure you.'

We had gone on, so far, in a mixture of confidential jest and earnest, that had long grown naturally out of our familiar relations, begun as mere children. But Agnes, now suddenly lifting up her eyes to mine, and speaking in a different manner, said:

'Trotwood, there is something that I want to ask you, and that I may not have another opportunity of asking for a long time, perhaps--something I would ask, I think, of no one else. Have you observed any gradual alteration in Papa?'

I had observed it, and had often wondered whether she had too. I must have shown as much, now, in my face; for her eyes were in a moment cast down, and I saw tears in them.

'Tell me what it is,' she said, in a low voice.

'I think--shall I be quite plain, Agnes, liking him so much?'

'Yes,' she said.

'I think he does himself no good by the habit that has increased upon him since I first came here. He is often very nervous--or I fancy so.'

'It is not fancy,' said Agnes, shaking her head.

'His hand trembles, his speech is not plain, and his eyes look wild. I have remarked that at those times, and when he is least like himself, he is most certain to be wanted on some business.'

'By Uriah,' said Agnes.

'Yes; and the sense of being unfit for it, or of not having understood it, or of having shown his condition in spite of himself, seems to make him so uneasy, that next day he is worse, and next day worse, and so he becomes jaded and haggard. Do not be alarmed by what I say, Agnes, but in this state I saw him, only the other evening, lay down his head upon his desk, and shed tears like a child.'

Her hand passed softly before my lips while I was yet speaking, and in a moment she had met her father at the door of the room, and was hanging on his shoulder. The expression of her face, as they both looked towards me, I felt to be very touching. There was such deep fondness for him, and gratitude to him for all his love and care, in her beautiful look;



and there was such a fervent appeal to me to deal tenderly by him, even in my inmost thoughts, and to let no harsh construction find any place against him; she was, at once, so proud of him and devoted to him, yet so compassionate and sorry, and so reliant upon me to be so, too; that nothing she could have said would have expressed more to me, or moved me more.

We were to drink tea at the Doctor's. We went there at the usual hour; and round the study fireside found the Doctor, and his young wife, and her mother. The Doctor, who made as much of my going away as if I were going to China, received me as an honoured guest; and called for a log of wood to be thrown on the fire, that he might see the face of his old pupil reddening in the blaze.

'I shall not see many more new faces in Trotwood's stead, Wickfield,' said the Doctor, warming his hands; 'I am getting lazy, and want ease. I shall relinquish all my young people in another six months, and lead a quieter life.'

'You have said so, any time these ten years, Doctor,' Mr. Wickfield answered.

'But now I mean to do it,' returned the Doctor. 'My first master will succeed me--I am in earnest at last--so you'll soon have to arrange our contracts, and to bind us firmly to them, like a couple of knaves.'

'And to take care,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'that you're not imposed on, eh? As you certainly would be, in any contract you should make for yourself. Well! I am ready. There are worse tasks than that, in my calling.'

'I shall have nothing to think of then,' said the Doctor, with a smile, 'but my Dictionary; and this other contract-bargain--Annie.'

As Mr. Wickfield glanced towards her, sitting at the tea table by Agnes, she seemed to me to avoid his look with such unwonted hesitation and timidity, that his attention became fixed upon her, as if something were suggested to his thoughts.

'There is a post come in from India, I observe,' he said, after a short silence.

'By the by! and letters from Mr. Jack Maldon!' said the Doctor.

'Indeed!' 'Poor dear Jack!' said Mrs. Markleham, shaking her head. 'That trying climate!--like living, they tell me, on a sand-heap, underneath a burning-glass! He looked strong, but he wasn't. My dear Doctor, it was his spirit, not his constitution, that he ventured on so boldly. Annie, my dear, I am sure you must perfectly recollect that your cousin never was strong--not what can be called ROBUST, you know,' said Mrs. Markleham, with emphasis, and looking round upon us generally, '--from the time when my daughter and himself were children together, and walking about, arm-in-arm, the livelong day.'

Annie, thus addressed, made no reply.

'Do I gather from what you say, ma'am, that Mr. Maldon is ill?' asked Mr. Wickfield.

'Ill!' replied the Old Soldier. 'My dear sir, he's all sorts of things.'

'Except well?' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Except well, indeed!' said the Old Soldier. 'He has had dreadful strokes of the sun, no doubt, and jungle fevers and agues, and every kind of thing you can mention. As to his liver,' said the Old Soldier resignedly, 'that, of course, he gave up altogether, when he first went

out!'

'Does he say all this?' asked Mr. Wickfield.

'Say? My dear sir,' returned Mrs. Markleham, shaking her head and her fan, 'you little know my poor Jack Maldon when you ask that question. Say? Not he. You might drag him at the heels of four wild horses first.'

'Mama!' said Mrs. Strong.

'Annie, my dear,' returned her mother, 'once for all, I must really beg that you will not interfere with me, unless it is to confirm what I say. You know as well as I do that your cousin Maldon would be dragged at the heels of any number of wild horses--why should I confine myself to four! I WON'T confine myself to four--eight, sixteen, two-and-thirty, rather than say anything calculated to overturn the Doctor's plans.'

'Wickfield's plans,' said the Doctor, stroking his face, and looking penitently at his adviser. 'That is to say, our joint plans for him. I said myself, abroad or at home.'

'And I said' added Mr. Wickfield gravely, 'abroad. I was the means of sending him abroad. It's my responsibility.'

'Oh! Responsibility!' said the Old Soldier. 'Everything was done for the best, my dear Mr. Wickfield; everything was done for the kindest and best, we know. But if the dear fellow can't live there, he can't live there. And if he can't live there, he'll die there, sooner than he'll overturn the Doctor's plans. I know him,' said the Old Soldier, fanning herself, in a sort of calm prophetic agony, 'and I know he'll die there, sooner than he'll overturn the Doctor's plans.'

'Well, well, ma'am,' said the Doctor cheerfully, 'I am not bigoted to

my plans, and I can overturn them myself. I can substitute some other plans. If Mr. Jack Maldon comes home on account of ill health, he must not be allowed to go back, and we must endeavour to make some more suitable and fortunate provision for him in this country.'

Mrs. Markleham was so overcome by this generous speech--which, I need not say, she had not at all expected or led up to--that she could only tell the Doctor it was like himself, and go several times through that operation of kissing the sticks of her fan, and then tapping his hand with it. After which she gently chid her daughter Annie, for not being more demonstrative when such kindnesses were showered, for her sake, on her old playfellow; and entertained us with some particulars concerning other deserving members of her family, whom it was desirable to set on their deserving legs.

All this time, her daughter Annie never once spoke, or lifted up her eyes. All this time, Mr. Wickfield had his glance upon her as she sat by his own daughter's side. It appeared to me that he never thought of being observed by anyone; but was so intent upon her, and upon his own thoughts in connexion with her, as to be quite absorbed. He now asked what Mr. Jack Maldon had actually written in reference to himself, and to whom he had written?

'Why, here,' said Mrs. Markleham, taking a letter from the chimney-piece above the Doctor's head, 'the dear fellow says to the Doctor himself--where is it? Oh!--"I am sorry to inform you that my health is suffering severely, and that I fear I may be reduced to the necessity of returning home for a time, as the only hope of restoration." That's pretty plain, poor fellow! His only hope of restoration! But Annie's letter is plainer still. Annie, show me that letter again.'

'Not now, mama,' she pleaded in a low tone.

'My dear, you absolutely are, on some subjects, one of the most ridiculous persons in the world,' returned her mother, 'and perhaps the most unnatural to the claims of your own family. We never should have heard of the letter at all, I believe, unless I had asked for it myself. Do you call that confidence, my love, towards Doctor Strong? I am surprised. You ought to know better.'

The letter was reluctantly produced; and as I handed it to the old lady, I saw how the unwilling hand from which I took it, trembled.

'Now let us see,' said Mrs. Markleham, putting her glass to her eye, 'where the passage is. "The remembrance of old times, my dearest Annie"--and so forth--it's not there. "The amiable old Proctor"--who's he? Dear me, Annie, how illegibly your cousin Maldon writes, and how stupid I am! "Doctor," of course. Ah! amiable indeed!' Here she left off, to kiss her fan again, and shake it at the Doctor, who was looking at us in a state of placid satisfaction. 'Now I have found it. "You may not be surprised to hear, Annie,"--no, to be sure, knowing that he never was really strong; what did I say just now?--"that I have undergone so much in this distant place, as to have decided to leave it at all hazards; on sick leave, if I can; on total resignation, if that is not to be obtained. What I have endured, and do endure here, is insupportable." And but for the promptitude of that best of creatures,' said Mrs. Markleham, telegraphing the Doctor as before, and refolding the letter, 'it would be insupportable to me to think of.'

Mr. Wickfield said not one word, though the old lady looked to him as if for his commentary on this intelligence; but sat severely silent, with his eyes fixed on the ground. Long after the subject was dismissed, and other topics occupied us, he remained so; seldom raising his eyes, unless to rest them for a moment, with a thoughtful frown, upon the Doctor, or his wife, or both.

The Doctor was very fond of music. Agnes sang with great sweetness and expression, and so did Mrs. Strong. They sang together, and played duets together, and we had quite a little concert. But I remarked two things: first, that though Annie soon recovered her composure, and was quite herself, there was a blank between her and Mr. Wickfield which separated them wholly from each other; secondly, that Mr. Wickfield seemed to dislike the intimacy between her and Agnes, and to watch it with uneasiness. And now, I must confess, the recollection of what I had seen on that night when Mr. Maldon went away, first began to return upon me with a meaning it had never had, and to trouble me. The innocent beauty of her face was not as innocent to me as it had been; I mistrusted the natural grace and charm of her manner; and when I looked at Agnes by her side, and thought how good and true Agnes was, suspicions arose within me that it was an ill-assorted friendship.

She was so happy in it herself, however, and the other was so happy too, that they made the evening fly away as if it were but an hour. It closed in an incident which I well remember. They were taking leave of each other, and Agnes was going to embrace her and kiss her, when Mr. Wickfield stepped between them, as if by accident, and drew Agnes quickly away. Then I saw, as though all the intervening time had been cancelled, and I were still standing in the doorway on the night of the departure, the expression of that night in the face of Mrs. Strong, as it confronted his.

I cannot say what an impression this made upon me, or how impossible I found it, when I thought of her afterwards, to separate her from this look, and remember her face in its innocent loveliness again. It haunted me when I got home. I seemed to have left the Doctor's roof with a dark cloud lowering on it. The reverence that I had for his grey head, was mingled with commiseration for his faith in those who were treacherous to him, and with resentment against those who injured him. The impending shadow of a great affliction, and a great disgrace that had no distinct

form in it yet, fell like a stain upon the quiet place where I had worked and played as a boy, and did it a cruel wrong. I had no pleasure in thinking, any more, of the grave old broad-leaved aloe-trees, which remained shut up in themselves a hundred years together, and of the trim smooth grass-plot, and the stone urns, and the Doctor's walk, and the congenial sound of the Cathedral bell hovering above them all. It was as if the tranquil sanctuary of my boyhood had been sacked before my face, and its peace and honour given to the winds.

But morning brought with it my parting from the old house, which Agnes had filled with her influence; and that occupied my mind sufficiently. I should be there again soon, no doubt; I might sleep again--perhaps often--in my old room; but the days of my inhabiting there were gone, and the old time was past. I was heavier at heart when I packed up such of my books and clothes as still remained there to be sent to Dover, than I cared to show to Uriah Heep; who was so officious to help me, that I uncharitably thought him mighty glad that I was going.

I got away from Agnes and her father, somehow, with an indifferent show of being very manly, and took my seat upon the box of the London coach. I was so softened and forgiving, going through the town, that I had half a mind to nod to my old enemy the butcher, and throw him five shillings to drink. But he looked such a very obdurate butcher as he stood scraping the great block in the shop, and moreover, his appearance was so little improved by the loss of a front tooth which I had knocked out, that I thought it best to make no advances.

The main object on my mind, I remember, when we got fairly on the road, was to appear as old as possible to the coachman, and to speak extremely gruff. The latter point I achieved at great personal inconvenience; but I stuck to it, because I felt it was a grown-up sort of thing.

'You are going through, sir?' said the coachman.

'Yes, William,' I said, condescendingly (I knew him); 'I am going to London. I shall go down into Suffolk afterwards.'

'Shooting, sir?' said the coachman.

He knew as well as I did that it was just as likely, at that time of year, I was going down there whaling; but I felt complimented, too.

'I don't know,' I said, pretending to be undecided, 'whether I shall take a shot or not.' 'Birds is got wery shy, I'm told,' said William.

'So I understand,' said I.

'Is Suffolk your county, sir?' asked William.

'Yes,' I said, with some importance. 'Suffolk's my county.'

'I'm told the dumplings is uncommon fine down there,' said William.

I was not aware of it myself, but I felt it necessary to uphold the institutions of my county, and to evince a familiarity with them; so I shook my head, as much as to say, 'I believe you!'

'And the Punches,' said William. 'There's cattle! A Suffolk Punch, when he's a good un, is worth his weight in gold. Did you ever breed any Suffolk Punches yourself, sir?'

'N-no,' I said, 'not exactly.'

'Here's a gen'lm'n behind me, I'll pound it,' said William, 'as has bred 'em by wholesale.'



The gentleman spoken of was a gentleman with a very unpromising squint, and a prominent chin, who had a tall white hat on with a narrow flat brim, and whose close-fitting drab trousers seemed to button all the way up outside his legs from his boots to his hips. His chin was cocked over the coachman's shoulder, so near to me, that his breath quite tickled the back of my head; and as I looked at him, he leered at the leaders with the eye with which he didn't squint, in a very knowing manner.

'Ain't you?' asked William.

'Ain't I what?' said the gentleman behind.

'Bred them Suffolk Punches by wholesale?'

'I should think so,' said the gentleman. 'There ain't no sort of orse that I ain't bred, and no sort of dorg. Orses and dorgs is some men's fancy. They're wittles and drink to me--lodging, wife, and children--reading, writing, and Arithmetic--snuff, tobacker, and sleep.'

'That ain't a sort of man to see sitting behind a coach-box, is it though?' said William in my ear, as he handled the reins.

I construed this remark into an indication of a wish that he should have my place, so I blushinglly offered to resign it.

'Well, if you don't mind, sir,' said William, 'I think it would be more correct.'

I have always considered this as the first fall I had in life. When I booked my place at the coach office I had had 'Box Seat' written against the entry, and had given the book-keeper half-a-crown. I was got up in a special great-coat and shawl, expressly to do honour to that distinguished eminence; had glorified myself upon it a good deal; and

had felt that I was a credit to the coach. And here, in the very first stage, I was supplanted by a shabby man with a squint, who had no other merit than smelling like a livery-stables, and being able to walk across me, more like a fly than a human being, while the horses were at a canter!

A distrust of myself, which has often beset me in life on small occasions, when it would have been better away, was assuredly not stopped in its growth by this little incident outside the Canterbury coach. It was in vain to take refuge in gruffness of speech. I spoke from the pit of my stomach for the rest of the journey, but I felt completely extinguished, and dreadfully young.

It was curious and interesting, nevertheless, to be sitting up there behind four horses: well educated, well dressed, and with plenty of money in my pocket; and to look out for the places where I had slept on my weary journey. I had abundant occupation for my thoughts, in every conspicuous landmark on the road. When I looked down at the tramps whom we passed, and saw that well-remembered style of face turned up, I felt as if the tinker's blackened hand were in the bosom of my shirt again. When we clattered through the narrow street of Chatham, and I caught a glimpse, in passing, of the lane where the old monster lived who had bought my jacket, I stretched my neck eagerly to look for the place where I had sat, in the sun and in the shade, waiting for my money. When we came, at last, within a stage of London, and passed the veritable Salem House where Mr. Creakle had laid about him with a heavy hand, I would have given all I had, for lawful permission to get down and thrash him, and let all the boys out like so many caged sparrows.

We went to the Golden Cross at Charing Cross, then a mouldy sort of establishment in a close neighbourhood. A waiter showed me into the coffee-room; and a chambermaid introduced me to my small bedchamber, which smelt like a hackney-coach, and was shut up like a family vault.

I was still painfully conscious of my youth, for nobody stood in any awe of me at all: the chambermaid being utterly indifferent to my opinions on any subject, and the waiter being familiar with me, and offering advice to my inexperience.

'Well now,' said the waiter, in a tone of confidence, 'what would you like for dinner? Young gentlemen likes poultry in general: have a fowl!'

I told him, as majestically as I could, that I wasn't in the humour for a fowl.

'Ain't you?' said the waiter. 'Young gentlemen is generally tired of beef and mutton: have a weal cutlet!'

I assented to this proposal, in default of being able to suggest anything else.

'Do you care for taters?' said the waiter, with an insinuating smile, and his head on one side. 'Young gentlemen generally has been overdosed with taters.'

I commanded him, in my deepest voice, to order a veal cutlet and potatoes, and all things fitting; and to inquire at the bar if there were any letters for Trotwood Copperfield, Esquire--which I knew there were not, and couldn't be, but thought it manly to appear to expect.

He soon came back to say that there were none (at which I was much surprised) and began to lay the cloth for my dinner in a box by the fire. While he was so engaged, he asked me what I would take with it; and on my replying 'Half a pint of sherry,' thought it a favourable opportunity, I am afraid, to extract that measure of wine from the stale leavings at the bottoms of several small decanters. I am of this opinion, because, while I was reading the newspaper, I observed him

behind a low wooden partition, which was his private apartment, very busy pouring out of a number of those vessels into one, like a chemist and druggist making up a prescription. When the wine came, too, I thought it flat; and it certainly had more English crumbs in it, than were to be expected in a foreign wine in anything like a pure state, but I was bashful enough to drink it, and say nothing.

Being then in a pleasant frame of mind (from which I infer that poisoning is not always disagreeable in some stages of the process), I resolved to go to the play. It was Covent Garden Theatre that I chose; and there, from the back of a centre box, I saw Julius Caesar and the new Pantomime. To have all those noble Romans alive before me, and walking in and out for my entertainment, instead of being the stern taskmasters they had been at school, was a most novel and delightful effect. But the mingled reality and mystery of the whole show, the influence upon me of the poetry, the lights, the music, the company, the smooth stupendous changes of glittering and brilliant scenery, were so dazzling, and opened up such illimitable regions of delight, that when I came out into the rainy street, at twelve o'clock at night, I felt as if I had come from the clouds, where I had been leading a romantic life for ages, to a bawling, splashing, link-lighted, umbrella-struggling, hackney-coach-jostling, patten-clinking, muddy, miserable world.

I had emerged by another door, and stood in the street for a little while, as if I really were a stranger upon earth: but the unceremonious pushing and hustling that I received, soon recalled me to myself, and put me in the road back to the hotel; whither I went, revolving the glorious vision all the way; and where, after some porter and oysters, I sat revolving it still, at past one o'clock, with my eyes on the coffee-room fire.

I was so filled with the play, and with the past--for it was, in a manner, like a shining transparency, through which I saw my earlier

life moving along--that I don't know when the figure of a handsome well-formed young man dressed with a tasteful easy negligence which I have reason to remember very well, became a real presence to me. But I recollect being conscious of his company without having noticed his coming in--and my still sitting, musing, over the coffee-room fire.

At last I rose to go to bed, much to the relief of the sleepy waiter, who had got the fidgets in his legs, and was twisting them, and hitting them, and putting them through all kinds of contortions in his small pantry. In going towards the door, I passed the person who had come in, and saw him plainly. I turned directly, came back, and looked again. He did not know me, but I knew him in a moment.

At another time I might have wanted the confidence or the decision to speak to him, and might have put it off until next day, and might have lost him. But, in the then condition of my mind, where the play was still running high, his former protection of me appeared so deserving of my gratitude, and my old love for him overflowed my breast so freshly and spontaneously, that I went up to him at once, with a fast-beating heart, and said:

'Steerforth! won't you speak to me?'

He looked at me--just as he used to look, sometimes--but I saw no recognition in his face.

'You don't remember me, I am afraid,' said I.

'My God!' he suddenly exclaimed. 'It's little Copperfield!'

I grasped him by both hands, and could not let them go. But for very shame, and the fear that it might displease him, I could have held him round the neck and cried.

'I never, never, never was so glad! My dear Steerforth, I am so overjoyed to see you!'

'And I am rejoiced to see you, too!' he said, shaking my hands heartily. 'Why, Copperfield, old boy, don't be overpowered!' And yet he was glad, too, I thought, to see how the delight I had in meeting him affected me.

I brushed away the tears that my utmost resolution had not been able to keep back, and I made a clumsy laugh of it, and we sat down together, side by side.

'Why, how do you come to be here?' said Steerforth, clapping me on the shoulder.

'I came here by the Canterbury coach, today. I have been adopted by an aunt down in that part of the country, and have just finished my education there. How do YOU come to be here, Steerforth?'

'Well, I am what they call an Oxford man,' he returned; 'that is to say, I get bored to death down there, periodically--and I am on my way now to my mother's. You're a devilish amiable-looking fellow, Copperfield. Just what you used to be, now I look at you! Not altered in the least!'

'I knew you immediately,' I said; 'but you are more easily remembered.'

He laughed as he ran his hand through the clustering curls of his hair, and said gaily:

'Yes, I am on an expedition of duty. My mother lives a little way out of town; and the roads being in a beastly condition, and our house tedious enough, I remained here tonight instead of going on. I have not been in town half-a-dozen hours, and those I have been dozing and grumbling away

at the play.'

'I have been at the play, too,' said I. 'At Covent Garden. What a delightful and magnificent entertainment, Steerforth!'

Steerforth laughed heartily.

'My dear young Davy,' he said, clapping me on the shoulder again, 'you are a very Daisy. The daisy of the field, at sunrise, is not fresher than you are. I have been at Covent Garden, too, and there never was a more miserable business. Holloa, you sir!'

This was addressed to the waiter, who had been very attentive to our recognition, at a distance, and now came forward deferentially.

'Where have you put my friend, Mr. Copperfield?' said Steerforth.

'Beg your pardon, sir?'

'Where does he sleep? What's his number? You know what I mean,' said Steerforth.

'Well, sir,' said the waiter, with an apologetic air. 'Mr. Copperfield is at present in forty-four, sir.'

'And what the devil do you mean,' retorted Steerforth, 'by putting Mr. Copperfield into a little loft over a stable?'

'Why, you see we wasn't aware, sir,' returned the waiter, still apologetically, 'as Mr. Copperfield was anyways particular. We can give Mr. Copperfield seventy-two, sir, if it would be preferred. Next you, sir.'

'Of course it would be preferred,' said Steerforth. 'And do it at once.' The waiter immediately withdrew to make the exchange. Steerforth, very much amused at my having been put into forty-four, laughed again, and clapped me on the shoulder again, and invited me to breakfast with him next morning at ten o'clock--an invitation I was only too proud and happy to accept. It being now pretty late, we took our candles and went upstairs, where we parted with friendly heartiness at his door, and where I found my new room a great improvement on my old one, it not being at all musty, and having an immense four-post bedstead in it, which was quite a little landed estate. Here, among pillows enough for six, I soon fell asleep in a blissful condition, and dreamed of ancient Rome, Steerforth, and friendship, until the early morning coaches, rumbling out of the archway underneath, made me dream of thunder and the gods.

#### CHAPTER 20. STEERFORTH'S HOME

When the chambermaid tapped at my door at eight o'clock, and informed me that my shaving-water was outside, I felt severely the having no occasion for it, and blushed in my bed. The suspicion that she laughed too, when she said it, preyed upon my mind all the time I was dressing; and gave me, I was conscious, a sneaking and guilty air when I passed her on the staircase, as I was going down to breakfast. I was so sensitively aware, indeed, of being younger than I could have wished, that for some time I could not make up my mind to pass her at all, under the ignoble circumstances of the case; but, hearing her there with a broom, stood peeping out of window at King Charles on horseback, surrounded by a maze of hackney-coaches, and looking anything but regal in a drizzling rain and a dark-brown fog, until I was admonished by the waiter that the gentleman was waiting for me.



It was not in the coffee-room that I found Steerforth expecting me, but in a snug private apartment, red-curtained and Turkey-carpeted, where the fire burnt bright, and a fine hot breakfast was set forth on a table covered with a clean cloth; and a cheerful miniature of the room, the fire, the breakfast, Steerforth, and all, was shining in the little round mirror over the sideboard. I was rather bashful at first, Steerforth being so self-possessed, and elegant, and superior to me in all respects (age included); but his easy patronage soon put that to rights, and made me quite at home. I could not enough admire the change he had wrought in the Golden Cross; or compare the dull forlorn state I had held yesterday, with this morning's comfort and this morning's entertainment. As to the waiter's familiarity, it was quenched as if it had never been. He attended on us, as I may say, in sackcloth and ashes.

'Now, Copperfield,' said Steerforth, when we were alone, 'I should like to hear what you are doing, and where you are going, and all about you. I feel as if you were my property.' Glowing with pleasure to find that he had still this interest in me, I told him how my aunt had proposed the little expedition that I had before me, and whither it tended.

'As you are in no hurry, then,' said Steerforth, 'come home with me to Highgate, and stay a day or two. You will be pleased with my mother--she is a little vain and prosy about me, but that you can forgive her--and she will be pleased with you.'

'I should like to be as sure of that, as you are kind enough to say you are,' I answered, smiling.

'Oh!' said Steerforth, 'everyone who likes me, has a claim on her that is sure to be acknowledged.'

'Then I think I shall be a favourite,' said I.

'Good!' said Steerforth. 'Come and prove it. We will go and see the lions for an hour or two--it's something to have a fresh fellow like you to show them to, Copperfield--and then we'll journey out to Highgate by the coach.'

I could hardly believe but that I was in a dream, and that I should wake presently in number forty-four, to the solitary box in the coffee-room and the familiar waiter again. After I had written to my aunt and told her of my fortunate meeting with my admired old schoolfellow, and my acceptance of his invitation, we went out in a hackney-chariot, and saw a Panorama and some other sights, and took a walk through the Museum, where I could not help observing how much Steerforth knew, on an infinite variety of subjects, and of how little account he seemed to make his knowledge.

'You'll take a high degree at college, Steerforth,' said I, 'if you have not done so already; and they will have good reason to be proud of you.'

'I take a degree!' cried Steerforth. 'Not I! my dear Daisy--will you mind my calling you Daisy?'

'Not at all!' said I.

'That's a good fellow! My dear Daisy,' said Steerforth, laughing. 'I have not the least desire or intention to distinguish myself in that way. I have done quite sufficient for my purpose. I find that I am heavy company enough for myself as I am.'

'But the fame--' I was beginning.

'You romantic Daisy!' said Steerforth, laughing still more heartily: 'why should I trouble myself, that a parcel of heavy-headed fellows may

gape and hold up their hands? Let them do it at some other man. There's fame for him, and he's welcome to it.'

I was abashed at having made so great a mistake, and was glad to change the subject. Fortunately it was not difficult to do, for Steerforth could always pass from one subject to another with a carelessness and lightness that were his own.

Lunch succeeded to our sight-seeing, and the short winter day wore away so fast, that it was dusk when the stage-coach stopped with us at an old brick house at Highgate on the summit of the hill. An elderly lady, though not very far advanced in years, with a proud carriage and a handsome face, was in the doorway as we alighted; and greeting Steerforth as 'My dearest James,' folded him in her arms. To this lady he presented me as his mother, and she gave me a stately welcome.

It was a genteel old-fashioned house, very quiet and orderly. From the windows of my room I saw all London lying in the distance like a great vapour, with here and there some lights twinkling through it. I had only time, in dressing, to glance at the solid furniture, the framed pieces of work (done, I supposed, by Steerforth's mother when she was a girl), and some pictures in crayons of ladies with powdered hair and bodices, coming and going on the walls, as the newly-kindled fire crackled and sputtered, when I was called to dinner.

There was a second lady in the dining-room, of a slight short figure, dark, and not agreeable to look at, but with some appearance of good looks too, who attracted my attention: perhaps because I had not expected to see her; perhaps because I found myself sitting opposite to her; perhaps because of something really remarkable in her. She had black hair and eager black eyes, and was thin, and had a scar upon her lip. It was an old scar--I should rather call it seam, for it was not discoloured, and had healed years ago--which had once cut through her

mouth, downward towards the chin, but was now barely visible across the table, except above and on her upper lip, the shape of which it had altered. I concluded in my own mind that she was about thirty years of age, and that she wished to be married. She was a little dilapidated--like a house--with having been so long to let; yet had, as I have said, an appearance of good looks. Her thinness seemed to be the effect of some wasting fire within her, which found a vent in her gaunt eyes.

She was introduced as Miss Dartle, and both Steerforth and his mother called her Rosa. I found that she lived there, and had been for a long time Mrs. Steerforth's companion. It appeared to me that she never said anything she wanted to say, outright; but hinted it, and made a great deal more of it by this practice. For example, when Mrs. Steerforth observed, more in jest than earnest, that she feared her son led but a wild life at college, Miss Dartle put in thus:

'Oh, really? You know how ignorant I am, and that I only ask for information, but isn't it always so? I thought that kind of life was on all hands understood to be--eh?' 'It is education for a very grave profession, if you mean that, Rosa,' Mrs. Steerforth answered with some coldness.

'Oh! Yes! That's very true,' returned Miss Dartle. 'But isn't it, though?--I want to be put right, if I am wrong--isn't it, really?'

'Really what?' said Mrs. Steerforth.

'Oh! You mean it's not!' returned Miss Dartle. 'Well, I'm very glad to hear it! Now, I know what to do! That's the advantage of asking. I shall never allow people to talk before me about wastefulness and profligacy, and so forth, in connexion with that life, any more.'

'And you will be right,' said Mrs. Steerforth. 'My son's tutor is a conscientious gentleman; and if I had not implicit reliance on my son, I should have reliance on him.'

'Should you?' said Miss Dartle. 'Dear me! Conscientious, is he? Really conscientious, now?'

'Yes, I am convinced of it,' said Mrs. Steerforth.

'How very nice!' exclaimed Miss Dartle. 'What a comfort! Really conscientious? Then he's not--but of course he can't be, if he's really conscientious. Well, I shall be quite happy in my opinion of him, from this time. You can't think how it elevates him in my opinion, to know for certain that he's really conscientious!'

Her own views of every question, and her correction of everything that was said to which she was opposed, Miss Dartle insinuated in the same way: sometimes, I could not conceal from myself, with great power, though in contradiction even of Steerforth. An instance happened before dinner was done. Mrs. Steerforth speaking to me about my intention of going down into Suffolk, I said at hazard how glad I should be, if Steerforth would only go there with me; and explaining to him that I was going to see my old nurse, and Mr. Peggotty's family, I reminded him of the boatman whom he had seen at school.

'Oh! That bluff fellow!' said Steerforth. 'He had a son with him, hadn't he?'

'No. That was his nephew,' I replied; 'whom he adopted, though, as a son. He has a very pretty little niece too, whom he adopted as a daughter. In short, his house--or rather his boat, for he lives in one, on dry land--is full of people who are objects of his generosity and kindness. You would be delighted to see that household.'

'Should I?' said Steerforth. 'Well, I think I should. I must see what can be done. It would be worth a journey (not to mention the pleasure of a journey with you, Daisy), to see that sort of people together, and to make one of 'em.'

My heart leaped with a new hope of pleasure. But it was in reference to the tone in which he had spoken of 'that sort of people', that Miss Dartle, whose sparkling eyes had been watchful of us, now broke in again.

'Oh, but, really? Do tell me. Are they, though?' she said.

'Are they what? And are who what?' said Steerforth.

'That sort of people.---Are they really animals and clods, and beings of another order? I want to know SO much.'

'Why, there's a pretty wide separation between them and us,' said Steerforth, with indifference. 'They are not to be expected to be as sensitive as we are. Their delicacy is not to be shocked, or hurt easily. They are wonderfully virtuous, I dare say--some people contend for that, at least; and I am sure I don't want to contradict them--but they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded.'

'Really!' said Miss Dartle. 'Well, I don't know, now, when I have been better pleased than to hear that. It's so consoling! It's such a delight to know that, when they suffer, they don't feel! Sometimes I have been quite uneasy for that sort of people; but now I shall just dismiss the idea of them, altogether. Live and learn. I had my doubts, I confess, but now they're cleared up. I didn't know, and now I do know, and that shows the advantage of asking--don't it?'

I believed that Steerforth had said what he had, in jest, or to draw Miss Dartle out; and I expected him to say as much when she was gone, and we two were sitting before the fire. But he merely asked me what I thought of her.

'She is very clever, is she not?' I asked.

'Clever! She brings everything to a grindstone,' said Steerforth, and sharpens it, as she has sharpened her own face and figure these years past. She has worn herself away by constant sharpening. She is all edge.'

'What a remarkable scar that is upon her lip!' I said.

Steerforth's face fell, and he paused a moment.

'Why, the fact is,' he returned, 'I did that.'

'By an unfortunate accident!'

'No. I was a young boy, and she exasperated me, and I threw a hammer at her. A promising young angel I must have been!' I was deeply sorry to have touched on such a painful theme, but that was useless now.

'She has borne the mark ever since, as you see,' said Steerforth; 'and she'll bear it to her grave, if she ever rests in one--though I can hardly believe she will ever rest anywhere. She was the motherless child of a sort of cousin of my father's. He died one day. My mother, who was then a widow, brought her here to be company to her. She has a couple of thousand pounds of her own, and saves the interest of it every year, to add to the principal. There's the history of Miss Rosa Dartle for you.'

'And I have no doubt she loves you like a brother?' said I.

'Humph!' retorted Steerforth, looking at the fire. 'Some brothers are not loved over much; and some love--but help yourself, Copperfield! We'll drink the daisies of the field, in compliment to you; and the lilies of the valley that toil not, neither do they spin, in compliment to me--the more shame for me!' A moody smile that had overspread his features cleared off as he said this merrily, and he was his own frank, winning self again.

I could not help glancing at the scar with a painful interest when we went in to tea. It was not long before I observed that it was the most susceptible part of her face, and that, when she turned pale, that mark altered first, and became a dull, lead-coloured streak, lengthening out to its full extent, like a mark in invisible ink brought to the fire. There was a little altercation between her and Steerforth about a cast of the dice at back gammon--when I thought her, for one moment, in a storm of rage; and then I saw it start forth like the old writing on the wall.

It was no matter of wonder to me to find Mrs. Steerforth devoted to her son. She seemed to be able to speak or think about nothing else. She showed me his picture as an infant, in a locket, with some of his baby-hair in it; she showed me his picture as he had been when I first knew him; and she wore at her breast his picture as he was now. All the letters he had ever written to her, she kept in a cabinet near her own chair by the fire; and she would have read me some of them, and I should have been very glad to hear them too, if he had not interposed, and coaxed her out of the design.

'It was at Mr. Creakle's, my son tells me, that you first became acquainted,' said Mrs. Steerforth, as she and I were talking at one table, while they played backgammon at another. 'Indeed, I recollect his



speaking, at that time, of a pupil younger than himself who had taken his fancy there; but your name, as you may suppose, has not lived in my memory.'

'He was very generous and noble to me in those days, I assure you, ma'am,' said I, 'and I stood in need of such a friend. I should have been quite crushed without him.'

'He is always generous and noble,' said Mrs. Steerforth, proudly.

I subscribed to this with all my heart, God knows. She knew I did; for the stateliness of her manner already abated towards me, except when she spoke in praise of him, and then her air was always lofty.

'It was not a fit school generally for my son,' said she; 'far from it; but there were particular circumstances to be considered at the time, of more importance even than that selection. My son's high spirit made it desirable that he should be placed with some man who felt its superiority, and would be content to bow himself before it; and we found such a man there.'

I knew that, knowing the fellow. And yet I did not despise him the more for it, but thought it a redeeming quality in him if he could be allowed any grace for not resisting one so irresistible as Steerforth.

'My son's great capacity was tempted on, there, by a feeling of voluntary emulation and conscious pride,' the fond lady went on to say. 'He would have risen against all constraint; but he found himself the monarch of the place, and he haughtily determined to be worthy of his station. It was like himself.'

I echoed, with all my heart and soul, that it was like himself.

'So my son took, of his own will, and on no compulsion, to the course in which he can always, when it is his pleasure, outstrip every competitor,' she pursued. 'My son informs me, Mr. Copperfield, that you were quite devoted to him, and that when you met yesterday you made yourself known to him with tears of joy. I should be an affected woman if I made any pretence of being surprised by my son's inspiring such emotions; but I cannot be indifferent to anyone who is so sensible of his merit, and I am very glad to see you here, and can assure you that he feels an unusual friendship for you, and that you may rely on his protection.'

Miss Dartle played backgammon as eagerly as she did everything else. If I had seen her, first, at the board, I should have fancied that her figure had got thin, and her eyes had got large, over that pursuit, and no other in the world. But I am very much mistaken if she missed a word of this, or lost a look of mine as I received it with the utmost pleasure, and honoured by Mrs. Steerforth's confidence, felt older than I had done since I left Canterbury.

When the evening was pretty far spent, and a tray of glasses and decanters came in, Steerforth promised, over the fire, that he would seriously think of going down into the country with me. There was no hurry, he said; a week hence would do; and his mother hospitably said the same. While we were talking, he more than once called me Daisy; which brought Miss Dartle out again.

'But really, Mr. Copperfield,' she asked, 'is it a nickname? And why does he give it you? Is it--eh?--because he thinks you young and innocent? I am so stupid in these things.'

I coloured in replying that I believed it was.

'Oh!' said Miss Dartle. 'Now I am glad to know that! I ask for

information, and I am glad to know it. He thinks you young and innocent; and so you are his friend. Well, that's quite delightful!'

She went to bed soon after this, and Mrs. Steerforth retired too. Steerforth and I, after lingering for half-an-hour over the fire, talking about Traddles and all the rest of them at old Salem House, went upstairs together. Steerforth's room was next to mine, and I went in to look at it. It was a picture of comfort, full of easy-chairs, cushions and footstools, worked by his mother's hand, and with no sort of thing omitted that could help to render it complete. Finally, her handsome features looked down on her darling from a portrait on the wall, as if it were even something to her that her likeness should watch him while he slept.

I found the fire burning clear enough in my room by this time, and the curtains drawn before the windows and round the bed, giving it a very snug appearance. I sat down in a great chair upon the hearth to meditate on my happiness; and had enjoyed the contemplation of it for some time, when I found a likeness of Miss Dartle looking eagerly at me from above the chimney-piece.

It was a startling likeness, and necessarily had a startling look. The painter hadn't made the scar, but I made it; and there it was, coming and going; now confined to the upper lip as I had seen it at dinner, and now showing the whole extent of the wound inflicted by the hammer, as I had seen it when she was passionate.

I wondered peevishly why they couldn't put her anywhere else instead of quartering her on me. To get rid of her, I undressed quickly, extinguished my light, and went to bed. But, as I fell asleep, I could not forget that she was still there looking, 'Is it really, though? I want to know'; and when I awoke in the night, I found that I was uneasily asking all sorts of people in my dreams whether it really was

or not--without knowing what I meant.

## CHAPTER 21. LITTLE EM'LY

There was a servant in that house, a man who, I understood, was usually with Steerforth, and had come into his service at the University, who was in appearance a pattern of respectability. I believe there never existed in his station a more respectable-looking man. He was taciturn, soft-footed, very quiet in his manner, deferential, observant, always at hand when wanted, and never near when not wanted; but his great claim to consideration was his respectability. He had not a pliant face, he had rather a stiff neck, rather a tight smooth head with short hair clinging to it at the sides, a soft way of speaking, with a peculiar habit of whispering the letter S so distinctly, that he seemed to use it oftener than any other man; but every peculiarity that he had he made respectable. If his nose had been upside-down, he would have made that respectable. He surrounded himself with an atmosphere of respectability, and walked secure in it. It would have been next to impossible to suspect him of anything wrong, he was so thoroughly respectable. Nobody could have thought of putting him in a livery, he was so highly respectable. To have imposed any derogatory work upon him, would have been to inflict a wanton insult on the feelings of a most respectable man. And of this, I noticed--the women-servants in the household were so intuitively conscious, that they always did such work themselves, and generally while he read the paper by the pantry fire.

Such a self-contained man I never saw. But in that quality, as in every other he possessed, he only seemed to be the more respectable. Even the fact that no one knew his Christian name, seemed to form a part of his respectability. Nothing could be objected against his surname, Littimer,

by which he was known. Peter might have been hanged, or Tom transported; but Littimer was perfectly respectable.

It was occasioned, I suppose, by the reverend nature of respectability in the abstract, but I felt particularly young in this man's presence. How old he was himself, I could not guess--and that again went to his credit on the same score; for in the calmness of respectability he might have numbered fifty years as well as thirty.

Littimer was in my room in the morning before I was up, to bring me that reproachful shaving-water, and to put out my clothes. When I undrew the curtains and looked out of bed, I saw him, in an equable temperature of respectability, unaffected by the east wind of January, and not even breathing frostily, standing my boots right and left in the first dancing position, and blowing specks of dust off my coat as he laid it down like a baby.

I gave him good morning, and asked him what o'clock it was. He took out of his pocket the most respectable hunting-watch I ever saw, and preventing the spring with his thumb from opening far, looked in at the face as if he were consulting an oracular oyster, shut it up again, and said, if I pleased, it was half past eight.

'Mr. Steerforth will be glad to hear how you have rested, sir.'

'Thank you,' said I, 'very well indeed. Is Mr. Steerforth quite well?'

'Thank you, sir, Mr. Steerforth is tolerably well.' Another of his characteristics--no use of superlatives. A cool calm medium always.

'Is there anything more I can have the honour of doing for you, sir? The warning-bell will ring at nine; the family take breakfast at half past nine.'

'Nothing, I thank you.'

'I thank YOU, sir, if you please'; and with that, and with a little inclination of his head when he passed the bed-side, as an apology for correcting me, he went out, shutting the door as delicately as if I had just fallen into a sweet sleep on which my life depended.

Every morning we held exactly this conversation: never any more, and never any less: and yet, invariably, however far I might have been lifted out of myself over-night, and advanced towards maturer years, by Steerforth's companionship, or Mrs. Steerforth's confidence, or Miss Dartle's conversation, in the presence of this most respectable man I became, as our smaller poets sing, 'a boy again'.

He got horses for us; and Steerforth, who knew everything, gave me lessons in riding. He provided foils for us, and Steerforth gave me lessons in fencing--gloves, and I began, of the same master, to improve in boxing. It gave me no manner of concern that Steerforth should find me a novice in these sciences, but I never could bear to show my want of skill before the respectable Littimer. I had no reason to believe that Littimer understood such arts himself; he never led me to suppose anything of the kind, by so much as the vibration of one of his respectable eyelashes; yet whenever he was by, while we were practising, I felt myself the greenest and most inexperienced of mortals.

I am particular about this man, because he made a particular effect on me at that time, and because of what took place thereafter.

The week passed away in a most delightful manner. It passed rapidly, as may be supposed, to one entranced as I was; and yet it gave me so many occasions for knowing Steerforth better, and admiring him more in a thousand respects, that at its close I seemed to have been with him

for a much longer time. A dashing way he had of treating me like a plaything, was more agreeable to me than any behaviour he could have adopted. It reminded me of our old acquaintance; it seemed the natural sequel of it; it showed me that he was unchanged; it relieved me of any uneasiness I might have felt, in comparing my merits with his, and measuring my claims upon his friendship by any equal standard; above all, it was a familiar, unrestrained, affectionate demeanour that he used towards no one else. As he had treated me at school differently from all the rest, I joyfully believed that he treated me in life unlike any other friend he had. I believed that I was nearer to his heart than any other friend, and my own heart warmed with attachment to him. He made up his mind to go with me into the country, and the day arrived for our departure. He had been doubtful at first whether to take Littimer or not, but decided to leave him at home. The respectable creature, satisfied with his lot whatever it was, arranged our portmanteaux on the little carriage that was to take us into London, as if they were intended to defy the shocks of ages, and received my modestly proffered donation with perfect tranquillity.

We bade adieu to Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle, with many thanks on my part, and much kindness on the devoted mother's. The last thing I saw was Littimer's unruffled eye; fraught, as I fancied, with the silent conviction that I was very young indeed.

What I felt, in returning so auspiciously to the old familiar places, I shall not endeavour to describe. We went down by the Mail. I was so concerned, I recollect, even for the honour of Yarmouth, that when Steerforth said, as we drove through its dark streets to the inn, that, as well as he could make out, it was a good, queer, out-of-the-way kind of hole, I was highly pleased. We went to bed on our arrival (I observed a pair of dirty shoes and gaiters in connexion with my old friend the Dolphin as we passed that door), and breakfasted late in the morning. Steerforth, who was in great spirits, had been strolling about the

beach before I was up, and had made acquaintance, he said, with half the boatmen in the place. Moreover, he had seen, in the distance, what he was sure must be the identical house of Mr. Peggotty, with smoke coming out of the chimney; and had had a great mind, he told me, to walk in and swear he was myself grown out of knowledge.

'When do you propose to introduce me there, Daisy?' he said. 'I am at your disposal. Make your own arrangements.'

'Why, I was thinking that this evening would be a good time, Steerforth, when they are all sitting round the fire. I should like you to see it when it's snug, it's such a curious place.'

'So be it!' returned Steerforth. 'This evening.'

'I shall not give them any notice that we are here, you know,' said I, delighted. 'We must take them by surprise.'

'Oh, of course! It's no fun,' said Steerforth, 'unless we take them by surprise. Let us see the natives in their aboriginal condition.'

'Though they ARE that sort of people that you mentioned,' I returned.

'Aha! What! you recollect my skirmishes with Rosa, do you?' he exclaimed with a quick look. 'Confound the girl, I am half afraid of her. She's like a goblin to me. But never mind her. Now what are you going to do? You are going to see your nurse, I suppose?'

'Why, yes,' I said, 'I must see Peggotty first of all.'

'Well,' replied Steerforth, looking at his watch. 'Suppose I deliver you up to be cried over for a couple of hours. Is that long enough?'



I answered, laughing, that I thought we might get through it in that time, but that he must come also; for he would find that his renown had preceded him, and that he was almost as great a personage as I was.

'I'll come anywhere you like,' said Steerforth, 'or do anything you like. Tell me where to come to; and in two hours I'll produce myself in any state you please, sentimental or comical.'

I gave him minute directions for finding the residence of Mr. Barkis, carrier to Blunderstone and elsewhere; and, on this understanding, went out alone. There was a sharp bracing air; the ground was dry; the sea was crisp and clear; the sun was diffusing abundance of light, if not much warmth; and everything was fresh and lively. I was so fresh and lively myself, in the pleasure of being there, that I could have stopped the people in the streets and shaken hands with them.

The streets looked small, of course. The streets that we have only seen as children always do, I believe, when we go back to them. But I had forgotten nothing in them, and found nothing changed, until I came to Mr. Omer's shop. OMER AND Joram was now written up, where OMER used to be; but the inscription, DRAPER, TAILOR, HABERDASHER, FUNERAL FURNISHER, &c., remained as it was.

My footsteps seemed to tend so naturally to the shop door, after I had read these words from over the way, that I went across the road and looked in. There was a pretty woman at the back of the shop, dancing a little child in her arms, while another little fellow clung to her apron. I had no difficulty in recognizing either Minnie or Minnie's children. The glass door of the parlour was not open; but in the workshop across the yard I could faintly hear the old tune playing, as if it had never left off.

'Is Mr. Omer at home?' said I, entering. 'I should like to see him, for

a moment, if he is.'

'Oh yes, sir, he is at home,' said Minnie; 'the weather don't suit his asthma out of doors. Joe, call your grandfather!'

The little fellow, who was holding her apron, gave such a lusty shout, that the sound of it made him bashful, and he buried his face in her skirts, to her great admiration. I heard a heavy puffing and blowing coming towards us, and soon Mr. Omer, shorter-winded than of yore, but not much older-looking, stood before me.

'Servant, sir,' said Mr. Omer. 'What can I do for you, sir?' 'You can shake hands with me, Mr. Omer, if you please,' said I, putting out my own. 'You were very good-natured to me once, when I am afraid I didn't show that I thought so.'

'Was I though?' returned the old man. 'I'm glad to hear it, but I don't remember when. Are you sure it was me?'

'Quite.'

'I think my memory has got as short as my breath,' said Mr. Omer, looking at me and shaking his head; 'for I don't remember you.'

'Don't you remember your coming to the coach to meet me, and my having breakfast here, and our riding out to Blunderstone together: you, and I, and Mrs. Joram, and Mr. Joram too--who wasn't her husband then?'

'Why, Lord bless my soul!' exclaimed Mr. Omer, after being thrown by his surprise into a fit of coughing, 'you don't say so! Minnie, my dear, you recollect? Dear me, yes; the party was a lady, I think?'

'My mother,' I rejoined.

'To--be--sure,' said Mr. Omer, touching my waistcoat with his forefinger, 'and there was a little child too! There was two parties. The little party was laid along with the other party. Over at Blunderstone it was, of course. Dear me! And how have you been since?'

Very well, I thanked him, as I hoped he had been too.

'Oh! nothing to grumble at, you know,' said Mr. Omer. 'I find my breath gets short, but it seldom gets longer as a man gets older. I take it as it comes, and make the most of it. That's the best way, ain't it?'

Mr. Omer coughed again, in consequence of laughing, and was assisted out of his fit by his daughter, who now stood close beside us, dancing her smallest child on the counter.

'Dear me!' said Mr. Omer. 'Yes, to be sure. Two parties! Why, in that very ride, if you'll believe me, the day was named for my Minnie to marry Joram. "Do name it, sir," says Joram. "Yes, do, father," says Minnie. And now he's come into the business. And look here! The youngest!'

Minnie laughed, and stroked her banded hair upon her temples, as her father put one of his fat fingers into the hand of the child she was dancing on the counter.

'Two parties, of course!' said Mr. Omer, nodding his head retrospectively. 'Ex-actly so! And Joram's at work, at this minute, on a grey one with silver nails, not this measurement'--the measurement of the dancing child upon the counter--'by a good two inches.---Will you take something?'

I thanked him, but declined.

'Let me see,' said Mr. Omer. 'Barkis's the carrier's wife--Peggotty's the boatman's sister--she had something to do with your family? She was in service there, sure?'

My answering in the affirmative gave him great satisfaction.

'I believe my breath will get long next, my memory's getting so much so,' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir, we've got a young relation of hers here, under articles to us, that has as elegant a taste in the dress-making business--I assure you I don't believe there's a Duchess in England can touch her.'

'Not little Em'ly?' said I, involuntarily.

'Em'ly's her name,' said Mr. Omer, 'and she's little too. But if you'll believe me, she has such a face of her own that half the women in this town are mad against her.'

'Nonsense, father!' cried Minnie.

'My dear,' said Mr. Omer, 'I don't say it's the case with you,' winking at me, 'but I say that half the women in Yarmouth--ah! and in five mile round--are mad against that girl.'

'Then she should have kept to her own station in life, father,' said Minnie, 'and not have given them any hold to talk about her, and then they couldn't have done it.'

'Couldn't have done it, my dear!' retorted Mr. Omer. 'Couldn't have done it! Is that YOUR knowledge of life? What is there that any woman couldn't do, that she shouldn't do--especially on the subject of another woman's good looks?'

I really thought it was all over with Mr. Omer, after he had uttered this libellous pleasantry. He coughed to that extent, and his breath eluded all his attempts to recover it with that obstinacy, that I fully expected to see his head go down behind the counter, and his little black breeches, with the rusty little bunches of ribbons at the knees, come quivering up in a last ineffectual struggle. At length, however, he got better, though he still panted hard, and was so exhausted that he was obliged to sit on the stool of the shop-desk.

'You see,' he said, wiping his head, and breathing with difficulty, 'she hasn't taken much to any companions here; she hasn't taken kindly to any particular acquaintances and friends, not to mention sweethearts. In consequence, an ill-natured story got about, that Em'ly wanted to be a lady. Now my opinion is, that it came into circulation principally on account of her sometimes saying, at the school, that if she was a lady she would like to do so-and-so for her uncle--don't you see?--and buy him such-and-such fine things.'

'I assure you, Mr. Omer, she has said so to me,' I returned eagerly, 'when we were both children.'

Mr. Omer nodded his head and rubbed his chin. 'Just so. Then out of a very little, she could dress herself, you see, better than most others could out of a deal, and that made things unpleasant. Moreover, she was rather what might be called wayward--I'll go so far as to say what I should call wayward myself,' said Mr. Omer; '-didn't know her own mind quite--a little spoiled--and couldn't, at first, exactly bind herself down. No more than that was ever said against her, Minnie?'

'No, father,' said Mrs. Joram. 'That's the worst, I believe.'

'So when she got a situation,' said Mr. Omer, 'to keep a fractious old

lady company, they didn't very well agree, and she didn't stop. At last she came here, apprenticed for three years. Nearly two of 'em are over, and she has been as good a girl as ever was. Worth any six! Minnie, is she worth any six, now?'

'Yes, father,' replied Minnie. 'Never say I detracted from her!'

'Very good,' said Mr. Omer. 'That's right. And so, young gentleman,' he added, after a few moments' further rubbing of his chin, 'that you may not consider me long-winded as well as short-breathed, I believe that's all about it.'

As they had spoken in a subdued tone, while speaking of Em'ly, I had no doubt that she was near. On my asking now, if that were not so, Mr. Omer nodded yes, and nodded towards the door of the parlour. My hurried inquiry if I might peep in, was answered with a free permission; and, looking through the glass, I saw her sitting at her work. I saw her, a most beautiful little creature, with the cloudless blue eyes, that had looked into my childish heart, turned laughingly upon another child of Minnie's who was playing near her; with enough of wilfulness in her bright face to justify what I had heard; with much of the old capricious coyness lurking in it; but with nothing in her pretty looks, I am sure, but what was meant for goodness and for happiness, and what was on a good and happy course.

The tune across the yard that seemed as if it never had left off--alas! it was the tune that never DOES leave off--was beating, softly, all the while.

'Wouldn't you like to step in,' said Mr. Omer, 'and speak to her? Walk in and speak to her, sir! Make yourself at home!'

I was too bashful to do so then--I was afraid of confusing her, and I

was no less afraid of confusing myself.--but I informed myself of the hour at which she left of an evening, in order that our visit might be timed accordingly; and taking leave of Mr. Omer, and his pretty daughter, and her little children, went away to my dear old Peggotty's.

Here she was, in the tiled kitchen, cooking dinner! The moment I knocked at the door she opened it, and asked me what I pleased to want. I looked at her with a smile, but she gave me no smile in return. I had never ceased to write to her, but it must have been seven years since we had met.

'Is Mr. Barkis at home, ma'am?' I said, feigning to speak roughly to her.

'He's at home, sir,' returned Peggotty, 'but he's bad abed with the rheumatics.'

'Don't he go over to Blunderstone now?' I asked.

'When he's well he do,' she answered.

'Do YOU ever go there, Mrs. Barkis?'

She looked at me more attentively, and I noticed a quick movement of her hands towards each other.

'Because I want to ask a question about a house there, that they call the--what is it?--the Rookery,' said I.

She took a step backward, and put out her hands in an undecided frightened way, as if to keep me off.

'Peggotty!' I cried to her.

She cried, 'My darling boy!' and we both burst into tears, and were locked in one another's arms.

What extravagances she committed; what laughing and crying over me; what pride she showed, what joy, what sorrow that she whose pride and joy I might have been, could never hold me in a fond embrace; I have not the heart to tell. I was troubled with no misgiving that it was young in me to respond to her emotions. I had never laughed and cried in all my life, I dare say--not even to her--more freely than I did that morning.

'Barkis will be so glad,' said Peggotty, wiping her eyes with her apron, 'that it'll do him more good than pints of liniment. May I go and tell him you are here? Will you come up and see him, my dear?'

Of course I would. But Peggotty could not get out of the room as easily as she meant to, for as often as she got to the door and looked round at me, she came back again to have another laugh and another cry upon my shoulder. At last, to make the matter easier, I went upstairs with her; and having waited outside for a minute, while she said a word of preparation to Mr. Barkis, presented myself before that invalid.

He received me with absolute enthusiasm. He was too rheumatic to be shaken hands with, but he begged me to shake the tassel on the top of his nightcap, which I did most cordially. When I sat down by the side of the bed, he said that it did him a world of good to feel as if he was driving me on the Blunderstone road again. As he lay in bed, face upward, and so covered, with that exception, that he seemed to be nothing but a face--like a conventional cherubim--he looked the queerest object I ever beheld.

'What name was it, as I wrote up in the cart, sir?' said Mr. Barkis, with a slow rheumatic smile.



'Ah! Mr. Barkis, we had some grave talks about that matter, hadn't we?'

'I was willin' a long time, sir?' said Mr. Barkis.

'A long time,' said I.

'And I don't regret it,' said Mr. Barkis. 'Do you remember what you told me once, about her making all the apple parsties and doing all the cooking?'

'Yes, very well,' I returned.

'It was as true,' said Mr. Barkis, 'as turnips is. It was as true,' said Mr. Barkis, nodding his nightcap, which was his only means of emphasis, 'as taxes is. And nothing's truer than them.'

Mr. Barkis turned his eyes upon me, as if for my assent to this result of his reflections in bed; and I gave it.

'Nothing's truer than them,' repeated Mr. Barkis; 'a man as poor as I am, finds that out in his mind when he's laid up. I'm a very poor man, sir!'

'I am sorry to hear it, Mr. Barkis.'

'A very poor man, indeed I am,' said Mr. Barkis.

Here his right hand came slowly and feebly from under the bedclothes, and with a purposeless uncertain grasp took hold of a stick which was loosely tied to the side of the bed. After some poking about with this instrument, in the course of which his face assumed a variety of distracted expressions, Mr. Barkis poked it against a box, an end

of which had been visible to me all the time. Then his face became composed.

'Old clothes,' said Mr. Barkis.

'Oh!' said I.

'I wish it was Money, sir,' said Mr. Barkis.

'I wish it was, indeed,' said I.

'But it AIN'T,' said Mr. Barkis, opening both his eyes as wide as he possibly could.

I expressed myself quite sure of that, and Mr. Barkis, turning his eyes more gently to his wife, said:

'She's the usefulest and best of women, C. P. Barkis. All the praise that anyone can give to C. P. Barkis, she deserves, and more! My dear, you'll get a dinner today, for company; something good to eat and drink, will you?'

I should have protested against this unnecessary demonstration in my honour, but that I saw Peggotty, on the opposite side of the bed, extremely anxious I should not. So I held my peace.

'I have got a trifle of money somewhere about me, my dear,' said Mr. Barkis, 'but I'm a little tired. If you and Mr. David will leave me for a short nap, I'll try and find it when I wake.'

We left the room, in compliance with this request. When we got outside the door, Peggotty informed me that Mr. Barkis, being now 'a little nearer' than he used to be, always resorted to this same device before

producing a single coin from his store; and that he endured unheard-of agonies in crawling out of bed alone, and taking it from that unlucky box. In effect, we presently heard him uttering suppressed groans of the most dismal nature, as this magpie proceeding racked him in every joint; but while Peggotty's eyes were full of compassion for him, she said his generous impulse would do him good, and it was better not to check it. So he groaned on, until he had got into bed again, suffering, I have no doubt, a martyrdom; and then called us in, pretending to have just woke up from a refreshing sleep, and to produce a guinea from under his pillow. His satisfaction in which happy imposition on us, and in having preserved the impenetrable secret of the box, appeared to be a sufficient compensation to him for all his tortures.

I prepared Peggotty for Steerforth's arrival and it was not long before he came. I am persuaded she knew no difference between his having been a personal benefactor of hers, and a kind friend to me, and that she would have received him with the utmost gratitude and devotion in any case. But his easy, spirited good humour; his genial manner, his handsome looks, his natural gift of adapting himself to whomsoever he pleased, and making direct, when he cared to do it, to the main point of interest in anybody's heart; bound her to him wholly in five minutes. His manner to me, alone, would have won her. But, through all these causes combined, I sincerely believe she had a kind of adoration for him before he left the house that night.

He stayed there with me to dinner--if I were to say willingly, I should not half express how readily and gaily. He went into Mr. Barkis's room like light and air, brightening and refreshing it as if he were healthy weather. There was no noise, no effort, no consciousness, in anything he did; but in everything an indescribable lightness, a seeming impossibility of doing anything else, or doing anything better, which was so graceful, so natural, and agreeable, that it overcomes me, even now, in the remembrance.

We made merry in the little parlour, where the Book of Martyrs, unthumbed since my time, was laid out upon the desk as of old, and where I now turned over its terrific pictures, remembering the old sensations they had awakened, but not feeling them. When Peggotty spoke of what she called my room, and of its being ready for me at night, and of her hoping I would occupy it, before I could so much as look at Steerforth, hesitating, he was possessed of the whole case.

'Of course,' he said. 'You'll sleep here, while we stay, and I shall sleep at the hotel.'

'But to bring you so far,' I returned, 'and to separate, seems bad companionship, Steerforth.'

'Why, in the name of Heaven, where do you naturally belong?' he said. 'What is "seems", compared to that?' It was settled at once.

He maintained all his delightful qualities to the last, until we started forth, at eight o'clock, for Mr. Peggotty's boat. Indeed, they were more and more brightly exhibited as the hours went on; for I thought even then, and I have no doubt now, that the consciousness of success in his determination to please, inspired him with a new delicacy of perception, and made it, subtle as it was, more easy to him. If anyone had told me, then, that all this was a brilliant game, played for the excitement of the moment, for the employment of high spirits, in the thoughtless love of superiority, in a mere wasteful careless course of winning what was worthless to him, and next minute thrown away--I say, if anyone had told me such a lie that night, I wonder in what manner of receiving it my indignation would have found a vent! Probably only in an increase, had that been possible, of the romantic feelings of fidelity and friendship with which I walked beside him, over the dark wintry sands towards the old boat; the wind sighing around us even more mournfully, than it had

sighed and moaned upon the night when I first darkened Mr. Peggotty's door.

'This is a wild kind of place, Steerforth, is it not?'

'Dismal enough in the dark,' he said: 'and the sea roars as if it were hungry for us. Is that the boat, where I see a light yonder?' 'That's the boat,' said I.

'And it's the same I saw this morning,' he returned. 'I came straight to it, by instinct, I suppose.'

We said no more as we approached the light, but made softly for the door. I laid my hand upon the latch; and whispering Steerforth to keep close to me, went in.

A murmur of voices had been audible on the outside, and, at the moment of our entrance, a clapping of hands: which latter noise, I was surprised to see, proceeded from the generally disconsolate Mrs. Gummidge. But Mrs. Gummidge was not the only person there who was unusually excited. Mr. Peggotty, his face lighted up with uncommon satisfaction, and laughing with all his might, held his rough arms wide open, as if for little Em'ly to run into them; Ham, with a mixed expression in his face of admiration, exultation, and a lumbering sort of bashfulness that sat upon him very well, held little Em'ly by the hand, as if he were presenting her to Mr. Peggotty; little Em'ly herself, blushing and shy, but delighted with Mr. Peggotty's delight, as her joyous eyes expressed, was stopped by our entrance (for she saw us first) in the very act of springing from Ham to nestle in Mr. Peggotty's embrace. In the first glimpse we had of them all, and at the moment of our passing from the dark cold night into the warm light room, this was the way in which they were all employed: Mrs. Gummidge in the background, clapping her hands like a madwoman.

The little picture was so instantaneously dissolved by our going in, that one might have doubted whether it had ever been. I was in the midst of the astonished family, face to face with Mr. Peggotty, and holding out my hand to him, when Ham shouted:

'Mas'r Davy! It's Mas'r Davy!'

In a moment we were all shaking hands with one another, and asking one another how we did, and telling one another how glad we were to meet, and all talking at once. Mr. Peggotty was so proud and overjoyed to see us, that he did not know what to say or do, but kept over and over again shaking hands with me, and then with Steerforth, and then with me, and then ruffling his shaggy hair all over his head, and laughing with such glee and triumph, that it was a treat to see him.

'Why, that you two gent'lmen--gent'lmen growed--should come to this here roof tonight, of all nights in my life,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'is such a thing as never happened afore, I do rightly believe! Em'ly, my darling, come here! Come here, my little witch! There's Mas'r Davy's friend, my dear! There's the gent'lman as you've heerd on, Em'ly. He comes to see you, along with Mas'r Davy, on the brightest night of your uncle's life as ever was or will be, Gorm the t'other one, and horroar for it!'

After delivering this speech all in a breath, and with extraordinary animation and pleasure, Mr. Peggotty put one of his large hands rapturously on each side of his niece's face, and kissing it a dozen times, laid it with a gentle pride and love upon his broad chest, and patted it as if his hand had been a lady's. Then he let her go; and as she ran into the little chamber where I used to sleep, looked round upon us, quite hot and out of breath with his uncommon satisfaction.

'If you two gent'lmen--gent'lmen growed now, and such gent'lmen--' said

Mr. Peggotty.

'So th' are, so th' are!' cried Ham. 'Well said! So th' are. Mas'r Davy bor'--gent'lmen grewed--so th' are!'

'If you two gent'lmen, gent'lmen grewed,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'don't ex-cuse me for being in a state of mind, when you understand matters, I'll arks your pardon. Em'ly, my dear!--She knows I'm a going to tell,' here his delight broke out again, 'and has made off. Would you be so good as look arter her, Mawther, for a minute?'

Mrs. Gummidge nodded and disappeared.

'If this ain't,' said Mr. Peggotty, sitting down among us by the fire, 'the brightest night o' my life, I'm a shellfish--biled too--and more I can't say. This here little Em'ly, sir,' in a low voice to Steerforth, '--her as you see a blushing here just now--'

Steerforth only nodded; but with such a pleased expression of interest, and of participation in Mr. Peggotty's feelings, that the latter answered him as if he had spoken.

'To be sure,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'That's her, and so she is. Thankee, sir.'

Ham nodded to me several times, as if he would have said so too.

'This here little Em'ly of ours,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'has been, in our house, what I suppose (I'm a ignorant man, but that's my belief) no one but a little bright-eyed creetur can be in a house. She ain't my child; I never had one; but I couldn't love her more. You understand! I couldn't do it!'

'I quite understand,' said Steerforth.

'I know you do, sir,' returned Mr. Peggotty, 'and thankee again. Mas'r Davy, he can remember what she was; you may judge for your own self what she is; but neither of you can't fully know what she has been, is, and will be, to my loving art. I am rough, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I am as rough as a Sea Porkypine; but no one, unless, mayhap, it is a woman, can know, I think, what our little Em'ly is to me. And betwixt ourselves,' sinking his voice lower yet, 'that woman's name ain't Missis Gummidge neither, though she has a world of merits.' Mr. Peggotty ruffled his hair again, with both hands, as a further preparation for what he was going to say, and went on, with a hand upon each of his knees:

'There was a certain person as had know'd our Em'ly, from the time when her father was drowned; as had seen her constant; when a babby, when a young gal, when a woman. Not much of a person to look at, he warn't,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'something o' my own build--rough--a good deal o' the sou'-wester in him--wery salt--but, on the whole, a honest sort of a chap, with his art in the right place.'

I thought I had never seen Ham grin to anything like the extent to which he sat grinning at us now.

'What does this here blessed tarpaulin go and do,' said Mr. Peggotty, with his face one high noon of enjoyment, 'but he loses that there art of his to our little Em'ly. He follers her about, he makes hisself a sort o' servant to her, he loses in a great measure his relish for his wittles, and in the long-run he makes it clear to me wot's amiss. Now I could wish myself, you see, that our little Em'ly was in a fair way of being married. I could wish to see her, at all ewents, under articles to a honest man as had a right to defend her. I don't know how long I may live, or how soon I may die; but I know that if I was capsized, any night, in a gale of wind in Yarmouth Roads here, and was to see the



town-lights shining for the last time over the rollers as I couldn't make no head against, I could go down quieter for thinking "There's a man ashore there, iron-true to my little Em'ly, God bless her, and no wrong can touch my Em'ly while so be as that man lives."'

Mr. Peggotty, in simple earnestness, waved his right arm, as if he were waving it at the town-lights for the last time, and then, exchanging a nod with Ham, whose eye he caught, proceeded as before.

'Well! I counsels him to speak to Em'ly. He's big enough, but he's bashfuller than a little un, and he don't like. So I speak. "What! Him!" says Em'ly. "Him that I've know'd so intimate so many years, and like so much. Oh, Uncle! I never can have him. He's such a good fellow!" I gives her a kiss, and I says no more to her than, "My dear, you're right to speak out, you're to choose for yourself, you're as free as a little bird." Then I aways to him, and I says, "I wish it could have been so, but it can't. But you can both be as you was, and wot I say to you is, Be as you was with her, like a man." He says to me, a-shaking of my hand, "I will!" he says. And he was--honourable and manful--for two year going on, and we was just the same at home here as afore.'

Mr. Peggotty's face, which had varied in its expression with the various stages of his narrative, now resumed all its former triumphant delight, as he laid a hand upon my knee and a hand upon Steerforth's (previously wetting them both, for the greater emphasis of the action), and divided the following speech between us:

'All of a sudden, one evening--as it might be tonight--comes little Em'ly from her work, and him with her! There ain't so much in that, you'll say. No, because he takes care on her, like a brother, arter dark, and indeed afore dark, and at all times. But this tarpaulin chap, he takes hold of her hand, and he cries out to me, joyful, "Look here! This is to be my little wife!" And she says, half bold and half shy, and

half a laughing and half a crying, "Yes, Uncle! If you please."--If I please!' cried Mr. Peggotty, rolling his head in an ecstasy at the idea; 'Lord, as if I should do anythink else!--"If you please, I am steadier now, and I have thought better of it, and I'll be as good a little wife as I can to him, for he's a dear, good fellow!" Then Missis Gummidge, she claps her hands like a play, and you come in. Theer! the murder's out!' said Mr. Peggotty--'You come in! It took place this here present hour; and here's the man that'll marry her, the minute she's out of her time.'

Ham staggered, as well he might, under the blow Mr. Peggotty dealt him in his unbounded joy, as a mark of confidence and friendship; but feeling called upon to say something to us, he said, with much faltering and great difficulty:

'She warn't no higher than you was, Mas'r Davy--when you first come--when I thought what she'd grow up to be. I see her grown up--gent'lmen--like a flower. I'd lay down my life for her--Mas'r Davy--Oh! most content and cheerful! She's more to me--gent'lmen--than--she's all to me that ever I can want, and more than ever I--than ever I could say. I--I love her true. There ain't a gent'lman in all the land--nor yet sailing upon all the sea--that can love his lady more than I love her, though there's many a common man--would say better--what he meant.'

I thought it affecting to see such a sturdy fellow as Ham was now, trembling in the strength of what he felt for the pretty little creature who had won his heart. I thought the simple confidence reposed in us by Mr. Peggotty and by himself, was, in itself, affecting. I was affected by the story altogether. How far my emotions were influenced by the recollections of my childhood, I don't know. Whether I had come there with any lingering fancy that I was still to love little Em'ly, I don't know. I know that I was filled with pleasure by all this; but, at first,

with an indescribably sensitive pleasure, that a very little would have changed to pain.

Therefore, if it had depended upon me to touch the prevailing chord among them with any skill, I should have made a poor hand of it. But it depended upon Steerforth; and he did it with such address, that in a few minutes we were all as easy and as happy as it was possible to be.

'Mr. Peggotty,' he said, 'you are a thoroughly good fellow, and deserve to be as happy as you are tonight. My hand upon it! Ham, I give you joy, my boy. My hand upon that, too! Daisy, stir the fire, and make it a brisk one! and Mr. Peggotty, unless you can induce your gentle niece to come back (for whom I vacate this seat in the corner), I shall go. Any gap at your fireside on such a night--such a gap least of all--I wouldn't make, for the wealth of the Indies!'

So Mr. Peggotty went into my old room to fetch little Em'ly. At first little Em'ly didn't like to come, and then Ham went. Presently they brought her to the fireside, very much confused, and very shy,--but she soon became more assured when she found how gently and respectfully Steerforth spoke to her; how skilfully he avoided anything that would embarrass her; how he talked to Mr. Peggotty of boats, and ships, and tides, and fish; how he referred to me about the time when he had seen Mr. Peggotty at Salem House; how delighted he was with the boat and all belonging to it; how lightly and easily he carried on, until he brought us, by degrees, into a charmed circle, and we were all talking away without any reserve.

Em'ly, indeed, said little all the evening; but she looked, and listened, and her face got animated, and she was charming. Steerforth told a story of a dismal shipwreck (which arose out of his talk with Mr. Peggotty), as if he saw it all before him--and little Em'ly's eyes were fastened on him all the time, as if she saw it too. He told us a merry

adventure of his own, as a relief to that, with as much gaiety as if the narrative were as fresh to him as it was to us--and little Em'ly laughed until the boat rang with the musical sounds, and we all laughed (Steerforth too), in irresistible sympathy with what was so pleasant and light-hearted. He got Mr. Peggotty to sing, or rather to roar, 'When the stormy winds do blow, do blow, do blow'; and he sang a sailor's song himself, so pathetically and beautifully, that I could have almost fancied that the real wind creeping sorrowfully round the house, and murmuring low through our unbroken silence, was there to listen.

As to Mrs. Gummidge, he roused that victim of despondency with a success never attained by anyone else (so Mr. Peggotty informed me), since the decease of the old one. He left her so little leisure for being miserable, that she said next day she thought she must have been bewitched.

But he set up no monopoly of the general attention, or the conversation. When little Em'ly grew more courageous, and talked (but still bashfully) across the fire to me, of our old wanderings upon the beach, to pick up shells and pebbles; and when I asked her if she recollected how I used to be devoted to her; and when we both laughed and reddened, casting these looks back on the pleasant old times, so unreal to look at now; he was silent and attentive, and observed us thoughtfully. She sat, at this time, and all the evening, on the old locker in her old little corner by the fire--Ham beside her, where I used to sit. I could not satisfy myself whether it was in her own little tormenting way, or in a maidenly reserve before us, that she kept quite close to the wall, and away from him; but I observed that she did so, all the evening.

As I remember, it was almost midnight when we took our leave. We had had some biscuit and dried fish for supper, and Steerforth had produced from his pocket a full flask of Hollands, which we men (I may say we men, now, without a blush) had emptied. We parted merrily; and as they all

stood crowded round the door to light us as far as they could upon our road, I saw the sweet blue eyes of little Em'ly peeping after us, from behind Ham, and heard her soft voice calling to us to be careful how we went.

'A most engaging little Beauty!' said Steerforth, taking my arm. 'Well! It's a quaint place, and they are quaint company, and it's quite a new sensation to mix with them.'

'How fortunate we are, too,' I returned, 'to have arrived to witness their happiness in that intended marriage! I never saw people so happy. How delightful to see it, and to be made the sharers in their honest joy, as we have been!'

'That's rather a chuckle-headed fellow for the girl; isn't he?' said Steerforth.

He had been so hearty with him, and with them all, that I felt a shock in this unexpected and cold reply. But turning quickly upon him, and seeing a laugh in his eyes, I answered, much relieved:

'Ah, Steerforth! It's well for you to joke about the poor! You may skirmish with Miss Dartle, or try to hide your sympathies in jest from me, but I know better. When I see how perfectly you understand them, how exquisitely you can enter into happiness like this plain fisherman's, or humour a love like my old nurse's, I know that there is not a joy or sorrow, not an emotion, of such people, that can be indifferent to you. And I admire and love you for it, Steerforth, twenty times the more!'

He stopped, and, looking in my face, said, 'Daisy, I believe you are in earnest, and are good. I wish we all were!' Next moment he was gaily singing Mr. Peggotty's song, as we walked at a round pace back to Yarmouth.

## CHAPTER 22. SOME OLD SCENES, AND SOME NEW PEOPLE

Steerforth and I stayed for more than a fortnight in that part of the country. We were very much together, I need not say; but occasionally we were asunder for some hours at a time. He was a good sailor, and I was but an indifferent one; and when he went out boating with Mr. Peggotty, which was a favourite amusement of his, I generally remained ashore. My occupation of Peggotty's spare-room put a constraint upon me, from which he was free: for, knowing how assiduously she attended on Mr. Barkis all day, I did not like to remain out late at night; whereas Steerforth, lying at the Inn, had nothing to consult but his own humour. Thus it came about, that I heard of his making little treats for the fishermen at Mr. Peggotty's house of call, 'The Willing Mind', after I was in bed, and of his being afloat, wrapped in fishermen's clothes, whole moonlight nights, and coming back when the morning tide was at flood. By this time, however, I knew that his restless nature and bold spirits delighted to find a vent in rough toil and hard weather, as in any other means of excitement that presented itself freshly to him; so none of his proceedings surprised me.

Another cause of our being sometimes apart, was, that I had naturally an interest in going over to Blunderstone, and revisiting the old familiar scenes of my childhood; while Steerforth, after being there once, had naturally no great interest in going there again. Hence, on three or four days that I can at once recall, we went our several ways after an early breakfast, and met again at a late dinner. I had no idea how he employed his time in the interval, beyond a general knowledge that he was very popular in the place, and had twenty means of actively diverting himself where another man might not have found one.

For my own part, my occupation in my solitary pilgrimages was to recall every yard of the old road as I went along it, and to haunt the old spots, of which I never tired. I haunted them, as my memory had often done, and lingered among them as my younger thoughts had lingered when I was far away. The grave beneath the tree, where both my parents lay--on which I had looked out, when it was my father's only, with such curious feelings of compassion, and by which I had stood, so desolate, when it was opened to receive my pretty mother and her baby--the grave which Peggotty's own faithful care had ever since kept neat, and made a garden of, I walked near, by the hour. It lay a little off the churchyard path, in a quiet corner, not so far removed but I could read the names upon the stone as I walked to and fro, startled by the sound of the church-bell when it struck the hour, for it was like a departed voice to me. My reflections at these times were always associated with the figure I was to make in life, and the distinguished things I was to do. My echoing footsteps went to no other tune, but were as constant to that as if I had come home to build my castles in the air at a living mother's side.

There were great changes in my old home. The ragged nests, so long deserted by the rooks, were gone; and the trees were lopped and topped out of their remembered shapes. The garden had run wild, and half the windows of the house were shut up. It was occupied, but only by a poor lunatic gentleman, and the people who took care of him. He was always sitting at my little window, looking out into the churchyard; and I wondered whether his rambling thoughts ever went upon any of the fancies that used to occupy mine, on the rosy mornings when I peeped out of that same little window in my night-clothes, and saw the sheep quietly feeding in the light of the rising sun.

Our old neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Grayper, were gone to South America, and the rain had made its way through the roof of their empty house,

and stained the outer walls. Mr. Chillip was married again to a tall, raw-boned, high-nosed wife; and they had a weazen little baby, with a heavy head that it couldn't hold up, and two weak staring eyes, with which it seemed to be always wondering why it had ever been born.

It was with a singular jumble of sadness and pleasure that I used to linger about my native place, until the reddening winter sun admonished me that it was time to start on my returning walk. But, when the place was left behind, and especially when Steerforth and I were happily seated over our dinner by a blazing fire, it was delicious to think of having been there. So it was, though in a softened degree, when I went to my neat room at night; and, turning over the leaves of the crocodile-book (which was always there, upon a little table), remembered with a grateful heart how blest I was in having such a friend as Steerforth, such a friend as Peggotty, and such a substitute for what I had lost as my excellent and generous aunt.

MY nearest way to Yarmouth, in coming back from these long walks, was by a ferry. It landed me on the flat between the town and the sea, which I could make straight across, and so save myself a considerable circuit by the high road. Mr. Peggotty's house being on that waste-place, and not a hundred yards out of my track, I always looked in as I went by. Steerforth was pretty sure to be there expecting me, and we went on together through the frosty air and gathering fog towards the twinkling lights of the town.

One dark evening, when I was later than usual--for I had, that day, been making my parting visit to Blunderstone, as we were now about to return home--I found him alone in Mr. Peggotty's house, sitting thoughtfully before the fire. He was so intent upon his own reflections that he was quite unconscious of my approach. This, indeed, he might easily have been if he had been less absorbed, for footsteps fell noiselessly on the sandy ground outside; but even my entrance failed to rouse him. I was



standing close to him, looking at him; and still, with a heavy brow, he was lost in his meditations.

He gave such a start when I put my hand upon his shoulder, that he made me start too.

'You come upon me,' he said, almost angrily, 'like a reproachful ghost!'

'I was obliged to announce myself, somehow,' I replied. 'Have I called you down from the stars?'

'No,' he answered. 'No.'

'Up from anywhere, then?' said I, taking my seat near him.

'I was looking at the pictures in the fire,' he returned.

'But you are spoiling them for me,' said I, as he stirred it quickly with a piece of burning wood, striking out of it a train of red-hot sparks that went careering up the little chimney, and roaring out into the air.

'You would not have seen them,' he returned. 'I detest this mongrel time, neither day nor night. How late you are! Where have you been?'

'I have been taking leave of my usual walk,' said I.

'And I have been sitting here,' said Steerforth, glancing round the room, 'thinking that all the people we found so glad on the night of our coming down, might--to judge from the present wasted air of the place--be dispersed, or dead, or come to I don't know what harm. David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years!'

'My dear Steerforth, what is the matter?'

'I wish with all my soul I had been better guided!' he exclaimed. 'I wish with all my soul I could guide myself better!'

There was a passionate dejection in his manner that quite amazed me. He was more unlike himself than I could have supposed possible.

'It would be better to be this poor Peggotty, or his lout of a nephew,' he said, getting up and leaning moodily against the chimney-piece, with his face towards the fire, 'than to be myself, twenty times richer and twenty times wiser, and be the torment to myself that I have been, in this Devil's bark of a boat, within the last half-hour!'

I was so confounded by the alteration in him, that at first I could only observe him in silence, as he stood leaning his head upon his hand, and looking gloomily down at the fire. At length I begged him, with all the earnestness I felt, to tell me what had occurred to cross him so unusually, and to let me sympathize with him, if I could not hope to advise him. Before I had well concluded, he began to laugh--fretfully at first, but soon with returning gaiety.

'Tut, it's nothing, Daisy! nothing!' he replied. 'I told you at the inn in London, I am heavy company for myself, sometimes. I have been a nightmare to myself, just now--must have had one, I think. At odd dull times, nursery tales come up into the memory, unrecognized for what they are. I believe I have been confounding myself with the bad boy who "didn't care", and became food for lions--a grander kind of going to the dogs, I suppose. What old women call the horrors, have been creeping over me from head to foot. I have been afraid of myself.'

'You are afraid of nothing else, I think,' said I.

'Perhaps not, and yet may have enough to be afraid of too,' he answered. 'Well! So it goes by! I am not about to be hipped again, David; but I tell you, my good fellow, once more, that it would have been well for me (and for more than me) if I had had a steadfast and judicious father!'

His face was always full of expression, but I never saw it express such a dark kind of earnestness as when he said these words, with his glance bent on the fire.

'So much for that!' he said, making as if he tossed something light into the air, with his hand. "'Why, being gone, I am a man again,'" like Macbeth. And now for dinner! If I have not (Macbeth-like) broken up the feast with most admired disorder, Daisy.'

'But where are they all, I wonder!' said I.

'God knows,' said Steerforth. 'After strolling to the ferry looking for you, I strolled in here and found the place deserted. That set me thinking, and you found me thinking.'

The advent of Mrs. Gummidge with a basket, explained how the house had happened to be empty. She had hurried out to buy something that was needed, against Mr. Peggotty's return with the tide; and had left the door open in the meanwhile, lest Ham and little Em'ly, with whom it was an early night, should come home while she was gone. Steerforth, after very much improving Mrs. Gummidge's spirits by a cheerful salutation and a jocose embrace, took my arm, and hurried me away.

He had improved his own spirits, no less than Mrs. Gummidge's, for they were again at their usual flow, and he was full of vivacious conversation as we went along.

'And so,' he said, gaily, 'we abandon this buccaneer life tomorrow, do

we?'

'So we agreed,' I returned. 'And our places by the coach are taken, you know.'

'Ay! there's no help for it, I suppose,' said Steerforth. 'I have almost forgotten that there is anything to do in the world but to go out tossing on the sea here. I wish there was not.'

'As long as the novelty should last,' said I, laughing.

'Like enough,' he returned; 'though there's a sarcastic meaning in that observation for an amiable piece of innocence like my young friend. Well! I dare say I am a capricious fellow, David. I know I am; but while the iron is hot, I can strike it vigorously too. I could pass a reasonably good examination already, as a pilot in these waters, I think.'

'Mr. Peggotty says you are a wonder,' I returned.

'A nautical phenomenon, eh?' laughed Steerforth.

'Indeed he does, and you know how truly; I know how ardent you are in any pursuit you follow, and how easily you can master it. And that amazes me most in you, Steerforth--that you should be contented with such fitful uses of your powers.'

'Contented?' he answered, merrily. 'I am never contented, except with your freshness, my gentle Daisy. As to fitfulness, I have never learnt the art of binding myself to any of the wheels on which the Ixions of these days are turning round and round. I missed it somehow in a bad apprenticeship, and now don't care about it.---You know I have bought a boat down here?'

'What an extraordinary fellow you are, Steerforth!' I exclaimed, stopping--for this was the first I had heard of it. 'When you may never care to come near the place again!'

'I don't know that,' he returned. 'I have taken a fancy to the place. At all events,' walking me briskly on, 'I have bought a boat that was for sale--a clipper, Mr. Peggotty says; and so she is--and Mr. Peggotty will be master of her in my absence.'

'Now I understand you, Steerforth!' said I, exultingly. 'You pretend to have bought it for yourself, but you have really done so to confer a benefit on him. I might have known as much at first, knowing you. My dear kind Steerforth, how can I tell you what I think of your generosity?'

'Tush!' he answered, turning red. 'The less said, the better.'

'Didn't I know?' cried I, 'didn't I say that there was not a joy, or sorrow, or any emotion of such honest hearts that was indifferent to you?'

'Aye, aye,' he answered, 'you told me all that. There let it rest. We have said enough!'

Afraid of offending him by pursuing the subject when he made so light of it, I only pursued it in my thoughts as we went on at even a quicker pace than before.

'She must be newly rigged,' said Steerforth, 'and I shall leave Littimer behind to see it done, that I may know she is quite complete. Did I tell you Littimer had come down?'

'No.'

'Oh yes! came down this morning, with a letter from my mother.'

As our looks met, I observed that he was pale even to his lips, though he looked very steadily at me. I feared that some difference between him and his mother might have led to his being in the frame of mind in which I had found him at the solitary fireside. I hinted so.

'Oh no!' he said, shaking his head, and giving a slight laugh. 'Nothing of the sort! Yes. He is come down, that man of mine.'

'The same as ever?' said I.

'The same as ever,' said Steerforth. 'Distant and quiet as the North Pole. He shall see to the boat being fresh named. She's the "Stormy Petrel" now. What does Mr. Peggotty care for Stormy Petrels! I'll have her christened again.'

'By what name?' I asked.

'The "Little Em'ly".'

As he had continued to look steadily at me, I took it as a reminder that he objected to being extolled for his consideration. I could not help showing in my face how much it pleased me, but I said little, and he resumed his usual smile, and seemed relieved.

'But see here,' he said, looking before us, 'where the original little Em'ly comes! And that fellow with her, eh? Upon my soul, he's a true knight. He never leaves her!'

Ham was a boat-builder in these days, having improved a natural

ingenuity in that handicraft, until he had become a skilled workman. He was in his working-dress, and looked rugged enough, but manly withal, and a very fit protector for the blooming little creature at his side. Indeed, there was a frankness in his face, an honesty, and an undisguised show of his pride in her, and his love for her, which were, to me, the best of good looks. I thought, as they came towards us, that they were well matched even in that particular.

She withdrew her hand timidly from his arm as we stopped to speak to them, and blushed as she gave it to Steerforth and to me. When they passed on, after we had exchanged a few words, she did not like to replace that hand, but, still appearing timid and constrained, walked by herself. I thought all this very pretty and engaging, and Steerforth seemed to think so too, as we looked after them fading away in the light of a young moon.

Suddenly there passed us--evidently following them--a young woman whose approach we had not observed, but whose face I saw as she went by, and thought I had a faint remembrance of. She was lightly dressed; looked bold, and haggard, and flaunting, and poor; but seemed, for the time, to have given all that to the wind which was blowing, and to have nothing in her mind but going after them. As the dark distant level, absorbing their figures into itself, left but itself visible between us and the sea and clouds, her figure disappeared in like manner, still no nearer to them than before.

'That is a black shadow to be following the girl,' said Steerforth, standing still; 'what does it mean?'

He spoke in a low voice that sounded almost strange to Me.

'She must have it in her mind to beg of them, I think,' said I.

'A beggar would be no novelty,' said Steerforth; 'but it is a strange thing that the beggar should take that shape tonight.'

'Why?' I asked.

'For no better reason, truly, than because I was thinking,' he said, after a pause, 'of something like it, when it came by. Where the Devil did it come from, I wonder!'

'From the shadow of this wall, I think,' said I, as we emerged upon a road on which a wall abutted.

'It's gone!' he returned, looking over his shoulder. 'And all ill go with it. Now for our dinner!'

But he looked again over his shoulder towards the sea-line glimmering afar off, and yet again. And he wondered about it, in some broken expressions, several times, in the short remainder of our walk; and only seemed to forget it when the light of fire and candle shone upon us, seated warm and merry, at table.

Littimer was there, and had his usual effect upon me. When I said to him that I hoped Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle were well, he answered respectfully (and of course respectably), that they were tolerably well, he thanked me, and had sent their compliments. This was all, and yet he seemed to me to say as plainly as a man could say: 'You are very young, sir; you are exceedingly young.'

We had almost finished dinner, when taking a step or two towards the table, from the corner where he kept watch upon us, or rather upon me, as I felt, he said to his master:

'I beg your pardon, sir. Miss Mowcher is down here.'



'Who?' cried Steerforth, much astonished.

'Miss Mowcher, sir.'

'Why, what on earth does she do here?' said Steerforth.

'It appears to be her native part of the country, sir. She informs me that she makes one of her professional visits here, every year, sir. I met her in the street this afternoon, and she wished to know if she might have the honour of waiting on you after dinner, sir.'

'Do you know the Giantess in question, Daisy?' inquired Steerforth.

I was obliged to confess--I felt ashamed, even of being at this disadvantage before Littimer--that Miss Mowcher and I were wholly unacquainted.

'Then you shall know her,' said Steerforth, 'for she is one of the seven wonders of the world. When Miss Mowcher comes, show her in.'

I felt some curiosity and excitement about this lady, especially as Steerforth burst into a fit of laughing when I referred to her, and positively refused to answer any question of which I made her the subject. I remained, therefore, in a state of considerable expectation until the cloth had been removed some half an hour, and we were sitting over our decanter of wine before the fire, when the door opened, and Littimer, with his habitual serenity quite undisturbed, announced:

'Miss Mowcher!'

I looked at the doorway and saw nothing. I was still looking at the doorway, thinking that Miss Mowcher was a long while making her

appearance, when, to my infinite astonishment, there came waddling round a sofa which stood between me and it, a porsy dwarf, of about forty or forty-five, with a very large head and face, a pair of roguish grey eyes, and such extremely little arms, that, to enable herself to lay a finger archly against her snub nose, as she ogled Steerforth, she was obliged to meet the finger half-way, and lay her nose against it.

Her chin, which was what is called a double chin, was so fat that it entirely swallowed up the strings of her bonnet, bow and all. Throat she had none; waist she had none; legs she had none, worth mentioning; for though she was more than full-sized down to where her waist would have been, if she had had any, and though she terminated, as human beings generally do, in a pair of feet, she was so short that she stood at a common-sized chair as at a table, resting a bag she carried on the seat. This lady--dressed in an off-hand, easy style; bringing her nose and her forefinger together, with the difficulty I have described; standing with her head necessarily on one side, and, with one of her sharp eyes shut up, making an uncommonly knowing face--after ogling Steerforth for a few moments, broke into a torrent of words.

'What! My flower!' she pleasantly began, shaking her large head at him. 'You're there, are you! Oh, you naughty boy, fie for shame, what do you do so far away from home? Up to mischief, I'll be bound. Oh, you're a downy fellow, Steerforth, so you are, and I'm another, ain't I? Ha, ha, ha! You'd have betted a hundred pound to five, now, that you wouldn't have seen me here, wouldn't you? Bless you, man alive, I'm everywhere. I'm here and there, and where not, like the conjurer's half-crown in the lady's handkercher. Talking of handkerchers--and talking of ladies--what a comfort you are to your blessed mother, ain't you, my dear boy, over one of my shoulders, and I don't say which!'

Miss Mowcher untied her bonnet, at this passage of her discourse, threw back the strings, and sat down, panting, on a footstool in front of the fire--making a kind of arbour of the dining table, which spread its

mahogany shelter above her head.

'Oh my stars and what's-their-names!' she went on, clapping a hand on each of her little knees, and glancing shrewdly at me, 'I'm of too full a habit, that's the fact, Steerforth. After a flight of stairs, it gives me as much trouble to draw every breath I want, as if it was a bucket of water. If you saw me looking out of an upper window, you'd think I was a fine woman, wouldn't you?'

'I should think that, wherever I saw you,' replied Steerforth.

'Go along, you dog, do!' cried the little creature, making a whisk at him with the handkerchief with which she was wiping her face, 'and don't be impudent! But I give you my word and honour I was at Lady Mithers's last week--THERE'S a woman! How SHE wears!--and Mithers himself came into the room where I was waiting for her--THERE'S a man! How HE wears! and his wig too, for he's had it these ten years--and he went on at that rate in the complimentary line, that I began to think I should be obliged to ring the bell. Ha! ha! ha! He's a pleasant wretch, but he wants principle.'

'What were you doing for Lady Mithers?' asked Steerforth.

'That's tellings, my blessed infant,' she retorted, tapping her nose again, screwing up her face, and twinkling her eyes like an imp of supernatural intelligence. 'Never YOU mind! You'd like to know whether I stop her hair from falling off, or dye it, or touch up her complexion, or improve her eyebrows, wouldn't you? And so you shall, my darling--when I tell you! Do you know what my great grandfather's name was?'

'No,' said Steerforth.

'It was Walker, my sweet pet,' replied Miss Mowcher, 'and he came of a long line of Walkers, that I inherit all the Hookey estates from.'

I never beheld anything approaching to Miss Mowcher's wink except Miss Mowcher's self-possession. She had a wonderful way too, when listening to what was said to her, or when waiting for an answer to what she had said herself, of pausing with her head cunningly on one side, and one eye turned up like a magpie's. Altogether I was lost in amazement, and sat staring at her, quite oblivious, I am afraid, of the laws of politeness.

She had by this time drawn the chair to her side, and was busily engaged in producing from the bag (plunging in her short arm to the shoulder, at every dive) a number of small bottles, sponges, combs, brushes, bits of flannel, little pairs of curling-irons, and other instruments, which she tumbled in a heap upon the chair. From this employment she suddenly desisted, and said to Steerforth, much to my confusion:

'Who's your friend?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Steerforth; 'he wants to know you.'

'Well, then, he shall! I thought he looked as if he did!' returned Miss Mowcher, waddling up to me, bag in hand, and laughing on me as she came. 'Face like a peach!' standing on tiptoe to pinch my cheek as I sat. 'Quite tempting! I'm very fond of peaches. Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Copperfield, I'm sure.'

I said that I congratulated myself on having the honour to make hers, and that the happiness was mutual.

'Oh, my goodness, how polite we are!' exclaimed Miss Mowcher, making a preposterous attempt to cover her large face with her morsel of a hand.

'What a world of gammon and spinnage it is, though, ain't it!'

This was addressed confidentially to both of us, as the morsel of a hand came away from the face, and buried itself, arm and all, in the bag again.

'What do you mean, Miss Mowcher?' said Steerforth.

'Ha! ha! ha! What a refreshing set of humbugs we are, to be sure, ain't we, my sweet child?' replied that morsel of a woman, feeling in the bag with her head on one side and her eye in the air. 'Look here!' taking something out. 'Scraps of the Russian Prince's nails. Prince Alphabet turned topsy-turvy, I call him, for his name's got all the letters in it, higgledy-piggledy.'

'The Russian Prince is a client of yours, is he?' said Steerforth.

'I believe you, my pet,' replied Miss Mowcher. 'I keep his nails in order for him. Twice a week! Fingers and toes.'

'He pays well, I hope?' said Steerforth.

'Pays, as he speaks, my dear child--through the nose,' replied Miss Mowcher. 'None of your close shavers the Prince ain't. You'd say so, if you saw his moustachios. Red by nature, black by art.'

'By your art, of course,' said Steerforth.

Miss Mowcher winked assent. 'Forced to send for me. Couldn't help it. The climate affected his dye; it did very well in Russia, but it was no go here. You never saw such a rusty Prince in all your born days as he was. Like old iron!' 'Is that why you called him a humbug, just now?' inquired Steerforth.

'Oh, you're a broth of a boy, ain't you?' returned Miss Mowcher, shaking her head violently. 'I said, what a set of humbugs we were in general, and I showed you the scraps of the Prince's nails to prove it. The Prince's nails do more for me in private families of the genteel sort, than all my talents put together. I always carry 'em about. They're the best introduction. If Miss Mowcher cuts the Prince's nails, she must be all right. I give 'em away to the young ladies. They put 'em in albums, I believe. Ha! ha! ha! Upon my life, "the whole social system" (as the men call it when they make speeches in Parliament) is a system of Prince's nails!' said this least of women, trying to fold her short arms, and nodding her large head.

Steerforth laughed heartily, and I laughed too. Miss Mowcher continuing all the time to shake her head (which was very much on one side), and to look into the air with one eye, and to wink with the other.

'Well, well!' she said, smiting her small knees, and rising, 'this is not business. Come, Steerforth, let's explore the polar regions, and have it over.'

She then selected two or three of the little instruments, and a little bottle, and asked (to my surprise) if the table would bear. On Steerforth's replying in the affirmative, she pushed a chair against it, and begging the assistance of my hand, mounted up, pretty nimbly, to the top, as if it were a stage.

'If either of you saw my ankles,' she said, when she was safely elevated, 'say so, and I'll go home and destroy myself!'

'I did not,' said Steerforth.

'I did not,' said I.

'Well then,' cried Miss Mowcher, 'I'll consent to live. Now, ducky, ducky, ducky, come to Mrs. Bond and be killed.'

This was an invocation to Steerforth to place himself under her hands; who, accordingly, sat himself down, with his back to the table, and his laughing face towards me, and submitted his head to her inspection, evidently for no other purpose than our entertainment. To see Miss Mowcher standing over him, looking at his rich profusion of brown hair through a large round magnifying glass, which she took out of her pocket, was a most amazing spectacle.

'You're a pretty fellow!' said Miss Mowcher, after a brief inspection. 'You'd be as bald as a friar on the top of your head in twelve months, but for me. Just half a minute, my young friend, and we'll give you a polishing that shall keep your curls on for the next ten years!'

With this, she tilted some of the contents of the little bottle on to one of the little bits of flannel, and, again imparting some of the virtues of that preparation to one of the little brushes, began rubbing and scraping away with both on the crown of Steerforth's head in the busiest manner I ever witnessed, talking all the time.

'There's Charley Pyegrave, the duke's son,' she said. 'You know Charley?' peeping round into his face.

'A little,' said Steerforth.

'What a man HE is! THERE'S a whisker! As to Charley's legs, if they were only a pair (which they ain't), they'd defy competition. Would you believe he tried to do without me--in the Life-Guards, too?'

'Mad!' said Steerforth.

'It looks like it. However, mad or sane, he tried,' returned Miss Mowcher. 'What does he do, but, lo and behold you, he goes into a perfumer's shop, and wants to buy a bottle of the Madagascar Liquid.'

'Charley does?' said Steerforth.

'Charley does. But they haven't got any of the Madagascar Liquid.'

'What is it? Something to drink?' asked Steerforth.

'To drink?' returned Miss Mowcher, stopping to slap his cheek. 'To doctor his own moustachios with, you know. There was a woman in the shop--elderly female--quite a Griffin--who had never even heard of it by name. "Begging pardon, sir," said the Griffin to Charley, "it's not--not--not ROUGE, is it?" "Rouge," said Charley to the Griffin. "What the unmentionable to ears polite, do you think I want with rouge?" "No offence, sir," said the Griffin; "we have it asked for by so many names, I thought it might be." Now that, my child,' continued Miss Mowcher, rubbing all the time as busily as ever, 'is another instance of the refreshing humbug I was speaking of. I do something in that way myself--perhaps a good deal--perhaps a little--sharp's the word, my dear boy--never mind!'

'In what way do you mean? In the rouge way?' said Steerforth.

'Put this and that together, my tender pupil,' returned the wary Mowcher, touching her nose, 'work it by the rule of Secrets in all trades, and the product will give you the desired result. I say I do a little in that way myself. One Dowager, SHE calls it lip-salve. Another, SHE calls it gloves. Another, SHE calls it tucker-edging. Another, SHE calls it a fan. I call it whatever THEY call it. I supply it for 'em, but we keep up the trick so, to one another, and make believe with



such a face, that they'd as soon think of laying it on, before a whole drawing-room, as before me. And when I wait upon 'em, they'll say to me sometimes--WITH IT ON--thick, and no mistake--"How am I looking, Mowcher? Am I pale?" Ha! ha! ha! ha! Isn't THAT refreshing, my young friend!'

I never did in my days behold anything like Mowcher as she stood upon the dining table, intensely enjoying this refreshment, rubbing busily at Steerforth's head, and winking at me over it.

'Ah!' she said. 'Such things are not much in demand hereabouts. That sets me off again! I haven't seen a pretty woman since I've been here, jemmy.'

'No?' said Steerforth.

'Not the ghost of one,' replied Miss Mowcher.

'We could show her the substance of one, I think?' said Steerforth, addressing his eyes to mine. 'Eh, Daisy?'

'Yes, indeed,' said I.

'Aha?' cried the little creature, glancing sharply at my face, and then peeping round at Steerforth's. 'Umph?'

The first exclamation sounded like a question put to both of us, and the second like a question put to Steerforth only. She seemed to have found no answer to either, but continued to rub, with her head on one side and her eye turned up, as if she were looking for an answer in the air and were confident of its appearing presently.

'A sister of yours, Mr. Copperfield?' she cried, after a pause, and

still keeping the same look-out. 'Aye, aye?'

'No,' said Steerforth, before I could reply. 'Nothing of the sort. On the contrary, Mr. Copperfield used--or I am much mistaken--to have a great admiration for her.'

'Why, hasn't he now?' returned Miss Mowcher. 'Is he fickle? Oh, for shame! Did he sip every flower, and change every hour, until Polly his passion requited?--Is her name Polly?'

The Elfin suddenness with which she pounced upon me with this question, and a searching look, quite disconcerted me for a moment.

'No, Miss Mowcher,' I replied. 'Her name is Emily.'

'Aha?' she cried exactly as before. 'Umph? What a rattle I am! Mr. Copperfield, ain't I volatile?'

Her tone and look implied something that was not agreeable to me in connexion with the subject. So I said, in a graver manner than any of us had yet assumed: 'She is as virtuous as she is pretty. She is engaged to be married to a most worthy and deserving man in her own station of life. I esteem her for her good sense, as much as I admire her for her good looks.'

'Well said!' cried Steerforth. 'Hear, hear, hear! Now I'll quench the curiosity of this little Fatima, my dear Daisy, by leaving her nothing to guess at. She is at present apprenticed, Miss Mowcher, or articted, or whatever it may be, to Omer and Joram, Haberdashers, Milliners, and so forth, in this town. Do you observe? Omer and Joram. The promise of which my friend has spoken, is made and entered into with her cousin; Christian name, Ham; surname, Peggotty; occupation, boat-builder; also of this town. She lives with a relative; Christian name, unknown;

surname, Peggotty; occupation, seafaring; also of this town. She is the prettiest and most engaging little fairy in the world. I admire her--as my friend does--exceedingly. If it were not that I might appear to disparage her Intended, which I know my friend would not like, I would add, that to me she seems to be throwing herself away; that I am sure she might do better; and that I swear she was born to be a lady.'

Miss Mowcher listened to these words, which were very slowly and distinctly spoken, with her head on one side, and her eye in the air as if she were still looking for that answer. When he ceased she became brisk again in an instant, and rattled away with surprising volubility.

'Oh! And that's all about it, is it?' she exclaimed, trimming his whiskers with a little restless pair of scissors, that went glancing round his head in all directions. 'Very well: very well! Quite a long story. Ought to end "and they lived happy ever afterwards"; oughtn't it? Ah! What's that game at forfeits? I love my love with an E, because she's enticing; I hate her with an E, because she's engaged. I took her to the sign of the exquisite, and treated her with an elopement, her name's Emily, and she lives in the east? Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Copperfield, ain't I volatile?'

Merely looking at me with extravagant slyness, and not waiting for any reply, she continued, without drawing breath:

'There! If ever any scapegrace was trimmed and touched up to perfection, you are, Steerforth. If I understand any noddle in the world, I understand yours. Do you hear me when I tell you that, my darling? I understand yours,' peeping down into his face. 'Now you may mizzle, jemmy (as we say at Court), and if Mr. Copperfield will take the chair I'll operate on him.'

'What do you say, Daisy?' inquired Steerforth, laughing, and resigning

his seat. 'Will you be improved?'

'Thank you, Miss Mowcher, not this evening.'

'Don't say no,' returned the little woman, looking at me with the aspect of a connoisseur; 'a little bit more eyebrow?'

'Thank you,' I returned, 'some other time.'

'Have it carried half a quarter of an inch towards the temple,' said Miss Mowcher. 'We can do it in a fortnight.'

'No, I thank you. Not at present.'

'Go in for a tip,' she urged. 'No? Let's get the scaffolding up, then, for a pair of whiskers. Come!'

I could not help blushing as I declined, for I felt we were on my weak point, now. But Miss Mowcher, finding that I was not at present disposed for any decoration within the range of her art, and that I was, for the time being, proof against the blandishments of the small bottle which she held up before one eye to enforce her persuasions, said we would make a beginning on an early day, and requested the aid of my hand to descend from her elevated station. Thus assisted, she skipped down with much agility, and began to tie her double chin into her bonnet.

'The fee,' said Steerforth, 'is--'

'Five bob,' replied Miss Mowcher, 'and dirt cheap, my chicken. Ain't I volatile, Mr. Copperfield?'

I replied politely: 'Not at all.' But I thought she was rather so, when she tossed up his two half-crowns like a goblin pieman, caught them,

dropped them in her pocket, and gave it a loud slap.

'That's the Till!' observed Miss Mowcher, standing at the chair again, and replacing in the bag a miscellaneous collection of little objects she had emptied out of it. 'Have I got all my traps? It seems so. It won't do to be like long Ned Beadwood, when they took him to church "to marry him to somebody", as he says, and left the bride behind. Ha! ha! ha! A wicked rascal, Ned, but droll! Now, I know I'm going to break your hearts, but I am forced to leave you. You must call up all your fortitude, and try to bear it. Good-bye, Mr. Copperfield! Take care of yourself, jockey of Norfolk! How I have been rattling on! It's all the fault of you two wretches. I forgive you! "Bob swore!"--as the Englishman said for "Good night", when he first learnt French, and thought it so like English. "Bob swore," my ducks!'

With the bag slung over her arm, and rattling as she waddled away, she waddled to the door, where she stopped to inquire if she should leave us a lock of her hair. 'Ain't I volatile?' she added, as a commentary on this offer, and, with her finger on her nose, departed.

Steerforth laughed to that degree, that it was impossible for me to help laughing too; though I am not sure I should have done so, but for this inducement. When we had had our laugh quite out, which was after some time, he told me that Miss Mowcher had quite an extensive connexion, and made herself useful to a variety of people in a variety of ways. Some people trifled with her as a mere oddity, he said; but she was as shrewdly and sharply observant as anyone he knew, and as long-headed as she was short-armed. He told me that what she had said of being here, and there, and everywhere, was true enough; for she made little darts into the provinces, and seemed to pick up customers everywhere, and to know everybody. I asked him what her disposition was: whether it was at all mischievous, and if her sympathies were generally on the right side of things: but, not succeeding in attracting his attention to these

questions after two or three attempts, I forbore or forgot to repeat them. He told me instead, with much rapidity, a good deal about her skill, and her profits; and about her being a scientific cupper, if I should ever have occasion for her service in that capacity.

She was the principal theme of our conversation during the evening: and when we parted for the night Steerforth called after me over the banisters, 'Bob swore!' as I went downstairs.

I was surprised, when I came to Mr. Barkis's house, to find Ham walking up and down in front of it, and still more surprised to learn from him that little Em'ly was inside. I naturally inquired why he was not there too, instead of pacing the streets by himself?

'Why, you see, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined, in a hesitating manner, 'Em'ly, she's talking to some 'un in here.'

'I should have thought,' said I, smiling, 'that that was a reason for your being in here too, Ham.'

'Well, Mas'r Davy, in a general way, so 't would be,' he returned; 'but look'ee here, Mas'r Davy,' lowering his voice, and speaking very gravely. 'It's a young woman, sir--a young woman, that Em'ly knowed once, and doesn't ought to know no more.'

When I heard these words, a light began to fall upon the figure I had seen following them, some hours ago.

'It's a poor wurem, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, 'as is trod under foot by all the town. Up street and down street. The mowld o' the churchyard don't hold any that the folk shrink away from, more.'

'Did I see her tonight, Ham, on the sand, after we met you?'

'Keeping us in sight?' said Ham. 'It's like you did, Mas'r Davy. Not that I know'd then, she was theer, sir, but along of her creeping soon arterwards under Em'ly's little winder, when she see the light come, and whispering "Em'ly, Em'ly, for Christ's sake, have a woman's heart towards me. I was once like you!" Those was solemn words, Mas'r Davy, fur to hear!'

'They were indeed, Ham. What did Em'ly do?' 'Says Em'ly, "Martha, is it you? Oh, Martha, can it be you?"--for they had sat at work together, many a day, at Mr. Omer's.'

'I recollect her now!' cried I, recalling one of the two girls I had seen when I first went there. 'I recollect her quite well!'

'Martha Endell,' said Ham. 'Two or three year older than Em'ly, but was at the school with her.'

'I never heard her name,' said I. 'I didn't mean to interrupt you.'

'For the matter o' that, Mas'r Davy,' replied Ham, 'all's told a'most in them words, "Em'ly, Em'ly, for Christ's sake, have a woman's heart towards me. I was once like you!" She wanted to speak to Em'ly. Em'ly couldn't speak to her theer, for her loving uncle was come home, and he wouldn't--no, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, with great earnestness, 'he couldn't, kind-natur'd, tender-hearted as he is, see them two together, side by side, for all the treasures that's wrecked in the sea.'

I felt how true this was. I knew it, on the instant, quite as well as Ham.

'So Em'ly writes in pencil on a bit of paper,' he pursued, 'and gives it to her out o' winder to bring here. "Show that," she says, "to my aunt,

Mrs. Barkis, and she'll set you down by her fire, for the love of me, till uncle is gone out, and I can come." By and by she tells me what I tell you, Mas'r Davy, and asks me to bring her. What can I do? She doesn't ought to know any such, but I can't deny her, when the tears is on her face.'

He put his hand into the breast of his shaggy jacket, and took out with great care a pretty little purse.

'And if I could deny her when the tears was on her face, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, tenderly adjusting it on the rough palm of his hand, 'how could I deny her when she give me this to carry for her--knowing what she brought it for? Such a toy as it is!' said Ham, thoughtfully looking on it. 'With such a little money in it, Em'ly my dear.'

I shook him warmly by the hand when he had put it away again--for that was more satisfactory to me than saying anything--and we walked up and down, for a minute or two, in silence. The door opened then, and Peggotty appeared, beckoning to Ham to come in. I would have kept away, but she came after me, entreating me to come in too. Even then, I would have avoided the room where they all were, but for its being the neat-tiled kitchen I have mentioned more than once. The door opening immediately into it, I found myself among them before I considered whither I was going.

The girl--the same I had seen upon the sands--was near the fire. She was sitting on the ground, with her head and one arm lying on a chair. I fancied, from the disposition of her figure, that Em'ly had but newly risen from the chair, and that the forlorn head might perhaps have been lying on her lap. I saw but little of the girl's face, over which her hair fell loose and scattered, as if she had been disordering it with her own hands; but I saw that she was young, and of a fair complexion. Peggotty had been crying. So had little Em'ly. Not a word was spoken



when we first went in; and the Dutch clock by the dresser seemed, in the silence, to tick twice as loud as usual. Em'ly spoke first.

'Martha wants,' she said to Ham, 'to go to London.'

'Why to London?' returned Ham.

He stood between them, looking on the prostrate girl with a mixture of compassion for her, and of jealousy of her holding any companionship with her whom he loved so well, which I have always remembered distinctly. They both spoke as if she were ill; in a soft, suppressed tone that was plainly heard, although it hardly rose above a whisper.

'Better there than here,' said a third voice aloud--Martha's, though she did not move. 'No one knows me there. Everybody knows me here.'

'What will she do there?' inquired Ham.

She lifted up her head, and looked darkly round at him for a moment; then laid it down again, and curved her right arm about her neck, as a woman in a fever, or in an agony of pain from a shot, might twist herself.

'She will try to do well,' said little Em'ly. 'You don't know what she has said to us. Does he--do they--aunt?'

Peggotty shook her head compassionately.

'I'll try,' said Martha, 'if you'll help me away. I never can do worse than I have done here. I may do better. Oh!' with a dreadful shiver, 'take me out of these streets, where the whole town knows me from a child!'

As Em'ly held out her hand to Ham, I saw him put in it a little canvas bag. She took it, as if she thought it were her purse, and made a step or two forward; but finding her mistake, came back to where he had retired near me, and showed it to him.

'It's all yourn, Em'ly,' I could hear him say. 'I haven't nowt in all the wureld that ain't yourn, my dear. It ain't of no delight to me, except for you!'

The tears rose freshly in her eyes, but she turned away and went to Martha. What she gave her, I don't know. I saw her stooping over her, and putting money in her bosom. She whispered something, as she asked was that enough? 'More than enough,' the other said, and took her hand and kissed it.

Then Martha arose, and gathering her shawl about her, covering her face with it, and weeping aloud, went slowly to the door. She stopped a moment before going out, as if she would have uttered something or turned back; but no word passed her lips. Making the same low, dreary, wretched moaning in her shawl, she went away.

As the door closed, little Em'ly looked at us three in a hurried manner and then hid her face in her hands, and fell to sobbing.

'Doen't, Em'ly!' said Ham, tapping her gently on the shoulder. 'Doen't, my dear! You doen't ought to cry so, pretty!'

'Oh, Ham!' she exclaimed, still weeping pitifully, 'I am not so good a girl as I ought to be! I know I have not the thankful heart, sometimes, I ought to have!'

'Yes, yes, you have, I'm sure,' said Ham.

'No! no! no!' cried little Em'ly, sobbing, and shaking her head. 'I am not as good a girl as I ought to be. Not near! not near!' And still she cried, as if her heart would break.

'I try your love too much. I know I do!' she sobbed. 'I'm often cross to you, and changeable with you, when I ought to be far different. You are never so to me. Why am I ever so to you, when I should think of nothing but how to be grateful, and to make you happy!'

'You always make me so,' said Ham, 'my dear! I am happy in the sight of you. I am happy, all day long, in the thoughts of you.'

'Ah! that's not enough!' she cried. 'That is because you are good; not because I am! Oh, my dear, it might have been a better fortune for you, if you had been fond of someone else--of someone steadier and much worthier than me, who was all bound up in you, and never vain and changeable like me!'

'Poor little tender-heart,' said Ham, in a low voice. 'Martha has overset her, altogether.'

'Please, aunt,' sobbed Em'ly, 'come here, and let me lay my head upon you. Oh, I am very miserable tonight, aunt! Oh, I am not as good a girl as I ought to be. I am not, I know!'

Peggotty had hastened to the chair before the fire. Em'ly, with her arms around her neck, kneeled by her, looking up most earnestly into her face.

'Oh, pray, aunt, try to help me! Ham, dear, try to help me! Mr. David, for the sake of old times, do, please, try to help me! I want to be a better girl than I am. I want to feel a hundred times more thankful than I do. I want to feel more, what a blessed thing it is to be the wife of

a good man, and to lead a peaceful life. Oh me, oh me! Oh my heart, my heart!'

She dropped her face on my old nurse's breast, and, ceasing this supplication, which in its agony and grief was half a woman's, half a child's, as all her manner was (being, in that, more natural, and better suited to her beauty, as I thought, than any other manner could have been), wept silently, while my old nurse hushed her like an infant.

She got calmer by degrees, and then we soothed her; now talking encouragingly, and now jesting a little with her, until she began to raise her head and speak to us. So we got on, until she was able to smile, and then to laugh, and then to sit up, half ashamed; while Peggotty recalled her stray ringlets, dried her eyes, and made her neat again, lest her uncle should wonder, when she got home, why his darling had been crying.

I saw her do, that night, what I had never seen her do before. I saw her innocently kiss her chosen husband on the cheek, and creep close to his bluff form as if it were her best support. When they went away together, in the waning moonlight, and I looked after them, comparing their departure in my mind with Martha's, I saw that she held his arm with both her hands, and still kept close to him.

## CHAPTER 23. I CORROBORATE Mr. DICK, AND CHOOSE A PROFESSION

When I awoke in the morning I thought very much of little Em'ly, and her emotion last night, after Martha had left. I felt as if I had come into the knowledge of those domestic weaknesses and tenderesses in a sacred confidence, and that to disclose them, even to Steerforth, would be

wrong. I had no gentler feeling towards anyone than towards the pretty creature who had been my playmate, and whom I have always been persuaded, and shall always be persuaded, to my dying day, I then devotedly loved. The repetition to any ears--even to Steerforth's--of what she had been unable to repress when her heart lay open to me by an accident, I felt would be a rough deed, unworthy of myself, unworthy of the light of our pure childhood, which I always saw encircling her head. I made a resolution, therefore, to keep it in my own breast; and there it gave her image a new grace.

While we were at breakfast, a letter was delivered to me from my aunt. As it contained matter on which I thought Steerforth could advise me as well as anyone, and on which I knew I should be delighted to consult him, I resolved to make it a subject of discussion on our journey home. For the present we had enough to do, in taking leave of all our friends. Mr. Barkis was far from being the last among them, in his regret at our departure; and I believe would even have opened the box again, and sacrificed another guinea, if it would have kept us eight-and-forty hours in Yarmouth. Peggotty and all her family were full of grief at our going. The whole house of Omer and Joram turned out to bid us good-bye; and there were so many seafaring volunteers in attendance on Steerforth, when our portmanteaux went to the coach, that if we had had the baggage of a regiment with us, we should hardly have wanted porters to carry it. In a word, we departed to the regret and admiration of all concerned, and left a great many people very sorry behind us.

Do you stay long here, Littimer?' said I, as he stood waiting to see the coach start.

'No, sir,' he replied; 'probably not very long, sir.'

'He can hardly say, just now,' observed Steerforth, carelessly. 'He knows what he has to do, and he'll do it.'

'That I am sure he will,' said I.

Littimer touched his hat in acknowledgement of my good opinion, and I felt about eight years old. He touched it once more, wishing us a good journey; and we left him standing on the pavement, as respectable a mystery as any pyramid in Egypt.

For some little time we held no conversation, Steerforth being unusually silent, and I being sufficiently engaged in wondering, within myself, when I should see the old places again, and what new changes might happen to me or them in the meanwhile. At length Steerforth, becoming gay and talkative in a moment, as he could become anything he liked at any moment, pulled me by the arm:

'Find a voice, David. What about that letter you were speaking of at breakfast?'

'Oh!' said I, taking it out of my pocket. 'It's from my aunt.'

'And what does she say, requiring consideration?'

'Why, she reminds me, Steerforth,' said I, 'that I came out on this expedition to look about me, and to think a little.'

'Which, of course, you have done?'

'Indeed I can't say I have, particularly. To tell you the truth, I am afraid I have forgotten it.'

'Well! look about you now, and make up for your negligence,' said Steerforth. 'Look to the right, and you'll see a flat country, with a good deal of marsh in it; look to the left, and you'll see the same.'

Look to the front, and you'll find no difference; look to the rear, and there it is still.' I laughed, and replied that I saw no suitable profession in the whole prospect; which was perhaps to be attributed to its flatness.

'What says our aunt on the subject?' inquired Steerforth, glancing at the letter in my hand. 'Does she suggest anything?'

'Why, yes,' said I. 'She asks me, here, if I think I should like to be a proctor? What do you think of it?'

'Well, I don't know,' replied Steerforth, coolly. 'You may as well do that as anything else, I suppose?'

I could not help laughing again, at his balancing all callings and professions so equally; and I told him so.

'What is a proctor, Steerforth?' said I.

'Why, he is a sort of monkish attorney,' replied Steerforth. 'He is, to some faded courts held in Doctors' Commons,--a lazy old nook near St. Paul's Churchyard--what solicitors are to the courts of law and equity. He is a functionary whose existence, in the natural course of things, would have terminated about two hundred years ago. I can tell you best what he is, by telling you what Doctors' Commons is. It's a little out-of-the-way place, where they administer what is called ecclesiastical law, and play all kinds of tricks with obsolete old monsters of acts of Parliament, which three-fourths of the world know nothing about, and the other fourth supposes to have been dug up, in a fossil state, in the days of the Edwards. It's a place that has an ancient monopoly in suits about people's wills and people's marriages, and disputes among ships and boats.'

'Nonsense, Steerforth!' I exclaimed. 'You don't mean to say that there is any affinity between nautical matters and ecclesiastical matters?'

'I don't, indeed, my dear boy,' he returned; 'but I mean to say that they are managed and decided by the same set of people, down in that same Doctors' Commons. You shall go there one day, and find them blundering through half the nautical terms in Young's Dictionary, apropos of the "Nancy" having run down the "Sarah Jane", or Mr. Peggotty and the Yarmouth boatmen having put off in a gale of wind with an anchor and cable to the "Nelson" Indiaman in distress; and you shall go there another day, and find them deep in the evidence, pro and con, respecting a clergyman who has misbehaved himself; and you shall find the judge in the nautical case, the advocate in the clergyman's case, or contrariwise. They are like actors: now a man's a judge, and now he is not a judge; now he's one thing, now he's another; now he's something else, change and change about; but it's always a very pleasant, profitable little affair of private theatricals, presented to an uncommonly select audience.'

'But advocates and proctors are not one and the same?' said I, a little puzzled. 'Are they?'

'No,' returned Steerforth, 'the advocates are civilians--men who have taken a doctor's degree at college--which is the first reason of my knowing anything about it. The proctors employ the advocates. Both get very comfortable fees, and altogether they make a mighty snug little party. On the whole, I would recommend you to take to Doctors' Commons kindly, David. They plume them-selves on their gentility there, I can tell you, if that's any satisfaction.'

I made allowance for Steerforth's light way of treating the subject, and, considering it with reference to the staid air of gravity and antiquity which I associated with that 'lazy old nook near St. Paul's



Churchyard', did not feel indisposed towards my aunt's suggestion; which she left to my free decision, making no scruple of telling me that it had occurred to her, on her lately visiting her own proctor in Doctors' Commons for the purpose of settling her will in my favour.

'That's a laudable proceeding on the part of our aunt, at all events,' said Steerforth, when I mentioned it; 'and one deserving of all encouragement. Daisy, my advice is that you take kindly to Doctors' Commons.'

I quite made up my mind to do so. I then told Steerforth that my aunt was in town awaiting me (as I found from her letter), and that she had taken lodgings for a week at a kind of private hotel at Lincoln's Inn Fields, where there was a stone staircase, and a convenient door in the roof; my aunt being firmly persuaded that every house in London was going to be burnt down every night.

We achieved the rest of our journey pleasantly, sometimes recurring to Doctors' Commons, and anticipating the distant days when I should be a proctor there, which Steerforth pictured in a variety of humorous and whimsical lights, that made us both merry. When we came to our journey's end, he went home, engaging to call upon me next day but one; and I drove to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where I found my aunt up, and waiting supper.

If I had been round the world since we parted, we could hardly have been better pleased to meet again. My aunt cried outright as she embraced me; and said, pretending to laugh, that if my poor mother had been alive, that silly little creature would have shed tears, she had no doubt.

'So you have left Mr. Dick behind, aunt?' said I. 'I am sorry for that. Ah, Janet, how do you do?'

As Janet curtsied, hoping I was well, I observed my aunt's visage lengthen very much.

'I am sorry for it, too,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose. 'I have had no peace of mind, Trot, since I have been here.' Before I could ask why, she told me.

'I am convinced,' said my aunt, laying her hand with melancholy firmness on the table, 'that Dick's character is not a character to keep the donkeys off. I am confident he wants strength of purpose. I ought to have left Janet at home, instead, and then my mind might perhaps have been at ease. If ever there was a donkey trespassing on my green,' said my aunt, with emphasis, 'there was one this afternoon at four o'clock. A cold feeling came over me from head to foot, and I know it was a donkey!'

I tried to comfort her on this point, but she rejected consolation.

'It was a donkey,' said my aunt; 'and it was the one with the stumpy tail which that Murdering sister of a woman rode, when she came to my house.' This had been, ever since, the only name my aunt knew for Miss Murdstone. 'If there is any Donkey in Dover, whose audacity it is harder to me to bear than another's, that,' said my aunt, striking the table, 'is the animal!'

Janet ventured to suggest that my aunt might be disturbing herself unnecessarily, and that she believed the donkey in question was then engaged in the sand-and-gravel line of business, and was not available for purposes of trespass. But my aunt wouldn't hear of it.

Supper was comfortably served and hot, though my aunt's rooms were very high up--whether that she might have more stone stairs for her money, or might be nearer to the door in the roof, I don't know--and consisted of

a roast fowl, a steak, and some vegetables, to all of which I did ample justice, and which were all excellent. But my aunt had her own ideas concerning London provision, and ate but little.

'I suppose this unfortunate fowl was born and brought up in a cellar,' said my aunt, 'and never took the air except on a hackney coach-stand. I hope the steak may be beef, but I don't believe it. Nothing's genuine in the place, in my opinion, but the dirt.'

'Don't you think the fowl may have come out of the country, aunt?' I hinted.

'Certainly not,' returned my aunt. 'It would be no pleasure to a London tradesman to sell anything which was what he pretended it was.'

I did not venture to controvert this opinion, but I made a good supper, which it greatly satisfied her to see me do. When the table was cleared, Janet assisted her to arrange her hair, to put on her nightcap, which was of a smarter construction than usual ('in case of fire', my aunt said), and to fold her gown back over her knees, these being her usual preparations for warming herself before going to bed. I then made her, according to certain established regulations from which no deviation, however slight, could ever be permitted, a glass of hot wine and water, and a slice of toast cut into long thin strips. With these accompaniments we were left alone to finish the evening, my aunt sitting opposite to me drinking her wine and water; soaking her strips of toast in it, one by one, before eating them; and looking benignantlly on me, from among the borders of her nightcap.

'Well, Trot,' she began, 'what do you think of the proctor plan? Or have you not begun to think about it yet?'

'I have thought a good deal about it, my dear aunt, and I have talked a

good deal about it with Steerforth. I like it very much indeed. I like it exceedingly.'

'Come!' said my aunt. 'That's cheering!'

'I have only one difficulty, aunt.'

'Say what it is, Trot,' she returned.

'Why, I want to ask, aunt, as this seems, from what I understand, to be a limited profession, whether my entrance into it would not be very expensive?'

'It will cost,' returned my aunt, 'to article you, just a thousand pounds.'

'Now, my dear aunt,' said I, drawing my chair nearer, 'I am uneasy in my mind about that. It's a large sum of money. You have expended a great deal on my education, and have always been as liberal to me in all things as it was possible to be. You have been the soul of generosity. Surely there are some ways in which I might begin life with hardly any outlay, and yet begin with a good hope of getting on by resolution and exertion. Are you sure that it would not be better to try that course? Are you certain that you can afford to part with so much money, and that it is right that it should be so expended? I only ask you, my second mother, to consider. Are you certain?'

My aunt finished eating the piece of toast on which she was then engaged, looking me full in the face all the while; and then setting her glass on the chimney-piece, and folding her hands upon her folded skirts, replied as follows:

'Trot, my child, if I have any object in life, it is to provide for

your being a good, a sensible, and a happy man. I am bent upon it--so is Dick. I should like some people that I know to hear Dick's conversation on the subject. Its sagacity is wonderful. But no one knows the resources of that man's intellect, except myself!'

She stopped for a moment to take my hand between hers, and went on:

'It's in vain, Trot, to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present. Perhaps I might have been better friends with your poor father. Perhaps I might have been better friends with that poor child your mother, even after your sister Betsey Trotwood disappointed me. When you came to me, a little runaway boy, all dusty and way-worn, perhaps I thought so. From that time until now, Trot, you have ever been a credit to me and a pride and a pleasure. I have no other claim upon my means; at least'--here to my surprise she hesitated, and was confused--'no, I have no other claim upon my means--and you are my adopted child. Only be a loving child to me in my age, and bear with my whims and fancies; and you will do more for an old woman whose prime of life was not so happy or conciliating as it might have been, than ever that old woman did for you.'

It was the first time I had heard my aunt refer to her past history. There was a magnanimity in her quiet way of doing so, and of dismissing it, which would have exalted her in my respect and affection, if anything could.

'All is agreed and understood between us, now, Trot,' said my aunt, 'and we need talk of this no more. Give me a kiss, and we'll go to the Commons after breakfast tomorrow.'

We had a long chat by the fire before we went to bed. I slept in a room on the same floor with my aunt's, and was a little disturbed in the course of the night by her knocking at my door as often as she was

agitated by a distant sound of hackney-coaches or market-carts, and inquiring, 'if I heard the engines?' But towards morning she slept better, and suffered me to do so too.

At about mid-day, we set out for the office of Messrs Spenlow and Jorkins, in Doctors' Commons. My aunt, who had this other general opinion in reference to London, that every man she saw was a pickpocket, gave me her purse to carry for her, which had ten guineas in it and some silver.

We made a pause at the toy shop in Fleet Street, to see the giants of Saint Dunstan's strike upon the bells--we had timed our going, so as to catch them at it, at twelve o'clock--and then went on towards Ludgate Hill, and St. Paul's Churchyard. We were crossing to the former place, when I found that my aunt greatly accelerated her speed, and looked frightened. I observed, at the same time, that a lowering ill-dressed man who had stopped and stared at us in passing, a little before, was coming so close after us as to brush against her.

'Trot! My dear Trot!' cried my aunt, in a terrified whisper, and pressing my arm. 'I don't know what I am to do.'

'Don't be alarmed,' said I. 'There's nothing to be afraid of. Step into a shop, and I'll soon get rid of this fellow.'

'No, no, child!' she returned. 'Don't speak to him for the world. I entreat, I order you!'

'Good Heaven, aunt!' said I. 'He is nothing but a sturdy beggar.'

'You don't know what he is!' replied my aunt. 'You don't know who he is! You don't know what you say!'

We had stopped in an empty door-way, while this was passing, and he had stopped too.

'Don't look at him!' said my aunt, as I turned my head indignantly, 'but get me a coach, my dear, and wait for me in St. Paul's Churchyard.'

'Wait for you?' I replied.

'Yes,' rejoined my aunt. 'I must go alone. I must go with him.'

'With him, aunt? This man?'

'I am in my senses,' she replied, 'and I tell you I must. Get me a coach!'

However much astonished I might be, I was sensible that I had no right to refuse compliance with such a peremptory command. I hurried away a few paces, and called a hackney-chariot which was passing empty. Almost before I could let down the steps, my aunt sprang in, I don't know how, and the man followed. She waved her hand to me to go away, so earnestly, that, all confounded as I was, I turned from them at once. In doing so, I heard her say to the coachman, 'Drive anywhere! Drive straight on!' and presently the chariot passed me, going up the hill.

What Mr. Dick had told me, and what I had supposed to be a delusion of his, now came into my mind. I could not doubt that this person was the person of whom he had made such mysterious mention, though what the nature of his hold upon my aunt could possibly be, I was quite unable to imagine. After half an hour's cooling in the churchyard, I saw the chariot coming back. The driver stopped beside me, and my aunt was sitting in it alone.

She had not yet sufficiently recovered from her agitation to be quite

prepared for the visit we had to make. She desired me to get into the chariot, and to tell the coachman to drive slowly up and down a little while. She said no more, except, 'My dear child, never ask me what it was, and don't refer to it,' until she had perfectly regained her composure, when she told me she was quite herself now, and we might get out. On her giving me her purse to pay the driver, I found that all the guineas were gone, and only the loose silver remained.

Doctors' Commons was approached by a little low archway. Before we had taken many paces down the street beyond it, the noise of the city seemed to melt, as if by magic, into a softened distance. A few dull courts and narrow ways brought us to the sky-lighted offices of Spenlow and Jorkins; in the vestibule of which temple, accessible to pilgrims without the ceremony of knocking, three or four clerks were at work as copyists. One of these, a little dry man, sitting by himself, who wore a stiff brown wig that looked as if it were made of gingerbread, rose to receive my aunt, and show us into Mr. Spenlow's room.

'Mr. Spenlow's in Court, ma'am,' said the dry man; 'it's an Arches day; but it's close by, and I'll send for him directly.'

As we were left to look about us while Mr. Spenlow was fetched, I availed myself of the opportunity. The furniture of the room was old-fashioned and dusty; and the green baize on the top of the writing-table had lost all its colour, and was as withered and pale as an old pauper. There were a great many bundles of papers on it, some endorsed as Allegations, and some (to my surprise) as Libels, and some as being in the Consistory Court, and some in the Arches Court, and some in the Prerogative Court, and some in the Admiralty Court, and some in the Delegates' Court; giving me occasion to wonder much, how many Courts there might be in the gross, and how long it would take to understand them all. Besides these, there were sundry immense manuscript Books of Evidence taken on affidavit, strongly bound, and tied together in



massive sets, a set to each cause, as if every cause were a history in ten or twenty volumes. All this looked tolerably expensive, I thought, and gave me an agreeable notion of a proctor's business. I was casting my eyes with increasing complacency over these and many similar objects, when hasty footsteps were heard in the room outside, and Mr. Spenlow, in a black gown trimmed with white fur, came hurrying in, taking off his hat as he came.

He was a little light-haired gentleman, with undeniable boots, and the stiffest of white cravats and shirt-collars. He was buttoned up, mighty trim and tight, and must have taken a great deal of pains with his whiskers, which were accurately curled. His gold watch-chain was so massive, that a fancy came across me, that he ought to have a sinewy golden arm, to draw it out with, like those which are put up over the goldbeaters' shops. He was got up with such care, and was so stiff, that he could hardly bend himself; being obliged, when he glanced at some papers on his desk, after sitting down in his chair, to move his whole body, from the bottom of his spine, like Punch.

I had previously been presented by my aunt, and had been courteously received. He now said:

'And so, Mr. Copperfield, you think of entering into our profession? I casually mentioned to Miss Trotwood, when I had the pleasure of an interview with her the other day,'--with another inclination of his body--Punch again--'that there was a vacancy here. Miss Trotwood was good enough to mention that she had a nephew who was her peculiar care, and for whom she was seeking to provide genteelly in life. That nephew, I believe, I have now the pleasure of'--Punch again. I bowed my acknowledgements, and said, my aunt had mentioned to me that there was that opening, and that I believed I should like it very much. That I was strongly inclined to like it, and had taken immediately to the proposal. That I could not absolutely pledge myself to like it, until I knew

something more about it. That although it was little else than a matter of form, I presumed I should have an opportunity of trying how I liked it, before I bound myself to it irrevocably.

'Oh surely! surely!' said Mr. Spenlow. 'We always, in this house, propose a month--an initiatory month. I should be happy, myself, to propose two months--three--an indefinite period, in fact--but I have a partner. Mr. Jorkins.'

'And the premium, sir,' I returned, 'is a thousand pounds?'

'And the premium, Stamp included, is a thousand pounds,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'As I have mentioned to Miss Trotwood, I am actuated by no mercenary considerations; few men are less so, I believe; but Mr. Jorkins has his opinions on these subjects, and I am bound to respect Mr. Jorkins's opinions. Mr. Jorkins thinks a thousand pounds too little, in short.'

'I suppose, sir,' said I, still desiring to spare my aunt, 'that it is not the custom here, if an articled clerk were particularly useful, and made himself a perfect master of his profession'--I could not help blushing, this looked so like praising myself--'I suppose it is not the custom, in the later years of his time, to allow him any--'

Mr. Spenlow, by a great effort, just lifted his head far enough out of his cravat to shake it, and answered, anticipating the word 'salary':

'No. I will not say what consideration I might give to that point myself, Mr. Copperfield, if I were unfettered. Mr. Jorkins is immovable.'

I was quite dismayed by the idea of this terrible Jorkins. But I found out afterwards that he was a mild man of a heavy temperament, whose

place in the business was to keep himself in the background, and be constantly exhibited by name as the most obdurate and ruthless of men. If a clerk wanted his salary raised, Mr. Jorkins wouldn't listen to such a proposition. If a client were slow to settle his bill of costs, Mr. Jorkins was resolved to have it paid; and however painful these things might be (and always were) to the feelings of Mr. Spenlow, Mr. Jorkins would have his bond. The heart and hand of the good angel Spenlow would have been always open, but for the restraining demon Jorkins. As I have grown older, I think I have had experience of some other houses doing business on the principle of Spenlow and Jorkins!

It was settled that I should begin my month's probation as soon as I pleased, and that my aunt need neither remain in town nor return at its expiration, as the articles of agreement, of which I was to be the subject, could easily be sent to her at home for her signature. When we had got so far, Mr. Spenlow offered to take me into Court then and there, and show me what sort of place it was. As I was willing enough to know, we went out with this object, leaving my aunt behind; who would trust herself, she said, in no such place, and who, I think, regarded all Courts of Law as a sort of powder-mills that might blow up at any time.

Mr. Spenlow conducted me through a paved courtyard formed of grave brick houses, which I inferred, from the Doctors' names upon the doors, to be the official abiding-places of the learned advocates of whom Steerforth had told me; and into a large dull room, not unlike a chapel to my thinking, on the left hand. The upper part of this room was fenced off from the rest; and there, on the two sides of a raised platform of the horse-shoe form, sitting on easy old-fashioned dining-room chairs, were sundry gentlemen in red gowns and grey wigs, whom I found to be the Doctors aforesaid. Blinking over a little desk like a pulpit-desk, in the curve of the horse-shoe, was an old gentleman, whom, if I had seen him in an aviary, I should certainly have taken for an owl, but who, I

learned, was the presiding judge. In the space within the horse-shoe, lower than these, that is to say, on about the level of the floor, were sundry other gentlemen, of Mr. Spenlow's rank, and dressed like him in black gowns with white fur upon them, sitting at a long green table. Their cravats were in general stiff, I thought, and their looks haughty; but in this last respect I presently conceived I had done them an injustice, for when two or three of them had to rise and answer a question of the presiding dignitary, I never saw anything more sheepish. The public, represented by a boy with a comforter, and a shabby-genteel man secretly eating crumbs out of his coat pockets, was warming itself at a stove in the centre of the Court. The languid stillness of the place was only broken by the chirping of this fire and by the voice of one of the Doctors, who was wandering slowly through a perfect library of evidence, and stopping to put up, from time to time, at little roadside inns of argument on the journey. Altogether, I have never, on any occasion, made one at such a cosey, dosey, old-fashioned, time-forgotten, sleepy-headed little family-party in all my life; and I felt it would be quite a soothing opiate to belong to it in any character--except perhaps as a suitor.

Very well satisfied with the dreamy nature of this retreat, I informed Mr. Spenlow that I had seen enough for that time, and we rejoined my aunt; in company with whom I presently departed from the Commons, feeling very young when I went out of Spenlow and Jorkins's, on account of the clerks poking one another with their pens to point me out.

We arrived at Lincoln's Inn Fields without any new adventures, except encountering an unlucky donkey in a costermonger's cart, who suggested painful associations to my aunt. We had another long talk about my plans, when we were safely housed; and as I knew she was anxious to get home, and, between fire, food, and pickpockets, could never be considered at her ease for half-an-hour in London, I urged her not to be uncomfortable on my account, but to leave me to take care of myself.

'I have not been here a week tomorrow, without considering that too, my dear,' she returned. 'There is a furnished little set of chambers to be let in the Adelphi, Trot, which ought to suit you to a marvel.'

With this brief introduction, she produced from her pocket an advertisement, carefully cut out of a newspaper, setting forth that in Buckingham Street in the Adelphi there was to be let furnished, with a view of the river, a singularly desirable, and compact set of chambers, forming a genteel residence for a young gentleman, a member of one of the Inns of Court, or otherwise, with immediate possession. Terms moderate, and could be taken for a month only, if required.

'Why, this is the very thing, aunt!' said I, flushed with the possible dignity of living in chambers.

'Then come,' replied my aunt, immediately resuming the bonnet she had a minute before laid aside. 'We'll go and look at 'em.'

Away we went. The advertisement directed us to apply to Mrs. Crupp on the premises, and we rung the area bell, which we supposed to communicate with Mrs. Crupp. It was not until we had rung three or four times that we could prevail on Mrs. Crupp to communicate with us, but at last she appeared, being a stout lady with a flounce of flannel petticoat below a nankeen gown.

'Let us see these chambers of yours, if you please, ma'am,' said my aunt.

'For this gentleman?' said Mrs. Crupp, feeling in her pocket for her keys.

'Yes, for my nephew,' said my aunt.

'And a sweet set they is for sich!' said Mrs. Crupp.

So we went upstairs.

They were on the top of the house--a great point with my aunt, being near the fire-escape--and consisted of a little half-blind entry where you could see hardly anything, a little stone-blind pantry where you could see nothing at all, a sitting-room, and a bedroom. The furniture was rather faded, but quite good enough for me; and, sure enough, the river was outside the windows.

As I was delighted with the place, my aunt and Mrs. Crupp withdrew into the pantry to discuss the terms, while I remained on the sitting-room sofa, hardly daring to think it possible that I could be destined to live in such a noble residence. After a single combat of some duration they returned, and I saw, to my joy, both in Mrs. Crupp's countenance and in my aunt's, that the deed was done.

'Is it the last occupant's furniture?' inquired my aunt.

'Yes, it is, ma'am,' said Mrs. Crupp.

'What's become of him?' asked my aunt.

Mrs. Crupp was taken with a troublesome cough, in the midst of which she articulated with much difficulty. 'He was took ill here, ma'am, and--ugh! ugh! ugh! dear me!--and he died!'

'Hey! What did he die of?' asked my aunt.

'Well, ma'am, he died of drink,' said Mrs. Crupp, in confidence. 'And smoke.'

'Smoke? You don't mean chimneys?' said my aunt.

'No, ma'am,' returned Mrs. Crupp. 'Cigars and pipes.'

'That's not catching, Trot, at any rate,' remarked my aunt, turning to me.

'No, indeed,' said I.

In short, my aunt, seeing how enraptured I was with the premises, took them for a month, with leave to remain for twelve months when that time was out. Mrs. Crupp was to find linen, and to cook; every other necessary was already provided; and Mrs. Crupp expressly intimated that she should always yearn towards me as a son. I was to take possession the day after tomorrow, and Mrs. Crupp said, thank Heaven she had now found summun she could care for!

On our way back, my aunt informed me how she confidently trusted that the life I was now to lead would make me firm and self-reliant, which was all I wanted. She repeated this several times next day, in the intervals of our arranging for the transmission of my clothes and books from Mr. Wickfield's; relative to which, and to all my late holiday, I wrote a long letter to Agnes, of which my aunt took charge, as she was to leave on the succeeding day. Not to lengthen these particulars, I need only add, that she made a handsome provision for all my possible wants during my month of trial; that Steerforth, to my great disappointment and hers too, did not make his appearance before she went away; that I saw her safely seated in the Dover coach, exulting in the coming discomfiture of the vagrant donkeys, with Janet at her side; and that when the coach was gone, I turned my face to the Adelphi, pondering on the old days when I used to roam about its subterranean arches, and on the happy changes which had brought me to the surface.

## CHAPTER 24. MY FIRST DISSIPATION

It was a wonderfully fine thing to have that lofty castle to myself, and to feel, when I shut my outer door, like Robinson Crusoe, when he had got into his fortification, and pulled his ladder up after him. It was a wonderfully fine thing to walk about town with the key of my house in my pocket, and to know that I could ask any fellow to come home, and make quite sure of its being inconvenient to nobody, if it were not so to me. It was a wonderfully fine thing to let myself in and out, and to come and go without a word to anyone, and to ring Mrs. Crupp up, gasping, from the depths of the earth, when I wanted her--and when she was disposed to come. All this, I say, was wonderfully fine; but I must say, too, that there were times when it was very dreary.

It was fine in the morning, particularly in the fine mornings. It looked a very fresh, free life, by daylight: still fresher, and more free, by sunlight. But as the day declined, the life seemed to go down too. I don't know how it was; it seldom looked well by candle-light. I wanted somebody to talk to, then. I missed Agnes. I found a tremendous blank, in the place of that smiling repository of my confidence. Mrs. Crupp appeared to be a long way off. I thought about my predecessor, who had died of drink and smoke; and I could have wished he had been so good as to live, and not bother me with his decease.

After two days and nights, I felt as if I had lived there for a year, and yet I was not an hour older, but was quite as much tormented by my own youthfulness as ever.

Steerforth not yet appearing, which induced me to apprehend that he must



be ill, I left the Commons early on the third day, and walked out to Highgate. Mrs. Steerforth was very glad to see me, and said that he had gone away with one of his Oxford friends to see another who lived near St. Albans, but that she expected him to return tomorrow. I was so fond of him, that I felt quite jealous of his Oxford friends.

As she pressed me to stay to dinner, I remained, and I believe we talked about nothing but him all day. I told her how much the people liked him at Yarmouth, and what a delightful companion he had been. Miss Dartle was full of hints and mysterious questions, but took a great interest in all our proceedings there, and said, 'Was it really though?' and so forth, so often, that she got everything out of me she wanted to know. Her appearance was exactly what I have described it, when I first saw her; but the society of the two ladies was so agreeable, and came so natural to me, that I felt myself falling a little in love with her. I could not help thinking, several times in the course of the evening, and particularly when I walked home at night, what delightful company she would be in Buckingham Street.

I was taking my coffee and roll in the morning, before going to the Commons--and I may observe in this place that it is surprising how much coffee Mrs. Crupp used, and how weak it was, considering--when Steerforth himself walked in, to my unbounded joy.

'My dear Steerforth,' cried I, 'I began to think I should never see you again!'

'I was carried off, by force of arms,' said Steerforth, 'the very next morning after I got home. Why, Daisy, what a rare old bachelor you are here!'

I showed him over the establishment, not omitting the pantry, with no little pride, and he commended it highly. 'I tell you what, old boy,' he

added, 'I shall make quite a town-house of this place, unless you give me notice to quit.'

This was a delightful hearing. I told him if he waited for that, he would have to wait till doomsday.

'But you shall have some breakfast!' said I, with my hand on the bell-rope, 'and Mrs. Crupp shall make you some fresh coffee, and I'll toast you some bacon in a bachelor's Dutch-oven, that I have got here.'

'No, no!' said Steerforth. 'Don't ring! I can't! I am going to breakfast with one of these fellows who is at the Piazza Hotel, in Covent Garden.'

'But you'll come back to dinner?' said I.

'I can't, upon my life. There's nothing I should like better, but I must remain with these two fellows. We are all three off together tomorrow morning.'

'Then bring them here to dinner,' I returned. 'Do you think they would come?'

'Oh! they would come fast enough,' said Steerforth; 'but we should inconvenience you. You had better come and dine with us somewhere.'

I would not by any means consent to this, for it occurred to me that I really ought to have a little house-warming, and that there never could be a better opportunity. I had a new pride in my rooms after his approval of them, and burned with a desire to develop their utmost resources. I therefore made him promise positively in the names of his two friends, and we appointed six o'clock as the dinner-hour.

When he was gone, I rang for Mrs. Crupp, and acquainted her with my

desperate design. Mrs. Crupp said, in the first place, of course it was well known she couldn't be expected to wait, but she knew a handy young man, who she thought could be prevailed upon to do it, and whose terms would be five shillings, and what I pleased. I said, certainly we would have him. Next Mrs. Crupp said it was clear she couldn't be in two places at once (which I felt to be reasonable), and that 'a young gal' stationed in the pantry with a bedroom candle, there never to desist from washing plates, would be indispensable. I said, what would be the expense of this young female? and Mrs. Crupp said she supposed eighteenpence would neither make me nor break me. I said I supposed not; and THAT was settled. Then Mrs. Crupp said, Now about the dinner.

It was a remarkable instance of want of forethought on the part of the ironmonger who had made Mrs. Crupp's kitchen fireplace, that it was capable of cooking nothing but chops and mashed potatoes. As to a fish-kettle, Mrs. Crupp said, well! would I only come and look at the range? She couldn't say fairer than that. Would I come and look at it? As I should not have been much the wiser if I HAD looked at it, I declined, and said, 'Never mind fish.' But Mrs. Crupp said, Don't say that; oysters was in, why not them? So THAT was settled. Mrs. Crupp then said what she would recommend would be this. A pair of hot roast fowls--from the pastry-cook's; a dish of stewed beef, with vegetables--from the pastry-cook's; two little corner things, as a raised pie and a dish of kidneys--from the pastrycook's; a tart, and (if I liked) a shape of jelly--from the pastrycook's. This, Mrs. Crupp said, would leave her at full liberty to concentrate her mind on the potatoes, and to serve up the cheese and celery as she could wish to see it done.

I acted on Mrs. Crupp's opinion, and gave the order at the pastry-cook's myself. Walking along the Strand, afterwards, and observing a hard mottled substance in the window of a ham and beef shop, which resembled marble, but was labelled 'Mock Turtle', I went in and bought a slab of it, which I have since seen reason to believe would have sufficed for

fifteen people. This preparation, Mrs. Crupp, after some difficulty, consented to warm up; and it shrunk so much in a liquid state, that we found it what Steerforth called 'rather a tight fit' for four.

These preparations happily completed, I bought a little dessert in Covent Garden Market, and gave a rather extensive order at a retail wine-merchant's in that vicinity. When I came home in the afternoon, and saw the bottles drawn up in a square on the pantry floor, they looked so numerous (though there were two missing, which made Mrs. Crupp very uncomfortable), that I was absolutely frightened at them.

One of Steerforth's friends was named Grainger, and the other Markham. They were both very gay and lively fellows; Grainger, something older than Steerforth; Markham, youthful-looking, and I should say not more than twenty. I observed that the latter always spoke of himself indefinitely, as 'a man', and seldom or never in the first person singular.

'A man might get on very well here, Mr. Copperfield,' said Markham--meaning himself.

'It's not a bad situation,' said I, 'and the rooms are really commodious.'

'I hope you have both brought appetites with you?' said Steerforth.

'Upon my honour,' returned Markham, 'town seems to sharpen a man's appetite. A man is hungry all day long. A man is perpetually eating.'

Being a little embarrassed at first, and feeling much too young to preside, I made Steerforth take the head of the table when dinner was announced, and seated myself opposite to him. Everything was very good; we did not spare the wine; and he exerted himself so brilliantly to make

the thing pass off well, that there was no pause in our festivity. I was not quite such good company during dinner as I could have wished to be, for my chair was opposite the door, and my attention was distracted by observing that the handy young man went out of the room very often, and that his shadow always presented itself, immediately afterwards, on the wall of the entry, with a bottle at its mouth. The 'young gal' likewise occasioned me some uneasiness: not so much by neglecting to wash the plates, as by breaking them. For being of an inquisitive disposition, and unable to confine herself (as her positive instructions were) to the pantry, she was constantly peering in at us, and constantly imagining herself detected; in which belief, she several times retired upon the plates (with which she had carefully paved the floor), and did a great deal of destruction.

These, however, were small drawbacks, and easily forgotten when the cloth was cleared, and the dessert put on the table; at which period of the entertainment the handy young man was discovered to be speechless. Giving him private directions to seek the society of Mrs. Crupp, and to remove the 'young gal' to the basement also, I abandoned myself to enjoyment.

I began, by being singularly cheerful and light-hearted; all sorts of half-forgotten things to talk about, came rushing into my mind, and made me hold forth in a most unwonted manner. I laughed heartily at my own jokes, and everybody else's; called Steerforth to order for not passing the wine; made several engagements to go to Oxford; announced that I meant to have a dinner-party exactly like that, once a week, until further notice; and madly took so much snuff out of Grainger's box, that I was obliged to go into the pantry, and have a private fit of sneezing ten minutes long.

I went on, by passing the wine faster and faster yet, and continually starting up with a corkscrew to open more wine, long before any was

needed. I proposed Steerforth's health. I said he was my dearest friend, the protector of my boyhood, and the companion of my prime. I said I was delighted to propose his health. I said I owed him more obligations than I could ever repay, and held him in a higher admiration than I could ever express. I finished by saying, 'I'll give you Steerforth! God bless him! Hurrah!' We gave him three times three, and another, and a good one to finish with. I broke my glass in going round the table to shake hands with him, and I said (in two words)

'Steerforth--you're the guiding star of my existence.'

I went on, by finding suddenly that somebody was in the middle of a song. Markham was the singer, and he sang 'When the heart of a man is depressed with care'. He said, when he had sung it, he would give us 'Woman!' I took objection to that, and I couldn't allow it. I said it was not a respectful way of proposing the toast, and I would never permit that toast to be drunk in my house otherwise than as 'The Ladies!' I was very high with him, mainly I think because I saw Steerforth and Grainger laughing at me--or at him--or at both of us. He said a man was not to be dictated to. I said a man was. He said a man was not to be insulted, then. I said he was right there--never under my roof, where the Lares were sacred, and the laws of hospitality paramount. He said it was no derogation from a man's dignity to confess that I was a devilish good fellow. I instantly proposed his health.

Somebody was smoking. We were all smoking. I was smoking, and trying to suppress a rising tendency to shudder. Steerforth had made a speech about me, in the course of which I had been affected almost to tears. I returned thanks, and hoped the present company would dine with me tomorrow, and the day after--each day at five o'clock, that we might enjoy the pleasures of conversation and society through a long evening. I felt called upon to propose an individual. I would give them my aunt. Miss Betsey Trotwood, the best of her sex!

Somebody was leaning out of my bedroom window, refreshing his forehead against the cool stone of the parapet, and feeling the air upon his face. It was myself. I was addressing myself as 'Copperfield', and saying, 'Why did you try to smoke? You might have known you couldn't do it.' Now, somebody was unsteadily contemplating his features in the looking-glass. That was I too. I was very pale in the looking-glass; my eyes had a vacant appearance; and my hair--only my hair, nothing else--looked drunk.

Somebody said to me, 'Let us go to the theatre, Copperfield!' There was no bedroom before me, but again the jingling table covered with glasses; the lamp; Grainger on my right hand, Markham on my left, and Steerforth opposite--all sitting in a mist, and a long way off. The theatre? To be sure. The very thing. Come along! But they must excuse me if I saw everybody out first, and turned the lamp off--in case of fire.

Owing to some confusion in the dark, the door was gone. I was feeling for it in the window-curtains, when Steerforth, laughing, took me by the arm and led me out. We went downstairs, one behind another. Near the bottom, somebody fell, and rolled down. Somebody else said it was Copperfield. I was angry at that false report, until, finding myself on my back in the passage, I began to think there might be some foundation for it.

A very foggy night, with great rings round the lamps in the streets! There was an indistinct talk of its being wet. I considered it frosty. Steerforth dusted me under a lamp-post, and put my hat into shape, which somebody produced from somewhere in a most extraordinary manner, for I hadn't had it on before. Steerforth then said, 'You are all right, Copperfield, are you not?' and I told him, 'Neverberrer.'

A man, sitting in a pigeon-hole-place, looked out of the fog, and took

money from somebody, inquiring if I was one of the gentlemen paid for, and appearing rather doubtful (as I remember in the glimpse I had of him) whether to take the money for me or not. Shortly afterwards, we were very high up in a very hot theatre, looking down into a large pit, that seemed to me to smoke; the people with whom it was crammed were so indistinct. There was a great stage, too, looking very clean and smooth after the streets; and there were people upon it, talking about something or other, but not at all intelligibly. There was an abundance of bright lights, and there was music, and there were ladies down in the boxes, and I don't know what more. The whole building looked to me as if it were learning to swim; it conducted itself in such an unaccountable manner, when I tried to steady it.

On somebody's motion, we resolved to go downstairs to the dress-boxes, where the ladies were. A gentleman lounging, full dressed, on a sofa, with an opera-glass in his hand, passed before my view, and also my own figure at full length in a glass. Then I was being ushered into one of these boxes, and found myself saying something as I sat down, and people about me crying 'Silence!' to somebody, and ladies casting indignant glances at me, and--what! yes!--Agnes, sitting on the seat before me, in the same box, with a lady and gentleman beside her, whom I didn't know. I see her face now, better than I did then, I dare say, with its indelible look of regret and wonder turned upon me.

'Agnes!' I said, thickly, 'Lorblessmer! Agnes!'

'Hush! Pray!' she answered, I could not conceive why. 'You disturb the company. Look at the stage!'

I tried, on her injunction, to fix it, and to hear something of what was going on there, but quite in vain. I looked at her again by and by, and saw her shrink into her corner, and put her gloved hand to her forehead.



'Agnes!' I said. 'I'm afraid you're not well.'

'Yes, yes. Do not mind me, Trotwood,' she returned. 'Listen! Are you going away soon?'

'Amigo away soon?' I repeated.

'Yes.'

I had a stupid intention of replying that I was going to wait, to hand her downstairs. I suppose I expressed it, somehow; for after she had looked at me attentively for a little while, she appeared to understand, and replied in a low tone:

'I know you will do as I ask you, if I tell you I am very earnest in it. Go away now, Trotwood, for my sake, and ask your friends to take you home.'

She had so far improved me, for the time, that though I was angry with her, I felt ashamed, and with a short 'Goori!' (which I intended for 'Good night!') got up and went away. They followed, and I stepped at once out of the box-door into my bedroom, where only Steerforth was with me, helping me to undress, and where I was by turns telling him that Agnes was my sister, and adjuring him to bring the corkscrew, that I might open another bottle of wine.

How somebody, lying in my bed, lay saying and doing all this over again, at cross purposes, in a feverish dream all night--the bed a rocking sea that was never still! How, as that somebody slowly settled down into myself, did I begin to parch, and feel as if my outer covering of skin were a hard board; my tongue the bottom of an empty kettle, furred with long service, and burning up over a slow fire; the palms of my hands, hot plates of metal which no ice could cool!

But the agony of mind, the remorse, and shame I felt when I became conscious next day! My horror of having committed a thousand offences I had forgotten, and which nothing could ever expiate--my recollection of that indelible look which Agnes had given me--the torturing impossibility of communicating with her, not knowing, Beast that I was, how she came to be in London, or where she stayed--my disgust of the very sight of the room where the revel had been held--my racking head--the smell of smoke, the sight of glasses, the impossibility of going out, or even getting up! Oh, what a day it was!

Oh, what an evening, when I sat down by my fire to a basin of mutton broth, dimpled all over with fat, and thought I was going the way of my predecessor, and should succeed to his dismal story as well as to his chambers, and had half a mind to rush express to Dover and reveal all! What an evening, when Mrs. Crupp, coming in to take away the broth-basin, produced one kidney on a cheese-plate as the entire remains of yesterday's feast, and I was really inclined to fall upon her nankeen breast and say, in heartfelt penitence, 'Oh, Mrs. Crupp, Mrs. Crupp, never mind the broken meats! I am very miserable!'--only that I doubted, even at that pass, if Mrs. Crupp were quite the sort of woman to confide in!

## CHAPTER 25. GOOD AND BAD ANGELS

I was going out at my door on the morning after that deplorable day of headache, sickness, and repentance, with an odd confusion in my mind relative to the date of my dinner-party, as if a body of Titans had taken an enormous lever and pushed the day before yesterday some months back, when I saw a ticket-porter coming upstairs, with a letter in his hand. He was taking his time about his errand, then; but when he saw me

on the top of the staircase, looking at him over the banisters, he swung into a trot, and came up panting as if he had run himself into a state of exhaustion.

'T. Copperfield, Esquire,' said the ticket-porter, touching his hat with his little cane.

I could scarcely lay claim to the name: I was so disturbed by the conviction that the letter came from Agnes. However, I told him I was T. Copperfield, Esquire, and he believed it, and gave me the letter, which he said required an answer. I shut him out on the landing to wait for the answer, and went into my chambers again, in such a nervous state that I was fain to lay the letter down on my breakfast table, and familiarize myself with the outside of it a little, before I could resolve to break the seal.

I found, when I did open it, that it was a very kind note, containing no reference to my condition at the theatre. All it said was, 'My dear Trotwood. I am staying at the house of papa's agent, Mr. Waterbrook, in Ely Place, Holborn. Will you come and see me today, at any time you like to appoint? Ever yours affectionately, AGNES.'

It took me such a long time to write an answer at all to my satisfaction, that I don't know what the ticket-porter can have thought, unless he thought I was learning to write. I must have written half-a-dozen answers at least. I began one, 'How can I ever hope, my dear Agnes, to efface from your remembrance the disgusting impression'--there I didn't like it, and then I tore it up. I began another, 'Shakespeare has observed, my dear Agnes, how strange it is that a man should put an enemy into his mouth'--that reminded me of Markham, and it got no farther. I even tried poetry. I began one note, in a six-syllable line, 'Oh, do not remember'--but that associated itself with the fifth of November, and became an absurdity. After many

attempts, I wrote, 'My dear Agnes. Your letter is like you, and what could I say of it that would be higher praise than that? I will come at four o'clock. Affectionately and sorrowfully, T.C.' With this missive (which I was in twenty minds at once about recalling, as soon as it was out of my hands), the ticket-porter at last departed.

If the day were half as tremendous to any other professional gentleman in Doctors' Commons as it was to me, I sincerely believe he made some expiation for his share in that rotten old ecclesiastical cheese. Although I left the office at half past three, and was prowling about the place of appointment within a few minutes afterwards, the appointed time was exceeded by a full quarter of an hour, according to the clock of St. Andrew's, Holborn, before I could muster up sufficient desperation to pull the private bell-handle let into the left-hand door-post of Mr. Waterbrook's house.

The professional business of Mr. Waterbrook's establishment was done on the ground-floor, and the genteel business (of which there was a good deal) in the upper part of the building. I was shown into a pretty but rather close drawing-room, and there sat Agnes, netting a purse.

She looked so quiet and good, and reminded me so strongly of my airy fresh school days at Canterbury, and the sodden, smoky, stupid wretch I had been the other night, that, nobody being by, I yielded to my self-reproach and shame, and--in short, made a fool of myself. I cannot deny that I shed tears. To this hour I am undecided whether it was upon the whole the wisest thing I could have done, or the most ridiculous.

'If it had been anyone but you, Agnes,' said I, turning away my head, 'I should not have minded it half so much. But that it should have been you who saw me! I almost wish I had been dead, first.'

She put her hand--its touch was like no other hand--upon my arm for a

moment; and I felt so befriended and comforted, that I could not help moving it to my lips, and gratefully kissing it.

'Sit down,' said Agnes, cheerfully. 'Don't be unhappy, Trotwood. If you cannot confidently trust me, whom will you trust?'

'Ah, Agnes!' I returned. 'You are my good Angel!'

She smiled rather sadly, I thought, and shook her head.

'Yes, Agnes, my good Angel! Always my good Angel!'

'If I were, indeed, Trotwood,' she returned, 'there is one thing that I should set my heart on very much.'

I looked at her inquiringly; but already with a foreknowledge of her meaning.

'On warning you,' said Agnes, with a steady glance, 'against your bad Angel.'

'My dear Agnes,' I began, 'if you mean Steerforth--'

'I do, Trotwood,' she returned. 'Then, Agnes, you wrong him very much. He my bad Angel, or anyone's! He, anything but a guide, a support, and a friend to me! My dear Agnes! Now, is it not unjust, and unlike you, to judge him from what you saw of me the other night?'

'I do not judge him from what I saw of you the other night,' she quietly replied.

'From what, then?'

'From many things--trifles in themselves, but they do not seem to me to be so, when they are put together. I judge him, partly from your account of him, Trotwood, and your character, and the influence he has over you.'

There was always something in her modest voice that seemed to touch a chord within me, answering to that sound alone. It was always earnest; but when it was very earnest, as it was now, there was a thrill in it that quite subdued me. I sat looking at her as she cast her eyes down on her work; I sat seeming still to listen to her; and Steerforth, in spite of all my attachment to him, darkened in that tone.

'It is very bold in me,' said Agnes, looking up again, 'who have lived in such seclusion, and can know so little of the world, to give you my advice so confidently, or even to have this strong opinion. But I know in what it is engendered, Trotwood,--in how true a remembrance of our having grown up together, and in how true an interest in all relating to you. It is that which makes me bold. I am certain that what I say is right. I am quite sure it is. I feel as if it were someone else speaking to you, and not I, when I caution you that you have made a dangerous friend.'

Again I looked at her, again I listened to her after she was silent, and again his image, though it was still fixed in my heart, darkened.

'I am not so unreasonable as to expect,' said Agnes, resuming her usual tone, after a little while, 'that you will, or that you can, at once, change any sentiment that has become a conviction to you; least of all a sentiment that is rooted in your trusting disposition. You ought not hastily to do that. I only ask you, Trotwood, if you ever think of me--I mean,' with a quiet smile, for I was going to interrupt her, and she knew why, 'as often as you think of me--to think of what I have said. Do you forgive me for all this?'

'I will forgive you, Agnes,' I replied, 'when you come to do Steerforth justice, and to like him as well as I do.'

'Not until then?' said Agnes.

I saw a passing shadow on her face when I made this mention of him, but she returned my smile, and we were again as unreserved in our mutual confidence as of old.

'And when, Agnes,' said I, 'will you forgive me the other night?'

'When I recall it,' said Agnes.

She would have dismissed the subject so, but I was too full of it to allow that, and insisted on telling her how it happened that I had disgraced myself, and what chain of accidental circumstances had had the theatre for its final link. It was a great relief to me to do this, and to enlarge on the obligation that I owed to Steerforth for his care of me when I was unable to take care of myself.

'You must not forget,' said Agnes, calmly changing the conversation as soon as I had concluded, 'that you are always to tell me, not only when you fall into trouble, but when you fall in love. Who has succeeded to Miss Larkins, Trotwood?'

'No one, Agnes.'

'Someone, Trotwood,' said Agnes, laughing, and holding up her finger.

'No, Agnes, upon my word! There is a lady, certainly, at Mrs. Steerforth's house, who is very clever, and whom I like to talk to--Miss Dartle--but I don't adore her.'

Agnes laughed again at her own penetration, and told me that if I were faithful to her in my confidence she thought she should keep a little register of my violent attachments, with the date, duration, and termination of each, like the table of the reigns of the kings and queens, in the History of England. Then she asked me if I had seen Uriah.

'Uriah Heep?' said I. 'No. Is he in London?'

'He comes to the office downstairs, every day,' returned Agnes. 'He was in London a week before me. I am afraid on disagreeable business, Trotwood.'

'On some business that makes you uneasy, Agnes, I see,' said I. 'What can that be?'

Agnes laid aside her work, and replied, folding her hands upon one another, and looking pensively at me out of those beautiful soft eyes of hers:

'I believe he is going to enter into partnership with papa.'

'What? Uriah? That mean, fawning fellow, worm himself into such promotion!' I cried, indignantly. 'Have you made no remonstrance about it, Agnes? Consider what a connexion it is likely to be. You must speak out. You must not allow your father to take such a mad step. You must prevent it, Agnes, while there's time.'

Still looking at me, Agnes shook her head while I was speaking, with a faint smile at my warmth: and then replied:

'You remember our last conversation about papa? It was not long after



that--not more than two or three days--when he gave me the first intimation of what I tell you. It was sad to see him struggling between his desire to represent it to me as a matter of choice on his part, and his inability to conceal that it was forced upon him. I felt very sorry.'

'Forced upon him, Agnes! Who forces it upon him?'

'Uriah,' she replied, after a moment's hesitation, 'has made himself indispensable to papa. He is subtle and watchful. He has mastered papa's weaknesses, fostered them, and taken advantage of them, until--to say all that I mean in a word, Trotwood,--until papa is afraid of him.'

There was more that she might have said; more that she knew, or that she suspected; I clearly saw. I could not give her pain by asking what it was, for I knew that she withheld it from me, to spare her father. It had long been going on to this, I was sensible: yes, I could not but feel, on the least reflection, that it had been going on to this for a long time. I remained silent.

'His ascendancy over papa,' said Agnes, 'is very great. He professes humility and gratitude--with truth, perhaps: I hope so--but his position is really one of power, and I fear he makes a hard use of his power.'

I said he was a hound, which, at the moment, was a great satisfaction to me.

'At the time I speak of, as the time when papa spoke to me,' pursued Agnes, 'he had told papa that he was going away; that he was very sorry, and unwilling to leave, but that he had better prospects. Papa was very much depressed then, and more bowed down by care than ever you or I have seen him; but he seemed relieved by this expedient of the partnership, though at the same time he seemed hurt by it and ashamed of it.'

'And how did you receive it, Agnes?'

'I did, Trotwood,' she replied, 'what I hope was right. Feeling sure that it was necessary for papa's peace that the sacrifice should be made, I entreated him to make it. I said it would lighten the load of his life--I hope it will!--and that it would give me increased opportunities of being his companion. Oh, Trotwood!' cried Agnes, putting her hands before her face, as her tears started on it, 'I almost feel as if I had been papa's enemy, instead of his loving child. For I know how he has altered, in his devotion to me. I know how he has narrowed the circle of his sympathies and duties, in the concentration of his whole mind upon me. I know what a multitude of things he has shut out for my sake, and how his anxious thoughts of me have shadowed his life, and weakened his strength and energy, by turning them always upon one idea. If I could ever set this right! If I could ever work out his restoration, as I have so innocently been the cause of his decline!'

I had never before seen Agnes cry. I had seen tears in her eyes when I had brought new honours home from school, and I had seen them there when we last spoke about her father, and I had seen her turn her gentle head aside when we took leave of one another; but I had never seen her grieve like this. It made me so sorry that I could only say, in a foolish, helpless manner, 'Pray, Agnes, don't! Don't, my dear sister!'

But Agnes was too superior to me in character and purpose, as I know well now, whatever I might know or not know then, to be long in need of my entreaties. The beautiful, calm manner, which makes her so different in my remembrance from everybody else, came back again, as if a cloud had passed from a serene sky.

'We are not likely to remain alone much longer,' said Agnes, 'and while I have an opportunity, let me earnestly entreat you, Trotwood, to be

friendly to Uriah. Don't repel him. Don't resent (as I think you have a general disposition to do) what may be uncongenial to you in him. He may not deserve it, for we know no certain ill of him. In any case, think first of papa and me!'

Agnes had no time to say more, for the room door opened, and Mrs. Waterbrook, who was a large lady--or who wore a large dress: I don't exactly know which, for I don't know which was dress and which was lady--came sailing in. I had a dim recollection of having seen her at the theatre, as if I had seen her in a pale magic lantern; but she appeared to remember me perfectly, and still to suspect me of being in a state of intoxication.

Finding by degrees, however, that I was sober, and (I hope) that I was a modest young gentleman, Mrs. Waterbrook softened towards me considerably, and inquired, firstly, if I went much into the parks, and secondly, if I went much into society. On my replying to both these questions in the negative, it occurred to me that I fell again in her good opinion; but she concealed the fact gracefully, and invited me to dinner next day. I accepted the invitation, and took my leave, making a call on Uriah in the office as I went out, and leaving a card for him in his absence.

When I went to dinner next day, and on the street door being opened, plunged into a vapour-bath of haunch of mutton, I divined that I was not the only guest, for I immediately identified the ticket-porter in disguise, assisting the family servant, and waiting at the foot of the stairs to carry up my name. He looked, to the best of his ability, when he asked me for it confidentially, as if he had never seen me before; but well did I know him, and well did he know me. Conscience made cowards of us both.

I found Mr. Waterbrook to be a middle-aged gentleman, with a short

throat, and a good deal of shirt-collar, who only wanted a black nose to be the portrait of a pug-dog. He told me he was happy to have the honour of making my acquaintance; and when I had paid my homage to Mrs. Waterbrook, presented me, with much ceremony, to a very awful lady in a black velvet dress, and a great black velvet hat, whom I remember as looking like a near relation of Hamlet's--say his aunt.

Mrs. Henry Spiker was this lady's name; and her husband was there too: so cold a man, that his head, instead of being grey, seemed to be sprinkled with hoar-frost. Immense deference was shown to the Henry Spikers, male and female; which Agnes told me was on account of Mr. Henry Spiker being solicitor to something Or to Somebody, I forget what or which, remotely connected with the Treasury.

I found Uriah Heep among the company, in a suit of black, and in deep humility. He told me, when I shook hands with him, that he was proud to be noticed by me, and that he really felt obliged to me for my condescension. I could have wished he had been less obliged to me, for he hovered about me in his gratitude all the rest of the evening; and whenever I said a word to Agnes, was sure, with his shadowless eyes and cadaverous face, to be looking gauntly down upon us from behind.

There were other guests--all iced for the occasion, as it struck me, like the wine. But there was one who attracted my attention before he came in, on account of my hearing him announced as Mr. Traddles! My mind flew back to Salem House; and could it be Tommy, I thought, who used to draw the skeletons!

I looked for Mr. Traddles with unusual interest. He was a sober, steady-looking young man of retiring manners, with a comic head of hair, and eyes that were rather wide open; and he got into an obscure corner so soon, that I had some difficulty in making him out. At length I had a good view of him, and either my vision deceived me, or it was the old

unfortunate Tommy.

I made my way to Mr. Waterbrook, and said, that I believed I had the pleasure of seeing an old schoolfellow there.

'Indeed!' said Mr. Waterbrook, surprised. 'You are too young to have been at school with Mr. Henry Spiker?'

'Oh, I don't mean him!' I returned. 'I mean the gentleman named Traddles.'

'Oh! Aye, aye! Indeed!' said my host, with much diminished interest. 'Possibly.'

'If it's really the same person,' said I, glancing towards him, 'it was at a place called Salem House where we were together, and he was an excellent fellow.'

'Oh yes. Traddles is a good fellow,' returned my host nodding his head with an air of toleration. 'Traddles is quite a good fellow.'

'It's a curious coincidence,' said I.

'It is really,' returned my host, 'quite a coincidence, that Traddles should be here at all: as Traddles was only invited this morning, when the place at table, intended to be occupied by Mrs. Henry Spiker's brother, became vacant, in consequence of his indisposition. A very gentlemanly man, Mrs. Henry Spiker's brother, Mr. Copperfield.'

I murmured an assent, which was full of feeling, considering that I knew nothing at all about him; and I inquired what Mr. Traddles was by profession.

'Traddles,' returned Mr. Waterbrook, 'is a young man reading for the bar. Yes. He is quite a good fellow--nobody's enemy but his own.'

'Is he his own enemy?' said I, sorry to hear this.

'Well,' returned Mr. Waterbrook, pursing up his mouth, and playing with his watch-chain, in a comfortable, prosperous sort of way. 'I should say he was one of those men who stand in their own light. Yes, I should say he would never, for example, be worth five hundred pound. Traddles was recommended to me by a professional friend. Oh yes. Yes. He has a kind of talent for drawing briefs, and stating a case in writing, plainly. I am able to throw something in Traddles's way, in the course of the year; something--for him--considerable. Oh yes. Yes.'

I was much impressed by the extremely comfortable and satisfied manner in which Mr. Waterbrook delivered himself of this little word 'Yes', every now and then. There was wonderful expression in it. It completely conveyed the idea of a man who had been born, not to say with a silver spoon, but with a scaling-ladder, and had gone on mounting all the heights of life one after another, until now he looked, from the top of the fortifications, with the eye of a philosopher and a patron, on the people down in the trenches.

My reflections on this theme were still in progress when dinner was announced. Mr. Waterbrook went down with Hamlet's aunt. Mr. Henry Spiker took Mrs. Waterbrook. Agnes, whom I should have liked to take myself, was given to a simpering fellow with weak legs. Uriah, Traddles, and I, as the junior part of the company, went down last, how we could. I was not so vexed at losing Agnes as I might have been, since it gave me an opportunity of making myself known to Traddles on the stairs, who greeted me with great fervour; while Uriah writhed with such obtrusive satisfaction and self-abasement, that I could gladly have pitched him over the banisters. Traddles and I were separated at table, being

billeted in two remote corners: he in the glare of a red velvet lady; I, in the gloom of Hamlet's aunt. The dinner was very long, and the conversation was about the Aristocracy--and Blood. Mrs. Waterbrook repeatedly told us, that if she had a weakness, it was Blood.

It occurred to me several times that we should have got on better, if we had not been quite so genteel. We were so exceedingly genteel, that our scope was very limited. A Mr. and Mrs. Gulpidge were of the party, who had something to do at second-hand (at least, Mr. Gulpidge had) with the law business of the Bank; and what with the Bank, and what with the Treasury, we were as exclusive as the Court Circular. To mend the matter, Hamlet's aunt had the family failing of indulging in soliloquy, and held forth in a desultory manner, by herself, on every topic that was introduced. These were few enough, to be sure; but as we always fell back upon Blood, she had as wide a field for abstract speculation as her nephew himself.

We might have been a party of Ogres, the conversation assumed such a sanguine complexion.

'I confess I am of Mrs. Waterbrook's opinion,' said Mr. Waterbrook, with his wine-glass at his eye. 'Other things are all very well in their way, but give me Blood!'

'Oh! There is nothing,' observed Hamlet's aunt, 'so satisfactory to one! There is nothing that is so much one's beau-ideal of--of all that sort of thing, speaking generally. There are some low minds (not many, I am happy to believe, but there are some) that would prefer to do what I should call bow down before idols. Positively Idols! Before service, intellect, and so on. But these are intangible points. Blood is not so. We see Blood in a nose, and we know it. We meet with it in a chin, and we say, "There it is! That's Blood!" It is an actual matter of fact. We point it out. It admits of no doubt.'

The simpering fellow with the weak legs, who had taken Agnes down, stated the question more decisively yet, I thought.

'Oh, you know, deuce take it,' said this gentleman, looking round the board with an imbecile smile, 'we can't forego Blood, you know. We must have Blood, you know. Some young fellows, you know, may be a little behind their station, perhaps, in point of education and behaviour, and may go a little wrong, you know, and get themselves and other people into a variety of fixes--and all that--but deuce take it, it's delightful to reflect that they've got Blood in 'em! Myself, I'd rather at any time be knocked down by a man who had got Blood in him, than I'd be picked up by a man who hadn't!'

This sentiment, as compressing the general question into a nutshell, gave the utmost satisfaction, and brought the gentleman into great notice until the ladies retired. After that, I observed that Mr. Gulpidge and Mr. Henry Spiker, who had hitherto been very distant, entered into a defensive alliance against us, the common enemy, and exchanged a mysterious dialogue across the table for our defeat and overthrow.

'That affair of the first bond for four thousand five hundred pounds has not taken the course that was expected, Spiker,' said Mr. Gulpidge.

'Do you mean the D. of A.'s?' said Mr. Spiker.

'The C. of B.'s!' said Mr. Gulpidge.

Mr. Spiker raised his eyebrows, and looked much concerned.

'When the question was referred to Lord--I needn't name him,' said Mr. Gulpidge, checking himself--



'I understand,' said Mr. Spiker, 'N.'

Mr. Gulpidge darkly nodded--'was referred to him, his answer was,  
"Money, or no release."'

'Lord bless my soul!' cried Mr. Spiker.

"'Money, or no release,'" repeated Mr. Gulpidge, firmly. 'The next in  
reversion--you understand me?'

'K.,' said Mr. Spiker, with an ominous look.

'--K. then positively refused to sign. He was attended at Newmarket for  
that purpose, and he point-blank refused to do it.'

Mr. Spiker was so interested, that he became quite stony.

'So the matter rests at this hour,' said Mr. Gulpidge, throwing himself  
back in his chair. 'Our friend Waterbrook will excuse me if I forbear to  
explain myself generally, on account of the magnitude of the interests  
involved.'

Mr. Waterbrook was only too happy, as it appeared to me, to have such  
interests, and such names, even hinted at, across his table. He assumed  
an expression of gloomy intelligence (though I am persuaded he knew  
no more about the discussion than I did), and highly approved of the  
discretion that had been observed. Mr. Spiker, after the receipt of such  
a confidence, naturally desired to favour his friend with a confidence  
of his own; therefore the foregoing dialogue was succeeded by another,  
in which it was Mr. Gulpidge's turn to be surprised, and that by another  
in which the surprise came round to Mr. Spiker's turn again, and so on,  
turn and turn about. All this time we, the outsiders, remained oppressed

by the tremendous interests involved in the conversation; and our host regarded us with pride, as the victims of a salutary awe and astonishment. I was very glad indeed to get upstairs to Agnes, and to talk with her in a corner, and to introduce Traddles to her, who was shy, but agreeable, and the same good-natured creature still. As he was obliged to leave early, on account of going away next morning for a month, I had not nearly so much conversation with him as I could have wished; but we exchanged addresses, and promised ourselves the pleasure of another meeting when he should come back to town. He was greatly interested to hear that I knew Steerforth, and spoke of him with such warmth that I made him tell Agnes what he thought of him. But Agnes only looked at me the while, and very slightly shook her head when only I observed her.

As she was not among people with whom I believed she could be very much at home, I was almost glad to hear that she was going away within a few days, though I was sorry at the prospect of parting from her again so soon. This caused me to remain until all the company were gone. Conversing with her, and hearing her sing, was such a delightful reminder to me of my happy life in the grave old house she had made so beautiful, that I could have remained there half the night; but, having no excuse for staying any longer, when the lights of Mr. Waterbrook's society were all snuffed out, I took my leave very much against my inclination. I felt then, more than ever, that she was my better Angel; and if I thought of her sweet face and placid smile, as though they had shone on me from some removed being, like an Angel, I hope I thought no harm.

I have said that the company were all gone; but I ought to have excepted Uriah, whom I don't include in that denomination, and who had never ceased to hover near us. He was close behind me when I went downstairs. He was close beside me, when I walked away from the house, slowly fitting his long skeleton fingers into the still longer fingers of a

great Guy Fawkes pair of gloves.

It was in no disposition for Uriah's company, but in remembrance of the entreaty Agnes had made to me, that I asked him if he would come home to my rooms, and have some coffee.

'Oh, really, Master Copperfield,' he rejoined--'I beg your pardon, Mister Copperfield, but the other comes so natural, I don't like that you should put a constraint upon yourself to ask a numble person like me to your ouse.'

'There is no constraint in the case,' said I. 'Will you come?'

'I should like to, very much,' replied Uriah, with a writhe.

'Well, then, come along!' said I.

I could not help being rather short with him, but he appeared not to mind it. We went the nearest way, without conversing much upon the road; and he was so humble in respect of those scarecrow gloves, that he was still putting them on, and seemed to have made no advance in that labour, when we got to my place.

I led him up the dark stairs, to prevent his knocking his head against anything, and really his damp cold hand felt so like a frog in mine, that I was tempted to drop it and run away. Agnes and hospitality prevailed, however, and I conducted him to my fireside. When I lighted my candles, he fell into meek transports with the room that was revealed to him; and when I heated the coffee in an unassuming block-tin vessel in which Mrs. Crupp delighted to prepare it (chiefly, I believe, because it was not intended for the purpose, being a shaving-pot, and because there was a patent invention of great price mouldering away in the pantry), he professed so much emotion, that I could joyfully have

scalded him.

'Oh, really, Master Copperfield,--I mean Mister Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'to see you waiting upon me is what I never could have expected! But, one way and another, so many things happen to me which I never could have expected, I am sure, in my umble station, that it seems to rain blessings on my ed. You have heard something, I des-say, of a change in my expectations, Master Copperfield,--I should say, Mister Copperfield?'

As he sat on my sofa, with his long knees drawn up under his coffee-cup, his hat and gloves upon the ground close to him, his spoon going softly round and round, his shadowless red eyes, which looked as if they had scorched their lashes off, turned towards me without looking at me, the disagreeable dints I have formerly described in his nostrils coming and going with his breath, and a snaky undulation pervading his frame from his chin to his boots, I decided in my own mind that I disliked him intensely. It made me very uncomfortable to have him for a guest, for I was young then, and unused to disguise what I so strongly felt.

'You have heard something, I des-say, of a change in my expectations, Master Copperfield,--I should say, Mister Copperfield?' observed Uriah.

'Yes,' said I, 'something.'

'Ah! I thought Miss Agnes would know of it!' he quietly returned. 'I'm glad to find Miss Agnes knows of it. Oh, thank you, Master--Mister Copperfield!'

I could have thrown my bootjack at him (it lay ready on the rug), for having entrapped me into the disclosure of anything concerning Agnes, however immaterial. But I only drank my coffee.

'What a prophet you have shown yourself, Mister Copperfield!' pursued Uriah. 'Dear me, what a prophet you have proved yourself to be! Don't you remember saying to me once, that perhaps I should be a partner in Mr. Wickfield's business, and perhaps it might be Wickfield and Heep? You may not recollect it; but when a person is umble, Master Copperfield, a person treasures such things up!'

'I recollect talking about it,' said I, 'though I certainly did not think it very likely then.' 'Oh! who would have thought it likely, Mister Copperfield!' returned Uriah, enthusiastically. 'I am sure I didn't myself. I recollect saying with my own lips that I was much too umble. So I considered myself really and truly.'

He sat, with that carved grin on his face, looking at the fire, as I looked at him.

'But the umblest persons, Master Copperfield,' he presently resumed, 'may be the instruments of good. I am glad to think I have been the instrument of good to Mr. Wickfield, and that I may be more so. Oh what a worthy man he is, Mister Copperfield, but how imprudent he has been!'

'I am sorry to hear it,' said I. I could not help adding, rather pointedly, 'on all accounts.'

'Decidedly so, Mister Copperfield,' replied Uriah. 'On all accounts. Miss Agnes's above all! You don't remember your own eloquent expressions, Master Copperfield; but I remember how you said one day that everybody must admire her, and how I thanked you for it! You have forgot that, I have no doubt, Master Copperfield?'

'No,' said I, drily.

'Oh how glad I am you have not!' exclaimed Uriah. 'To think that you

should be the first to kindle the sparks of ambition in my umble breast, and that you've not forgot it! Oh!--Would you excuse me asking for a cup more coffee?'

Something in the emphasis he laid upon the kindling of those sparks, and something in the glance he directed at me as he said it, had made me start as if I had seen him illuminated by a blaze of light. Recalled by his request, preferred in quite another tone of voice, I did the honours of the shaving-pot; but I did them with an unsteadiness of hand, a sudden sense of being no match for him, and a perplexed suspicious anxiety as to what he might be going to say next, which I felt could not escape his observation.

He said nothing at all. He stirred his coffee round and round, he sipped it, he felt his chin softly with his grisly hand, he looked at the fire, he looked about the room, he gasped rather than smiled at me, he writhed and undulated about, in his deferential servility, he stirred and sipped again, but he left the renewal of the conversation to me.

'So, Mr. Wickfield,' said I, at last, 'who is worth five hundred of you--or me'; for my life, I think, I could not have helped dividing that part of the sentence with an awkward jerk; 'has been imprudent, has he, Mr. Heep?'

'Oh, very imprudent indeed, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, sighing modestly. 'Oh, very much so! But I wish you'd call me Uriah, if you please. It's like old times.'

'Well! Uriah,' said I, bolting it out with some difficulty.

'Thank you,' he returned, with fervour. 'Thank you, Master Copperfield! It's like the blowing of old breezes or the ringing of old bellses to hear YOU say Uriah. I beg your pardon. Was I making any observation?'

'About Mr. Wickfield,' I suggested.

'Oh! Yes, truly,' said Uriah. 'Ah! Great imprudence, Master Copperfield. It's a topic that I wouldn't touch upon, to any soul but you. Even to you I can only touch upon it, and no more. If anyone else had been in my place during the last few years, by this time he would have had Mr. Wickfield (oh, what a worthy man he is, Master Copperfield, too!) under his thumb. Un--der--his thumb,' said Uriah, very slowly, as he stretched out his cruel-looking hand above my table, and pressed his own thumb upon it, until it shook, and shook the room.

If I had been obliged to look at him with him splay foot on Mr. Wickfield's head, I think I could scarcely have hated him more.

'Oh, dear, yes, Master Copperfield,' he proceeded, in a soft voice, most remarkably contrasting with the action of his thumb, which did not diminish its hard pressure in the least degree, 'there's no doubt of it. There would have been loss, disgrace, I don't know what at all. Mr. Wickfield knows it. I am the umble instrument of umbly serving him, and he puts me on an eminence I hardly could have hoped to reach. How thankful should I be!' With his face turned towards me, as he finished, but without looking at me, he took his crooked thumb off the spot where he had planted it, and slowly and thoughtfully scraped his lank jaw with it, as if he were shaving himself.

I recollect well how indignantly my heart beat, as I saw his crafty face, with the appropriately red light of the fire upon it, preparing for something else.

'Master Copperfield,' he began--'but am I keeping you up?'

'You are not keeping me up. I generally go to bed late.'

'Thank you, Master Copperfield! I have risen from my umble station since first you used to address me, it is true; but I am umble still. I hope I never shall be otherwise than umble. You will not think the worse of my umbleness, if I make a little confidence to you, Master Copperfield? Will you?'

'Oh no,' said I, with an effort.

'Thank you!' He took out his pocket-handkerchief, and began wiping the palms of his hands. 'Miss Agnes, Master Copperfield--' 'Well, Uriah?'

'Oh, how pleasant to be called Uriah, spontaneously!' he cried; and gave himself a jerk, like a convulsive fish. 'You thought her looking very beautiful tonight, Master Copperfield?'

'I thought her looking as she always does: superior, in all respects, to everyone around her,' I returned.

'Oh, thank you! It's so true!' he cried. 'Oh, thank you very much for that!'

'Not at all,' I said, loftily. 'There is no reason why you should thank me.'

'Why that, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'is, in fact, the confidence that I am going to take the liberty of reposing. Umble as I am,' he wiped his hands harder, and looked at them and at the fire by turns, 'umble as my mother is, and lowly as our poor but honest roof has ever been, the image of Miss Agnes (I don't mind trusting you with my secret, Master Copperfield, for I have always overflowed towards you since the first moment I had the pleasure of beholding you in a pony-shay) has been in my breast for years. Oh, Master Copperfield, with what a pure



affection do I love the ground my Agnes walks on!'

I believe I had a delirious idea of seizing the red-hot poker out of the fire, and running him through with it. It went from me with a shock, like a ball fired from a rifle: but the image of Agnes, outraged by so much as a thought of this red-headed animal's, remained in my mind when I looked at him, sitting all awry as if his mean soul griped his body, and made me giddy. He seemed to swell and grow before my eyes; the room seemed full of the echoes of his voice; and the strange feeling (to which, perhaps, no one is quite a stranger) that all this had occurred before, at some indefinite time, and that I knew what he was going to say next, took possession of me.

A timely observation of the sense of power that there was in his face, did more to bring back to my remembrance the entreaty of Agnes, in its full force, than any effort I could have made. I asked him, with a better appearance of composure than I could have thought possible a minute before, whether he had made his feelings known to Agnes.

'Oh no, Master Copperfield!' he returned; 'oh dear, no! Not to anyone but you. You see I am only just emerging from my lowly station. I rest a good deal of hope on her observing how useful I am to her father (for I trust to be very useful to him indeed, Master Copperfield), and how I smooth the way for him, and keep him straight. She's so much attached to her father, Master Copperfield (oh, what a lovely thing it is in a daughter!), that I think she may come, on his account, to be kind to me.'

I fathomed the depth of the rascal's whole scheme, and understood why he laid it bare.

'If you'll have the goodness to keep my secret, Master Copperfield,' he pursued, 'and not, in general, to go against me, I shall take it as a

particular favour. You wouldn't wish to make unpleasantness. I know what a friendly heart you've got; but having only known me on my umble footing (on my umblest I should say, for I am very umble still), you might, unbeknown, go against me rather, with my Agnes. I call her mine, you see, Master Copperfield. There's a song that says, "I'd crowns resign, to call her mine!" I hope to do it, one of these days.'

Dear Agnes! So much too loving and too good for anyone that I could think of, was it possible that she was reserved to be the wife of such a wretch as this!

'There's no hurry at present, you know, Master Copperfield,' Uriah proceeded, in his slimy way, as I sat gazing at him, with this thought in my mind. 'My Agnes is very young still; and mother and me will have to work our way upwards, and make a good many new arrangements, before it would be quite convenient. So I shall have time gradually to make her familiar with my hopes, as opportunities offer. Oh, I'm so much obliged to you for this confidence! Oh, it's such a relief, you can't think, to know that you understand our situation, and are certain (as you wouldn't wish to make unpleasantness in the family) not to go against me!'

He took the hand which I dared not withhold, and having given it a damp squeeze, referred to his pale-faced watch.

'Dear me!' he said, 'it's past one. The moments slip away so, in the confidence of old times, Master Copperfield, that it's almost half past one!'

I answered that I had thought it was later. Not that I had really thought so, but because my conversational powers were effectually scattered.

'Dear me!' he said, considering. 'The ouse that I am stopping at--a sort

of a private hotel and boarding ouse, Master Copperfield, near the New River ed--will have gone to bed these two hours.'

'I am sorry,' I returned, 'that there is only one bed here, and that I--'

'Oh, don't think of mentioning beds, Master Copperfield!' he rejoined ecstatically, drawing up one leg. 'But would you have any objections to my laying down before the fire?'

'If it comes to that,' I said, 'pray take my bed, and I'll lie down before the fire.'

His repudiation of this offer was almost shrill enough, in the excess of its surprise and humility, to have penetrated to the ears of Mrs. Crupp, then sleeping, I suppose, in a distant chamber, situated at about the level of low-water mark, soothed in her slumbers by the ticking of an incorrigible clock, to which she always referred me when we had any little difference on the score of punctuality, and which was never less than three-quarters of an hour too slow, and had always been put right in the morning by the best authorities. As no arguments I could urge, in my bewildered condition, had the least effect upon his modesty in inducing him to accept my bedroom, I was obliged to make the best arrangements I could, for his repose before the fire. The mattress of the sofa (which was a great deal too short for his lank figure), the sofa pillows, a blanket, the table-cover, a clean breakfast-cloth, and a great-coat, made him a bed and covering, for which he was more than thankful. Having lent him a night-cap, which he put on at once, and in which he made such an awful figure, that I have never worn one since, I left him to his rest.

I never shall forget that night. I never shall forget how I turned and tumbled; how I wearied myself with thinking about Agnes and this

creature; how I considered what could I do, and what ought I to do; how I could come to no other conclusion than that the best course for her peace was to do nothing, and to keep to myself what I had heard. If I went to sleep for a few moments, the image of Agnes with her tender eyes, and of her father looking fondly on her, as I had so often seen him look, arose before me with appealing faces, and filled me with vague terrors. When I awoke, the recollection that Uriah was lying in the next room, sat heavy on me like a waking nightmare; and oppressed me with a leaden dread, as if I had had some meaner quality of devil for a lodger.

The poker got into my dozing thoughts besides, and wouldn't come out. I thought, between sleeping and waking, that it was still red hot, and I had snatched it out of the fire, and run him through the body. I was so haunted at last by the idea, though I knew there was nothing in it, that I stole into the next room to look at him. There I saw him, lying on his back, with his legs extending to I don't know where, gurglings taking place in his throat, stoppages in his nose, and his mouth open like a post-office. He was so much worse in reality than in my distempered fancy, that afterwards I was attracted to him in very repulsion, and could not help wandering in and out every half-hour or so, and taking another look at him. Still, the long, long night seemed heavy and hopeless as ever, and no promise of day was in the murky sky.

When I saw him going downstairs early in the morning (for, thank Heaven! he would not stay to breakfast), it appeared to me as if the night was going away in his person. When I went out to the Commons, I charged Mrs. Crupp with particular directions to leave the windows open, that my sitting-room might be aired, and purged of his presence.

## CHAPTER 26. I FALL INTO CAPTIVITY

I saw no more of Uriah Heep, until the day when Agnes left town. I was at the coach office to take leave of her and see her go; and there was he, returning to Canterbury by the same conveyance. It was some small satisfaction to me to observe his spare, short-waisted, high-shouldered, mulberry-coloured great-coat perched up, in company with an umbrella like a small tent, on the edge of the back seat on the roof, while Agnes was, of course, inside; but what I underwent in my efforts to be friendly with him, while Agnes looked on, perhaps deserved that little recompense. At the coach window, as at the dinner-party, he hovered about us without a moment's intermission, like a great vulture: gorging himself on every syllable that I said to Agnes, or Agnes said to me.

In the state of trouble into which his disclosure by my fire had thrown me, I had thought very much of the words Agnes had used in reference to the partnership. 'I did what I hope was right. Feeling sure that it was necessary for papa's peace that the sacrifice should be made, I entreated him to make it.' A miserable foreboding that she would yield to, and sustain herself by, the same feeling in reference to any sacrifice for his sake, had oppressed me ever since. I knew how she loved him. I knew what the devotion of her nature was. I knew from her own lips that she regarded herself as the innocent cause of his errors, and as owing him a great debt she ardently desired to pay. I had no consolation in seeing how different she was from this detestable Rufus with the mulberry-coloured great-coat, for I felt that in the very difference between them, in the self-denial of her pure soul and the sordid baseness of his, the greatest danger lay. All this, doubtless, he knew thoroughly, and had, in his cunning, considered well.

Yet I was so certain that the prospect of such a sacrifice afar off, must destroy the happiness of Agnes; and I was so sure, from her manner, of its being unseen by her then, and having cast no shadow on her yet; that I could as soon have injured her, as given her any warning of what

impended. Thus it was that we parted without explanation: she waving her hand and smiling farewell from the coach window; her evil genius writhing on the roof, as if he had her in his clutches and triumphed.

I could not get over this farewell glimpse of them for a long time. When Agnes wrote to tell me of her safe arrival, I was as miserable as when I saw her going away. Whenever I fell into a thoughtful state, this subject was sure to present itself, and all my uneasiness was sure to be redoubled. Hardly a night passed without my dreaming of it. It became a part of my life, and as inseparable from my life as my own head.

I had ample leisure to refine upon my uneasiness: for Steerforth was at Oxford, as he wrote to me, and when I was not at the Commons, I was very much alone. I believe I had at this time some lurking distrust of Steerforth. I wrote to him most affectionately in reply to his, but I think I was glad, upon the whole, that he could not come to London just then. I suspect the truth to be, that the influence of Agnes was upon me, undisturbed by the sight of him; and that it was the more powerful with me, because she had so large a share in my thoughts and interest.

In the meantime, days and weeks slipped away. I was articled to Spenlow and Jorkins. I had ninety pounds a year (exclusive of my house-rent and sundry collateral matters) from my aunt. My rooms were engaged for twelve months certain: and though I still found them dreary of an evening, and the evenings long, I could settle down into a state of equable low spirits, and resign myself to coffee; which I seem, on looking back, to have taken by the gallon at about this period of my existence. At about this time, too, I made three discoveries: first, that Mrs. Crupp was a martyr to a curious disorder called 'the spazzums', which was generally accompanied with inflammation of the nose, and required to be constantly treated with peppermint; secondly, that something peculiar in the temperature of my pantry, made the brandy-bottles burst; thirdly, that I was alone in the world, and much

given to record that circumstance in fragments of English versification.

On the day when I was articled, no festivity took place, beyond my having sandwiches and sherry into the office for the clerks, and going alone to the theatre at night. I went to see *The Stranger*, as a Doctors' Commons sort of play, and was so dreadfully cut up, that I hardly knew myself in my own glass when I got home. Mr. Spenslow remarked, on this occasion, when we concluded our business, that he should have been happy to have seen me at his house at Norwood to celebrate our becoming connected, but for his domestic arrangements being in some disorder, on account of the expected return of his daughter from finishing her education at Paris. But, he intimated that when she came home he should hope to have the pleasure of entertaining me. I knew that he was a widower with one daughter, and expressed my acknowledgements.

Mr. Spenslow was as good as his word. In a week or two, he referred to this engagement, and said, that if I would do him the favour to come down next Saturday, and stay till Monday, he would be extremely happy. Of course I said I would do him the favour; and he was to drive me down in his phaeton, and to bring me back.

When the day arrived, my very carpet-bag was an object of veneration to the stipendiary clerks, to whom the house at Norwood was a sacred mystery. One of them informed me that he had heard that Mr. Spenslow ate entirely off plate and china; and another hinted at champagne being constantly on draught, after the usual custom of table-beer. The old clerk with the wig, whose name was Mr. Tiffey, had been down on business several times in the course of his career, and had on each occasion penetrated to the breakfast-parlour. He described it as an apartment of the most sumptuous nature, and said that he had drunk brown East India sherry there, of a quality so precious as to make a man wink. We had an adjourned cause in the Consistory that day--about excommunicating a baker who had been objecting in a vestry to a paving-rate--and as the

evidence was just twice the length of Robinson Crusoe, according to a calculation I made, it was rather late in the day before we finished. However, we got him excommunicated for six weeks, and sentenced in no end of costs; and then the baker's proctor, and the judge, and the advocates on both sides (who were all nearly related), went out of town together, and Mr. Spenlow and I drove away in the phaeton.

The phaeton was a very handsome affair; the horses arched their necks and lifted up their legs as if they knew they belonged to Doctors' Commons. There was a good deal of competition in the Commons on all points of display, and it turned out some very choice equipages then; though I always have considered, and always shall consider, that in my time the great article of competition there was starch: which I think was worn among the proctors to as great an extent as it is in the nature of man to bear.

We were very pleasant, going down, and Mr. Spenlow gave me some hints in reference to my profession. He said it was the genteelest profession in the world, and must on no account be confounded with the profession of a solicitor: being quite another sort of thing, infinitely more exclusive, less mechanical, and more profitable. We took things much more easily in the Commons than they could be taken anywhere else, he observed, and that set us, as a privileged class, apart. He said it was impossible to conceal the disagreeable fact, that we were chiefly employed by solicitors; but he gave me to understand that they were an inferior race of men, universally looked down upon by all proctors of any pretensions.

I asked Mr. Spenlow what he considered the best sort of professional business? He replied, that a good case of a disputed will, where there was a neat little estate of thirty or forty thousand pounds, was, perhaps, the best of all. In such a case, he said, not only were there very pretty pickings, in the way of arguments at every stage of the proceedings, and mountains upon mountains of evidence on interrogatory



and counter-interrogatory (to say nothing of an appeal lying, first to the Delegates, and then to the Lords), but, the costs being pretty sure to come out of the estate at last, both sides went at it in a lively and spirited manner, and expense was no consideration. Then, he launched into a general eulogium on the Commons. What was to be particularly admired (he said) in the Commons, was its compactness. It was the most conveniently organized place in the world. It was the complete idea of snugness. It lay in a nutshell. For example: You brought a divorce case, or a restitution case, into the Consistory. Very good. You tried it in the Consistory. You made a quiet little round game of it, among a family group, and you played it out at leisure. Suppose you were not satisfied with the Consistory, what did you do then? Why, you went into the Arches. What was the Arches? The same court, in the same room, with the same bar, and the same practitioners, but another judge, for there the Consistory judge could plead any court-day as an advocate. Well, you played your round game out again. Still you were not satisfied. Very good. What did you do then? Why, you went to the Delegates. Who were the Delegates? Why, the Ecclesiastical Delegates were the advocates without any business, who had looked on at the round game when it was playing in both courts, and had seen the cards shuffled, and cut, and played, and had talked to all the players about it, and now came fresh, as judges, to settle the matter to the satisfaction of everybody! Discontented people might talk of corruption in the Commons, closeness in the Commons, and the necessity of reforming the Commons, said Mr. Spenlow solemnly, in conclusion; but when the price of wheat per bushel had been highest, the Commons had been busiest; and a man might lay his hand upon his heart, and say this to the whole world,--'Touch the Commons, and down comes the country!'

I listened to all this with attention; and though, I must say, I had my doubts whether the country was quite as much obliged to the Commons as Mr. Spenlow made out, I respectfully deferred to his opinion. That about the price of wheat per bushel, I modestly felt was too much for

my strength, and quite settled the question. I have never, to this hour, got the better of that bushel of wheat. It has reappeared to annihilate me, all through my life, in connexion with all kinds of subjects. I don't know now, exactly, what it has to do with me, or what right it has to crush me, on an infinite variety of occasions; but whenever I see my old friend the bushel brought in by the head and shoulders (as he always is, I observe), I give up a subject for lost.

This is a digression. I was not the man to touch the Commons, and bring down the country. I submissively expressed, by my silence, my acquiescence in all I had heard from my superior in years and knowledge; and we talked about The Stranger and the Drama, and the pairs of horses, until we came to Mr. Spenlow's gate.

There was a lovely garden to Mr. Spenlow's house; and though that was not the best time of the year for seeing a garden, it was so beautifully kept, that I was quite enchanted. There was a charming lawn, there were clusters of trees, and there were perspective walks that I could just distinguish in the dark, arched over with trellis-work, on which shrubs and flowers grew in the growing season. 'Here Miss Spenlow walks by herself,' I thought. 'Dear me!'

We went into the house, which was cheerfully lighted up, and into a hall where there were all sorts of hats, caps, great-coats, plaids, gloves, whips, and walking-sticks. 'Where is Miss Dora?' said Mr. Spenlow to the servant. 'Dora!' I thought. 'What a beautiful name!'

We turned into a room near at hand (I think it was the identical breakfast-room, made memorable by the brown East Indian sherry), and I heard a voice say, 'Mr. Copperfield, my daughter Dora, and my daughter Dora's confidential friend!' It was, no doubt, Mr. Spenlow's voice, but I didn't know it, and I didn't care whose it was. All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved

Dora Spenlow to distraction!

She was more than human to me. She was a Fairy, a Sylph, I don't know what she was--anything that no one ever saw, and everything that everybody ever wanted. I was swallowed up in an abyss of love in an instant. There was no pausing on the brink; no looking down, or looking back; I was gone, headlong, before I had sense to say a word to her.

'I,' observed a well-remembered voice, when I had bowed and murmured something, 'have seen Mr. Copperfield before.'

The speaker was not Dora. No; the confidential friend, Miss Murdstone!

I don't think I was much astonished. To the best of my judgement, no capacity of astonishment was left in me. There was nothing worth mentioning in the material world, but Dora Spenlow, to be astonished about. I said, 'How do you do, Miss Murdstone? I hope you are well.' She answered, 'Very well.' I said, 'How is Mr. Murdstone?' She replied, 'My brother is robust, I am obliged to you.'

Mr. Spenlow, who, I suppose, had been surprised to see us recognize each other, then put in his word.

'I am glad to find,' he said, 'Copperfield, that you and Miss Murdstone are already acquainted.'

'Mr. Copperfield and myself,' said Miss Murdstone, with severe composure, 'are connexions. We were once slightly acquainted. It was in his childish days. Circumstances have separated us since. I should not have known him.'

I replied that I should have known her, anywhere. Which was true enough.

'Miss Murdstone has had the goodness,' said Mr. Spenlow to me, 'to accept the office--if I may so describe it--of my daughter Dora's confidential friend. My daughter Dora having, unhappily, no mother, Miss Murdstone is obliging enough to become her companion and protector.'

A passing thought occurred to me that Miss Murdstone, like the pocket instrument called a life-preserver, was not so much designed for purposes of protection as of assault. But as I had none but passing thoughts for any subject save Dora, I glanced at her, directly afterwards, and was thinking that I saw, in her prettily pettish manner, that she was not very much inclined to be particularly confidential to her companion and protector, when a bell rang, which Mr. Spenlow said was the first dinner-bell, and so carried me off to dress.

The idea of dressing one's self, or doing anything in the way of action, in that state of love, was a little too ridiculous. I could only sit down before my fire, biting the key of my carpet-bag, and think of the captivating, girlish, bright-eyed lovely Dora. What a form she had, what a face she had, what a graceful, variable, enchanting manner!

The bell rang again so soon that I made a mere scramble of my dressing, instead of the careful operation I could have wished under the circumstances, and went downstairs. There was some company. Dora was talking to an old gentleman with a grey head. Grey as he was--and a great-grandfather into the bargain, for he said so--I was madly jealous of him.

What a state of mind I was in! I was jealous of everybody. I couldn't bear the idea of anybody knowing Mr. Spenlow better than I did. It was torturing to me to hear them talk of occurrences in which I had had no share. When a most amiable person, with a highly polished bald head, asked me across the dinner table, if that were the first occasion of my seeing the grounds, I could have done anything to him that was savage

and revengeful.

I don't remember who was there, except Dora. I have not the least idea what we had for dinner, besides Dora. My impression is, that I dined off Dora, entirely, and sent away half-a-dozen plates untouched. I sat next to her. I talked to her. She had the most delightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways, that ever led a lost youth into hopeless slavery. She was rather diminutive altogether. So much the more precious, I thought.

When she went out of the room with Miss Murdstone (no other ladies were of the party), I fell into a reverie, only disturbed by the cruel apprehension that Miss Murdstone would disparage me to her. The amiable creature with the polished head told me a long story, which I think was about gardening. I think I heard him say, 'my gardener', several times. I seemed to pay the deepest attention to him, but I was wandering in a garden of Eden all the while, with Dora.

My apprehensions of being disparaged to the object of my engrossing affection were revived when we went into the drawing-room, by the grim and distant aspect of Miss Murdstone. But I was relieved of them in an unexpected manner.

'David Copperfield,' said Miss Murdstone, beckoning me aside into a window. 'A word.'

I confronted Miss Murdstone alone.

'David Copperfield,' said Miss Murdstone, 'I need not enlarge upon family circumstances. They are not a tempting subject.' 'Far from it, ma'am,' I returned.

'Far from it,' assented Miss Murdstone. 'I do not wish to revive

the memory of past differences, or of past outrages. I have received outrages from a person--a female I am sorry to say, for the credit of my sex--who is not to be mentioned without scorn and disgust; and therefore I would rather not mention her.'

I felt very fiery on my aunt's account; but I said it would certainly be better, if Miss Murdstone pleased, not to mention her. I could not hear her disrespectfully mentioned, I added, without expressing my opinion in a decided tone.

Miss Murdstone shut her eyes, and disdainfully inclined her head; then, slowly opening her eyes, resumed:

'David Copperfield, I shall not attempt to disguise the fact, that I formed an unfavourable opinion of you in your childhood. It may have been a mistaken one, or you may have ceased to justify it. That is not in question between us now. I belong to a family remarkable, I believe, for some firmness; and I am not the creature of circumstance or change. I may have my opinion of you. You may have your opinion of me.'

I inclined my head, in my turn.

'But it is not necessary,' said Miss Murdstone, 'that these opinions should come into collision here. Under existing circumstances, it is as well on all accounts that they should not. As the chances of life have brought us together again, and may bring us together on other occasions, I would say, let us meet here as distant acquaintances. Family circumstances are a sufficient reason for our only meeting on that footing, and it is quite unnecessary that either of us should make the other the subject of remark. Do you approve of this?'

'Miss Murdstone,' I returned, 'I think you and Mr. Murdstone used me very cruelly, and treated my mother with great unkindness. I shall

always think so, as long as I live. But I quite agree in what you propose.'

Miss Murdstone shut her eyes again, and bent her head. Then, just touching the back of my hand with the tips of her cold, stiff fingers, she walked away, arranging the little fetters on her wrists and round her neck; which seemed to be the same set, in exactly the same state, as when I had seen her last. These reminded me, in reference to Miss Murdstone's nature, of the fetters over a jail door; suggesting on the outside, to all beholders, what was to be expected within.

All I know of the rest of the evening is, that I heard the empress of my heart sing enchanted ballads in the French language, generally to the effect that, whatever was the matter, we ought always to dance, Ta ra la, Ta ra la! accompanying herself on a glorified instrument, resembling a guitar. That I was lost in blissful delirium. That I refused refreshment. That my soul recoiled from punch particularly. That when Miss Murdstone took her into custody and led her away, she smiled and gave me her delicious hand. That I caught a view of myself in a mirror, looking perfectly imbecile and idiotic. That I retired to bed in a most maudlin state of mind, and got up in a crisis of feeble infatuation.

It was a fine morning, and early, and I thought I would go and take a stroll down one of those wire-arched walks, and indulge my passion by dwelling on her image. On my way through the hall, I encountered her little dog, who was called Jip--short for Gipsy. I approached him tenderly, for I loved even him; but he showed his whole set of teeth, got under a chair expressly to snarl, and wouldn't hear of the least familiarity.

The garden was cool and solitary. I walked about, wondering what my feelings of happiness would be, if I could ever become engaged to this dear wonder. As to marriage, and fortune, and all that, I believe I was

almost as innocently undesigning then, as when I loved little Em'ly. To be allowed to call her 'Dora', to write to her, to dote upon and worship her, to have reason to think that when she was with other people she was yet mindful of me, seemed to me the summit of human ambition--I am sure it was the summit of mine. There is no doubt whatever that I was a lackadaisical young spooney; but there was a purity of heart in all this, that prevents my having quite a contemptuous recollection of it, let me laugh as I may.

I had not been walking long, when I turned a corner, and met her. I tingle again from head to foot as my recollection turns that corner, and my pen shakes in my hand.

'You--are--out early, Miss Spenlow,' said I.

'It's so stupid at home,' she replied, 'and Miss Murdstone is so absurd! She talks such nonsense about its being necessary for the day to be aired, before I come out. Aired!' (She laughed, here, in the most melodious manner.) 'On a Sunday morning, when I don't practise, I must do something. So I told papa last night I must come out. Besides, it's the brightest time of the whole day. Don't you think so?'

I hazarded a bold flight, and said (not without stammering) that it was very bright to me then, though it had been very dark to me a minute before.

'Do you mean a compliment?' said Dora, 'or that the weather has really changed?'

I stammered worse than before, in replying that I meant no compliment, but the plain truth; though I was not aware of any change having taken place in the weather. It was in the state of my own feelings, I added bashfully: to clench the explanation.



I never saw such curls--how could I, for there never were such curls!--as those she shook out to hide her blushes. As to the straw hat and blue ribbons which was on the top of the curls, if I could only have hung it up in my room in Buckingham Street, what a priceless possession it would have been!

'You have just come home from Paris,' said I.

'Yes,' said she. 'Have you ever been there?'

'No.'

'Oh! I hope you'll go soon! You would like it so much!'

Traces of deep-seated anguish appeared in my countenance. That she should hope I would go, that she should think it possible I could go, was insupportable. I depreciated Paris; I depreciated France. I said I wouldn't leave England, under existing circumstances, for any earthly consideration. Nothing should induce me. In short, she was shaking the curls again, when the little dog came running along the walk to our relief.

He was mortally jealous of me, and persisted in barking at me. She took him up in her arms--oh my goodness!--and caressed him, but he persisted upon barking still. He wouldn't let me touch him, when I tried; and then she beat him. It increased my sufferings greatly to see the pats she gave him for punishment on the bridge of his blunt nose, while he winked his eyes, and licked her hand, and still growled within himself like a little double-bass. At length he was quiet--well he might be with her dimpled chin upon his head!--and we walked away to look at a greenhouse.

'You are not very intimate with Miss Murdstone, are you?' said Dora.

--'My pet.'

(The two last words were to the dog. Oh, if they had only been to me!)

'No,' I replied. 'Not at all so.'

'She is a tiresome creature,' said Dora, pouting. 'I can't think what papa can have been about, when he chose such a vexatious thing to be my companion. Who wants a protector? I am sure I don't want a protector. Jip can protect me a great deal better than Miss Murdstone,--can't you, Jip, dear?'

He only winked lazily, when she kissed his ball of a head.

'Papa calls her my confidential friend, but I am sure she is no such thing--is she, Jip? We are not going to confide in any such cross people, Jip and I. We mean to bestow our confidence where we like, and to find out our own friends, instead of having them found out for us--don't we, Jip?'

Jip made a comfortable noise, in answer, a little like a tea-kettle when it sings. As for me, every word was a new heap of fetters, riveted above the last.

'It is very hard, because we have not a kind Mama, that we are to have, instead, a sulky, gloomy old thing like Miss Murdstone, always following us about--isn't it, Jip? Never mind, Jip. We won't be confidential, and we'll make ourselves as happy as we can in spite of her, and we'll tease her, and not please her--won't we, Jip?'

If it had lasted any longer, I think I must have gone down on my knees on the gravel, with the probability before me of grazing them, and of being presently ejected from the premises besides. But, by good fortune

the greenhouse was not far off, and these words brought us to it.

It contained quite a show of beautiful geraniums. We loitered along in front of them, and Dora often stopped to admire this one or that one, and I stopped to admire the same one, and Dora, laughing, held the dog up childishly, to smell the flowers; and if we were not all three in Fairyland, certainly I was. The scent of a geranium leaf, at this day, strikes me with a half comical half serious wonder as to what change has come over me in a moment; and then I see a straw hat and blue ribbons, and a quantity of curls, and a little black dog being held up, in two slender arms, against a bank of blossoms and bright leaves.

Miss Murdstone had been looking for us. She found us here; and presented her uncongenial cheek, the little wrinkles in it filled with hair powder, to Dora to be kissed. Then she took Dora's arm in hers, and marched us into breakfast as if it were a soldier's funeral.

How many cups of tea I drank, because Dora made it, I don't know. But, I perfectly remember that I sat swilling tea until my whole nervous system, if I had had any in those days, must have gone by the board. By and by we went to church. Miss Murdstone was between Dora and me in the pew; but I heard her sing, and the congregation vanished. A sermon was delivered--about Dora, of course--and I am afraid that is all I know of the service.

We had a quiet day. No company, a walk, a family dinner of four, and an evening of looking over books and pictures; Miss Murdstone with a homily before her, and her eye upon us, keeping guard vigilantly. Ah! little did Mr. Spenlow imagine, when he sat opposite to me after dinner that day, with his pocket-handkerchief over his head, how fervently I was embracing him, in my fancy, as his son-in-law! Little did he think, when I took leave of him at night, that he had just given his full consent to my being engaged to Dora, and that I was invoking blessings on his head!

We departed early in the morning, for we had a Salvage case coming on in the Admiralty Court, requiring a rather accurate knowledge of the whole science of navigation, in which (as we couldn't be expected to know much about those matters in the Commons) the judge had entreated two old Trinity Masters, for charity's sake, to come and help him out. Dora was at the breakfast-table to make the tea again, however; and I had the melancholy pleasure of taking off my hat to her in the phaeton, as she stood on the door-step with Jip in her arms.

What the Admiralty was to me that day; what nonsense I made of our case in my mind, as I listened to it; how I saw 'DORA' engraved upon the blade of the silver oar which they lay upon the table, as the emblem of that high jurisdiction; and how I felt when Mr. Spenlow went home without me (I had had an insane hope that he might take me back again), as if I were a mariner myself, and the ship to which I belonged had sailed away and left me on a desert island; I shall make no fruitless effort to describe. If that sleepy old court could rouse itself, and present in any visible form the daydreams I have had in it about Dora, it would reveal my truth.

I don't mean the dreams that I dreamed on that day alone, but day after day, from week to week, and term to term. I went there, not to attend to what was going on, but to think about Dora. If ever I bestowed a thought upon the cases, as they dragged their slow length before me, it was only to wonder, in the matrimonial cases (remembering Dora), how it was that married people could ever be otherwise than happy; and, in the Prerogative cases, to consider, if the money in question had been left to me, what were the foremost steps I should immediately have taken in regard to Dora. Within the first week of my passion, I bought four sumptuous waistcoats--not for myself; I had no pride in them; for Dora--and took to wearing straw-coloured kid gloves in the streets, and laid the foundations of all the corns I have ever had. If the boots I

wore at that period could only be produced and compared with the natural size of my feet, they would show what the state of my heart was, in a most affecting manner.

And yet, wretched cripple as I made myself by this act of homage to Dora, I walked miles upon miles daily in the hope of seeing her. Not only was I soon as well known on the Norwood Road as the postmen on that beat, but I pervaded London likewise. I walked about the streets where the best shops for ladies were, I haunted the Bazaar like an unquiet spirit, I fagged through the Park again and again, long after I was quite knocked up. Sometimes, at long intervals and on rare occasions, I saw her. Perhaps I saw her glove waved in a carriage window; perhaps I met her, walked with her and Miss Murdstone a little way, and spoke to her. In the latter case I was always very miserable afterwards, to think that I had said nothing to the purpose; or that she had no idea of the extent of my devotion, or that she cared nothing about me. I was always looking out, as may be supposed, for another invitation to Mr. Spenlow's house. I was always being disappointed, for I got none.

Mrs. Crupp must have been a woman of penetration; for when this attachment was but a few weeks old, and I had not had the courage to write more explicitly even to Agnes, than that I had been to Mr. Spenlow's house, 'whose family,' I added, 'consists of one daughter';--I say Mrs. Crupp must have been a woman of penetration, for, even in that early stage, she found it out. She came up to me one evening, when I was very low, to ask (she being then afflicted with the disorder I have mentioned) if I could oblige her with a little tincture of cardamums mixed with rhubarb, and flavoured with seven drops of the essence of cloves, which was the best remedy for her complaint;--or, if I had not such a thing by me, with a little brandy, which was the next best. It was not, she remarked, so palatable to her, but it was the next best. As I had never even heard of the first remedy, and always had the second in the closet, I gave Mrs. Crupp a glass of the second, which (that I might

have no suspicion of its being devoted to any improper use) she began to take in my presence.

'Cheer up, sir,' said Mrs. Crupp. 'I can't abear to see you so, sir: I'm a mother myself.'

I did not quite perceive the application of this fact to myself, but I smiled on Mrs. Crupp, as benignly as was in my power.

'Come, sir,' said Mrs. Crupp. 'Excuse me. I know what it is, sir. There's a lady in the case.'

'Mrs. Crupp?' I returned, reddening.

'Oh, bless you! Keep a good heart, sir!' said Mrs. Crupp, nodding encouragement. 'Never say die, sir! If She don't smile upon you, there's a many as will. You are a young gentleman to be smiled on, Mr. Copperfull, and you must learn your value, sir.'

Mrs. Crupp always called me Mr. Copperfull: firstly, no doubt, because it was not my name; and secondly, I am inclined to think, in some indistinct association with a washing-day.

'What makes you suppose there is any young lady in the case, Mrs. Crupp?' said I.

'Mr. Copperfull,' said Mrs. Crupp, with a great deal of feeling, 'I'm a mother myself.'

For some time Mrs. Crupp could only lay her hand upon her nankeen bosom, and fortify herself against returning pain with sips of her medicine. At length she spoke again.

'When the present set were took for you by your dear aunt, Mr. Copperfull,' said Mrs. Crupp, 'my remark were, I had now found summun I could care for. "Thank Ev'in!" were the expression, "I have now found summun I can care for!"--You don't eat enough, sir, nor yet drink.'

'Is that what you found your supposition on, Mrs. Crupp?' said I.

'Sir,' said Mrs. Crupp, in a tone approaching to severity, 'I've laundressed other young gentlemen besides yourself. A young gentleman may be over-careful of himself, or he may be under-careful of himself. He may brush his hair too regular, or too un-regular. He may wear his boots much too large for him, or much too small. That is according as the young gentleman has his original character formed. But let him go to which extreme he may, sir, there's a young lady in both of 'em.'

Mrs. Crupp shook her head in such a determined manner, that I had not an inch of vantage-ground left.

'It was but the gentleman which died here before yourself,' said Mrs. Crupp, 'that fell in love--with a barmaid--and had his waistcoats took in directly, though much swelled by drinking.'

'Mrs. Crupp,' said I, 'I must beg you not to connect the young lady in my case with a barmaid, or anything of that sort, if you please.'

'Mr. Copperfull,' returned Mrs. Crupp, 'I'm a mother myself, and not likely. I ask your pardon, sir, if I intrude. I should never wish to intrude where I were not welcome. But you are a young gentleman, Mr. Copperfull, and my advice to you is, to cheer up, sir, to keep a good heart, and to know your own value. If you was to take to something, sir,' said Mrs. Crupp, 'if you was to take to skittles, now, which is healthy, you might find it divert your mind, and do you good.'

With these words, Mrs. Crupp, affecting to be very careful of the brandy--which was all gone--thanked me with a majestic curtsey, and retired. As her figure disappeared into the gloom of the entry, this counsel certainly presented itself to my mind in the light of a slight liberty on Mrs. Crupp's part; but, at the same time, I was content to receive it, in another point of view, as a word to the wise, and a warning in future to keep my secret better.

## CHAPTER 27. TOMMY TRADDLES

It may have been in consequence of Mrs. Crupp's advice, and, perhaps, for no better reason than because there was a certain similarity in the sound of the word skittles and Traddles, that it came into my head, next day, to go and look after Traddles. The time he had mentioned was more than out, and he lived in a little street near the Veterinary College at Camden Town, which was principally tenanted, as one of our clerks who lived in that direction informed me, by gentlemen students, who bought live donkeys, and made experiments on those quadrupeds in their private apartments. Having obtained from this clerk a direction to the academic grove in question, I set out, the same afternoon, to visit my old schoolfellow.

I found that the street was not as desirable a one as I could have wished it to be, for the sake of Traddles. The inhabitants appeared to have a propensity to throw any little trifles they were not in want of, into the road: which not only made it rank and sloppy, but untidy too, on account of the cabbage-leaves. The refuse was not wholly vegetable either, for I myself saw a shoe, a doubled-up saucepan, a black bonnet, and an umbrella, in various stages of decomposition, as I was looking out for the number I wanted.



The general air of the place reminded me forcibly of the days when I lived with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. An indescribable character of faded gentility that attached to the house I sought, and made it unlike all the other houses in the street--though they were all built on one monotonous pattern, and looked like the early copies of a blundering boy who was learning to make houses, and had not yet got out of his cramped brick-and-mortar pothooks--reminded me still more of Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. Happening to arrive at the door as it was opened to the afternoon milkman, I was reminded of Mr. and Mrs. Micawber more forcibly yet.

'Now,' said the milkman to a very youthful servant girl. 'Has that there little bill of mine been heerd on?'

'Oh, master says he'll attend to it immediate,' was the reply.

'Because,' said the milkman, going on as if he had received no answer, and speaking, as I judged from his tone, rather for the edification of somebody within the house, than of the youthful servant--an impression which was strengthened by his manner of glaring down the passage--'because that there little bill has been running so long, that I begin to believe it's run away altogether, and never won't be heerd of. Now, I'm not a going to stand it, you know!' said the milkman, still throwing his voice into the house, and glaring down the passage.

As to his dealing in the mild article of milk, by the by, there never was a greater anomaly. His deportment would have been fierce in a butcher or a brandy-merchant.

The voice of the youthful servant became faint, but she seemed to me, from the action of her lips, again to murmur that it would be attended to immediate.

'I tell you what,' said the milkman, looking hard at her for the first time, and taking her by the chin, 'are you fond of milk?'

'Yes, I likes it,' she replied. 'Good,' said the milkman. 'Then you won't have none tomorrow. D'ye hear? Not a fragment of milk you won't have tomorrow.'

I thought she seemed, upon the whole, relieved by the prospect of having any today. The milkman, after shaking his head at her darkly, released her chin, and with anything rather than good-will opened his can, and deposited the usual quantity in the family jug. This done, he went away, muttering, and uttered the cry of his trade next door, in a vindictive shriek.

'Does Mr. Traddles live here?' I then inquired.

A mysterious voice from the end of the passage replied 'Yes.' Upon which the youthful servant replied 'Yes.'

'Is he at home?' said I.

Again the mysterious voice replied in the affirmative, and again the servant echoed it. Upon this, I walked in, and in pursuance of the servant's directions walked upstairs; conscious, as I passed the back parlour-door, that I was surveyed by a mysterious eye, probably belonging to the mysterious voice.

When I got to the top of the stairs--the house was only a story high above the ground floor--Traddles was on the landing to meet me. He was delighted to see me, and gave me welcome, with great heartiness, to his little room. It was in the front of the house, and extremely neat, though sparely furnished. It was his only room, I saw; for there was a

sofa-bedstead in it, and his blacking-brushes and blacking were among his books--on the top shelf, behind a dictionary. His table was covered with papers, and he was hard at work in an old coat. I looked at nothing, that I know of, but I saw everything, even to the prospect of a church upon his china inkstand, as I sat down--and this, too, was a faculty confirmed in me in the old Micawber times. Various ingenious arrangements he had made, for the disguise of his chest of drawers, and the accommodation of his boots, his shaving-glass, and so forth, particularly impressed themselves upon me, as evidences of the same Traddles who used to make models of elephants' dens in writing-paper to put flies in; and to comfort himself under ill usage, with the memorable works of art I have so often mentioned.

In a corner of the room was something neatly covered up with a large white cloth. I could not make out what that was.

'Traddles,' said I, shaking hands with him again, after I had sat down, 'I am delighted to see you.'

'I am delighted to see YOU, Copperfield,' he returned. 'I am very glad indeed to see you. It was because I was thoroughly glad to see you when we met in Ely Place, and was sure you were thoroughly glad to see me, that I gave you this address instead of my address at chambers.' 'Oh! You have chambers?' said I.

'Why, I have the fourth of a room and a passage, and the fourth of a clerk,' returned Traddles. 'Three others and myself unite to have a set of chambers--to look business-like--and we quarter the clerk too. Half-a-crown a week he costs me.'

His old simple character and good temper, and something of his old unlucky fortune also, I thought, smiled at me in the smile with which he made this explanation.

'It's not because I have the least pride, Copperfield, you understand,' said Traddles, 'that I don't usually give my address here. It's only on account of those who come to me, who might not like to come here. For myself, I am fighting my way on in the world against difficulties, and it would be ridiculous if I made a pretence of doing anything else.'

'You are reading for the bar, Mr. Waterbrook informed me?' said I.

'Why, yes,' said Traddles, rubbing his hands slowly over one another. 'I am reading for the bar. The fact is, I have just begun to keep my terms, after rather a long delay. It's some time since I was articled, but the payment of that hundred pounds was a great pull. A great pull!' said Traddles, with a wince, as if he had had a tooth out.

'Do you know what I can't help thinking of, Traddles, as I sit here looking at you?' I asked him.

'No,' said he.

'That sky-blue suit you used to wear.'

'Lord, to be sure!' cried Traddles, laughing. 'Tight in the arms and legs, you know? Dear me! Well! Those were happy times, weren't they?'

'I think our schoolmaster might have made them happier, without doing any harm to any of us, I acknowledge,' I returned.

'Perhaps he might,' said Traddles. 'But dear me, there was a good deal of fun going on. Do you remember the nights in the bedroom? When we used to have the suppers? And when you used to tell the stories? Ha, ha, ha! And do you remember when I got caned for crying about Mr. Mell? Old Creakle! I should like to see him again, too!'

'He was a brute to you, Traddles,' said I, indignantly; for his good humour made me feel as if I had seen him beaten but yesterday.

'Do you think so?' returned Traddles. 'Really? Perhaps he was rather. But it's all over, a long while. Old Creakle!'

'You were brought up by an uncle, then?' said I.

'Of course I was!' said Traddles. 'The one I was always going to write to. And always didn't, eh! Ha, ha, ha! Yes, I had an uncle then. He died soon after I left school.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes. He was a retired--what do you call it!--draper--cloth-merchant--and had made me his heir. But he didn't like me when I grew up.'

'Do you really mean that?' said I. He was so composed, that I fancied he must have some other meaning.

'Oh dear, yes, Copperfield! I mean it,' replied Traddles. 'It was an unfortunate thing, but he didn't like me at all. He said I wasn't at all what he expected, and so he married his housekeeper.'

'And what did you do?' I asked.

'I didn't do anything in particular,' said Traddles. 'I lived with them, waiting to be put out in the world, until his gout unfortunately flew to his stomach--and so he died, and so she married a young man, and so I wasn't provided for.'

'Did you get nothing, Traddles, after all?'

'Oh dear, yes!' said Traddles. 'I got fifty pounds. I had never been brought up to any profession, and at first I was at a loss what to do for myself. However, I began, with the assistance of the son of a professional man, who had been to Salem House--Yawler, with his nose on one side. Do you recollect him?'

No. He had not been there with me; all the noses were straight in my day.

'It don't matter,' said Traddles. 'I began, by means of his assistance, to copy law writings. That didn't answer very well; and then I began to state cases for them, and make abstracts, and that sort of work. For I am a plodding kind of fellow, Copperfield, and had learnt the way of doing such things pithily. Well! That put it in my head to enter myself as a law student; and that ran away with all that was left of the fifty pounds. Yawler recommended me to one or two other offices, however--Mr. Waterbrook's for one--and I got a good many jobs. I was fortunate enough, too, to become acquainted with a person in the publishing way, who was getting up an Encyclopaedia, and he set me to work; and, indeed' (glancing at his table), 'I am at work for him at this minute. I am not a bad compiler, Copperfield,' said Traddles, preserving the same air of cheerful confidence in all he said, 'but I have no invention at all; not a particle. I suppose there never was a young man with less originality than I have.'

As Traddles seemed to expect that I should assent to this as a matter of course, I nodded; and he went on, with the same sprightly patience--I can find no better expression--as before.

'So, by little and little, and not living high, I managed to scrape up the hundred pounds at last,' said Traddles; 'and thank Heaven that's

paid--though it was--though it certainly was,' said Traddles, wincing again as if he had had another tooth out, 'a pull. I am living by the sort of work I have mentioned, still, and I hope, one of these days, to get connected with some newspaper: which would almost be the making of my fortune. Now, Copperfield, you are so exactly what you used to be, with that agreeable face, and it's so pleasant to see you, that I sha'n't conceal anything. Therefore you must know that I am engaged.'

Engaged! Oh, Dora!

'She is a curate's daughter,' said Traddles; 'one of ten, down in Devonshire. Yes!' For he saw me glance, involuntarily, at the prospect on the inkstand. 'That's the church! You come round here to the left, out of this gate,' tracing his finger along the inkstand, 'and exactly where I hold this pen, there stands the house--facing, you understand, towards the church.'

The delight with which he entered into these particulars, did not fully present itself to me until afterwards; for my selfish thoughts were making a ground-plan of Mr. Spenlow's house and garden at the same moment.

'She is such a dear girl!' said Traddles; 'a little older than me, but the dearest girl! I told you I was going out of town? I have been down there. I walked there, and I walked back, and I had the most delightful time! I dare say ours is likely to be a rather long engagement, but our motto is "Wait and hope!" We always say that. "Wait and hope," we always say. And she would wait, Copperfield, till she was sixty--any age you can mention--for me!'

Traddles rose from his chair, and, with a triumphant smile, put his hand upon the white cloth I had observed.

'However,' he said, 'it's not that we haven't made a beginning towards housekeeping. No, no; we have begun. We must get on by degrees, but we have begun. Here,' drawing the cloth off with great pride and care, 'are two pieces of furniture to commence with. This flower-pot and stand, she bought herself. You put that in a parlour window,' said Traddles, falling a little back from it to survey it with the greater admiration, 'with a plant in it, and--and there you are! This little round table with the marble top (it's two feet ten in circumference), I bought. You want to lay a book down, you know, or somebody comes to see you or your wife, and wants a place to stand a cup of tea upon, and--and there you are again!' said Traddles. 'It's an admirable piece of workmanship--firm as a rock!' I praised them both, highly, and Traddles replaced the covering as carefully as he had removed it.

'It's not a great deal towards the furnishing,' said Traddles, 'but it's something. The table-cloths, and pillow-cases, and articles of that kind, are what discourage me most, Copperfield. So does the ironmongery--candle-boxes, and gridirons, and that sort of necessities--because those things tell, and mount up. However, "wait and hope!" And I assure you she's the dearest girl!'

'I am quite certain of it,' said I.

'In the meantime,' said Traddles, coming back to his chair; 'and this is the end of my prosing about myself, I get on as well as I can. I don't make much, but I don't spend much. In general, I board with the people downstairs, who are very agreeable people indeed. Both Mr. and Mrs. Micawber have seen a good deal of life, and are excellent company.'

'My dear Traddles!' I quickly exclaimed. 'What are you talking about?'

Traddles looked at me, as if he wondered what I was talking about.



'Mr. and Mrs. Micawber!' I repeated. 'Why, I am intimately acquainted with them!'

An opportune double knock at the door, which I knew well from old experience in Windsor Terrace, and which nobody but Mr. Micawber could ever have knocked at that door, resolved any doubt in my mind as to their being my old friends. I begged Traddles to ask his landlord to walk up. Traddles accordingly did so, over the banister; and Mr. Micawber, not a bit changed--his tights, his stick, his shirt-collar, and his eye-glass, all the same as ever--came into the room with a genteel and youthful air.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Traddles,' said Mr. Micawber, with the old roll in his voice, as he checked himself in humming a soft tune. 'I was not aware that there was any individual, alien to this tenement, in your sanctum.'

Mr. Micawber slightly bowed to me, and pulled up his shirt-collar.

'How do you do, Mr. Micawber?' said I.

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you are exceedingly obliging. I am in statu quo.'

'And Mrs. Micawber?' I pursued.

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'she is also, thank God, in statu quo.'

'And the children, Mr. Micawber?'

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I rejoice to reply that they are, likewise, in the enjoyment of salubrity.'

All this time, Mr. Micawber had not known me in the least, though he had stood face to face with me. But now, seeing me smile, he examined my features with more attention, fell back, cried, 'Is it possible! Have I the pleasure of again beholding Copperfield!' and shook me by both hands with the utmost fervour.

'Good Heaven, Mr. Traddles!' said Mr. Micawber, 'to think that I should find you acquainted with the friend of my youth, the companion of earlier days! My dear!' calling over the banisters to Mrs. Micawber, while Traddles looked (with reason) not a little amazed at this description of me. 'Here is a gentleman in Mr. Traddles's apartment, whom he wishes to have the pleasure of presenting to you, my love!'

Mr. Micawber immediately reappeared, and shook hands with me again.

'And how is our good friend the Doctor, Copperfield?' said Mr. Micawber, 'and all the circle at Canterbury?'

'I have none but good accounts of them,' said I.

'I am most delighted to hear it,' said Mr. Micawber. 'It was at Canterbury where we last met. Within the shadow, I may figuratively say, of that religious edifice immortalized by Chaucer, which was anciently the resort of Pilgrims from the remotest corners of--in short,' said Mr. Micawber, 'in the immediate neighbourhood of the Cathedral.'

I replied that it was. Mr. Micawber continued talking as volubly as he could; but not, I thought, without showing, by some marks of concern in his countenance, that he was sensible of sounds in the next room, as of Mrs. Micawber washing her hands, and hurriedly opening and shutting drawers that were uneasy in their action.

'You find us, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, with one eye on Traddles,

'at present established, on what may be designated as a small and unassuming scale; but, you are aware that I have, in the course of my career, surmounted difficulties, and conquered obstacles. You are no stranger to the fact, that there have been periods of my life, when it has been requisite that I should pause, until certain expected events should turn up; when it has been necessary that I should fall back, before making what I trust I shall not be accused of presumption in terming--a spring. The present is one of those momentous stages in the life of man. You find me, fallen back, FOR a spring; and I have every reason to believe that a vigorous leap will shortly be the result.'

I was expressing my satisfaction, when Mrs. Micawber came in; a little more slatternly than she used to be, or so she seemed now, to my unaccustomed eyes, but still with some preparation of herself for company, and with a pair of brown gloves on.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, leading her towards me, 'here is a gentleman of the name of Copperfield, who wishes to renew his acquaintance with you.'

It would have been better, as it turned out, to have led gently up to this announcement, for Mrs. Micawber, being in a delicate state of health, was overcome by it, and was taken so unwell, that Mr. Micawber was obliged, in great trepidation, to run down to the water-butts in the backyard, and draw a basinful to lave her brow with. She presently revived, however, and was really pleased to see me. We had half-an-hour's talk, all together; and I asked her about the twins, who, she said, were 'grown great creatures'; and after Master and Miss Micawber, whom she described as 'absolute giants', but they were not produced on that occasion.

Mr. Micawber was very anxious that I should stay to dinner. I should not have been averse to do so, but that I imagined I detected trouble, and

calculation relative to the extent of the cold meat, in Mrs. Micawber's eye. I therefore pleaded another engagement; and observing that Mrs. Micawber's spirits were immediately lightened, I resisted all persuasion to forego it.

But I told Traddles, and Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, that before I could think of leaving, they must appoint a day when they would come and dine with me. The occupations to which Traddles stood pledged, rendered it necessary to fix a somewhat distant one; but an appointment was made for the purpose, that suited us all, and then I took my leave.

Mr. Micawber, under pretence of showing me a nearer way than that by which I had come, accompanied me to the corner of the street; being anxious (he explained to me) to say a few words to an old friend, in confidence.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I need hardly tell you that to have beneath our roof, under existing circumstances, a mind like that which gleams--if I may be allowed the expression--which gleams--in your friend Traddles, is an unspeakable comfort. With a washerwoman, who exposes hard-bake for sale in her parlour-window, dwelling next door, and a Bow-street officer residing over the way, you may imagine that his society is a source of consolation to myself and to Mrs. Micawber. I am at present, my dear Copperfield, engaged in the sale of corn upon commission. It is not an avocation of a remunerative description--in other words, it does not pay--and some temporary embarrassments of a pecuniary nature have been the consequence. I am, however, delighted to add that I have now an immediate prospect of something turning up (I am not at liberty to say in what direction), which I trust will enable me to provide, permanently, both for myself and for your friend Traddles, in whom I have an unaffected interest. You may, perhaps, be prepared to hear that Mrs. Micawber is in a state of health which renders it not wholly improbable that an addition may be ultimately made to those

pledges of affection which--in short, to the infantine group. Mrs. Micawber's family have been so good as to express their dissatisfaction at this state of things. I have merely to observe, that I am not aware that it is any business of theirs, and that I repel that exhibition of feeling with scorn, and with defiance!'

Mr. Micawber then shook hands with me again, and left me.

#### CHAPTER 28. Mr. MICAWBER'S GAUNTLET

Until the day arrived on which I was to entertain my newly-found old friends, I lived principally on Dora and coffee. In my love-lorn condition, my appetite languished; and I was glad of it, for I felt as though it would have been an act of perfidy towards Dora to have a natural relish for my dinner. The quantity of walking exercise I took, was not in this respect attended with its usual consequence, as the disappointment counteracted the fresh air. I have my doubts, too, founded on the acute experience acquired at this period of my life, whether a sound enjoyment of animal food can develop itself freely in any human subject who is always in torment from tight boots. I think the extremities require to be at peace before the stomach will conduct itself with vigour.

On the occasion of this domestic little party, I did not repeat my former extensive preparations. I merely provided a pair of soles, a small leg of mutton, and a pigeon-pie. Mrs. Crupp broke out into rebellion on my first bashful hint in reference to the cooking of the fish and joint, and said, with a dignified sense of injury, 'No! No, sir! You will not ask me such a thing, for you are better acquainted with me than to suppose me capable of doing what I cannot do with ampie'

satisfaction to my own feelings!' But, in the end, a compromise was effected; and Mrs. Crupp consented to achieve this feat, on condition that I dined from home for a fortnight afterwards.

And here I may remark, that what I underwent from Mrs. Crupp, in consequence of the tyranny she established over me, was dreadful. I never was so much afraid of anyone. We made a compromise of everything. If I hesitated, she was taken with that wonderful disorder which was always lying in ambush in her system, ready, at the shortest notice, to prey upon her vitals. If I rang the bell impatiently, after half-a-dozen unavailing modest pulls, and she appeared at last--which was not by any means to be relied upon--she would appear with a reproachful aspect, sink breathless on a chair near the door, lay her hand upon her nankeen bosom, and become so ill, that I was glad, at any sacrifice of brandy or anything else, to get rid of her. If I objected to having my bed made at five o'clock in the afternoon--which I do still think an uncomfortable arrangement--one motion of her hand towards the same nankeen region of wounded sensibility was enough to make me falter an apology. In short, I would have done anything in an honourable way rather than give Mrs. Crupp offence; and she was the terror of my life.

I bought a second-hand dumb-waiter for this dinner-party, in preference to re-engaging the handy young man; against whom I had conceived a prejudice, in consequence of meeting him in the Strand, one Sunday morning, in a waistcoat remarkably like one of mine, which had been missing since the former occasion. The 'young gal' was re-engaged; but on the stipulation that she should only bring in the dishes, and then withdraw to the landing-place, beyond the outer door; where a habit of sniffing she had contracted would be lost upon the guests, and where her retiring on the plates would be a physical impossibility.

Having laid in the materials for a bowl of punch, to be compounded by Mr. Micawber; having provided a bottle of lavender-water, two

wax-candles, a paper of mixed pins, and a pincushion, to assist Mrs. Micawber in her toilette at my dressing-table; having also caused the fire in my bedroom to be lighted for Mrs. Micawber's convenience; and having laid the cloth with my own hands, I awaited the result with composure.

At the appointed time, my three visitors arrived together. Mr. Micawber with more shirt-collar than usual, and a new ribbon to his eye-glass; Mrs. Micawber with her cap in a whitey-brown paper parcel; Traddles carrying the parcel, and supporting Mrs. Micawber on his arm. They were all delighted with my residence. When I conducted Mrs. Micawber to my dressing-table, and she saw the scale on which it was prepared for her, she was in such raptures, that she called Mr. Micawber to come in and look.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'this is luxurious. This is a way of life which reminds me of the period when I was myself in a state of celibacy, and Mrs. Micawber had not yet been solicited to plight her faith at the Hymeneal altar.'

'He means, solicited by him, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, archly. 'He cannot answer for others.'

'My dear,' returned Mr. Micawber with sudden seriousness, 'I have no desire to answer for others. I am too well aware that when, in the inscrutable decrees of Fate, you were reserved for me, it is possible you may have been reserved for one, destined, after a protracted struggle, at length to fall a victim to pecuniary involvements of a complicated nature. I understand your allusion, my love. I regret it, but I can bear it.'

'Micawber!' exclaimed Mrs. Micawber, in tears. 'Have I deserved this! I, who never have deserted you; who never WILL desert you, Micawber!' 'My

love,' said Mr. Micawber, much affected, 'you will forgive, and our old and tried friend Copperfield will, I am sure, forgive, the momentary laceration of a wounded spirit, made sensitive by a recent collision with the Minion of Power--in other words, with a ribald Turncock attached to the water-works--and will pity, not condemn, its excesses.'

Mr. Micawber then embraced Mrs. Micawber, and pressed my hand; leaving me to infer from this broken allusion that his domestic supply of water had been cut off that afternoon, in consequence of default in the payment of the company's rates.

To divert his thoughts from this melancholy subject, I informed Mr. Micawber that I relied upon him for a bowl of punch, and led him to the lemons. His recent despondency, not to say despair, was gone in a moment. I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself amid the fragrance of lemon-peel and sugar, the odour of burning rum, and the steam of boiling water, as Mr. Micawber did that afternoon. It was wonderful to see his face shining at us out of a thin cloud of these delicate fumes, as he stirred, and mixed, and tasted, and looked as if he were making, instead of punch, a fortune for his family down to the latest posterity. As to Mrs. Micawber, I don't know whether it was the effect of the cap, or the lavender-water, or the pins, or the fire, or the wax-candles, but she came out of my room, comparatively speaking, lovely. And the lark was never gayer than that excellent woman.

I suppose--I never ventured to inquire, but I suppose--that Mrs. Crupp, after frying the soles, was taken ill. Because we broke down at that point. The leg of mutton came up very red within, and very pale without: besides having a foreign substance of a gritty nature sprinkled over it, as if it had had a fall into the ashes of that remarkable kitchen fireplace. But we were not in condition to judge of this fact from the appearance of the gravy, forasmuch as the 'young gal' had dropped it all upon the stairs--where it remained, by the by, in a long train, until it



was worn out. The pigeon-pie was not bad, but it was a delusive pie: the crust being like a disappointing head, phrenologically speaking: full of lumps and bumps, with nothing particular underneath. In short, the banquet was such a failure that I should have been quite unhappy--about the failure, I mean, for I was always unhappy about Dora--if I had not been relieved by the great good humour of my company, and by a bright suggestion from Mr. Micawber.

'My dear friend Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'accidents will occur in the best-regulated families; and in families not regulated by that pervading influence which sanctifies while it enhances the--a--I would say, in short, by the influence of Woman, in the lofty character of Wife, they may be expected with confidence, and must be borne with philosophy. If you will allow me to take the liberty of remarking that there are few comestibles better, in their way, than a Devil, and that I believe, with a little division of labour, we could accomplish a good one if the young person in attendance could produce a gridiron, I would put it to you, that this little misfortune may be easily repaired.'

There was a gridiron in the pantry, on which my morning rasher of bacon was cooked. We had it in, in a twinkling, and immediately applied ourselves to carrying Mr. Micawber's idea into effect. The division of labour to which he had referred was this:--Traddles cut the mutton into slices; Mr. Micawber (who could do anything of this sort to perfection) covered them with pepper, mustard, salt, and cayenne; I put them on the gridiron, turned them with a fork, and took them off, under Mr. Micawber's direction; and Mrs. Micawber heated, and continually stirred, some mushroom ketchup in a little saucepan. When we had slices enough done to begin upon, we fell-to, with our sleeves still tucked up at the wrist, more slices sputtering and blazing on the fire, and our attention divided between the mutton on our plates, and the mutton then preparing.

What with the novelty of this cookery, the excellence of it, the bustle

of it, the frequent starting up to look after it, the frequent sitting down to dispose of it as the crisp slices came off the gridiron hot and hot, the being so busy, so flushed with the fire, so amused, and in the midst of such a tempting noise and savour, we reduced the leg of mutton to the bone. My own appetite came back miraculously. I am ashamed to record it, but I really believe I forgot Dora for a little while. I am satisfied that Mr. and Mrs. Micawber could not have enjoyed the feast more, if they had sold a bed to provide it. Traddles laughed as heartily, almost the whole time, as he ate and worked. Indeed we all did, all at once; and I dare say there was never a greater success.

We were at the height of our enjoyment, and were all busily engaged, in our several departments, endeavouring to bring the last batch of slices to a state of perfection that should crown the feast, when I was aware of a strange presence in the room, and my eyes encountered those of the staid Littimer, standing hat in hand before me.

'What's the matter?' I involuntarily asked.

'I beg your pardon, sir, I was directed to come in. Is my master not here, sir?'

'No.'

'Have you not seen him, sir?'

'No; don't you come from him?'

'Not immediately so, sir.'

'Did he tell you you would find him here?'

'Not exactly so, sir. But I should think he might be here tomorrow, as

he has not been here today.' 'Is he coming up from Oxford?'

'I beg, sir,' he returned respectfully, 'that you will be seated, and allow me to do this.' With which he took the fork from my unresisting hand, and bent over the gridiron, as if his whole attention were concentrated on it.

We should not have been much discomposed, I dare say, by the appearance of Steerforth himself, but we became in a moment the meekest of the meek before his respectable serving-man. Mr. Micawber, humming a tune, to show that he was quite at ease, subsided into his chair, with the handle of a hastily concealed fork sticking out of the bosom of his coat, as if he had stabbed himself. Mrs. Micawber put on her brown gloves, and assumed a genteel languor. Traddles ran his greasy hands through his hair, and stood it bolt upright, and stared in confusion on the table-cloth. As for me, I was a mere infant at the head of my own table; and hardly ventured to glance at the respectable phenomenon, who had come from Heaven knows where, to put my establishment to rights.

Meanwhile he took the mutton off the gridiron, and gravely handed it round. We all took some, but our appreciation of it was gone, and we merely made a show of eating it. As we severally pushed away our plates, he noiselessly removed them, and set on the cheese. He took that off, too, when it was done with; cleared the table; piled everything on the dumb-waiter; gave us our wine-glasses; and, of his own accord, wheeled the dumb-waiter into the pantry. All this was done in a perfect manner, and he never raised his eyes from what he was about. Yet his very elbows, when he had his back towards me, seemed to teem with the expression of his fixed opinion that I was extremely young.

'Can I do anything more, sir?'

I thanked him and said, No; but would he take no dinner himself?

'None, I am obliged to you, sir.'

'Is Mr. Steerforth coming from Oxford?'

'I beg your pardon, sir?'

'Is Mr. Steerforth coming from Oxford?'

'I should imagine that he might be here tomorrow, sir. I rather thought he might have been here today, sir. The mistake is mine, no doubt, sir.'

'If you should see him first--' said I.

'If you'll excuse me, sir, I don't think I shall see him first.'

'In case you do,' said I, 'pray say that I am sorry he was not here today, as an old schoolfellow of his was here.'

'Indeed, sir!' and he divided a bow between me and Traddles, with a glance at the latter.

He was moving softly to the door, when, in a forlorn hope of saying something naturally--which I never could, to this man--I said:

'Oh! Littimer!'

'Sir!'

'Did you remain long at Yarmouth, that time?'

'Not particularly so, sir.'

'You saw the boat completed?'

'Yes, sir. I remained behind on purpose to see the boat completed.'

'I know!' He raised his eyes to mine respectfully.

'Mr. Steerforth has not seen it yet, I suppose?'

'I really can't say, sir. I think--but I really can't say, sir. I wish you good night, sir.'

He comprehended everybody present, in the respectful bow with which he followed these words, and disappeared. My visitors seemed to breathe more freely when he was gone; but my own relief was very great, for besides the constraint, arising from that extraordinary sense of being at a disadvantage which I always had in this man's presence, my conscience had embarrassed me with whispers that I had mistrusted his master, and I could not repress a vague uneasy dread that he might find it out. How was it, having so little in reality to conceal, that I always DID feel as if this man were finding me out?

Mr. Micawber roused me from this reflection, which was blended with a certain remorseful apprehension of seeing Steerforth himself, by bestowing many encomiums on the absent Littimer as a most respectable fellow, and a thoroughly admirable servant. Mr. Micawber, I may remark, had taken his full share of the general bow, and had received it with infinite condescension.

'But punch, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, tasting it, 'like time and tide, waits for no man. Ah! it is at the present moment in high flavour. My love, will you give me your opinion?'

Mrs. Micawber pronounced it excellent.

'Then I will drink,' said Mr. Micawber, 'if my friend Copperfield will permit me to take that social liberty, to the days when my friend Copperfield and myself were younger, and fought our way in the world side by side. I may say, of myself and Copperfield, in words we have sung together before now, that

We twa hae run about the braes

And pu'd the gowans' fine

--in a figurative point of view--on several occasions. I am not exactly aware,' said Mr. Micawber, with the old roll in his voice, and the old indescribable air of saying something genteel, 'what gowans may be, but I have no doubt that Copperfield and myself would frequently have taken a pull at them, if it had been feasible.'

Mr. Micawber, at the then present moment, took a pull at his punch. So we all did: Traddles evidently lost in wondering at what distant time Mr. Micawber and I could have been comrades in the battle of the world.

'Ahem!' said Mr. Micawber, clearing his throat, and warming with the punch and with the fire. 'My dear, another glass?'

Mrs. Micawber said it must be very little; but we couldn't allow that, so it was a glassful.

'As we are quite confidential here, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, sipping her punch, 'Mr. Traddles being a part of our domesticity, I should much like to have your opinion on Mr. Micawber's prospects. For corn,' said Mrs. Micawber argumentatively, 'as I have repeatedly said to Mr. Micawber, may be gentlemanly, but it is not remunerative. Commission to the extent of two and ninepence in a fortnight cannot, however limited our ideas, be considered remunerative.'

We were all agreed upon that.

'Then,' said Mrs. Micawber, who prided herself on taking a clear view of things, and keeping Mr. Micawber straight by her woman's wisdom, when he might otherwise go a little crooked, 'then I ask myself this question. If corn is not to be relied upon, what is? Are coals to be relied upon? Not at all. We have turned our attention to that experiment, on the suggestion of my family, and we find it fallacious.'

Mr. Micawber, leaning back in his chair with his hands in his pockets, eyed us aside, and nodded his head, as much as to say that the case was very clearly put.

'The articles of corn and coals,' said Mrs. Micawber, still more argumentatively, 'being equally out of the question, Mr. Copperfield, I naturally look round the world, and say, "What is there in which a person of Mr. Micawber's talent is likely to succeed?" And I exclude the doing anything on commission, because commission is not a certainty. What is best suited to a person of Mr. Micawber's peculiar temperament is, I am convinced, a certainty.'

Traddles and I both expressed, by a feeling murmur, that this great discovery was no doubt true of Mr. Micawber, and that it did him much credit.

'I will not conceal from you, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that I have long felt the Brewing business to be particularly adapted to Mr. Micawber. Look at Barclay and Perkins! Look at Truman, Hanbury, and Buxton! It is on that extensive footing that Mr. Micawber, I know from my own knowledge of him, is calculated to shine; and the profits, I am told, are e-NOR-MOUS! But if Mr. Micawber cannot get into those firms--which decline to answer his letters, when he offers his

services even in an inferior capacity--what is the use of dwelling upon that idea? None. I may have a conviction that Mr. Micawber's manners--'

'Hem! Really, my dear,' interposed Mr. Micawber.

'My love, be silent,' said Mrs. Micawber, laying her brown glove on his hand. 'I may have a conviction, Mr. Copperfield, that Mr. Micawber's manners peculiarly qualify him for the Banking business. I may argue within myself, that if I had a deposit at a banking-house, the manners of Mr. Micawber, as representing that banking-house, would inspire confidence, and must extend the connexion. But if the various banking-houses refuse to avail themselves of Mr. Micawber's abilities, or receive the offer of them with contumely, what is the use of dwelling upon THAT idea? None. As to originating a banking-business, I may know that there are members of my family who, if they chose to place their money in Mr. Micawber's hands, might found an establishment of that description. But if they do NOT choose to place their money in Mr. Micawber's hands--which they don't--what is the use of that? Again I contend that we are no farther advanced than we were before.'

I shook my head, and said, 'Not a bit.' Traddles also shook his head, and said, 'Not a bit.'

'What do I deduce from this?' Mrs. Micawber went on to say, still with the same air of putting a case lucidly. 'What is the conclusion, my dear Mr. Copperfield, to which I am irresistibly brought? Am I wrong in saying, it is clear that we must live?'

I answered 'Not at all!' and Traddles answered 'Not at all!' and I found myself afterwards sagely adding, alone, that a person must either live or die.

'Just so,' returned Mrs. Micawber, 'It is precisely that. And the fact



is, my dear Mr. Copperfield, that we can not live without something widely different from existing circumstances shortly turning up. Now I am convinced, myself, and this I have pointed out to Mr. Micawber several times of late, that things cannot be expected to turn up of themselves. We must, in a measure, assist to turn them up. I may be wrong, but I have formed that opinion.'

Both Traddles and I applauded it highly.

'Very well,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'Then what do I recommend? Here is Mr. Micawber with a variety of qualifications--with great talent--'

'Really, my love,' said Mr. Micawber.

'Pray, my dear, allow me to conclude. Here is Mr. Micawber, with a variety of qualifications, with great talent--I should say, with genius, but that may be the partiality of a wife--'

Traddles and I both murmured 'No.'

'And here is Mr. Micawber without any suitable position or employment. Where does that responsibility rest? Clearly on society. Then I would make a fact so disgraceful known, and boldly challenge society to set it right. It appears to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, forcibly, 'that what Mr. Micawber has to do, is to throw down the gauntlet to society, and say, in effect, "Show me who will take that up. Let the party immediately step forward."''

I ventured to ask Mrs. Micawber how this was to be done.

'By advertising,' said Mrs. Micawber--'in all the papers. It appears to me, that what Mr. Micawber has to do, in justice to himself, in justice to his family, and I will even go so far as to say in justice to

society, by which he has been hitherto overlooked, is to advertise in all the papers; to describe himself plainly as so-and-so, with such and such qualifications and to put it thus: "Now employ me, on remunerative terms, and address, post-paid, to W. M., Post Office, Camden Town."

'This idea of Mrs. Micawber's, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, making his shirt-collar meet in front of his chin, and glancing at me sideways, 'is, in fact, the Leap to which I alluded, when I last had the pleasure of seeing you.'

'Advertising is rather expensive,' I remarked, dubiously.

'Exactly so!' said Mrs. Micawber, preserving the same logical air.

'Quite true, my dear Mr. Copperfield! I have made the identical observation to Mr. Micawber. It is for that reason especially, that I think Mr. Micawber ought (as I have already said, in justice to himself, in justice to his family, and in justice to society) to raise a certain sum of money--on a bill.'

Mr. Micawber, leaning back in his chair, trifled with his eye-glass and cast his eyes up at the ceiling; but I thought him observant of Traddles, too, who was looking at the fire.

'If no member of my family,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'is possessed of sufficient natural feeling to negotiate that bill--I believe there is a better business-term to express what I mean--'

Mr. Micawber, with his eyes still cast up at the ceiling, suggested 'Discount.'

'To discount that bill,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'then my opinion is, that Mr. Micawber should go into the City, should take that bill into the Money Market, and should dispose of it for what he can get. If the

individuals in the Money Market oblige Mr. Micawber to sustain a great sacrifice, that is between themselves and their consciences. I view it, steadily, as an investment. I recommend Mr. Micawber, my dear Mr. Copperfield, to do the same; to regard it as an investment which is sure of return, and to make up his mind to any sacrifice.'

I felt, but I am sure I don't know why, that this was self-denying and devoted in Mrs. Micawber, and I uttered a murmur to that effect. Traddles, who took his tone from me, did likewise, still looking at the fire.

'I will not,' said Mrs. Micawber, finishing her punch, and gathering her scarf about her shoulders, preparatory to her withdrawal to my bedroom: 'I will not protract these remarks on the subject of Mr. Micawber's pecuniary affairs. At your fireside, my dear Mr. Copperfield, and in the presence of Mr. Traddles, who, though not so old a friend, is quite one of ourselves, I could not refrain from making you acquainted with the course I advise Mr. Micawber to take. I feel that the time is arrived when Mr. Micawber should exert himself and--I will add--assert himself, and it appears to me that these are the means. I am aware that I am merely a female, and that a masculine judgement is usually considered more competent to the discussion of such questions; still I must not forget that, when I lived at home with my papa and mama, my papa was in the habit of saying, "Emma's form is fragile, but her grasp of a subject is inferior to none." That my papa was too partial, I well know; but that he was an observer of character in some degree, my duty and my reason equally forbid me to doubt.'

With these words, and resisting our entreaties that she would grace the remaining circulation of the punch with her presence, Mrs. Micawber retired to my bedroom. And really I felt that she was a noble woman--the sort of woman who might have been a Roman matron, and done all manner of heroic things, in times of public trouble.

In the fervour of this impression, I congratulated Mr. Micawber on the treasure he possessed. So did Traddles. Mr. Micawber extended his hand to each of us in succession, and then covered his face with his pocket-handkerchief, which I think had more snuff upon it than he was aware of. He then returned to the punch, in the highest state of exhilaration.

He was full of eloquence. He gave us to understand that in our children we lived again, and that, under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, any accession to their number was doubly welcome. He said that Mrs. Micawber had latterly had her doubts on this point, but that he had dispelled them, and reassured her. As to her family, they were totally unworthy of her, and their sentiments were utterly indifferent to him, and they might--I quote his own expression--go to the Devil.

Mr. Micawber then delivered a warm eulogy on Traddles. He said Traddles's was a character, to the steady virtues of which he (Mr. Micawber) could lay no claim, but which, he thanked Heaven, he could admire. He feelingly alluded to the young lady, unknown, whom Traddles had honoured with his affection, and who had reciprocated that affection by honouring and blessing Traddles with her affection. Mr. Micawber pledged her. So did I. Traddles thanked us both, by saying, with a simplicity and honesty I had sense enough to be quite charmed with, 'I am very much obliged to you indeed. And I do assure you, she's the dearest girl!--'

Mr. Micawber took an early opportunity, after that, of hinting, with the utmost delicacy and ceremony, at the state of MY affections. Nothing but the serious assurance of his friend Copperfield to the contrary, he observed, could deprive him of the impression that his friend Copperfield loved and was beloved. After feeling very hot and uncomfortable for some time, and after a good deal of blushing,

stammering, and denying, I said, having my glass in my hand, 'Well! I would give them D.!' which so excited and gratified Mr. Micawber, that he ran with a glass of punch into my bedroom, in order that Mrs. Micawber might drink D., who drank it with enthusiasm, crying from within, in a shrill voice, 'Hear, hear! My dear Mr. Copperfield, I am delighted. Hear!' and tapping at the wall, by way of applause.

Our conversation, afterwards, took a more worldly turn; Mr. Micawber telling us that he found Camden Town inconvenient, and that the first thing he contemplated doing, when the advertisement should have been the cause of something satisfactory turning up, was to move. He mentioned a terrace at the western end of Oxford Street, fronting Hyde Park, on which he had always had his eye, but which he did not expect to attain immediately, as it would require a large establishment. There would probably be an interval, he explained, in which he should content himself with the upper part of a house, over some respectable place of business--say in Piccadilly,--which would be a cheerful situation for Mrs. Micawber; and where, by throwing out a bow-window, or carrying up the roof another story, or making some little alteration of that sort, they might live, comfortably and reputably, for a few years. Whatever was reserved for him, he expressly said, or wherever his abode might be, we might rely on this--there would always be a room for Traddles, and a knife and fork for me. We acknowledged his kindness; and he begged us to forgive his having launched into these practical and business-like details, and to excuse it as natural in one who was making entirely new arrangements in life.

Mrs. Micawber, tapping at the wall again to know if tea were ready, broke up this particular phase of our friendly conversation. She made tea for us in a most agreeable manner; and, whenever I went near her, in handing about the tea-cups and bread-and-butter, asked me, in a whisper, whether D. was fair, or dark, or whether she was short, or tall: or something of that kind; which I think I liked. After tea, we discussed a

variety of topics before the fire; and Mrs. Micawber was good enough to sing us (in a small, thin, flat voice, which I remembered to have considered, when I first knew her, the very table-beer of acoustics) the favourite ballads of 'The Dashing White Sergeant', and 'Little Tafflin'. For both of these songs Mrs. Micawber had been famous when she lived at home with her papa and mama. Mr. Micawber told us, that when he heard her sing the first one, on the first occasion of his seeing her beneath the parental roof, she had attracted his attention in an extraordinary degree; but that when it came to Little Tafflin, he had resolved to win that woman or perish in the attempt.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock when Mrs. Micawber rose to replace her cap in the whitey-brown paper parcel, and to put on her bonnet. Mr. Micawber took the opportunity of Traddles putting on his great-coat, to slip a letter into my hand, with a whispered request that I would read it at my leisure. I also took the opportunity of my holding a candle over the banisters to light them down, when Mr. Micawber was going first, leading Mrs. Micawber, and Traddles was following with the cap, to detain Traddles for a moment on the top of the stairs.

'Traddles,' said I, 'Mr. Micawber don't mean any harm, poor fellow: but, if I were you, I wouldn't lend him anything.'

'My dear Copperfield,' returned Traddles, smiling, 'I haven't got anything to lend.'

'You have got a name, you know,' said I.

'Oh! You call THAT something to lend?' returned Traddles, with a thoughtful look.

'Certainly.'

'Oh!' said Traddles. 'Yes, to be sure! I am very much obliged to you, Copperfield; but--I am afraid I have lent him that already.'

'For the bill that is to be a certain investment?' I inquired.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Not for that one. This is the first I have heard of that one. I have been thinking that he will most likely propose that one, on the way home. Mine's another.'

'I hope there will be nothing wrong about it,' said I. 'I hope not,' said Traddles. 'I should think not, though, because he told me, only the other day, that it was provided for. That was Mr. Micawber's expression, "Provided for."'

Mr. Micawber looking up at this juncture to where we were standing, I had only time to repeat my caution. Traddles thanked me, and descended. But I was much afraid, when I observed the good-natured manner in which he went down with the cap in his hand, and gave Mrs. Micawber his arm, that he would be carried into the Money Market neck and heels.

I returned to my fireside, and was musing, half gravely and half laughing, on the character of Mr. Micawber and the old relations between us, when I heard a quick step ascending the stairs. At first, I thought it was Traddles coming back for something Mrs. Micawber had left behind; but as the step approached, I knew it, and felt my heart beat high, and the blood rush to my face, for it was Steerforth's.

I was never unmindful of Agnes, and she never left that sanctuary in my thoughts--if I may call it so--where I had placed her from the first. But when he entered, and stood before me with his hand out, the darkness that had fallen on him changed to light, and I felt confounded and ashamed of having doubted one I loved so heartily. I loved her none the less; I thought of her as the same benignant, gentle angel in my life; I

reproached myself, not her, with having done him an injury; and I would have made him any atonement if I had known what to make, and how to make it.

'Why, Daisy, old boy, dumb-foundered!' laughed Steerforth, shaking my hand heartily, and throwing it gaily away. 'Have I detected you in another feast, you Sybarite! These Doctors' Commons fellows are the gayest men in town, I believe, and beat us sober Oxford people all to nothing!' His bright glance went merrily round the room, as he took the seat on the sofa opposite to me, which Mrs. Micawber had recently vacated, and stirred the fire into a blaze.

'I was so surprised at first,' said I, giving him welcome with all the cordiality I felt, 'that I had hardly breath to greet you with, Steerforth.'

'Well, the sight of me is good for sore eyes, as the Scotch say,' replied Steerforth, 'and so is the sight of you, Daisy, in full bloom. How are you, my Bacchanal?'

'I am very well,' said I; 'and not at all Bacchanalian tonight, though I confess to another party of three.'

'All of whom I met in the street, talking loud in your praise,' returned Steerforth. 'Who's our friend in the tights?'

I gave him the best idea I could, in a few words, of Mr. Micawber. He laughed heartily at my feeble portrait of that gentleman, and said he was a man to know, and he must know him. 'But who do you suppose our other friend is?' said I, in my turn.

'Heaven knows,' said Steerforth. 'Not a bore, I hope? I thought he looked a little like one.'



'Traddles!' I replied, triumphantly.

'Who's he?' asked Steerforth, in his careless way.

'Don't you remember Traddles? Traddles in our room at Salem House?'

'Oh! That fellow!' said Steerforth, beating a lump of coal on the top of the fire, with the poker. 'Is he as soft as ever? And where the deuce did you pick him up?'

I extolled Traddles in reply, as highly as I could; for I felt that Steerforth rather slighted him. Steerforth, dismissing the subject with a light nod, and a smile, and the remark that he would be glad to see the old fellow too, for he had always been an odd fish, inquired if I could give him anything to eat? During most of this short dialogue, when he had not been speaking in a wild vivacious manner, he had sat idly beating on the lump of coal with the poker. I observed that he did the same thing while I was getting out the remains of the pigeon-pie, and so forth.

'Why, Daisy, here's a supper for a king!' he exclaimed, starting out of his silence with a burst, and taking his seat at the table. 'I shall do it justice, for I have come from Yarmouth.'

'I thought you came from Oxford?' I returned.

'Not I,' said Steerforth. 'I have been seafaring--better employed.'

'Littimer was here today, to inquire for you,' I remarked, 'and I understood him that you were at Oxford; though, now I think of it, he certainly did not say so.'

'Littimer is a greater fool than I thought him, to have been inquiring for me at all,' said Steerforth, jovially pouring out a glass of wine, and drinking to me. 'As to understanding him, you are a cleverer fellow than most of us, Daisy, if you can do that.'

'That's true, indeed,' said I, moving my chair to the table. 'So you have been at Yarmouth, Steerforth!' interested to know all about it. 'Have you been there long?'

'No,' he returned. 'An escapade of a week or so.'

'And how are they all? Of course, little Emily is not married yet?'

'Not yet. Going to be, I believe--in so many weeks, or months, or something or other. I have not seen much of 'em. By the by'; he laid down his knife and fork, which he had been using with great diligence, and began feeling in his pockets; 'I have a letter for you.'

'From whom?'

'Why, from your old nurse,' he returned, taking some papers out of his breast pocket. "'J. Steerforth, Esquire, debtor, to The Willing Mind"; that's not it. Patience, and we'll find it presently. Old what's-his-name's in a bad way, and it's about that, I believe.'

'Barkis, do you mean?'

'Yes!' still feeling in his pockets, and looking over their contents: 'it's all over with poor Barkis, I am afraid. I saw a little apothecary there--surgeon, or whatever he is--who brought your worship into the world. He was mighty learned about the case, to me; but the upshot of his opinion was, that the carrier was making his last journey rather fast.---Put your hand into the breast pocket of my great-coat on the

chair yonder, and I think you'll find the letter. Is it there?'

'Here it is!' said I.

'That's right!'

It was from Peggotty; something less legible than usual, and brief. It informed me of her husband's hopeless state, and hinted at his being 'a little nearer' than heretofore, and consequently more difficult to manage for his own comfort. It said nothing of her weariness and watching, and praised him highly. It was written with a plain, unaffected, homely piety that I knew to be genuine, and ended with 'my duty to my ever darling'--meaning myself.

While I deciphered it, Steerforth continued to eat and drink.

'It's a bad job,' he said, when I had done; 'but the sun sets every day, and people die every minute, and we mustn't be scared by the common lot. If we failed to hold our own, because that equal foot at all men's doors was heard knocking somewhere, every object in this world would slip from us. No! Ride on! Rough-shod if need be, smooth-shod if that will do, but ride on! Ride on over all obstacles, and win the race!'

'And win what race?' said I.

'The race that one has started in,' said he. 'Ride on!'

I noticed, I remember, as he paused, looking at me with his handsome head a little thrown back, and his glass raised in his hand, that, though the freshness of the sea-wind was on his face, and it was ruddy, there were traces in it, made since I last saw it, as if he had applied himself to some habitual strain of the fervent energy which, when roused, was so passionately roused within him. I had it in my thoughts

to remonstrate with him upon his desperate way of pursuing any fancy that he took--such as this buffeting of rough seas, and braving of hard weather, for example--when my mind glanced off to the immediate subject of our conversation again, and pursued that instead.

'I tell you what, Steerforth,' said I, 'if your high spirits will listen to me--'

'They are potent spirits, and will do whatever you like,' he answered, moving from the table to the fireside again.

'Then I tell you what, Steerforth. I think I will go down and see my old nurse. It is not that I can do her any good, or render her any real service; but she is so attached to me that my visit will have as much effect on her, as if I could do both. She will take it so kindly that it will be a comfort and support to her. It is no great effort to make, I am sure, for such a friend as she has been to me. Wouldn't you go a day's journey, if you were in my place?'

His face was thoughtful, and he sat considering a little before he answered, in a low voice, 'Well! Go. You can do no harm.'

'You have just come back,' said I, 'and it would be in vain to ask you to go with me?'

'Quite,' he returned. 'I am for Highgate tonight. I have not seen my mother this long time, and it lies upon my conscience, for it's something to be loved as she loves her prodigal son.---Bah! Nonsense!--You mean to go tomorrow, I suppose?' he said, holding me out at arm's length, with a hand on each of my shoulders.

'Yes, I think so.'

'Well, then, don't go till next day. I wanted you to come and stay a few days with us. Here I am, on purpose to bid you, and you fly off to Yarmouth!'

'You are a nice fellow to talk of flying off, Steerforth, who are always running wild on some unknown expedition or other!'

He looked at me for a moment without speaking, and then rejoined, still holding me as before, and giving me a shake:

'Come! Say the next day, and pass as much of tomorrow as you can with us! Who knows when we may meet again, else? Come! Say the next day! I want you to stand between Rosa Dartle and me, and keep us asunder.'

'Would you love each other too much, without me?'

'Yes; or hate,' laughed Steerforth; 'no matter which. Come! Say the next day!'

I said the next day; and he put on his great-coat and lighted his cigar, and set off to walk home. Finding him in this intention, I put on my own great-coat (but did not light my own cigar, having had enough of that for one while) and walked with him as far as the open road: a dull road, then, at night. He was in great spirits all the way; and when we parted, and I looked after him going so gallantly and airily homeward, I thought of his saying, 'Ride on over all obstacles, and win the race!' and wished, for the first time, that he had some worthy race to run.

I was undressing in my own room, when Mr. Micawber's letter tumbled on the floor. Thus reminded of it, I broke the seal and read as follows. It was dated an hour and a half before dinner. I am not sure whether I have mentioned that, when Mr. Micawber was at any particularly desperate crisis, he used a sort of legal phraseology, which he seemed to think

equivalent to winding up his affairs.

'SIR--for I dare not say my dear Copperfield,

'It is expedient that I should inform you that the undersigned is Crushed. Some flickering efforts to spare you the premature knowledge of his calamitous position, you may observe in him this day; but hope has sunk beneath the horizon, and the undersigned is Crushed.

'The present communication is penned within the personal range (I cannot call it the society) of an individual, in a state closely bordering on intoxication, employed by a broker. That individual is in legal possession of the premises, under a distress for rent. His inventory includes, not only the chattels and effects of every description belonging to the undersigned, as yearly tenant of this habitation, but also those appertaining to Mr. Thomas Traddles, lodger, a member of the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple.

'If any drop of gloom were wanting in the overflowing cup, which is now "commended" (in the language of an immortal Writer) to the lips of the undersigned, it would be found in the fact, that a friendly acceptance granted to the undersigned, by the before-mentioned Mr. Thomas Traddles, for the sum Of 23l 4s 9 1/2d is over due, and is NOT provided for. Also, in the fact that the living responsibilities clinging to the undersigned will, in the course of nature, be increased by the sum of one more helpless victim; whose miserable appearance may be looked for--in round numbers--at the expiration of a period not exceeding six lunar months from the present date.

'After premising thus much, it would be a work of supererogation to add, that dust and ashes are for ever scattered

'On  
 'The  
 'Head  
 'Of  
 'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

Poor Traddles! I knew enough of Mr. Micawber by this time, to foresee that he might be expected to recover the blow; but my night's rest was sorely distressed by thoughts of Traddles, and of the curate's daughter, who was one of ten, down in Devonshire, and who was such a dear girl, and who would wait for Traddles (ominous praise!) until she was sixty, or any age that could be mentioned.

#### CHAPTER 29. I VISIT STEERFORTH AT HIS HOME, AGAIN

I mentioned to Mr. Spenlow in the morning, that I wanted leave of absence for a short time; and as I was not in the receipt of any salary, and consequently was not obnoxious to the implacable Jorkins, there was no difficulty about it. I took that opportunity, with my voice sticking in my throat, and my sight failing as I uttered the words, to express my hope that Miss Spenlow was quite well; to which Mr. Spenlow replied, with no more emotion than if he had been speaking of an ordinary human being, that he was much obliged to me, and she was very well.

We articled clerks, as germs of the patrician order of proctors, were treated with so much consideration, that I was almost my own master at all times. As I did not care, however, to get to Highgate before one or two o'clock in the day, and as we had another little excommunication case in court that morning, which was called The office of the judge

promoted by Tipkins against Bullock for his soul's correction, I passed an hour or two in attendance on it with Mr. Spenlow very agreeably. It arose out of a scuffle between two churchwardens, one of whom was alleged to have pushed the other against a pump; the handle of which pump projecting into a school-house, which school-house was under a gable of the church-roof, made the push an ecclesiastical offence. It was an amusing case; and sent me up to Highgate, on the box of the stage-coach, thinking about the Commons, and what Mr. Spenlow had said about touching the Commons and bringing down the country.

Mrs. Steerforth was pleased to see me, and so was Rosa Dartle. I was agreeably surprised to find that Littimer was not there, and that we were attended by a modest little parlour-maid, with blue ribbons in her cap, whose eye it was much more pleasant, and much less disconcerting, to catch by accident, than the eye of that respectable man. But what I particularly observed, before I had been half-an-hour in the house, was the close and attentive watch Miss Dartle kept upon me; and the lurking manner in which she seemed to compare my face with Steerforth's, and Steerforth's with mine, and to lie in wait for something to come out between the two. So surely as I looked towards her, did I see that eager visage, with its gaunt black eyes and searching brow, intent on mine; or passing suddenly from mine to Steerforth's; or comprehending both of us at once. In this lynx-like scrutiny she was so far from faltering when she saw I observed it, that at such a time she only fixed her piercing look upon me with a more intent expression still. Blameless as I was, and knew that I was, in reference to any wrong she could possibly suspect me of, I shrunk before her strange eyes, quite unable to endure their hungry lustre.

All day, she seemed to pervade the whole house. If I talked to Steerforth in his room, I heard her dress rustle in the little gallery outside. When he and I engaged in some of our old exercises on the lawn behind the house, I saw her face pass from window to window, like a



wandering light, until it fixed itself in one, and watched us. When we all four went out walking in the afternoon, she closed her thin hand on my arm like a spring, to keep me back, while Steerforth and his mother went on out of hearing: and then spoke to me.

'You have been a long time,' she said, 'without coming here. Is your profession really so engaging and interesting as to absorb your whole attention? I ask because I always want to be informed, when I am ignorant. Is it really, though?'

I replied that I liked it well enough, but that I certainly could not claim so much for it.

'Oh! I am glad to know that, because I always like to be put right when I am wrong,' said Rosa Dartle. 'You mean it is a little dry, perhaps?'

'Well,' I replied; 'perhaps it was a little dry.'

'Oh! and that's a reason why you want relief and change--excitement and all that?' said she. 'Ah! very true! But isn't it a little--Eh?--for him; I don't mean you?'

A quick glance of her eye towards the spot where Steerforth was walking, with his mother leaning on his arm, showed me whom she meant; but beyond that, I was quite lost. And I looked so, I have no doubt.

'Don't it--I don't say that it does, mind I want to know--don't it rather engross him? Don't it make him, perhaps, a little more remiss than usual in his visits to his blindly-doting--eh?' With another quick glance at them, and such a glance at me as seemed to look into my innermost thoughts.

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'pray do not think--'

'I don't!' she said. 'Oh dear me, don't suppose that I think anything! I am not suspicious. I only ask a question. I don't state any opinion. I want to found an opinion on what you tell me. Then, it's not so? Well! I am very glad to know it.'

'It certainly is not the fact,' said I, perplexed, 'that I am accountable for Steerforth's having been away from home longer than usual--if he has been: which I really don't know at this moment, unless I understand it from you. I have not seen him this long while, until last night.'

'No?'

'Indeed, Miss Dartle, no!'

As she looked full at me, I saw her face grow sharper and paler, and the marks of the old wound lengthen out until it cut through the disfigured lip, and deep into the nether lip, and slanted down the face. There was something positively awful to me in this, and in the brightness of her eyes, as she said, looking fixedly at me:

'What is he doing?'

I repeated the words, more to myself than her, being so amazed.

'What is he doing?' she said, with an eagerness that seemed enough to consume her like a fire. 'In what is that man assisting him, who never looks at me without an inscrutable falsehood in his eyes? If you are honourable and faithful, I don't ask you to betray your friend. I ask you only to tell me, is it anger, is it hatred, is it pride, is it restlessness, is it some wild fancy, is it love, what is it, that is leading him?'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'how shall I tell you, so that you will believe me, that I know of nothing in Steerforth different from what there was when I first came here? I can think of nothing. I firmly believe there is nothing. I hardly understand even what you mean.'

As she still stood looking fixedly at me, a twitching or throbbing, from which I could not dissociate the idea of pain, came into that cruel mark; and lifted up the corner of her lip as if with scorn, or with a pity that despised its object. She put her hand upon it hurriedly--a hand so thin and delicate, that when I had seen her hold it up before the fire to shade her face, I had compared it in my thoughts to fine porcelain--and saying, in a quick, fierce, passionate way, 'I swear you to secrecy about this!' said not a word more.

Mrs. Steerforth was particularly happy in her son's society, and Steerforth was, on this occasion, particularly attentive and respectful to her. It was very interesting to me to see them together, not only on account of their mutual affection, but because of the strong personal resemblance between them, and the manner in which what was haughty or impetuous in him was softened by age and sex, in her, to a gracious dignity. I thought, more than once, that it was well no serious cause of division had ever come between them; or two such natures--I ought rather to express it, two such shades of the same nature--might have been harder to reconcile than the two extremest opposites in creation. The idea did not originate in my own discernment, I am bound to confess, but in a speech of Rosa Dartle's.

She said at dinner:

'Oh, but do tell me, though, somebody, because I have been thinking about it all day, and I want to know.'

'You want to know what, Rosa?' returned Mrs. Steerforth. 'Pray, pray, Rosa, do not be mysterious.'

'Mysterious!' she cried. 'Oh! really? Do you consider me so?'

'Do I constantly entreat you,' said Mrs. Steerforth, 'to speak plainly, in your own natural manner?'

'Oh! then this is not my natural manner?' she rejoined. 'Now you must really bear with me, because I ask for information. We never know ourselves.'

'It has become a second nature,' said Mrs. Steerforth, without any displeasure; 'but I remember,--and so must you, I think,--when your manner was different, Rosa; when it was not so guarded, and was more trustful.'

'I am sure you are right,' she returned; 'and so it is that bad habits grow upon one! Really? Less guarded and more trustful? How can I, imperceptibly, have changed, I wonder! Well, that's very odd! I must study to regain my former self.'

'I wish you would,' said Mrs. Steerforth, with a smile.

'Oh! I really will, you know!' she answered. 'I will learn frankness from--let me see--from James.'

'You cannot learn frankness, Rosa,' said Mrs. Steerforth quickly--for there was always some effect of sarcasm in what Rosa Dartle said, though it was said, as this was, in the most unconscious manner in the world--'in a better school.'

'That I am sure of,' she answered, with uncommon fervour. 'If I am sure

of anything, of course, you know, I am sure of that.'

Mrs. Steerforth appeared to me to regret having been a little nettled; for she presently said, in a kind tone:

'Well, my dear Rosa, we have not heard what it is that you want to be satisfied about?'

'That I want to be satisfied about?' she replied, with provoking coldness. 'Oh! It was only whether people, who are like each other in their moral constitution--is that the phrase?'

'It's as good a phrase as another,' said Steerforth.

'Thank you:--whether people, who are like each other in their moral constitution, are in greater danger than people not so circumstanced, supposing any serious cause of variance to arise between them, of being divided angrily and deeply?'

'I should say yes,' said Steerforth.

'Should you?' she retorted. 'Dear me! Supposing then, for instance--any unlikely thing will do for a supposition--that you and your mother were to have a serious quarrel.'

'My dear Rosa,' interposed Mrs. Steerforth, laughing good-naturedly, 'suggest some other supposition! James and I know our duty to each other better, I pray Heaven!'

'Oh!' said Miss Dartle, nodding her head thoughtfully. 'To be sure. That would prevent it? Why, of course it would. Exactly. Now, I am glad I have been so foolish as to put the case, for it is so very good to know that your duty to each other would prevent it! Thank you very much.'

One other little circumstance connected with Miss Dartle I must not omit; for I had reason to remember it thereafter, when all the irremediable past was rendered plain. During the whole of this day, but especially from this period of it, Steerforth exerted himself with his utmost skill, and that was with his utmost ease, to charm this singular creature into a pleasant and pleased companion. That he should succeed, was no matter of surprise to me. That she should struggle against the fascinating influence of his delightful art--delightful nature I thought it then--did not surprise me either; for I knew that she was sometimes jaundiced and perverse. I saw her features and her manner slowly change; I saw her look at him with growing admiration; I saw her try, more and more faintly, but always angrily, as if she condemned a weakness in herself, to resist the captivating power that he possessed; and finally, I saw her sharp glance soften, and her smile become quite gentle, and I ceased to be afraid of her as I had really been all day, and we all sat about the fire, talking and laughing together, with as little reserve as if we had been children.

Whether it was because we had sat there so long, or because Steerforth was resolved not to lose the advantage he had gained, I do not know; but we did not remain in the dining-room more than five minutes after her departure. 'She is playing her harp,' said Steerforth, softly, at the drawing-room door, 'and nobody but my mother has heard her do that, I believe, these three years.' He said it with a curious smile, which was gone directly; and we went into the room and found her alone.

'Don't get up,' said Steerforth (which she had already done) 'my dear Rosa, don't! Be kind for once, and sing us an Irish song.'

'What do you care for an Irish song?' she returned.

'Much!' said Steerforth. 'Much more than for any other. Here is Daisy,

too, loves music from his soul. Sing us an Irish song, Rosa! and let me sit and listen as I used to do.'

He did not touch her, or the chair from which she had risen, but sat himself near the harp. She stood beside it for some little while, in a curious way, going through the motion of playing it with her right hand, but not sounding it. At length she sat down, and drew it to her with one sudden action, and played and sang.

I don't know what it was, in her touch or voice, that made that song the most unearthly I have ever heard in my life, or can imagine. There was something fearful in the reality of it. It was as if it had never been written, or set to music, but sprung out of passion within her; which found imperfect utterance in the low sounds of her voice, and crouched again when all was still. I was dumb when she leaned beside the harp again, playing it, but not sounding it, with her right hand.

A minute more, and this had roused me from my trance:--Steerforth had left his seat, and gone to her, and had put his arm laughingly about her, and had said, 'Come, Rosa, for the future we will love each other very much!' And she had struck him, and had thrown him off with the fury of a wild cat, and had burst out of the room.

'What is the matter with Rosa?' said Mrs. Steerforth, coming in.

'She has been an angel, mother,' returned Steerforth, 'for a little while; and has run into the opposite extreme, since, by way of compensation.'

'You should be careful not to irritate her, James. Her temper has been soured, remember, and ought not to be tried.'

Rosa did not come back; and no other mention was made of her, until I

went with Steerforth into his room to say Good night. Then he laughed about her, and asked me if I had ever seen such a fierce little piece of incomprehensibility.

I expressed as much of my astonishment as was then capable of expression, and asked if he could guess what it was that she had taken so much amiss, so suddenly.

'Oh, Heaven knows,' said Steerforth. 'Anything you like--or nothing! I told you she took everything, herself included, to a grindstone, and sharpened it. She is an edge-tool, and requires great care in dealing with. She is always dangerous. Good night!'

'Good night!' said I, 'my dear Steerforth! I shall be gone before you wake in the morning. Good night!'

He was unwilling to let me go; and stood, holding me out, with a hand on each of my shoulders, as he had done in my own room.

'Daisy,' he said, with a smile--'for though that's not the name your godfathers and godmothers gave you, it's the name I like best to call you by--and I wish, I wish, I wish, you could give it to me!'

'Why so I can, if I choose,' said I.

'Daisy, if anything should ever separate us, you must think of me at my best, old boy. Come! Let us make that bargain. Think of me at my best, if circumstances should ever part us!'

'You have no best to me, Steerforth,' said I, 'and no worst. You are always equally loved, and cherished in my heart.'

So much compunction for having ever wronged him, even by a shapeless



thought, did I feel within me, that the confession of having done so was rising to my lips. But for the reluctance I had to betray the confidence of Agnes, but for my uncertainty how to approach the subject with no risk of doing so, it would have reached them before he said, 'God bless you, Daisy, and good night!' In my doubt, it did NOT reach them; and we shook hands, and we parted.

I was up with the dull dawn, and, having dressed as quietly as I could, looked into his room. He was fast asleep; lying, easily, with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.

The time came in its season, and that was very soon, when I almost wondered that nothing troubled his repose, as I looked at him. But he slept--let me think of him so again--as I had often seen him sleep at school; and thus, in this silent hour, I left him. --Never more, oh God forgive you, Steerforth! to touch that passive hand in love and friendship. Never, never more!

## CHAPTER 30. A LOSS

I got down to Yarmouth in the evening, and went to the inn. I knew that Peggotty's spare room--my room--was likely to have occupation enough in a little while, if that great Visitor, before whose presence all the living must give place, were not already in the house; so I betook myself to the inn, and dined there, and engaged my bed.

It was ten o'clock when I went out. Many of the shops were shut, and the town was dull. When I came to Omer and Joram's, I found the shutters up, but the shop door standing open. As I could obtain a perspective view of Mr. Omer inside, smoking his pipe by the parlour door, I entered, and

asked him how he was.

'Why, bless my life and soul!' said Mr. Omer, 'how do you find yourself? Take a seat.---Smoke not disagreeable, I hope?'

'By no means,' said I. 'I like it--in somebody else's pipe.'

'What, not in your own, eh?' Mr. Omer returned, laughing. 'All the better, sir. Bad habit for a young man. Take a seat. I smoke, myself, for the asthma.'

Mr. Omer had made room for me, and placed a chair. He now sat down again very much out of breath, gasping at his pipe as if it contained a supply of that necessary, without which he must perish.

'I am sorry to have heard bad news of Mr. Barkis,' said I.

Mr. Omer looked at me, with a steady countenance, and shook his head.

'Do you know how he is tonight?' I asked.

'The very question I should have put to you, sir,' returned Mr. Omer, 'but on account of delicacy. It's one of the drawbacks of our line of business. When a party's ill, we can't ask how the party is.'

The difficulty had not occurred to me; though I had had my apprehensions too, when I went in, of hearing the old tune. On its being mentioned, I recognized it, however, and said as much.

'Yes, yes, you understand,' said Mr. Omer, nodding his head. 'We dursn't do it. Bless you, it would be a shock that the generality of parties mightn't recover, to say "Omer and Joram's compliments, and how do you find yourself this morning?"--or this afternoon--as it may be.'

Mr. Omer and I nodded at each other, and Mr. Omer recruited his wind by the aid of his pipe.

'It's one of the things that cut the trade off from attentions they could often wish to show,' said Mr. Omer. 'Take myself. If I have known Barkis a year, to move to as he went by, I have known him forty years. But I can't go and say, "how is he?"'

I felt it was rather hard on Mr. Omer, and I told him so.

'I'm not more self-interested, I hope, than another man,' said Mr. Omer. 'Look at me! My wind may fail me at any moment, and it ain't likely that, to my own knowledge, I'd be self-interested under such circumstances. I say it ain't likely, in a man who knows his wind will go, when it DOES go, as if a pair of bellows was cut open; and that man a grandfather,' said Mr. Omer.

I said, 'Not at all.'

'It ain't that I complain of my line of business,' said Mr. Omer. 'It ain't that. Some good and some bad goes, no doubt, to all callings. What I wish is, that parties was brought up stronger-minded.'

Mr. Omer, with a very complacent and amiable face, took several puffs in silence; and then said, resuming his first point:

'Accordingly we're obleeged, in ascertaining how Barkis goes on, to limit ourselves to Em'ly. She knows what our real objects are, and she don't have any more alarms or suspicions about us, than if we was so many lambs. Minnie and Joram have just stepped down to the house, in fact (she's there, after hours, helping her aunt a bit), to ask her how he is tonight; and if you was to please to wait till they come back,

they'd give you full partic'lars. Will you take something? A glass of srub and water, now? I smoke on srub and water, myself,' said Mr. Omer, taking up his glass, 'because it's considered softening to the passages, by which this troublesome breath of mine gets into action. But, Lord bless you,' said Mr. Omer, huskily, 'it ain't the passages that's out of order! "Give me breath enough," said I to my daughter Minnie, "and I'll find passages, my dear."'

He really had no breath to spare, and it was very alarming to see him laugh. When he was again in a condition to be talked to, I thanked him for the proffered refreshment, which I declined, as I had just had dinner; and, observing that I would wait, since he was so good as to invite me, until his daughter and his son-in-law came back, I inquired how little Emily was?

'Well, sir,' said Mr. Omer, removing his pipe, that he might rub his chin: 'I tell you truly, I shall be glad when her marriage has taken place.'

'Why so?' I inquired.

'Well, she's unsettled at present,' said Mr. Omer. 'It ain't that she's not as pretty as ever, for she's prettier--I do assure you, she is prettier. It ain't that she don't work as well as ever, for she does. She WAS worth any six, and she IS worth any six. But somehow she wants heart. If you understand,' said Mr. Omer, after rubbing his chin again, and smoking a little, 'what I mean in a general way by the expression, "A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether, my hearties, hurrah!" I should say to you, that that was--in a general way--what I miss in Em'ly.'

Mr. Omer's face and manner went for so much, that I could conscientiously nod my head, as divining his meaning. My quickness of

apprehension seemed to please him, and he went on: 'Now I consider this is principally on account of her being in an unsettled state, you see. We have talked it over a good deal, her uncle and myself, and her sweetheart and myself, after business; and I consider it is principally on account of her being unsettled. You must always recollect of Em'ly,' said Mr. Omer, shaking his head gently, 'that she's a most extraordinary affectionate little thing. The proverb says, "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." Well, I don't know about that. I rather think you may, if you begin early in life. She has made a home out of that old boat, sir, that stone and marble couldn't beat.'

'I am sure she has!' said I.

'To see the clinging of that pretty little thing to her uncle,' said Mr. Omer; 'to see the way she holds on to him, tighter and tighter, and closer and closer, every day, is to see a sight. Now, you know, there's a struggle going on when that's the case. Why should it be made a longer one than is needful?'

I listened attentively to the good old fellow, and acquiesced, with all my heart, in what he said.

'Therefore, I mentioned to them,' said Mr. Omer, in a comfortable, easy-going tone, 'this. I said, "Now, don't consider Em'ly nailed down in point of time, at all. Make it your own time. Her services have been more valuable than was supposed; her learning has been quicker than was supposed; Omer and Joram can run their pen through what remains; and she's free when you wish. If she likes to make any little arrangement, afterwards, in the way of doing any little thing for us at home, very well. If she don't, very well still. We're no losers, anyhow." For--don't you see,' said Mr. Omer, touching me with his pipe, 'it ain't likely that a man so short of breath as myself, and a grandfather too, would go and strain points with a little bit of a blue-eyed blossom,

like her?'

'Not at all, I am certain,' said I.

'Not at all! You're right!' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir, her cousin--you know it's a cousin she's going to be married to?'

'Oh yes,' I replied. 'I know him well.'

'Of course you do,' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir! Her cousin being, as it appears, in good work, and well to do, thanked me in a very manly sort of manner for this (conducting himself altogether, I must say, in a way that gives me a high opinion of him), and went and took as comfortable a little house as you or I could wish to clap eyes on. That little house is now furnished right through, as neat and complete as a doll's parlour; and but for Barkis's illness having taken this bad turn, poor fellow, they would have been man and wife--I dare say, by this time. As it is, there's a postponement.'

'And Emily, Mr. Omer?' I inquired. 'Has she become more settled?'

'Why that, you know,' he returned, rubbing his double chin again, 'can't naturally be expected. The prospect of the change and separation, and all that, is, as one may say, close to her and far away from her, both at once. Barkis's death needn't put it off much, but his lingering might. Anyway, it's an uncertain state of matters, you see.'

'I see,' said I.

'Consequently,' pursued Mr. Omer, 'Em'ly's still a little down, and a little fluttered; perhaps, upon the whole, she's more so than she was. Every day she seems to get fonder and fonder of her uncle, and more loth to part from all of us. A kind word from me brings the tears into her

eyes; and if you was to see her with my daughter Minnie's little girl, you'd never forget it. Bless my heart alive!' said Mr. Omer, pondering, 'how she loves that child!'

Having so favourable an opportunity, it occurred to me to ask Mr. Omer, before our conversation should be interrupted by the return of his daughter and her husband, whether he knew anything of Martha.

'Ah!' he rejoined, shaking his head, and looking very much dejected. 'No good. A sad story, sir, however you come to know it. I never thought there was harm in the girl. I wouldn't wish to mention it before my daughter Minnie--for she'd take me up directly--but I never did. None of us ever did.'

Mr. Omer, hearing his daughter's footstep before I heard it, touched me with his pipe, and shut up one eye, as a caution. She and her husband came in immediately afterwards.

Their report was, that Mr. Barkis was 'as bad as bad could be'; that he was quite unconscious; and that Mr. Chillip had mournfully said in the kitchen, on going away just now, that the College of Physicians, the College of Surgeons, and Apothecaries' Hall, if they were all called in together, couldn't help him. He was past both Colleges, Mr. Chillip said, and the Hall could only poison him.

Hearing this, and learning that Mr. Peggotty was there, I determined to go to the house at once. I bade good night to Mr. Omer, and to Mr. and Mrs. Joram; and directed my steps thither, with a solemn feeling, which made Mr. Barkis quite a new and different creature.

My low tap at the door was answered by Mr. Peggotty. He was not so much surprised to see me as I had expected. I remarked this in Peggotty, too, when she came down; and I have seen it since; and I think, in the

expectation of that dread surprise, all other changes and surprises dwindle into nothing.

I shook hands with Mr. Peggotty, and passed into the kitchen, while he softly closed the door. Little Emily was sitting by the fire, with her hands before her face. Ham was standing near her.

We spoke in whispers; listening, between whiles, for any sound in the room above. I had not thought of it on the occasion of my last visit, but how strange it was to me, now, to miss Mr. Barkis out of the kitchen!

'This is very kind of you, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'It's oncommon kind,' said Ham.

'Em'ly, my dear,' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'See here! Here's Mas'r Davy come! What, cheer up, pretty! Not a wured to Mas'r Davy?'

There was a trembling upon her, that I can see now. The coldness of her hand when I touched it, I can feel yet. Its only sign of animation was to shrink from mine; and then she glided from the chair, and creeping to the other side of her uncle, bowed herself, silently and trembling still, upon his breast.

'It's such a loving art,' said Mr. Peggotty, smoothing her rich hair with his great hard hand, 'that it can't abear the sorrer of this. It's nat'ral in young folk, Mas'r Davy, when they're new to these here trials, and timid, like my little bird,--it's nat'ral.'

She clung the closer to him, but neither lifted up her face, nor spoke a word.



'It's getting late, my dear,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and here's Ham come fur to take you home. Theer! Go along with t'other loving art! What' Em'ly? Eh, my pretty?'

The sound of her voice had not reached me, but he bent his head as if he listened to her, and then said:

'Let you stay with your uncle? Why, you doesn't mean to ask me that! Stay with your uncle, Moppet? When your husband that'll be so soon, is here fur to take you home? Now a person wouldn't think it, fur to see this little thing alongside a rough-weather chap like me,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking round at both of us, with infinite pride; 'but the sea ain't more salt in it than she has fondness in her for her uncle--a foolish little Em'ly!'

'Em'ly's in the right in that, Mas'r Davy!' said Ham. 'Looke here! As Em'ly wishes of it, and as she's hurried and frightened, like, besides, I'll leave her till morning. Let me stay too!'

'No, no,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'You doesn't ought--a married man like you--or what's as good--to take and hull away a day's work. And you doesn't ought to watch and work both. That won't do. You go home and turn in. You ain't afeerd of Em'ly not being took good care on, I know.'

Ham yielded to this persuasion, and took his hat to go. Even when he kissed her--and I never saw him approach her, but I felt that nature had given him the soul of a gentleman--she seemed to cling closer to her uncle, even to the avoidance of her chosen husband. I shut the door after him, that it might cause no disturbance of the quiet that prevailed; and when I turned back, I found Mr. Peggotty still talking to her.

'Now, I'm a going upstairs to tell your aunt as Mas'r Davy's here, and

that'll cheer her up a bit,' he said. 'Sit ye down by the fire, the while, my dear, and warm those mortal cold hands. You doesn't need to be so fearsome, and take on so much. What? You'll go along with me?--Well! come along with me--come! If her uncle was turned out of house and home, and forced to lay down in a dyke, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty, with no less pride than before, 'it's my belief she'd go along with him, now! But there'll be someone else, soon,--someone else, soon, Em'ly!'

Afterwards, when I went upstairs, as I passed the door of my little chamber, which was dark, I had an indistinct impression of her being within it, cast down upon the floor. But, whether it was really she, or whether it was a confusion of the shadows in the room, I don't know now.

I had leisure to think, before the kitchen fire, of pretty little Emily's dread of death--which, added to what Mr. Omer had told me, I took to be the cause of her being so unlike herself--and I had leisure, before Peggotty came down, even to think more leniently of the weakness of it: as I sat counting the ticking of the clock, and deepening my sense of the solemn hush around me. Peggotty took me in her arms, and blessed and thanked me over and over again for being such a comfort to her (that was what she said) in her distress. She then entreated me to come upstairs, sobbing that Mr. Barkis had always liked me and admired me; that he had often talked of me, before he fell into a stupor; and that she believed, in case of his coming to himself again, he would brighten up at sight of me, if he could brighten up at any earthly thing.

The probability of his ever doing so, appeared to me, when I saw him, to be very small. He was lying with his head and shoulders out of bed, in an uncomfortable attitude, half resting on the box which had cost him so much pain and trouble. I learned, that, when he was past creeping out of bed to open it, and past assuring himself of its safety by means of the divining rod I had seen him use, he had required to have it placed on

the chair at the bed-side, where he had ever since embraced it, night and day. His arm lay on it now. Time and the world were slipping from beneath him, but the box was there; and the last words he had uttered were (in an explanatory tone) 'Old clothes!'

'Barkis, my dear!' said Peggotty, almost cheerfully: bending over him, while her brother and I stood at the bed's foot. 'Here's my dear boy--my dear boy, Master Davy, who brought us together, Barkis! That you sent messages by, you know! Won't you speak to Master Davy?'

He was as mute and senseless as the box, from which his form derived the only expression it had.

'He's a going out with the tide,' said Mr. Peggotty to me, behind his hand.

My eyes were dim and so were Mr. Peggotty's; but I repeated in a whisper, 'With the tide?'

'People can't die, along the coast,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'except when the tide's pretty nigh out. They can't be born, unless it's pretty nigh in--not properly born, till flood. He's a going out with the tide. It's ebb at half-arter three, slack water half an hour. If he lives till it turns, he'll hold his own till past the flood, and go out with the next tide.'

We remained there, watching him, a long time--hours. What mysterious influence my presence had upon him in that state of his senses, I shall not pretend to say; but when he at last began to wander feebly, it is certain he was muttering about driving me to school.

'He's coming to himself,' said Peggotty.

Mr. Peggotty touched me, and whispered with much awe and reverence.

'They are both a-going out fast.'

'Barkis, my dear!' said Peggotty.

'C. P. Barkis,' he cried faintly. 'No better woman anywhere!'

'Look! Here's Master Davy!' said Peggotty. For he now opened his eyes.

I was on the point of asking him if he knew me, when he tried to stretch out his arm, and said to me, distinctly, with a pleasant smile:

'Barkis is willin'!'

And, it being low water, he went out with the tide.

## CHAPTER 31. A GREATER LOSS

It was not difficult for me, on Peggotty's solicitation, to resolve to stay where I was, until after the remains of the poor carrier should have made their last journey to Blunderstone. She had long ago bought, out of her own savings, a little piece of ground in our old churchyard near the grave of 'her sweet girl', as she always called my mother; and there they were to rest.

In keeping Peggotty company, and doing all I could for her (little enough at the utmost), I was as grateful, I rejoice to think, as even now I could wish myself to have been. But I am afraid I had a supreme satisfaction, of a personal and professional nature, in taking charge of Mr. Barkis's will, and expounding its contents.

I may claim the merit of having originated the suggestion that the will should be looked for in the box. After some search, it was found in the box, at the bottom of a horse's nose-bag; wherein (besides hay) there was discovered an old gold watch, with chain and seals, which Mr. Barkis had worn on his wedding-day, and which had never been seen before or since; a silver tobacco-stopper, in the form of a leg; an imitation lemon, full of minute cups and saucers, which I have some idea Mr. Barkis must have purchased to present to me when I was a child, and afterwards found himself unable to part with; eighty-seven guineas and a half, in guineas and half-guineas; two hundred and ten pounds, in perfectly clean Bank notes; certain receipts for Bank of England stock; an old horseshoe, a bad shilling, a piece of camphor, and an oyster-shell. From the circumstance of the latter article having been much polished, and displaying prismatic colours on the inside, I conclude that Mr. Barkis had some general ideas about pearls, which never resolved themselves into anything definite.

For years and years, Mr. Barkis had carried this box, on all his journeys, every day. That it might the better escape notice, he had invented a fiction that it belonged to 'Mr. Blackboy', and was 'to be left with Barkis till called for'; a fable he had elaborately written on the lid, in characters now scarcely legible.

He had hoarded, all these years, I found, to good purpose. His property in money amounted to nearly three thousand pounds. Of this he bequeathed the interest of one thousand to Mr. Peggotty for his life; on his decease, the principal to be equally divided between Peggotty, little Emily, and me, or the survivor or survivors of us, share and share alike. All the rest he died possessed of, he bequeathed to Peggotty; whom he left residuary legatee, and sole executrix of that his last will and testament.

I felt myself quite a proctor when I read this document aloud with all possible ceremony, and set forth its provisions, any number of times, to those whom they concerned. I began to think there was more in the Commons than I had supposed. I examined the will with the deepest attention, pronounced it perfectly formal in all respects, made a pencil-mark or so in the margin, and thought it rather extraordinary that I knew so much.

In this abstruse pursuit; in making an account for Peggotty, of all the property into which she had come; in arranging all the affairs in an orderly manner; and in being her referee and adviser on every point, to our joint delight; I passed the week before the funeral. I did not see little Emily in that interval, but they told me she was to be quietly married in a fortnight.

I did not attend the funeral in character, if I may venture to say so. I mean I was not dressed up in a black coat and a streamer, to frighten the birds; but I walked over to Blunderstone early in the morning, and was in the churchyard when it came, attended only by Peggotty and her brother. The mad gentleman looked on, out of my little window; Mr. Chillip's baby wagged its heavy head, and rolled its goggle eyes, at the clergyman, over its nurse's shoulder; Mr. Omer breathed short in the background; no one else was there; and it was very quiet. We walked about the churchyard for an hour, after all was over; and pulled some young leaves from the tree above my mother's grave.

A dread falls on me here. A cloud is lowering on the distant town, towards which I retraced my solitary steps. I fear to approach it. I cannot bear to think of what did come, upon that memorable night; of what must come again, if I go on.

It is no worse, because I write of it. It would be no better, if I stopped my most unwilling hand. It is done. Nothing can undo it; nothing

can make it otherwise than as it was.

My old nurse was to go to London with me next day, on the business of the will. Little Emily was passing that day at Mr. Omer's. We were all to meet in the old boathouse that night. Ham would bring Emily at the usual hour. I would walk back at my leisure. The brother and sister would return as they had come, and be expecting us, when the day closed in, at the fireside.

I parted from them at the wicket-gate, where visionary Strap had rested with Roderick Random's knapsack in the days of yore; and, instead of going straight back, walked a little distance on the road to Lowestoft. Then I turned, and walked back towards Yarmouth. I stayed to dine at a decent alehouse, some mile or two from the Ferry I have mentioned before; and thus the day wore away, and it was evening when I reached it. Rain was falling heavily by that time, and it was a wild night; but there was a moon behind the clouds, and it was not dark.

I was soon within sight of Mr. Peggotty's house, and of the light within it shining through the window. A little floundering across the sand, which was heavy, brought me to the door, and I went in.

It looked very comfortable indeed. Mr. Peggotty had smoked his evening pipe and there were preparations for some supper by and by. The fire was bright, the ashes were thrown up, the locker was ready for little Emily in her old place. In her own old place sat Peggotty, once more, looking (but for her dress) as if she had never left it. She had fallen back, already, on the society of the work-box with St. Paul's upon the lid, the yard-measure in the cottage, and the bit of wax-candle; and there they all were, just as if they had never been disturbed. Mrs. Gummidge appeared to be fretting a little, in her old corner; and consequently looked quite natural, too.

'You're first of the lot, Mas'r Davy!' said Mr. Peggotty with a happy face. 'Doen't keep in that coat, sir, if it's wet.'

'Thank you, Mr. Peggotty,' said I, giving him my outer coat to hang up. 'It's quite dry.'

'So 'tis!' said Mr. Peggotty, feeling my shoulders. 'As a chip! Sit ye down, sir. It ain't o' no use saying welcome to you, but you're welcome, kind and hearty.'

'Thank you, Mr. Peggotty, I am sure of that. Well, Peggotty!' said I, giving her a kiss. 'And how are you, old woman?'

'Ha, ha!' laughed Mr. Peggotty, sitting down beside us, and rubbing his hands in his sense of relief from recent trouble, and in the genuine heartiness of his nature; 'there's not a woman in the wureld, sir--as I tell her--that need to feel more easy in her mind than her! She done her dooty by the departed, and the departed know'd it; and the departed done what was right by her, as she done what was right by the departed;--and--and--and it's all right!'

Mrs. Gummidge groaned.

'Cheer up, my pritty mawther!' said Mr. Peggotty. (But he shook his head aside at us, evidently sensible of the tendency of the late occurrences to recall the memory of the old one.) 'Doen't be down! Cheer up, for your own self, on'y a little bit, and see if a good deal more doen't come nat'ral!'

'Not to me, Dan'l,' returned Mrs. Gummidge. 'Nothink's nat'ral to me but to be lone and lorn.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Peggotty, soothing her sorrows.



'Yes, yes, Dan'l!' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'I ain't a person to live with them as has had money left. Thinks go too contrary with me. I had better be a riddance.'

'Why, how should I ever spend it without you?' said Mr. Peggotty, with an air of serious remonstrance. 'What are you a talking on? Doen't I want you more now, than ever I did?'

'I know'd I was never wanted before!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, with a pitiabie whimper, 'and now I'm told so! How could I expect to be wanted, being so lone and lorn, and so contrary!'

Mr. Peggotty seemed very much shocked at himself for having made a speech capable of this unfeeling construction, but was prevented from replying, by Peggotty's pulling his sleeve, and shaking her head. After looking at Mrs. Gummidge for some moments, in sore distress of mind, he glanced at the Dutch clock, rose, snuffed the candle, and put it in the window.

'Theer!' said Mr. Peggotty, cheerily. 'Theer we are, Missis Gummidge!' Mrs. Gummidge slightly groaned. 'Lighted up, accordin' to custom! You're a wonderin' what that's fur, sir! Well, it's fur our little Em'ly. You see, the path ain't over light or cheerful arter dark; and when I'm here at the hour as she's a comin' home, I puts the light in the winder. That, you see,' said Mr. Peggotty, bending over me with great glee, 'meets two objects. She says, says Em'ly, "Theer's home!" she says. And likewise, says Em'ly, "My uncle's theer!" Fur if I ain't theer, I never have no light showed.'

'You're a baby!' said Peggotty; very fond of him for it, if she thought so.

'Well,' returned Mr. Peggotty, standing with his legs pretty wide apart, and rubbing his hands up and down them in his comfortable satisfaction, as he looked alternately at us and at the fire. 'I doesn't know but I am. Not, you see, to look at.'

'Not azackly,' observed Peggotty.

'No,' laughed Mr. Peggotty, 'not to look at, but to--to consider on, you know. I doesn't care, bless you! Now I tell you. When I go a looking and looking about that theer pritty house of our Em'ly's, I'm--I'm Gormed,' said Mr. Peggotty, with sudden emphasis--'theer! I can't say more--if I doesn't feel as if the littlest things was her, a'most. I takes 'em up and I put 'em down, and I touches of 'em as delicate as if they was our Em'ly. So 'tis with her little bonnets and that. I couldn't see one on 'em rough used a purpose--not fur the whole wureld. There's a babby fur you, in the form of a great Sea Porkypine!' said Mr. Peggotty, relieving his earnestness with a roar of laughter.

Peggotty and I both laughed, but not so loud.

'It's my opinion, you see,' said Mr. Peggotty, with a delighted face, after some further rubbing of his legs, 'as this is along of my havin' played with her so much, and made believe as we was Turks, and French, and sharks, and every wariety of forinners--bless you, yes; and lions and whales, and I doesn't know what all!--when she warn't no higher than my knee. I've got into the way on it, you know. Why, this here candle, now!' said Mr. Peggotty, gleefully holding out his hand towards it, 'I know wery well that arter she's married and gone, I shall put that candle theer, just the same as now. I know wery well that when I'm here o' nights (and where else should I live, bless your arts, whatever fortun' I come into!) and she ain't here or I ain't theer, I shall put the candle in the winder, and sit afore the fire, pretending I'm expecting of her, like I'm a doing now. THERE'S a babby for you,' said

Mr. Peggotty, with another roar, 'in the form of a Sea Porkypine! Why, at the present minute, when I see the candle sparkle up, I says to myself, "She's a looking at it! Em'ly's a coming!" THERE'S a babby for you, in the form of a Sea Porkypine! Right for all that,' said Mr. Peggotty, stopping in his roar, and smiting his hands together; 'fur here she is!'

It was only Ham. The night should have turned more wet since I came in, for he had a large sou'wester hat on, slouched over his face.

'Wheer's Em'ly?' said Mr. Peggotty.

Ham made a motion with his head, as if she were outside. Mr. Peggotty took the light from the window, trimmed it, put it on the table, and was busily stirring the fire, when Ham, who had not moved, said:

'Mas'r Davy, will you come out a minute, and see what Em'ly and me has got to show you?'

We went out. As I passed him at the door, I saw, to my astonishment and fright, that he was deadly pale. He pushed me hastily into the open air, and closed the door upon us. Only upon us two.

'Ham! what's the matter?'

'Mas'r Davy!--' Oh, for his broken heart, how dreadfully he wept!

I was paralysed by the sight of such grief. I don't know what I thought, or what I dreaded. I could only look at him.

'Ham! Poor good fellow! For Heaven's sake, tell me what's the matter!'

'My love, Mas'r Davy--the pride and hope of my art--her that I'd have

died for, and would die for now--she's gone!'

'Gone!'

'Em'ly's run away! Oh, Mas'r Davy, think HOW she's run away, when I pray my good and gracious God to kill her (her that is so dear above all things) sooner than let her come to ruin and disgrace!'

The face he turned up to the troubled sky, the quivering of his clasped hands, the agony of his figure, remain associated with the lonely waste, in my remembrance, to this hour. It is always night there, and he is the only object in the scene.

'You're a scholar,' he said, hurriedly, 'and know what's right and best. What am I to say, indoors? How am I ever to break it to him, Mas'r Davy?'

I saw the door move, and instinctively tried to hold the latch on the outside, to gain a moment's time. It was too late. Mr. Peggotty thrust forth his face; and never could I forget the change that came upon it when he saw us, if I were to live five hundred years.

I remember a great wail and cry, and the women hanging about him, and we all standing in the room; I with a paper in my hand, which Ham had given me; Mr. Peggotty, with his vest torn open, his hair wild, his face and lips quite white, and blood trickling down his bosom (it had sprung from his mouth, I think), looking fixedly at me.

'Read it, sir,' he said, in a low shivering voice. 'Slow, please. I doesn't know as I can understand.'

In the midst of the silence of death, I read thus, from a blotted letter:

"When you, who love me so much better than I ever have deserved, even when my mind was innocent, see this, I shall be far away."

'I shall be far away,' he repeated slowly. 'Stop! Em'ly far away. Well!'

"When I leave my dear home--my dear home--oh, my dear home!--in the morning,"

the letter bore date on the previous night:

"--it will be never to come back, unless he brings me back a lady. This will be found at night, many hours after, instead of me. Oh, if you knew how my heart is torn. If even you, that I have wronged so much, that never can forgive me, could only know what I suffer! I am too wicked to write about myself! Oh, take comfort in thinking that I am so bad. Oh, for mercy's sake, tell uncle that I never loved him half so dear as now. Oh, don't remember how affectionate and kind you have all been to me--don't remember we were ever to be married--but try to think as if I died when I was little, and was buried somewhere. Pray Heaven that I am going away from, have compassion on my uncle! Tell him that I never loved him half so dear. Be his comfort. Love some good girl that will be what I was once to uncle, and be true to you, and worthy of you, and know no shame but me. God bless all! I'll pray for all, often, on my knees. If he don't bring me back a lady, and I don't pray for my own self, I'll pray for all. My parting love to uncle. My last tears, and my last thanks, for uncle!"

That was all.

He stood, long after I had ceased to read, still looking at me. At length I ventured to take his hand, and to entreat him, as well as I could, to endeavour to get some command of himself. He replied, 'I thankee, sir, I thankee!' without moving.

Ham spoke to him. Mr. Peggotty was so far sensible of HIS affliction, that he wrung his hand; but, otherwise, he remained in the same state, and no one dared to disturb him.

Slowly, at last, he moved his eyes from my face, as if he were waking from a vision, and cast them round the room. Then he said, in a low voice:

'Who's the man? I want to know his name.'

Ham glanced at me, and suddenly I felt a shock that struck me back.

'There's a man suspected,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Who is it?'

'Mas'r Davy!' implored Ham. 'Go out a bit, and let me tell him what I must. You doesn't ought to hear it, sir.'

I felt the shock again. I sank down in a chair, and tried to utter some reply; but my tongue was fettered, and my sight was weak.

'I want to know his name!' I heard said once more.

'For some time past,' Ham faltered, 'there's been a servant about here, at odd times. There's been a gen'lm'n too. Both of 'em belonged to one another.'

Mr. Peggotty stood fixed as before, but now looking at him.

'The servant,' pursued Ham, 'was seen along with--our poor girl--last night. He's been in hiding about here, this week or over. He was thought to have gone, but he was hiding. Doen't stay, Mas'r Davy, doen't!'

I felt Peggotty's arm round my neck, but I could not have moved if the house had been about to fall upon me.

'A strange chay and hosses was outside town, this morning, on the Norwich road, a'most afore the day broke,' Ham went on. 'The servant went to it, and come from it, and went to it again. When he went to it again, Em'ly was nigh him. The t'other was inside. He's the man.'

'For the Lord's love,' said Mr. Peggotty, falling back, and putting out his hand, as if to keep off what he dreaded. 'Doen't tell me his name's Steerforth!'

'Mas'r Davy,' exclaimed Ham, in a broken voice, 'it ain't no fault of yourn--and I am far from laying of it to you--but his name is Steerforth, and he's a damned villain!'

Mr. Peggotty uttered no cry, and shed no tear, and moved no more, until he seemed to wake again, all at once, and pulled down his rough coat from its peg in a corner.

'Bear a hand with this! I'm struck of a heap, and can't do it,' he said, impatiently. 'Bear a hand and help me. Well!' when somebody had done so. 'Now give me that theer hat!'

Ham asked him whither he was going.

'I'm a going to seek my niece. I'm a going to seek my Em'ly. I'm a going, first, to stave in that theer boat, and sink it where I would

have drowned him, as I'm a living soul, if I had had one thought of what was in him! As he sat afore me,' he said, wildly, holding out his clenched right hand, 'as he sat afore me, face to face, strike me down dead, but I'd have drowned him, and thought it right!--I'm a going to seek my niece.'

'Where?' cried Ham, interposing himself before the door.

'Anywhere! I'm a going to seek my niece through the wureld. I'm a going to find my poor niece in her shame, and bring her back. No one stop me! I tell you I'm a going to seek my niece!'

'No, no!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, coming between them, in a fit of crying. 'No, no, Dan'l, not as you are now. Seek her in a little while, my lone lorn Dan'l, and that'll be but right! but not as you are now. Sit ye down, and give me your forgiveness for having ever been a worrit to you, Dan'l--what have my contraries ever been to this!--and let us speak a word about them times when she was first an orphan, and when Ham was too, and when I was a poor widder woman, and you took me in. It'll soften your poor heart, Dan'l,' laying her head upon his shoulder, 'and you'll bear your sorrow better; for you know the promise, Dan'l, "As you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me",--and that can never fail under this roof, that's been our shelter for so many, many year!'

He was quite passive now; and when I heard him crying, the impulse that had been upon me to go down upon my knees, and ask their pardon for the desolation I had caused, and curse Steer--forth, yielded to a better feeling, My overcharged heart found the same relief, and I cried too.



What is natural in me, is natural in many other men, I infer, and so I am not afraid to write that I never had loved Steerforth better than when the ties that bound me to him were broken. In the keen distress of the discovery of his unworthiness, I thought more of all that was brilliant in him, I softened more towards all that was good in him, I did more justice to the qualities that might have made him a man of a noble nature and a great name, than ever I had done in the height of my devotion to him. Deeply as I felt my own unconscious part in his pollution of an honest home, I believed that if I had been brought face to face with him, I could not have uttered one reproach. I should have loved him so well still--though he fascinated me no longer--I should have held in so much tenderness the memory of my affection for him, that I think I should have been as weak as a spirit-wounded child, in all but the entertainment of a thought that we could ever be re-united. That thought I never had. I felt, as he had felt, that all was at an end between us. What his remembrances of me were, I have never known--they were light enough, perhaps, and easily dismissed--but mine of him were as the remembrances of a cherished friend, who was dead.

Yes, Steerforth, long removed from the scenes of this poor history! My sorrow may bear involuntary witness against you at the judgement Throne; but my angry thoughts or my reproaches never will, I know!

The news of what had happened soon spread through the town; insomuch that as I passed along the streets next morning, I overheard the people speaking of it at their doors. Many were hard upon her, some few were hard upon him, but towards her second father and her lover there was but one sentiment. Among all kinds of people a respect for them in their distress prevailed, which was full of gentleness and delicacy. The seafaring men kept apart, when those two were seen early, walking with slow steps on the beach; and stood in knots, talking compassionately

among themselves.

It was on the beach, close down by the sea, that I found them. It would have been easy to perceive that they had not slept all last night, even if Peggotty had failed to tell me of their still sitting just as I left them, when it was broad day. They looked worn; and I thought Mr. Peggotty's head was bowed in one night more than in all the years I had known him. But they were both as grave and steady as the sea itself, then lying beneath a dark sky, waveless--yet with a heavy roll upon it, as if it breathed in its rest--and touched, on the horizon, with a strip of silvery light from the unseen sun.

'We have had a mort of talk, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty to me, when we had all three walked a little while in silence, 'of what we ought and doesn't ought to do. But we see our course now.'

I happened to glance at Ham, then looking out to sea upon the distant light, and a frightful thought came into my mind--not that his face was angry, for it was not; I recall nothing but an expression of stern determination in it--that if ever he encountered Steerforth, he would kill him.

'My dooty here, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'is done. I'm a going to seek my--' he stopped, and went on in a firmer voice: 'I'm a going to seek her. That's my dooty evermore.'

He shook his head when I asked him where he would seek her, and inquired if I were going to London tomorrow? I told him I had not gone today, fearing to lose the chance of being of any service to him; but that I was ready to go when he would.

'I'll go along with you, sir,' he rejoined, 'if you're agreeable, tomorrow.'

We walked again, for a while, in silence.

'Ham,' he presently resumed, 'he'll hold to his present work, and go and live along with my sister. The old boat yonder--'

'Will you desert the old boat, Mr. Peggotty?' I gently interposed.

'My station, Mas'r Davy,' he returned, 'ain't there no longer; and if ever a boat foundered, since there was darkness on the face of the deep, that one's gone down. But no, sir, no; I doesn't mean as it should be deserted. Fur from that.'

We walked again for a while, as before, until he explained:

'My wishes is, sir, as it shall look, day and night, winter and summer, as it has always looked, since she fust know'd it. If ever she should come a wandering back, I wouldn't have the old place seem to cast her off, you understand, but seem to tempt her to draw nigher to 't, and to peep in, maybe, like a ghost, out of the wind and rain, through the old winder, at the old seat by the fire. Then, maybe, Mas'r Davy, seein' none but Missis Gummidge there, she might take heart to creep in, trembling; and might come to be laid down in her old bed, and rest her weary head where it was once so gay.'

I could not speak to him in reply, though I tried.

'Every night,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'as reg'lar as the night comes, the candle must be stood in its old pane of glass, that if ever she should see it, it may seem to say "Come back, my child, come back!" If ever there's a knock, Ham (partic'ler a soft knock), arter dark, at your aunt's door, doesn't you go nigh it. Let it be her--not you--that sees my fallen child!'

He walked a little in front of us, and kept before us for some minutes. During this interval, I glanced at Ham again, and observing the same expression on his face, and his eyes still directed to the distant light, I touched his arm.

Twice I called him by his name, in the tone in which I might have tried to rouse a sleeper, before he heeded me. When I at last inquired on what his thoughts were so bent, he replied:

'On what's afore me, Mas'r Davy; and over yon.' 'On the life before you, do you mean?' He had pointed confusedly out to sea.

'Ay, Mas'r Davy. I doen't rightly know how 'tis, but from over yon there seemed to me to come--the end of it like,' looking at me as if he were waking, but with the same determined face.

'What end?' I asked, possessed by my former fear.

'I doen't know,' he said, thoughtfully; 'I was calling to mind that the beginning of it all did take place here--and then the end come. But it's gone! Mas'r Davy,' he added; answering, as I think, my look; 'you han't no call to be afeerd of me: but I'm kiender muddled; I don't fare to feel no matters,'--which was as much as to say that he was not himself, and quite confounded.

Mr. Peggotty stopping for us to join him: we did so, and said no more. The remembrance of this, in connexion with my former thought, however, haunted me at intervals, even until the inexorable end came at its appointed time.

We insensibly approached the old boat, and entered. Mrs. Gummidge, no longer moping in her especial corner, was busy preparing breakfast.

She took Mr. Peggotty's hat, and placed his seat for him, and spoke so comfortably and softly, that I hardly knew her.

'Dan'l, my good man,' said she, 'you must eat and drink, and keep up your strength, for without it you'll do nowt. Try, that's a dear soul! An if I disturb you with my clicketten,' she meant her chattering, 'tell me so, Dan'l, and I won't.'

When she had served us all, she withdrew to the window, where she sedulously employed herself in repairing some shirts and other clothes belonging to Mr. Peggotty, and neatly folding and packing them in an old oilskin bag, such as sailors carry. Meanwhile, she continued talking, in the same quiet manner:

'All times and seasons, you know, Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge, 'I shall be allus here, and everythink will look accordin' to your wishes. I'm a poor scholar, but I shall write to you, odd times, when you're away, and send my letters to Mas'r Davy. Maybe you'll write to me too, Dan'l, odd times, and tell me how you fare to feel upon your lone lorn journies.'

'You'll be a solitary woman heer, I'm afeerd!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'No, no, Dan'l,' she returned, 'I shan't be that. Doen't you mind me. I shall have enough to do to keep a Beein for you' (Mrs. Gummidge meant a home), 'again you come back--to keep a Beein here for any that may hap to come back, Dan'l. In the fine time, I shall set outside the door as I used to do. If any should come nigh, they shall see the old widder woman true to 'em, a long way off.'

What a change in Mrs. Gummidge in a little time! She was another woman. She was so devoted, she had such a quick perception of what it would be well to say, and what it would be well to leave unsaid; she was so forgetful of herself, and so regardful of the sorrow about her, that I

held her in a sort of veneration. The work she did that day! There were many things to be brought up from the beach and stored in the outhouse--as oars, nets, sails, cordage, spars, lobster-pots, bags of ballast, and the like; and though there was abundance of assistance rendered, there being not a pair of working hands on all that shore but would have laboured hard for Mr. Peggotty, and been well paid in being asked to do it, yet she persisted, all day long, in toiling under weights that she was quite unequal to, and fagging to and fro on all sorts of unnecessary errands. As to deploring her misfortunes, she appeared to have entirely lost the recollection of ever having had any. She preserved an equable cheerfulness in the midst of her sympathy, which was not the least astonishing part of the change that had come over her. Querulousness was out of the question. I did not even observe her voice to falter, or a tear to escape from her eyes, the whole day through, until twilight; when she and I and Mr. Peggotty being alone together, and he having fallen asleep in perfect exhaustion, she broke into a half-suppressed fit of sobbing and crying, and taking me to the door, said, 'Ever bless you, Mas'r Davy, be a friend to him, poor dear!' Then, she immediately ran out of the house to wash her face, in order that she might sit quietly beside him, and be found at work there, when he should awake. In short I left her, when I went away at night, the prop and staff of Mr. Peggotty's affliction; and I could not meditate enough upon the lesson that I read in Mrs. Gummidge, and the new experience she unfolded to me.

It was between nine and ten o'clock when, strolling in a melancholy manner through the town, I stopped at Mr. Omer's door. Mr. Omer had taken it so much to heart, his daughter told me, that he had been very low and poorly all day, and had gone to bed without his pipe.

'A deceitful, bad-hearted girl,' said Mrs. Joram. 'There was no good in her, ever!'

'Don't say so,' I returned. 'You don't think so.'

'Yes, I do!' cried Mrs. Joram, angrily.

'No, no,' said I.

Mrs. Joram tossed her head, endeavouring to be very stern and cross; but she could not command her softer self, and began to cry. I was young, to be sure; but I thought much the better of her for this sympathy, and fancied it became her, as a virtuous wife and mother, very well indeed.

'What will she ever do!' sobbed Minnie. 'Where will she go! What will become of her! Oh, how could she be so cruel, to herself and him!'

I remembered the time when Minnie was a young and pretty girl; and I was glad she remembered it too, so feelingly.

'My little Minnie,' said Mrs. Joram, 'has only just now been got to sleep. Even in her sleep she is sobbing for Em'ly. All day long, little Minnie has cried for her, and asked me, over and over again, whether Em'ly was wicked? What can I say to her, when Em'ly tied a ribbon off her own neck round little Minnie's the last night she was here, and laid her head down on the pillow beside her till she was fast asleep! The ribbon's round my little Minnie's neck now. It ought not to be, perhaps, but what can I do? Em'ly is very bad, but they were fond of one another. And the child knows nothing!'

Mrs. Joram was so unhappy that her husband came out to take care of her. Leaving them together, I went home to Peggotty's; more melancholy myself, if possible, than I had been yet.

That good creature--I mean Peggotty--all untired by her late anxieties and sleepless nights, was at her brother's, where she meant to stay till

morning. An old woman, who had been employed about the house for some weeks past, while Peggotty had been unable to attend to it, was the house's only other occupant besides myself. As I had no occasion for her services, I sent her to bed, by no means against her will, and sat down before the kitchen fire a little while, to think about all this.

I was blending it with the deathbed of the late Mr. Barkis, and was driving out with the tide towards the distance at which Ham had looked so singularly in the morning, when I was recalled from my wanderings by a knock at the door. There was a knocker upon the door, but it was not that which made the sound. The tap was from a hand, and low down upon the door, as if it were given by a child.

It made me start as much as if it had been the knock of a footman to a person of distinction. I opened the door; and at first looked down, to my amazement, on nothing but a great umbrella that appeared to be walking about of itself. But presently I discovered underneath it, Miss Mowcher.

I might not have been prepared to give the little creature a very kind reception, if, on her removing the umbrella, which her utmost efforts were unable to shut up, she had shown me the 'volatile' expression of face which had made so great an impression on me at our first and last meeting. But her face, as she turned it up to mine, was so earnest; and when I relieved her of the umbrella (which would have been an inconvenient one for the Irish Giant), she wrung her little hands in such an afflicted manner; that I rather inclined towards her.

'Miss Mowcher!' said I, after glancing up and down the empty street, without distinctly knowing what I expected to see besides; 'how do you come here? What is the matter?' She motioned to me with her short right arm, to shut the umbrella for her; and passing me hurriedly, went into the kitchen. When I had closed the door, and followed, with the umbrella



in my hand, I found her sitting on the corner of the fender--it was a low iron one, with two flat bars at top to stand plates upon--in the shadow of the boiler, swaying herself backwards and forwards, and chafing her hands upon her knees like a person in pain.

Quite alarmed at being the only recipient of this untimely visit, and the only spectator of this portentous behaviour, I exclaimed again, 'Pray tell me, Miss Mowcher, what is the matter! are you ill?'

'My dear young soul,' returned Miss Mowcher, squeezing her hands upon her heart one over the other. 'I am ill here, I am very ill. To think that it should come to this, when I might have known it and perhaps prevented it, if I hadn't been a thoughtless fool!'

Again her large bonnet (very disproportionate to the figure) went backwards and forwards, in her swaying of her little body to and fro; while a most gigantic bonnet rocked, in unison with it, upon the wall.

'I am surprised,' I began, 'to see you so distressed and serious'-when she interrupted me.

'Yes, it's always so!' she said. 'They are all surprised, these inconsiderate young people, fairly and full grown, to see any natural feeling in a little thing like me! They make a plaything of me, use me for their amusement, throw me away when they are tired, and wonder that I feel more than a toy horse or a wooden soldier! Yes, yes, that's the way. The old way!'

'It may be, with others,' I returned, 'but I do assure you it is not with me. Perhaps I ought not to be at all surprised to see you as you are now: I know so little of you. I said, without consideration, what I thought.'

'What can I do?' returned the little woman, standing up, and holding out her arms to show herself. 'See! What I am, my father was; and my sister is; and my brother is. I have worked for sister and brother these many years--hard, Mr. Copperfield--all day. I must live. I do no harm. If there are people so unreflecting or so cruel, as to make a jest of me, what is left for me to do but to make a jest of myself, them, and everything? If I do so, for the time, whose fault is that? Mine?'

No. Not Miss Mowcher's, I perceived.

'If I had shown myself a sensitive dwarf to your false friend,' pursued the little woman, shaking her head at me, with reproachful earnestness, 'how much of his help or good will do you think I should ever have had? If little Mowcher (who had no hand, young gentleman, in the making of herself) addressed herself to him, or the like of him, because of her misfortunes, when do you suppose her small voice would have been heard? Little Mowcher would have as much need to live, if she was the bitterest and dullest of pigmies; but she couldn't do it. No. She might whistle for her bread and butter till she died of Air.'

Miss Mowcher sat down on the fender again, and took out her handkerchief, and wiped her eyes.

'Be thankful for me, if you have a kind heart, as I think you have,' she said, 'that while I know well what I am, I can be cheerful and endure it all. I am thankful for myself, at any rate, that I can find my tiny way through the world, without being beholden to anyone; and that in return for all that is thrown at me, in folly or vanity, as I go along, I can throw bubbles back. If I don't brood over all I want, it is the better for me, and not the worse for anyone. If I am a plaything for you giants, be gentle with me.'

Miss Mowcher replaced her handkerchief in her pocket, looking at me with

very intent expression all the while, and pursued:

'I saw you in the street just now. You may suppose I am not able to walk as fast as you, with my short legs and short breath, and I couldn't overtake you; but I guessed where you came, and came after you. I have been here before, today, but the good woman wasn't at home.'

'Do you know her?' I demanded.

'I know of her, and about her,' she replied, 'from Omer and Joram. I was there at seven o'clock this morning. Do you remember what Steerforth said to me about this unfortunate girl, that time when I saw you both at the inn?'

The great bonnet on Miss Mowcher's head, and the greater bonnet on the wall, began to go backwards and forwards again when she asked this question.

I remembered very well what she referred to, having had it in my thoughts many times that day. I told her so.

'May the Father of all Evil confound him,' said the little woman, holding up her forefinger between me and her sparkling eyes, 'and ten times more confound that wicked servant; but I believed it was YOU who had a boyish passion for her!'

'I?' I repeated.

'Child, child! In the name of blind ill-fortune,' cried Miss Mowcher, wringing her hands impatiently, as she went to and fro again upon the fender, 'why did you praise her so, and blush, and look disturbed?'

I could not conceal from myself that I had done this, though for a

reason very different from her supposition.

'What did I know?' said Miss Mowcher, taking out her handkerchief again, and giving one little stamp on the ground whenever, at short intervals, she applied it to her eyes with both hands at once. 'He was crossing you and wheedling you, I saw; and you were soft wax in his hands, I saw. Had I left the room a minute, when his man told me that "Young Innocence" (so he called you, and you may call him "Old Guilt" all the days of your life) had set his heart upon her, and she was giddy and liked him, but his master was resolved that no harm should come of it--more for your sake than for hers--and that that was their business here? How could I BUT believe him? I saw Steerforth soothe and please you by his praise of her! You were the first to mention her name. You owned to an old admiration of her. You were hot and cold, and red and white, all at once when I spoke to you of her. What could I think--what DID I think--but that you were a young libertine in everything but experience, and had fallen into hands that had experience enough, and could manage you (having the fancy) for your own good? Oh! oh! oh! They were afraid of my finding out the truth,' exclaimed Miss Mowcher, getting off the fender, and trotting up and down the kitchen with her two short arms distressfully lifted up, 'because I am a sharp little thing--I need be, to get through the world at all!--and they deceived me altogether, and I gave the poor unfortunate girl a letter, which I fully believe was the beginning of her ever speaking to Littimer, who was left behind on purpose!'

I stood amazed at the revelation of all this perfidy, looking at Miss Mowcher as she walked up and down the kitchen until she was out of breath: when she sat upon the fender again, and, drying her face with her handkerchief, shook her head for a long time, without otherwise moving, and without breaking silence.

'My country rounds,' she added at length, 'brought me to Norwich, Mr.

Copperfield, the night before last. What I happened to find there, about their secret way of coming and going, without you--which was strange--led to my suspecting something wrong. I got into the coach from London last night, as it came through Norwich, and was here this morning. Oh, oh, oh! too late!

Poor little Mowcher turned so chilly after all her crying and fretting, that she turned round on the fender, putting her poor little wet feet in among the ashes to warm them, and sat looking at the fire, like a large doll. I sat in a chair on the other side of the hearth, lost in unhappy reflections, and looking at the fire too, and sometimes at her.

'I must go,' she said at last, rising as she spoke. 'It's late. You don't mistrust me?'

Meeting her sharp glance, which was as sharp as ever when she asked me, I could not on that short challenge answer no, quite frankly.

'Come!' said she, accepting the offer of my hand to help her over the fender, and looking wistfully up into my face, 'you know you wouldn't mistrust me, if I was a full-sized woman!'

I felt that there was much truth in this; and I felt rather ashamed of myself.

'You are a young man,' she said, nodding. 'Take a word of advice, even from three foot nothing. Try not to associate bodily defects with mental, my good friend, except for a solid reason.'

She had got over the fender now, and I had got over my suspicion. I told her that I believed she had given me a faithful account of herself, and that we had both been hapless instruments in designing hands. She thanked me, and said I was a good fellow.

'Now, mind!' she exclaimed, turning back on her way to the door, and looking shrewdly at me, with her forefinger up again.--'I have some reason to suspect, from what I have heard--my ears are always open; I can't afford to spare what powers I have--that they are gone abroad. But if ever they return, if ever any one of them returns, while I am alive, I am more likely than another, going about as I do, to find it out soon. Whatever I know, you shall know. If ever I can do anything to serve the poor betrayed girl, I will do it faithfully, please Heaven! And Littimer had better have a bloodhound at his back, than little Mowcher!'

I placed implicit faith in this last statement, when I marked the look with which it was accompanied.

'Trust me no more, but trust me no less, than you would trust a full-sized woman,' said the little creature, touching me appealingly on the wrist. 'If ever you see me again, unlike what I am now, and like what I was when you first saw me, observe what company I am in. Call to mind that I am a very helpless and defenceless little thing. Think of me at home with my brother like myself and sister like myself, when my day's work is done. Perhaps you won't, then, be very hard upon me, or surprised if I can be distressed and serious. Good night!'

I gave Miss Mowcher my hand, with a very different opinion of her from that which I had hitherto entertained, and opened the door to let her out. It was not a trifling business to get the great umbrella up, and properly balanced in her grasp; but at last I successfully accomplished this, and saw it go bobbing down the street through the rain, without the least appearance of having anybody underneath it, except when a heavier fall than usual from some over-charged water-spout sent it toppling over, on one side, and discovered Miss Mowcher struggling violently to get it right. After making one or two sallies to her relief, which were rendered futile by the umbrella's hopping on again,

like an immense bird, before I could reach it, I came in, went to bed, and slept till morning.

In the morning I was joined by Mr. Peggotty and by my old nurse, and we went at an early hour to the coach office, where Mrs. Gummidge and Ham were waiting to take leave of us.

'Mas'r Davy,' Ham whispered, drawing me aside, while Mr. Peggotty was stowing his bag among the luggage, 'his life is quite broke up. He doesn't know wheer he's going; he doesn't know--what's afore him; he's bound upon a voyage that'll last, on and off, all the rest of his days, take my wured for 't, unless he finds what he's a seeking of. I am sure you'll be a friend to him, Mas'r Davy?'

'Trust me, I will indeed,' said I, shaking hands with Ham earnestly.

'Thankee. Thankee, very kind, sir. One thing funder. I'm in good employ, you know, Mas'r Davy, and I han't no way now of spending what I gets. Money's of no use to me no more, except to live. If you can lay it out for him, I shall do my work with a better art. Though as to that, sir,' and he spoke very steadily and mildly, 'you're not to think but I shall work at all times, like a man, and act the best that lays in my power!'

I told him I was well convinced of it; and I hinted that I hoped the time might even come, when he would cease to lead the lonely life he naturally contemplated now.

'No, sir,' he said, shaking his head, 'all that's past and over with me, sir. No one can never fill the place that's empty. But you'll bear in mind about the money, as theer's at all times some laying by for him?'

Reminding him of the fact, that Mr. Peggotty derived a steady, though certainly a very moderate income from the bequest of his late

brother-in-law, I promised to do so. We then took leave of each other. I cannot leave him even now, without remembering with a pang, at once his modest fortitude and his great sorrow.

As to Mrs. Gummidge, if I were to endeavour to describe how she ran down the street by the side of the coach, seeing nothing but Mr. Peggotty on the roof, through the tears she tried to repress, and dashing herself against the people who were coming in the opposite direction, I should enter on a task of some difficulty. Therefore I had better leave her sitting on a baker's door-step, out of breath, with no shape at all remaining in her bonnet, and one of her shoes off, lying on the pavement at a considerable distance.

When we got to our journey's end, our first pursuit was to look about for a little lodging for Peggotty, where her brother could have a bed. We were so fortunate as to find one, of a very clean and cheap description, over a chandler's shop, only two streets removed from me. When we had engaged this domicile, I bought some cold meat at an eating-house, and took my fellow-travellers home to tea; a proceeding, I regret to state, which did not meet with Mrs. Crupp's approval, but quite the contrary. I ought to observe, however, in explanation of that lady's state of mind, that she was much offended by Peggotty's tucking up her widow's gown before she had been ten minutes in the place, and setting to work to dust my bedroom. This Mrs. Crupp regarded in the light of a liberty, and a liberty, she said, was a thing she never allowed.

Mr. Peggotty had made a communication to me on the way to London for which I was not unprepared. It was, that he purposed first seeing Mrs. Steerforth. As I felt bound to assist him in this, and also to mediate between them; with the view of sparing the mother's feelings as much as possible, I wrote to her that night. I told her as mildly as I could what his wrong was, and what my own share in his injury. I said he was a



man in very common life, but of a most gentle and upright character; and that I ventured to express a hope that she would not refuse to see him in his heavy trouble. I mentioned two o'clock in the afternoon as the hour of our coming, and I sent the letter myself by the first coach in the morning.

At the appointed time, we stood at the door--the door of that house where I had been, a few days since, so happy: where my youthful confidence and warmth of heart had been yielded up so freely: which was closed against me henceforth: which was now a waste, a ruin.

No Littimer appeared. The pleasanter face which had replaced his, on the occasion of my last visit, answered to our summons, and went before us to the drawing-room. Mrs. Steerforth was sitting there. Rosa Dartle glided, as we went in, from another part of the room and stood behind her chair.

I saw, directly, in his mother's face, that she knew from himself what he had done. It was very pale; and bore the traces of deeper emotion than my letter alone, weakened by the doubts her fondness would have raised upon it, would have been likely to create. I thought her more like him than ever I had thought her; and I felt, rather than saw, that the resemblance was not lost on my companion.

She sat upright in her arm-chair, with a stately, immovable, passionless air, that it seemed as if nothing could disturb. She looked very steadfastly at Mr. Peggotty when he stood before her; and he looked quite as steadfastly at her. Rosa Dartle's keen glance comprehended all of us. For some moments not a word was spoken.

She motioned to Mr. Peggotty to be seated. He said, in a low voice, 'I shouldn't feel it nat'ral, ma'am, to sit down in this house. I'd sooner stand.' And this was succeeded by another silence, which she broke thus:

'I know, with deep regret, what has brought you here. What do you want of me? What do you ask me to do?'

He put his hat under his arm, and feeling in his breast for Emily's letter, took it out, unfolded it, and gave it to her. 'Please to read that, ma'am. That's my niece's hand!'

She read it, in the same stately and impassive way,--untouched by its contents, as far as I could see,--and returned it to him.

'"Unless he brings me back a lady,"' said Mr. Peggotty, tracing out that part with his finger. 'I come to know, ma'am, whether he will keep his wured?'

'No,' she returned.

'Why not?' said Mr. Peggotty.

'It is impossible. He would disgrace himself. You cannot fail to know that she is far below him.'

'Raise her up!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'She is uneducated and ignorant.'

'Maybe she's not; maybe she is,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I think not, ma'am; but I'm no judge of them things. Teach her better!'

'Since you oblige me to speak more plainly, which I am very unwilling to do, her humble connexions would render such a thing impossible, if nothing else did.'

'Hark to this, ma'am,' he returned, slowly and quietly. 'You know what it is to love your child. So do I. If she was a hundred times my child, I couldn't love her more. You doesn't know what it is to lose your child. I do. All the heaps of riches in the wureld would be nowt to me (if they was mine) to buy her back! But, save her from this disgrace, and she shall never be disgraced by us. Not one of us that she's growed up among, not one of us that's lived along with her and had her for their all in all, these many year, will ever look upon her pritty face again. We'll be content to let her be; we'll be content to think of her, far off, as if she was underneath another sun and sky; we'll be content to trust her to her husband,--to her little children, p'raps,--and bide the time when all of us shall be alike in quality afore our God!'

The rugged eloquence with which he spoke, was not devoid of all effect. She still preserved her proud manner, but there was a touch of softness in her voice, as she answered:

'I justify nothing. I make no counter-accusations. But I am sorry to repeat, it is impossible. Such a marriage would irretrievably blight my son's career, and ruin his prospects. Nothing is more certain than that it never can take place, and never will. If there is any other compensation--'

'I am looking at the likeness of the face,' interrupted Mr. Peggotty, with a steady but a kindling eye, 'that has looked at me, in my home, at my fireside, in my boat--wheer not?---smiling and friendly, when it was so treacherous, that I go half wild when I think of it. If the likeness of that face don't turn to burning fire, at the thought of offering money to me for my child's blight and ruin, it's as bad. I doesn't know, being a lady's, but what it's worse.'

She changed now, in a moment. An angry flush overspread her features; and she said, in an intolerant manner, grasping the arm-chair tightly

with her hands:

'What compensation can you make to ME for opening such a pit between me and my son? What is your love to mine? What is your separation to ours?'

Miss Dartle softly touched her, and bent down her head to whisper, but she would not hear a word.

'No, Rosa, not a word! Let the man listen to what I say! My son, who has been the object of my life, to whom its every thought has been devoted, whom I have gratified from a child in every wish, from whom I have had no separate existence since his birth,--to take up in a moment with a miserable girl, and avoid me! To repay my confidence with systematic deception, for her sake, and quit me for her! To set this wretched fancy, against his mother's claims upon his duty, love, respect, gratitude--claims that every day and hour of his life should have strengthened into ties that nothing could be proof against! Is this no injury?'

Again Rosa Dartle tried to soothe her; again ineffectually.

'I say, Rosa, not a word! If he can stake his all upon the lightest object, I can stake my all upon a greater purpose. Let him go where he will, with the means that my love has secured to him! Does he think to reduce me by long absence? He knows his mother very little if he does. Let him put away his whim now, and he is welcome back. Let him not put her away now, and he never shall come near me, living or dying, while I can raise my hand to make a sign against it, unless, being rid of her for ever, he comes humbly to me and begs for my forgiveness. This is my right. This is the acknowledgement I WILL HAVE. This is the separation that there is between us! And is this,' she added, looking at her visitor with the proud intolerant air with which she had begun, 'no injury?'

While I heard and saw the mother as she said these words, I seemed to hear and see the son, defying them. All that I had ever seen in him of an unyielding, wilful spirit, I saw in her. All the understanding that I had now of his misdirected energy, became an understanding of her character too, and a perception that it was, in its strongest springs, the same.

She now observed to me, aloud, resuming her former restraint, that it was useless to hear more, or to say more, and that she begged to put an end to the interview. She rose with an air of dignity to leave the room, when Mr. Peggotty signified that it was needless.

'Doen't fear me being any hindrance to you, I have no more to say, ma'am,' he remarked, as he moved towards the door. 'I come beer with no hope, and I take away no hope. I have done what I thowt should be done, but I never looked fur any good to come of my stan'ning where I do. This has been too evil a house fur me and mine, fur me to be in my right senses and expect it.'

With this, we departed; leaving her standing by her elbow-chair, a picture of a noble presence and a handsome face.

We had, on our way out, to cross a paved hall, with glass sides and roof, over which a vine was trained. Its leaves and shoots were green then, and the day being sunny, a pair of glass doors leading to the garden were thrown open. Rosa Dartle, entering this way with a noiseless step, when we were close to them, addressed herself to me:

'You do well,' she said, 'indeed, to bring this fellow here!'

Such a concentration of rage and scorn as darkened her face, and flashed in her jet-black eyes, I could not have thought compressible even into

that face. The scar made by the hammer was, as usual in this excited state of her features, strongly marked. When the throbbing I had seen before, came into it as I looked at her, she absolutely lifted up her hand, and struck it.

'This is a fellow,' she said, 'to champion and bring here, is he not? You are a true man!'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'you are surely not so unjust as to condemn ME!'

'Why do you bring division between these two mad creatures?' she returned. 'Don't you know that they are both mad with their own self-will and pride?'

'Is it my doing?' I returned.

'Is it your doing!' she retorted. 'Why do you bring this man here?'

'He is a deeply-injured man, Miss Dartle,' I replied. 'You may not know it.'

'I know that James Steerforth,' she said, with her hand on her bosom, as if to prevent the storm that was raging there, from being loud, 'has a false, corrupt heart, and is a traitor. But what need I know or care about this fellow, and his common niece?'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'you deepen the injury. It is sufficient already. I will only say, at parting, that you do him a great wrong.'

'I do him no wrong,' she returned. 'They are a depraved, worthless set. I would have her whipped!'

Mr. Peggotty passed on, without a word, and went out at the door.

'Oh, shame, Miss Dartle! shame!' I said indignantly. 'How can you bear to trample on his undeserved affliction!'

'I would trample on them all,' she answered. 'I would have his house pulled down. I would have her branded on the face, dressed in rags, and cast out in the streets to starve. If I had the power to sit in judgement on her, I would see it done. See it done? I would do it! I detest her. If I ever could reproach her with her infamous condition, I would go anywhere to do so. If I could hunt her to her grave, I would. If there was any word of comfort that would be a solace to her in her dying hour, and only I possessed it, I wouldn't part with it for Life itself.'

The mere vehemence of her words can convey, I am sensible, but a weak impression of the passion by which she was possessed, and which made itself articulate in her whole figure, though her voice, instead of being raised, was lower than usual. No description I could give of her would do justice to my recollection of her, or to her entire deliverance of herself to her anger. I have seen passion in many forms, but I have never seen it in such a form as that.

When I joined Mr. Peggotty, he was walking slowly and thoughtfully down the hill. He told me, as soon as I came up with him, that having now discharged his mind of what he had purposed doing in London, he meant 'to set out on his travels', that night. I asked him where he meant to go? He only answered, 'I'm a going, sir, to seek my niece.'

We went back to the little lodging over the chandler's shop, and there I found an opportunity of repeating to Peggotty what he had said to me. She informed me, in return, that he had said the same to her that morning. She knew no more than I did, where he was going, but she

thought he had some project shaped out in his mind.

I did not like to leave him, under such circumstances, and we all three dined together off a beefsteak pie--which was one of the many good things for which Peggotty was famous--and which was curiously flavoured on this occasion, I recollect well, by a miscellaneous taste of tea, coffee, butter, bacon, cheese, new loaves, firewood, candles, and walnut ketchup, continually ascending from the shop. After dinner we sat for an hour or so near the window, without talking much; and then Mr. Peggotty got up, and brought his oilskin bag and his stout stick, and laid them on the table.

He accepted, from his sister's stock of ready money, a small sum on account of his legacy; barely enough, I should have thought, to keep him for a month. He promised to communicate with me, when anything befell him; and he slung his bag about him, took his hat and stick, and bade us both 'Good-bye!'

'All good attend you, dear old woman,' he said, embracing Peggotty, 'and you too, Mas'r Davy!' shaking hands with me. 'I'm a-going to seek her, fur and wide. If she should come home while I'm away--but ah, that ain't like to be!--or if I should bring her back, my meaning is, that she and me shall live and die where no one can't reproach her. If any hurt should come to me, remember that the last words I left for her was, "My unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her!"'

He said this solemnly, bare-headed; then, putting on his hat, he went down the stairs, and away. We followed to the door. It was a warm, dusty evening, just the time when, in the great main thoroughfare out of which that by-way turned, there was a temporary lull in the eternal tread of feet upon the pavement, and a strong red sunshine. He turned, alone, at the corner of our shady street, into a glow of light, in which we lost him.



Rarely did that hour of the evening come, rarely did I wake at night, rarely did I look up at the moon, or stars, or watch the falling rain, or hear the wind, but I thought of his solitary figure toiling on, poor pilgrim, and recalled the words:

'I'm a going to seek her, fur and wide. If any hurt should come to me, remember that the last words I left for her was, "My unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her!"'

### CHAPTER 33. BLISSFUL

All this time, I had gone on loving Dora, harder than ever. Her idea was my refuge in disappointment and distress, and made some amends to me, even for the loss of my friend. The more I pitied myself, or pitied others, the more I sought for consolation in the image of Dora. The greater the accumulation of deceit and trouble in the world, the brighter and the purer shone the star of Dora high above the world. I don't think I had any definite idea where Dora came from, or in what degree she was related to a higher order of beings; but I am quite sure I should have scouted the notion of her being simply human, like any other young lady, with indignation and contempt.

If I may so express it, I was steeped in Dora. I was not merely over head and ears in love with her, but I was saturated through and through. Enough love might have been wrung out of me, metaphorically speaking, to drown anybody in; and yet there would have remained enough within me, and all over me, to pervade my entire existence.

The first thing I did, on my own account, when I came back, was to take

a night-walk to Norwood, and, like the subject of a venerable riddle of my childhood, to go 'round and round the house, without ever touching the house', thinking about Dora. I believe the theme of this incomprehensible conundrum was the moon. No matter what it was, I, the moon-struck slave of Dora, perambulated round and round the house and garden for two hours, looking through crevices in the palings, getting my chin by dint of violent exertion above the rusty nails on the top, blowing kisses at the lights in the windows, and romantically calling on the night, at intervals, to shield my Dora--I don't exactly know what from, I suppose from fire. Perhaps from mice, to which she had a great objection.

My love was so much in my mind and it was so natural to me to confide in Peggotty, when I found her again by my side of an evening with the old set of industrial implements, busily making the tour of my wardrobe, that I imparted to her, in a sufficiently roundabout way, my great secret. Peggotty was strongly interested, but I could not get her into my view of the case at all. She was audaciously prejudiced in my favour, and quite unable to understand why I should have any misgivings, or be low-spirited about it. 'The young lady might think herself well off,' she observed, 'to have such a beau. And as to her Pa,' she said, 'what did the gentleman expect, for gracious sake!'

I observed, however, that Mr. Spenlow's proctorial gown and stiff cravat took Peggotty down a little, and inspired her with a greater reverence for the man who was gradually becoming more and more etherealized in my eyes every day, and about whom a reflected radiance seemed to me to beam when he sat erect in Court among his papers, like a little lighthouse in a sea of stationery. And by the by, it used to be uncommonly strange to me to consider, I remember, as I sat in Court too, how those dim old judges and doctors wouldn't have cared for Dora, if they had known her; how they wouldn't have gone out of their senses with rapture, if marriage with Dora had been proposed to them; how Dora might have sung,

and played upon that glorified guitar, until she led me to the verge of madness, yet not have tempted one of those slow-goers an inch out of his road!

I despised them, to a man. Frozen-out old gardeners in the flower-beds of the heart, I took a personal offence against them all. The Bench was nothing to me but an insensible blunderer. The Bar had no more tenderness or poetry in it, than the bar of a public-house.

Taking the management of Peggotty's affairs into my own hands, with no little pride, I proved the will, and came to a settlement with the Legacy Duty-office, and took her to the Bank, and soon got everything into an orderly train. We varied the legal character of these proceedings by going to see some perspiring Wax-work, in Fleet Street (melted, I should hope, these twenty years); and by visiting Miss Linwood's Exhibition, which I remember as a Mausoleum of needlework, favourable to self-examination and repentance; and by inspecting the Tower of London; and going to the top of St. Paul's. All these wonders afforded Peggotty as much pleasure as she was able to enjoy, under existing circumstances: except, I think, St. Paul's, which, from her long attachment to her work-box, became a rival of the picture on the lid, and was, in some particulars, vanquished, she considered, by that work of art.

Peggotty's business, which was what we used to call 'common-form business' in the Commons (and very light and lucrative the common-form business was), being settled, I took her down to the office one morning to pay her bill. Mr. Spenlow had stepped out, old Tiffey said, to get a gentleman sworn for a marriage licence; but as I knew he would be back directly, our place lying close to the Surrogate's, and to the Vicar-General's office too, I told Peggotty to wait.

We were a little like undertakers, in the Commons, as regarded Probate

transactions; generally making it a rule to look more or less cut up, when we had to deal with clients in mourning. In a similar feeling of delicacy, we were always blithe and light-hearted with the licence clients. Therefore I hinted to Peggotty that she would find Mr. Spenlow much recovered from the shock of Mr. Barkis's decease; and indeed he came in like a bridegroom.

But neither Peggotty nor I had eyes for him, when we saw, in company with him, Mr. Murdstone. He was very little changed. His hair looked as thick, and was certainly as black, as ever; and his glance was as little to be trusted as of old.

'Ah, Copperfield?' said Mr. Spenlow. 'You know this gentleman, I believe?'

I made my gentleman a distant bow, and Peggotty barely recognized him. He was, at first, somewhat disconcerted to meet us two together; but quickly decided what to do, and came up to me.

'I hope,' he said, 'that you are doing well?'

'It can hardly be interesting to you,' said I. 'Yes, if you wish to know.'

We looked at each other, and he addressed himself to Peggotty.

'And you,' said he. 'I am sorry to observe that you have lost your husband.'

'It's not the first loss I have had in my life, Mr. Murdstone,' replied Peggotty, trembling from head to foot. 'I am glad to hope that there is nobody to blame for this one,--nobody to answer for it.'

'Ha!' said he; 'that's a comfortable reflection. You have done your duty?'

'I have not worn anybody's life away,' said Peggotty, 'I am thankful to think! No, Mr. Murdstone, I have not worried and frightened any sweet creetur to an early grave!'

He eyed her gloomily--remorsefully I thought--for an instant; and said, turning his head towards me, but looking at my feet instead of my face:

'We are not likely to encounter soon again;--a source of satisfaction to us both, no doubt, for such meetings as this can never be agreeable. I do not expect that you, who always rebelled against my just authority, exerted for your benefit and reformation, should owe me any good-will now. There is an antipathy between us--'

'An old one, I believe?' said I, interrupting him.

He smiled, and shot as evil a glance at me as could come from his dark eyes.

'It rankled in your baby breast,' he said. 'It embittered the life of your poor mother. You are right. I hope you may do better, yet; I hope you may correct yourself.'

Here he ended the dialogue, which had been carried on in a low voice, in a corner of the outer office, by passing into Mr. Spenlow's room, and saying aloud, in his smoothest manner:

'Gentlemen of Mr. Spenlow's profession are accustomed to family differences, and know how complicated and difficult they always are!' With that, he paid the money for his licence; and, receiving it neatly folded from Mr. Spenlow, together with a shake of the hand, and a polite

wish for his happiness and the lady's, went out of the office.

I might have had more difficulty in constraining myself to be silent under his words, if I had had less difficulty in impressing upon Peggotty (who was only angry on my account, good creature!) that we were not in a place for recrimination, and that I besought her to hold her peace. She was so unusually roused, that I was glad to compound for an affectionate hug, elicited by this revival in her mind of our old injuries, and to make the best I could of it, before Mr. Spenlow and the clerks.

Mr. Spenlow did not appear to know what the connexion between Mr. Murdstone and myself was; which I was glad of, for I could not bear to acknowledge him, even in my own breast, remembering what I did of the history of my poor mother. Mr. Spenlow seemed to think, if he thought anything about the matter, that my aunt was the leader of the state party in our family, and that there was a rebel party commanded by somebody else--so I gathered at least from what he said, while we were waiting for Mr. Tiffey to make out Peggotty's bill of costs.

'Miss Trotwood,' he remarked, 'is very firm, no doubt, and not likely to give way to opposition. I have an admiration for her character, and I may congratulate you, Copperfield, on being on the right side. Differences between relations are much to be deplored--but they are extremely general--and the great thing is, to be on the right side': meaning, I take it, on the side of the moneyed interest.

'Rather a good marriage this, I believe?' said Mr. Spenlow.

I explained that I knew nothing about it.

'Indeed!' he said. 'Speaking from the few words Mr. Murdstone dropped--as a man frequently does on these occasions--and from what Miss

Murdstone let fall, I should say it was rather a good marriage.'

'Do you mean that there is money, sir?' I asked.

'Yes,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'I understand there's money. Beauty too, I am told.'

'Indeed! Is his new wife young?'

'Just of age,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'So lately, that I should think they had been waiting for that.'

'Lord deliver her!' said Peggotty. So very emphatically and unexpectedly, that we were all three discomposed; until Tiffey came in with the bill.

Old Tiffey soon appeared, however, and handed it to Mr. Spenlow, to look over. Mr. Spenlow, settling his chin in his cravat and rubbing it softly, went over the items with a deprecatory air--as if it were all Jorkins's doing--and handed it back to Tiffey with a bland sigh.

'Yes,' he said. 'That's right. Quite right. I should have been extremely happy, Copperfield, to have limited these charges to the actual expenditure out of pocket, but it is an irksome incident in my professional life, that I am not at liberty to consult my own wishes. I have a partner--Mr. Jorkins.'

As he said this with a gentle melancholy, which was the next thing to making no charge at all, I expressed my acknowledgements on Peggotty's behalf, and paid Tiffey in banknotes. Peggotty then retired to her lodging, and Mr. Spenlow and I went into Court, where we had a divorce-suit coming on, under an ingenious little statute (repealed now, I believe, but in virtue of which I have seen several marriages

annulled), of which the merits were these. The husband, whose name was Thomas Benjamin, had taken out his marriage licence as Thomas only; suppressing the Benjamin, in case he should not find himself as comfortable as he expected. NOT finding himself as comfortable as he expected, or being a little fatigued with his wife, poor fellow, he now came forward, by a friend, after being married a year or two, and declared that his name was Thomas Benjamin, and therefore he was not married at all. Which the Court confirmed, to his great satisfaction.

I must say that I had my doubts about the strict justice of this, and was not even frightened out of them by the bushel of wheat which reconciles all anomalies. But Mr. Spenlow argued the matter with me. He said, Look at the world, there was good and evil in that; look at the ecclesiastical law, there was good and evil in THAT. It was all part of a system. Very good. There you were!

I had not the hardihood to suggest to Dora's father that possibly we might even improve the world a little, if we got up early in the morning, and took off our coats to the work; but I confessed that I thought we might improve the Commons. Mr. Spenlow replied that he would particularly advise me to dismiss that idea from my mind, as not being worthy of my gentlemanly character; but that he would be glad to hear from me of what improvement I thought the Commons susceptible?

Taking that part of the Commons which happened to be nearest to us--for our man was unmarried by this time, and we were out of Court, and strolling past the Prerogative Office--I submitted that I thought the Prerogative Office rather a queerly managed institution. Mr. Spenlow inquired in what respect? I replied, with all due deference to his experience (but with more deference, I am afraid, to his being Dora's father), that perhaps it was a little nonsensical that the Registry of that Court, containing the original wills of all persons leaving effects within the immense province of Canterbury, for three whole centuries,



should be an accidental building, never designed for the purpose, leased by the registrars for their own private emolument, unsafe, not even ascertained to be fire-proof, choked with the important documents it held, and positively, from the roof to the basement, a mercenary speculation of the registrars, who took great fees from the public, and crammed the public's wills away anyhow and anywhere, having no other object than to get rid of them cheaply. That, perhaps, it was a little unreasonable that these registrars in the receipt of profits amounting to eight or nine thousand pounds a year (to say nothing of the profits of the deputy registrars, and clerks of seats), should not be obliged to spend a little of that money, in finding a reasonably safe place for the important documents which all classes of people were compelled to hand over to them, whether they would or no. That, perhaps, it was a little unjust, that all the great offices in this great office should be magnificent sinecures, while the unfortunate working-clerks in the cold dark room upstairs were the worst rewarded, and the least considered men, doing important services, in London. That perhaps it was a little indecent that the principal registrar of all, whose duty it was to find the public, constantly resorting to this place, all needful accommodation, should be an enormous sinecurist in virtue of that post (and might be, besides, a clergyman, a pluralist, the holder of a staff in a cathedral, and what not),--while the public was put to the inconvenience of which we had a specimen every afternoon when the office was busy, and which we knew to be quite monstrous. That, perhaps, in short, this Prerogative Office of the diocese of Canterbury was altogether such a pestilent job, and such a pernicious absurdity, that but for its being squeezed away in a corner of St. Paul's Churchyard, which few people knew, it must have been turned completely inside out, and upside down, long ago.

Mr. Spenslow smiled as I became modestly warm on the subject, and then argued this question with me as he had argued the other. He said, what was it after all? It was a question of feeling. If the public felt

that their wills were in safe keeping, and took it for granted that the office was not to be made better, who was the worse for it? Nobody. Who was the better for it? All the Sinecurists. Very well. Then the good predominated. It might not be a perfect system; nothing was perfect; but what he objected to, was, the insertion of the wedge. Under the Prerogative Office, the country had been glorious. Insert the wedge into the Prerogative Office, and the country would cease to be glorious. He considered it the principle of a gentleman to take things as he found them; and he had no doubt the Prerogative Office would last our time. I deferred to his opinion, though I had great doubts of it myself. I find he was right, however; for it has not only lasted to the present moment, but has done so in the teeth of a great parliamentary report made (not too willingly) eighteen years ago, when all these objections of mine were set forth in detail, and when the existing stowage for wills was described as equal to the accumulation of only two years and a half more. What they have done with them since; whether they have lost many, or whether they sell any, now and then, to the butter shops; I don't know. I am glad mine is not there, and I hope it may not go there, yet awhile.

I have set all this down, in my present blissful chapter, because here it comes into its natural place. Mr. Spenslow and I falling into this conversation, prolonged it and our saunter to and fro, until we diverged into general topics. And so it came about, in the end, that Mr. Spenslow told me this day week was Dora's birthday, and he would be glad if I would come down and join a little picnic on the occasion. I went out of my senses immediately; became a mere driveller next day, on receipt of a little lace-edged sheet of note-paper, 'Favoured by papa. To remind'; and passed the intervening period in a state of dotage.

I think I committed every possible absurdity in the way of preparation for this blessed event. I turn hot when I remember the cravat I bought. My boots might be placed in any collection of instruments of torture.

I provided, and sent down by the Norwood coach the night before, a delicate little hamper, amounting in itself, I thought, almost to a declaration. There were crackers in it with the tenderest mottoes that could be got for money. At six in the morning, I was in Covent Garden Market, buying a bouquet for Dora. At ten I was on horseback (I hired a gallant grey, for the occasion), with the bouquet in my hat, to keep it fresh, trotting down to Norwood.

I suppose that when I saw Dora in the garden and pretended not to see her, and rode past the house pretending to be anxiously looking for it, I committed two small fooleries which other young gentlemen in my circumstances might have committed--because they came so very natural to me. But oh! when I DID find the house, and DID dismount at the garden-gate, and drag those stony-hearted boots across the lawn to Dora sitting on a garden-seat under a lilac tree, what a spectacle she was, upon that beautiful morning, among the butterflies, in a white chip bonnet and a dress of celestial blue! There was a young lady with her--comparatively stricken in years--almost twenty, I should say. Her name was Miss Mills. And Dora called her Julia. She was the bosom friend of Dora. Happy Miss Mills!

Jip was there, and Jip WOULD bark at me again. When I presented my bouquet, he gnashed his teeth with jealousy. Well he might. If he had the least idea how I adored his mistress, well he might!

'Oh, thank you, Mr. Copperfield! What dear flowers!' said Dora.

I had had an intention of saying (and had been studying the best form of words for three miles) that I thought them beautiful before I saw them so near HER. But I couldn't manage it. She was too bewildering. To see her lay the flowers against her little dimpled chin, was to lose all presence of mind and power of language in a feeble ecstasy. I wonder I didn't say, 'Kill me, if you have a heart, Miss Mills. Let me die here!'

Then Dora held my flowers to Jip to smell. Then Jip growled, and wouldn't smell them. Then Dora laughed, and held them a little closer to Jip, to make him. Then Jip laid hold of a bit of geranium with his teeth, and worried imaginary cats in it. Then Dora beat him, and pouted, and said, 'My poor beautiful flowers!' as compassionately, I thought, as if Jip had laid hold of me. I wished he had!

'You'll be so glad to hear, Mr. Copperfield,' said Dora, 'that that cross Miss Murdstone is not here. She has gone to her brother's marriage, and will be away at least three weeks. Isn't that delightful?'

I said I was sure it must be delightful to her, and all that was delightful to her was delightful to me. Miss Mills, with an air of superior wisdom and benevolence, smiled upon us.

'She is the most disagreeable thing I ever saw,' said Dora. 'You can't believe how ill-tempered and shocking she is, Julia.'

'Yes, I can, my dear!' said Julia.

'YOU can, perhaps, love,' returned Dora, with her hand on Julia's.

'Forgive my not excepting you, my dear, at first.'

I learnt, from this, that Miss Mills had had her trials in the course of a chequered existence; and that to these, perhaps, I might refer that wise benignity of manner which I had already noticed. I found, in the course of the day, that this was the case: Miss Mills having been unhappy in a misplaced affection, and being understood to have retired from the world on her awful stock of experience, but still to take a calm interest in the unblighted hopes and loves of youth.

But now Mr. Spenlow came out of the house, and Dora went to him,

saying, 'Look, papa, what beautiful flowers!' And Miss Mills smiled thoughtfully, as who should say, 'Ye Mayflies, enjoy your brief existence in the bright morning of life!' And we all walked from the lawn towards the carriage, which was getting ready.

I shall never have such a ride again. I have never had such another. There were only those three, their hamper, my hamper, and the guitar-case, in the phaeton; and, of course, the phaeton was open; and I rode behind it, and Dora sat with her back to the horses, looking towards me. She kept the bouquet close to her on the cushion, and wouldn't allow Jip to sit on that side of her at all, for fear he should crush it. She often carried it in her hand, often refreshed herself with its fragrance. Our eyes at those times often met; and my great astonishment is that I didn't go over the head of my gallant grey into the carriage.

There was dust, I believe. There was a good deal of dust, I believe. I have a faint impression that Mr. Spenlow remonstrated with me for riding in it; but I knew of none. I was sensible of a mist of love and beauty about Dora, but of nothing else. He stood up sometimes, and asked me what I thought of the prospect. I said it was delightful, and I dare say it was; but it was all Dora to me. The sun shone Dora, and the birds sang Dora. The south wind blew Dora, and the wild flowers in the hedges were all Doras, to a bud. My comfort is, Miss Mills understood me. Miss Mills alone could enter into my feelings thoroughly.

I don't know how long we were going, and to this hour I know as little where we went. Perhaps it was near Guildford. Perhaps some Arabian-night magician, opened up the place for the day, and shut it up for ever when we came away. It was a green spot, on a hill, carpeted with soft turf. There were shady trees, and heather, and, as far as the eye could see, a rich landscape.

It was a trying thing to find people here, waiting for us; and my jealousy, even of the ladies, knew no bounds. But all of my own sex--especially one impostor, three or four years my elder, with a red whisker, on which he established an amount of presumption not to be endured--were my mortal foes.

We all unpacked our baskets, and employed ourselves in getting dinner ready. Red Whisker pretended he could make a salad (which I don't believe), and obtruded himself on public notice. Some of the young ladies washed the lettuces for him, and sliced them under his directions. Dora was among these. I felt that fate had pitted me against this man, and one of us must fall.

Red Whisker made his salad (I wondered how they could eat it. Nothing should have induced ME to touch it!) and voted himself into the charge of the wine-cellar, which he constructed, being an ingenious beast, in the hollow trunk of a tree. By and by, I saw him, with the majority of a lobster on his plate, eating his dinner at the feet of Dora!

I have but an indistinct idea of what happened for some time after this baleful object presented itself to my view. I was very merry, I know; but it was hollow merriment. I attached myself to a young creature in pink, with little eyes, and flirted with her desperately. She received my attentions with favour; but whether on my account solely, or because she had any designs on Red Whisker, I can't say. Dora's health was drunk. When I drank it, I affected to interrupt my conversation for that purpose, and to resume it immediately afterwards. I caught Dora's eye as I bowed to her, and I thought it looked appealing. But it looked at me over the head of Red Whisker, and I was adamant.

The young creature in pink had a mother in green; and I rather think the latter separated us from motives of policy. Howbeit, there was a general breaking up of the party, while the remnants of the dinner were being

put away; and I strolled off by myself among the trees, in a raging and remorseful state. I was debating whether I should pretend that I was not well, and fly--I don't know where--upon my gallant grey, when Dora and Miss Mills met me.

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Miss Mills, 'you are dull.'

I begged her pardon. Not at all.

'And Dora,' said Miss Mills, 'YOU are dull.'

Oh dear no! Not in the least.

'Mr. Copperfield and Dora,' said Miss Mills, with an almost venerable air. 'Enough of this. Do not allow a trivial misunderstanding to wither the blossoms of spring, which, once put forth and blighted, cannot be renewed. I speak,' said Miss Mills, 'from experience of the past--the remote, irrevocable past. The gushing fountains which sparkle in the sun, must not be stopped in mere caprice; the oasis in the desert of Sahara must not be plucked up idly.'

I hardly knew what I did, I was burning all over to that extraordinary extent; but I took Dora's little hand and kissed it--and she let me! I kissed Miss Mills's hand; and we all seemed, to my thinking, to go straight up to the seventh heaven. We did not come down again. We stayed up there all the evening. At first we strayed to and fro among the trees: I with Dora's shy arm drawn through mine: and Heaven knows, folly as it all was, it would have been a happy fate to have been struck immortal with those foolish feelings, and have stayed among the trees for ever!

But, much too soon, we heard the others laughing and talking, and calling 'where's Dora?' So we went back, and they wanted Dora to sing.

Red Whisker would have got the guitar-case out of the carriage, but Dora told him nobody knew where it was, but I. So Red Whisker was done for in a moment; and I got it, and I unlocked it, and I took the guitar out, and I sat by her, and I held her handkerchief and gloves, and I drank in every note of her dear voice, and she sang to ME who loved her, and all the others might applaud as much as they liked, but they had nothing to do with it!

I was intoxicated with joy. I was afraid it was too happy to be real, and that I should wake in Buckingham Street presently, and hear Mrs. Crupp clinking the teacups in getting breakfast ready. But Dora sang, and others sang, and Miss Mills sang--about the slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory; as if she were a hundred years old--and the evening came on; and we had tea, with the kettle boiling gipsy-fashion; and I was still as happy as ever.

I was happier than ever when the party broke up, and the other people, defeated Red Whisker and all, went their several ways, and we went ours through the still evening and the dying light, with sweet scents rising up around us. Mr. Spenlow being a little drowsy after the champagne--honour to the soil that grew the grape, to the grape that made the wine, to the sun that ripened it, and to the merchant who adulterated it!--and being fast asleep in a corner of the carriage, I rode by the side and talked to Dora. She admired my horse and patted him--oh, what a dear little hand it looked upon a horse!--and her shawl would not keep right, and now and then I drew it round her with my arm; and I even fancied that Jip began to see how it was, and to understand that he must make up his mind to be friends with me.

That sagacious Miss Mills, too; that amiable, though quite used up, recluse; that little patriarch of something less than twenty, who had done with the world, and mustn't on any account have the slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory awakened; what a kind thing she did!



'Mr. Copperfield,' said Miss Mills, 'come to this side of the carriage a moment--if you can spare a moment. I want to speak to you.'

Behold me, on my gallant grey, bending at the side of Miss Mills, with my hand upon the carriage door!

'Dora is coming to stay with me. She is coming home with me the day after tomorrow. If you would like to call, I am sure papa would be happy to see you.' What could I do but invoke a silent blessing on Miss Mills's head, and store Miss Mills's address in the securest corner of my memory! What could I do but tell Miss Mills, with grateful looks and fervent words, how much I appreciated her good offices, and what an inestimable value I set upon her friendship!

Then Miss Mills benignantly dismissed me, saying, 'Go back to Dora!' and I went; and Dora leaned out of the carriage to talk to me, and we talked all the rest of the way; and I rode my gallant grey so close to the wheel that I grazed his near fore leg against it, and 'took the bark off', as his owner told me, 'to the tune of three pun' sivin'--which I paid, and thought extremely cheap for so much joy. What time Miss Mills sat looking at the moon, murmuring verses--and recalling, I suppose, the ancient days when she and earth had anything in common.

Norwood was many miles too near, and we reached it many hours too soon; but Mr. Spenlow came to himself a little short of it, and said, 'You must come in, Copperfield, and rest!' and I consenting, we had sandwiches and wine-and-water. In the light room, Dora blushing looked so lovely, that I could not tear myself away, but sat there staring, in a dream, until the snoring of Mr. Spenlow inspired me with sufficient consciousness to take my leave. So we parted; I riding all the way to London with the farewell touch of Dora's hand still light on mine, recalling every incident and word ten thousand times; lying down in my

own bed at last, as enraptured a young noodle as ever was carried out of his five wits by love.

When I awoke next morning, I was resolute to declare my passion to Dora, and know my fate. Happiness or misery was now the question. There was no other question that I knew of in the world, and only Dora could give the answer to it. I passed three days in a luxury of wretchedness, torturing myself by putting every conceivable variety of discouraging construction on all that ever had taken place between Dora and me. At last, arrayed for the purpose at a vast expense, I went to Miss Mills's, fraught with a declaration.

How many times I went up and down the street, and round the square--painfully aware of being a much better answer to the old riddle than the original one--before I could persuade myself to go up the steps and knock, is no matter now. Even when, at last, I had knocked, and was waiting at the door, I had some flurried thought of asking if that were Mr. Blackboy's (in imitation of poor Barkis), begging pardon, and retreating. But I kept my ground.

Mr. Mills was not at home. I did not expect he would be. Nobody wanted HIM. Miss Mills was at home. Miss Mills would do.

I was shown into a room upstairs, where Miss Mills and Dora were. Jip was there. Miss Mills was copying music (I recollect, it was a new song, called 'Affection's Dirge'), and Dora was painting flowers. What were my feelings, when I recognized my own flowers; the identical Covent Garden Market purchase! I cannot say that they were very like, or that they particularly resembled any flowers that have ever come under my observation; but I knew from the paper round them which was accurately copied, what the composition was.

Miss Mills was very glad to see me, and very sorry her papa was not at

home: though I thought we all bore that with fortitude. Miss Mills was conversational for a few minutes, and then, laying down her pen upon 'Affection's Dirge', got up, and left the room.

I began to think I would put it off till tomorrow.

'I hope your poor horse was not tired, when he got home at night,' said Dora, lifting up her beautiful eyes. 'It was a long way for him.'

I began to think I would do it today.

'It was a long way for him,' said I, 'for he had nothing to uphold him on the journey.'

'Wasn't he fed, poor thing?' asked Dora.

I began to think I would put it off till tomorrow.

'Ye-yes,' I said, 'he was well taken care of. I mean he had not the unutterable happiness that I had in being so near you.'

Dora bent her head over her drawing and said, after a little while--I had sat, in the interval, in a burning fever, and with my legs in a very rigid state--

'You didn't seem to be sensible of that happiness yourself, at one time of the day.'

I saw now that I was in for it, and it must be done on the spot.

'You didn't care for that happiness in the least,' said Dora, slightly raising her eyebrows, and shaking her head, 'when you were sitting by Miss Kitt.'

Kitt, I should observe, was the name of the creature in pink, with the little eyes.

'Though certainly I don't know why you should,' said Dora, or why you should call it a happiness at all. But of course you don't mean what you say. And I am sure no one doubts your being at liberty to do whatever you like. Jip, you naughty boy, come here!'

I don't know how I did it. I did it in a moment. I intercepted Jip. I had Dora in my arms. I was full of eloquence. I never stopped for a word. I told her how I loved her. I told her I should die without her. I told her that I idolized and worshipped her. Jip barked madly all the time.

When Dora hung her head and cried, and trembled, my eloquence increased so much the more. If she would like me to die for her, she had but to say the word, and I was ready. Life without Dora's love was not a thing to have on any terms. I couldn't bear it, and I wouldn't. I had loved her every minute, day and night, since I first saw her. I loved her at that minute to distraction. I should always love her, every minute, to distraction. Lovers had loved before, and lovers would love again; but no lover had loved, might, could, would, or should ever love, as I loved Dora. The more I raved, the more Jip barked. Each of us, in his own way, got more mad every moment.

Well, well! Dora and I were sitting on the sofa by and by, quiet enough, and Jip was lying in her lap, winking peacefully at me. It was off my mind. I was in a state of perfect rapture. Dora and I were engaged.

I suppose we had some notion that this was to end in marriage. We must have had some, because Dora stipulated that we were never to be married without her papa's consent. But, in our youthful ecstasy, I don't think

that we really looked before us or behind us; or had any aspiration beyond the ignorant present. We were to keep our secret from Mr. Spenlow; but I am sure the idea never entered my head, then, that there was anything dishonourable in that.

Miss Mills was more than usually pensive when Dora, going to find her, brought her back;--I apprehend, because there was a tendency in what had passed to awaken the slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory. But she gave us her blessing, and the assurance of her lasting friendship, and spoke to us, generally, as became a Voice from the Cloister.

What an idle time it was! What an insubstantial, happy, foolish time it was!

When I measured Dora's finger for a ring that was to be made of Forget-me-nots, and when the jeweller, to whom I took the measure, found me out, and laughed over his order-book, and charged me anything he liked for the pretty little toy, with its blue stones--so associated in my remembrance with Dora's hand, that yesterday, when I saw such another, by chance, on the finger of my own daughter, there was a momentary stirring in my heart, like pain!

When I walked about, exalted with my secret, and full of my own interest, and felt the dignity of loving Dora, and of being beloved, so much, that if I had walked the air, I could not have been more above the people not so situated, who were creeping on the earth!

When we had those meetings in the garden of the square, and sat within the dingy summer-house, so happy, that I love the London sparrows to this hour, for nothing else, and see the plumage of the tropics in their smoky feathers! When we had our first great quarrel (within a week of our betrothal), and when Dora sent me back the ring, enclosed in a despairing cocked-hat note, wherein she used the terrible expression

that 'our love had begun in folly, and ended in madness!' which dreadful words occasioned me to tear my hair, and cry that all was over!

When, under cover of the night, I flew to Miss Mills, whom I saw by stealth in a back kitchen where there was a mangle, and implored Miss Mills to interpose between us and avert insanity. When Miss Mills undertook the office and returned with Dora, exhorting us, from the pulpit of her own bitter youth, to mutual concession, and the avoidance of the Desert of Sahara!

When we cried, and made it up, and were so blest again, that the back kitchen, mangle and all, changed to Love's own temple, where we arranged a plan of correspondence through Miss Mills, always to comprehend at least one letter on each side every day!

What an idle time! What an insubstantial, happy, foolish time! Of all the times of mine that Time has in his grip, there is none that in one retrospect I can smile at half so much, and think of half so tenderly.

#### CHAPTER 34. MY AUNT ASTONISHES ME

I wrote to Agnes as soon as Dora and I were engaged. I wrote her a long letter, in which I tried to make her comprehend how blest I was, and what a darling Dora was. I entreated Agnes not to regard this as a thoughtless passion which could ever yield to any other, or had the least resemblance to the boyish fancies that we used to joke about. I assured her that its profundity was quite unfathomable, and expressed my belief that nothing like it had ever been known.

Somehow, as I wrote to Agnes on a fine evening by my open window, and

the remembrance of her clear calm eyes and gentle face came stealing over me, it shed such a peaceful influence upon the hurry and agitation in which I had been living lately, and of which my very happiness partook in some degree, that it soothed me into tears. I remember that I sat resting my head upon my hand, when the letter was half done, cherishing a general fancy as if Agnes were one of the elements of my natural home. As if, in the retirement of the house made almost sacred to me by her presence, Dora and I must be happier than anywhere. As if, in love, joy, sorrow, hope, or disappointment; in all emotions; my heart turned naturally there, and found its refuge and best friend.

Of Steerforth I said nothing. I only told her there had been sad grief at Yarmouth, on account of Emily's flight; and that on me it made a double wound, by reason of the circumstances attending it. I knew how quick she always was to divine the truth, and that she would never be the first to breathe his name.

To this letter, I received an answer by return of post. As I read it, I seemed to hear Agnes speaking to me. It was like her cordial voice in my ears. What can I say more!

While I had been away from home lately, Traddles had called twice or thrice. Finding Peggotty within, and being informed by Peggotty (who always volunteered that information to whomsoever would receive it), that she was my old nurse, he had established a good-humoured acquaintance with her, and had stayed to have a little chat with her about me. So Peggotty said; but I am afraid the chat was all on her own side, and of immoderate length, as she was very difficult indeed to stop, God bless her! when she had me for her theme.

This reminds me, not only that I expected Traddles on a certain afternoon of his own appointing, which was now come, but that Mrs. Crupp had resigned everything appertaining to her office (the salary excepted)

until Peggotty should cease to present herself. Mrs. Crupp, after holding divers conversations respecting Peggotty, in a very high-pitched voice, on the staircase--with some invisible Familiar it would appear, for corporeally speaking she was quite alone at those times--addressed a letter to me, developing her views. Beginning it with that statement of universal application, which fitted every occurrence of her life, namely, that she was a mother herself, she went on to inform me that she had once seen very different days, but that at all periods of her existence she had had a constitutional objection to spies, intruders, and informers. She named no names, she said; let them the cap fitted, wear it; but spies, intruders, and informers, especially in widders' weeds (this clause was underlined), she had ever accustomed herself to look down upon. If a gentleman was the victim of spies, intruders, and informers (but still naming no names), that was his own pleasure. He had a right to please himself; so let him do. All that she, Mrs. Crupp, stipulated for, was, that she should not be 'brought in contract' with such persons. Therefore she begged to be excused from any further attendance on the top set, until things were as they formerly was, and as they could be wished to be; and further mentioned that her little book would be found upon the breakfast-table every Saturday morning, when she requested an immediate settlement of the same, with the benevolent view of saving trouble 'and an ill-convenience' to all parties.

After this, Mrs. Crupp confined herself to making pitfalls on the stairs, principally with pitchers, and endeavouring to delude Peggotty into breaking her legs. I found it rather harassing to live in this state of siege, but was too much afraid of Mrs. Crupp to see any way out of it.

'My dear Copperfield,' cried Traddles, punctually appearing at my door, in spite of all these obstacles, 'how do you do?'



'My dear Traddles,' said I, 'I am delighted to see you at last, and very sorry I have not been at home before. But I have been so much engaged--'

'Yes, yes, I know,' said Traddles, 'of course. Yours lives in London, I think.'

'What did you say?'

'She--excuse me--Miss D., you know,' said Traddles, colouring in his great delicacy, 'lives in London, I believe?'

'Oh yes. Near London.'

'Mine, perhaps you recollect,' said Traddles, with a serious look, 'lives down in Devonshire--one of ten. Consequently, I am not so much engaged as you--in that sense.'

'I wonder you can bear,' I returned, 'to see her so seldom.'

'Hah!' said Traddles, thoughtfully. 'It does seem a wonder. I suppose it is, Copperfield, because there is no help for it?'

'I suppose so,' I replied with a smile, and not without a blush. 'And because you have so much constancy and patience, Traddles.'

'Dear me!' said Traddles, considering about it, 'do I strike you in that way, Copperfield? Really I didn't know that I had. But she is such an extraordinarily dear girl herself, that it's possible she may have imparted something of those virtues to me. Now you mention it, Copperfield, I shouldn't wonder at all. I assure you she is always forgetting herself, and taking care of the other nine.'

'Is she the eldest?' I inquired.

'Oh dear, no,' said Traddles. 'The eldest is a Beauty.'

He saw, I suppose, that I could not help smiling at the simplicity of this reply; and added, with a smile upon his own ingenuous face:

'Not, of course, but that my Sophy--pretty name, Copperfield, I always think?'

'Very pretty!' said I.

'Not, of course, but that Sophy is beautiful too in my eyes, and would be one of the dearest girls that ever was, in anybody's eyes (I should think). But when I say the eldest is a Beauty, I mean she really is a--' he seemed to be describing clouds about himself, with both hands: 'Splendid, you know,' said Traddles, energetically. 'Indeed!' said I.

'Oh, I assure you,' said Traddles, 'something very uncommon, indeed! Then, you know, being formed for society and admiration, and not being able to enjoy much of it in consequence of their limited means, she naturally gets a little irritable and exacting, sometimes. Sophy puts her in good humour!'

'Is Sophy the youngest?' I hazarded.

'Oh dear, no!' said Traddles, stroking his chin. 'The two youngest are only nine and ten. Sophy educates 'em.'

'The second daughter, perhaps?' I hazarded.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Sarah's the second. Sarah has something the matter with her spine, poor girl. The malady will wear out by and by, the doctors say, but in the meantime she has to lie down for a twelvemonth.'

Sophy nurses her. Sophy's the fourth.'

'Is the mother living?' I inquired.

'Oh yes,' said Traddles, 'she is alive. She is a very superior woman indeed, but the damp country is not adapted to her constitution, and--in fact, she has lost the use of her limbs.'

'Dear me!' said I.

'Very sad, is it not?' returned Traddles. 'But in a merely domestic view it is not so bad as it might be, because Sophy takes her place. She is quite as much a mother to her mother, as she is to the other nine.'

I felt the greatest admiration for the virtues of this young lady; and, honestly with the view of doing my best to prevent the good-nature of Traddles from being imposed upon, to the detriment of their joint prospects in life, inquired how Mr. Micawber was?

'He is quite well, Copperfield, thank you,' said Traddles. 'I am not living with him at present.'

'No?'

'No. You see the truth is,' said Traddles, in a whisper, 'he had changed his name to Mortimer, in consequence of his temporary embarrassments; and he don't come out till after dark--and then in spectacles. There was an execution put into our house, for rent. Mrs. Micawber was in such a dreadful state that I really couldn't resist giving my name to that second bill we spoke of here. You may imagine how delightful it was to my feelings, Copperfield, to see the matter settled with it, and Mrs. Micawber recover her spirits.'

'Hum!' said I. 'Not that her happiness was of long duration,' pursued Traddles, 'for, unfortunately, within a week another execution came in. It broke up the establishment. I have been living in a furnished apartment since then, and the Mortimers have been very private indeed. I hope you won't think it selfish, Copperfield, if I mention that the broker carried off my little round table with the marble top, and Sophy's flower-pot and stand?'

'What a hard thing!' I exclaimed indignantly.

'It was a--it was a pull,' said Traddles, with his usual wince at that expression. 'I don't mention it reproachfully, however, but with a motive. The fact is, Copperfield, I was unable to repurchase them at the time of their seizure; in the first place, because the broker, having an idea that I wanted them, ran the price up to an extravagant extent; and, in the second place, because I--hadn't any money. Now, I have kept my eye since, upon the broker's shop,' said Traddles, with a great enjoyment of his mystery, 'which is up at the top of Tottenham Court Road, and, at last, today I find them put out for sale. I have only noticed them from over the way, because if the broker saw me, bless you, he'd ask any price for them! What has occurred to me, having now the money, is, that perhaps you wouldn't object to ask that good nurse of yours to come with me to the shop--I can show it her from round the corner of the next street--and make the best bargain for them, as if they were for herself, that she can!'

The delight with which Traddles propounded this plan to me, and the sense he had of its uncommon artfulness, are among the freshest things in my remembrance.

I told him that my old nurse would be delighted to assist him, and that we would all three take the field together, but on one condition. That condition was, that he should make a solemn resolution to grant no more

loans of his name, or anything else, to Mr. Micawber.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, 'I have already done so, because I begin to feel that I have not only been inconsiderate, but that I have been positively unjust to Sophy. My word being passed to myself, there is no longer any apprehension; but I pledge it to you, too, with the greatest readiness. That first unlucky obligation, I have paid. I have no doubt Mr. Micawber would have paid it if he could, but he could not. One thing I ought to mention, which I like very much in Mr. Micawber, Copperfield. It refers to the second obligation, which is not yet due. He don't tell me that it is provided for, but he says it WILL BE. Now, I think there is something very fair and honest about that!'

I was unwilling to damp my good friend's confidence, and therefore assented. After a little further conversation, we went round to the chandler's shop, to enlist Peggotty; Traddles declining to pass the evening with me, both because he endured the liveliest apprehensions that his property would be bought by somebody else before he could re-purchase it, and because it was the evening he always devoted to writing to the dearest girl in the world.

I never shall forget him peeping round the corner of the street in Tottenham Court Road, while Peggotty was bargaining for the precious articles; or his agitation when she came slowly towards us after vainly offering a price, and was hailed by the relenting broker, and went back again. The end of the negotiation was, that she bought the property on tolerably easy terms, and Traddles was transported with pleasure.

'I am very much obliged to you, indeed,' said Traddles, on hearing it was to be sent to where he lived, that night. 'If I might ask one other favour, I hope you would not think it absurd, Copperfield?'

I said beforehand, certainly not.

'Then if you WOULD be good enough,' said Traddles to Peggotty, 'to get the flower-pot now, I think I should like (it being Sophy's, Copperfield) to carry it home myself!'

Peggotty was glad to get it for him, and he overwhelmed her with thanks, and went his way up Tottenham Court Road, carrying the flower-pot affectionately in his arms, with one of the most delighted expressions of countenance I ever saw.

We then turned back towards my chambers. As the shops had charms for Peggotty which I never knew them possess in the same degree for anybody else, I sauntered easily along, amused by her staring in at the windows, and waiting for her as often as she chose. We were thus a good while in getting to the Adelphi.

On our way upstairs, I called her attention to the sudden disappearance of Mrs. Crupp's pitfalls, and also to the prints of recent footsteps. We were both very much surprised, coming higher up, to find my outer door standing open (which I had shut) and to hear voices inside.

We looked at one another, without knowing what to make of this, and went into the sitting-room. What was my amazement to find, of all people upon earth, my aunt there, and Mr. Dick! My aunt sitting on a quantity of luggage, with her two birds before her, and her cat on her knee, like a female Robinson Crusoe, drinking tea. Mr. Dick leaning thoughtfully on a great kite, such as we had often been out together to fly, with more luggage piled about him!

'My dear aunt!' cried I. 'Why, what an unexpected pleasure!'

We cordially embraced; and Mr. Dick and I cordially shook hands; and Mrs. Crupp, who was busy making tea, and could not be too attentive,

cordially said she had knowed well as Mr. Copperfull would have his heart in his mouth, when he see his dear relations.

'Holloa!' said my aunt to Peggotty, who quailed before her awful presence. 'How are YOU?'

'You remember my aunt, Peggotty?' said I.

'For the love of goodness, child,' exclaimed my aunt, 'don't call the woman by that South Sea Island name! If she married and got rid of it, which was the best thing she could do, why don't you give her the benefit of the change? What's your name now,--P?' said my aunt, as a compromise for the obnoxious appellation.

'Barkis, ma'am,' said Peggotty, with a curtsy.

'Well! That's human,' said my aunt. 'It sounds less as if you wanted a missionary. How d'ye do, Barkis? I hope you're well?'

Encouraged by these gracious words, and by my aunt's extending her hand, Barkis came forward, and took the hand, and curtsied her acknowledgements.

'We are older than we were, I see,' said my aunt. 'We have only met each other once before, you know. A nice business we made of it then! Trot, my dear, another cup.'

I handed it dutifully to my aunt, who was in her usual inflexible state of figure; and ventured a remonstrance with her on the subject of her sitting on a box.

'Let me draw the sofa here, or the easy-chair, aunt,' said I. 'Why should you be so uncomfortable?'

'Thank you, Trot,' replied my aunt, 'I prefer to sit upon my property.'  
 Here my aunt looked hard at Mrs. Crupp, and observed, 'We needn't trouble you to wait, ma'am.'

'Shall I put a little more tea in the pot afore I go, ma'am?' said Mrs. Crupp.

'No, I thank you, ma'am,' replied my aunt.

'Would you let me fetch another pat of butter, ma'am?' said Mrs. Crupp.  
 'Or would you be persuaded to try a new-laid hegg? or should I brile a rasher? Ain't there nothing I could do for your dear aunt, Mr. Copperfull?'

'Nothing, ma'am,' returned my aunt. 'I shall do very well, I thank you.'

Mrs. Crupp, who had been incessantly smiling to express sweet temper, and incessantly holding her head on one side, to express a general feebleness of constitution, and incessantly rubbing her hands, to express a desire to be of service to all deserving objects, gradually smiled herself, one-sided herself, and rubbed herself, out of the room.  
 'Dick!' said my aunt. 'You know what I told you about time-servers and wealth-worshippers?'

Mr. Dick--with rather a scared look, as if he had forgotten it--returned a hasty answer in the affirmative.

'Mrs. Crupp is one of them,' said my aunt. 'Barkis, I'll trouble you to look after the tea, and let me have another cup, for I don't fancy that woman's pouring-out!'

I knew my aunt sufficiently well to know that she had something of



importance on her mind, and that there was far more matter in this arrival than a stranger might have supposed. I noticed how her eye lighted on me, when she thought my attention otherwise occupied; and what a curious process of hesitation appeared to be going on within her, while she preserved her outward stiffness and composure. I began to reflect whether I had done anything to offend her; and my conscience whispered me that I had not yet told her about Dora. Could it by any means be that, I wondered!

As I knew she would only speak in her own good time, I sat down near her, and spoke to the birds, and played with the cat, and was as easy as I could be. But I was very far from being really easy; and I should still have been so, even if Mr. Dick, leaning over the great kite behind my aunt, had not taken every secret opportunity of shaking his head darkly at me, and pointing at her.

'Trot,' said my aunt at last, when she had finished her tea, and carefully smoothed down her dress, and wiped her lips--'you needn't go, Barkis!--Trot, have you got to be firm and self-reliant?'

'I hope so, aunt.'

'What do you think?' inquired Miss Betsey.

'I think so, aunt.'

'Then why, my love,' said my aunt, looking earnestly at me, 'why do you think I prefer to sit upon this property of mine tonight?'

I shook my head, unable to guess.

'Because,' said my aunt, 'it's all I have. Because I'm ruined, my dear!'

If the house, and every one of us, had tumbled out into the river together, I could hardly have received a greater shock.

'Dick knows it,' said my aunt, laying her hand calmly on my shoulder. 'I am ruined, my dear Trot! All I have in the world is in this room, except the cottage; and that I have left Janet to let. Barkis, I want to get a bed for this gentleman tonight. To save expense, perhaps you can make up something here for myself. Anything will do. It's only for tonight. We'll talk about this, more, tomorrow.'

I was roused from my amazement, and concern for her--I am sure, for her--by her falling on my neck, for a moment, and crying that she only grieved for me. In another moment she suppressed this emotion; and said with an aspect more triumphant than dejected:

'We must meet reverses boldly, and not suffer them to frighten us, my dear. We must learn to act the play out. We must live misfortune down, Trot!'

## CHAPTER 35. DEPRESSION

As soon as I could recover my presence of mind, which quite deserted me in the first overpowering shock of my aunt's intelligence, I proposed to Mr. Dick to come round to the chandler's shop, and take possession of the bed which Mr. Peggotty had lately vacated. The chandler's shop being in Hungerford Market, and Hungerford Market being a very different place in those days, there was a low wooden colonnade before the door (not very unlike that before the house where the little man and woman used to live, in the old weather-glass), which pleased Mr. Dick mightily. The glory of lodging over this structure would have compensated him, I dare

say, for many inconveniences; but, as there were really few to bear, beyond the compound of flavours I have already mentioned, and perhaps the want of a little more elbow-room, he was perfectly charmed with his accommodation. Mrs. Crupp had indignantly assured him that there wasn't room to swing a cat there; but, as Mr. Dick justly observed to me, sitting down on the foot of the bed, nursing his leg, 'You know, Trotwood, I don't want to swing a cat. I never do swing a cat. Therefore, what does that signify to ME!'

I tried to ascertain whether Mr. Dick had any understanding of the causes of this sudden and great change in my aunt's affairs. As I might have expected, he had none at all. The only account he could give of it was, that my aunt had said to him, the day before yesterday, 'Now, Dick, are you really and truly the philosopher I take you for?' That then he had said, Yes, he hoped so. That then my aunt had said, 'Dick, I am ruined.' That then he had said, 'Oh, indeed!' That then my aunt had praised him highly, which he was glad of. And that then they had come to me, and had had bottled porter and sandwiches on the road.

Mr. Dick was so very complacent, sitting on the foot of the bed, nursing his leg, and telling me this, with his eyes wide open and a surprised smile, that I am sorry to say I was provoked into explaining to him that ruin meant distress, want, and starvation; but I was soon bitterly reproved for this harshness, by seeing his face turn pale, and tears course down his lengthened cheeks, while he fixed upon me a look of such unutterable woe, that it might have softened a far harder heart than mine. I took infinitely greater pains to cheer him up again than I had taken to depress him; and I soon understood (as I ought to have known at first) that he had been so confident, merely because of his faith in the wisest and most wonderful of women, and his unbounded reliance on my intellectual resources. The latter, I believe, he considered a match for any kind of disaster not absolutely mortal.

'What can we do, Trotwood?' said Mr. Dick. 'There's the Memorial-'

'To be sure there is,' said I. 'But all we can do just now, Mr. Dick, is to keep a cheerful countenance, and not let my aunt see that we are thinking about it.'

He assented to this in the most earnest manner; and implored me, if I should see him wandering an inch out of the right course, to recall him by some of those superior methods which were always at my command. But I regret to state that the fright I had given him proved too much for his best attempts at concealment. All the evening his eyes wandered to my aunt's face, with an expression of the most dismal apprehension, as if he saw her growing thin on the spot. He was conscious of this, and put a constraint upon his head; but his keeping that immovable, and sitting rolling his eyes like a piece of machinery, did not mend the matter at all. I saw him look at the loaf at supper (which happened to be a small one), as if nothing else stood between us and famine; and when my aunt insisted on his making his customary repast, I detected him in the act of pocketing fragments of his bread and cheese; I have no doubt for the purpose of reviving us with those savings, when we should have reached an advanced stage of attenuation.

My aunt, on the other hand, was in a composed frame of mind, which was a lesson to all of us--to me, I am sure. She was extremely gracious to Peggotty, except when I inadvertently called her by that name; and, strange as I knew she felt in London, appeared quite at home. She was to have my bed, and I was to lie in the sitting-room, to keep guard over her. She made a great point of being so near the river, in case of a conflagration; and I suppose really did find some satisfaction in that circumstance.

'Trot, my dear,' said my aunt, when she saw me making preparations for compounding her usual night-draught, 'No!'

'Nothing, aunt?'

'Not wine, my dear. Ale.'

'But there is wine here, aunt. And you always have it made of wine.'

'Keep that, in case of sickness,' said my aunt. 'We mustn't use it carelessly, Trot. Ale for me. Half a pint.'

I thought Mr. Dick would have fallen, insensible. My aunt being resolute, I went out and got the ale myself. As it was growing late, Peggotty and Mr. Dick took that opportunity of repairing to the chandler's shop together. I parted from him, poor fellow, at the corner of the street, with his great kite at his back, a very monument of human misery.

My aunt was walking up and down the room when I returned, crimping the borders of her nightcap with her fingers. I warmed the ale and made the toast on the usual infallible principles. When it was ready for her, she was ready for it, with her nightcap on, and the skirt of her gown turned back on her knees.

'My dear,' said my aunt, after taking a spoonful of it; 'it's a great deal better than wine. Not half so bilious.'

I suppose I looked doubtful, for she added:

'Tut, tut, child. If nothing worse than Ale happens to us, we are well off.'

'I should think so myself, aunt, I am sure,' said I.

'Well, then, why DON'T you think so?' said my aunt.

'Because you and I are very different people,' I returned.

'Stuff and nonsense, Trot!' replied my aunt.

MY aunt went on with a quiet enjoyment, in which there was very little affectation, if any; drinking the warm ale with a tea-spoon, and soaking her strips of toast in it.

'Trot,' said she, 'I don't care for strange faces in general, but I rather like that Barkis of yours, do you know!'

'It's better than a hundred pounds to hear you say so!' said I.

'It's a most extraordinary world,' observed my aunt, rubbing her nose; 'how that woman ever got into it with that name, is unaccountable to me. It would be much more easy to be born a Jackson, or something of that sort, one would think.'

'Perhaps she thinks so, too; it's not her fault,' said I.

'I suppose not,' returned my aunt, rather grudging the admission; 'but it's very aggravating. However, she's Barkis now. That's some comfort. Barkis is uncommonly fond of you, Trot.'

'There is nothing she would leave undone to prove it,' said I.

'Nothing, I believe,' returned my aunt. 'Here, the poor fool has been begging and praying about handing over some of her money--because she has got too much of it. A simpleton!'

My aunt's tears of pleasure were positively trickling down into the warm

ale.

'She's the most ridiculous creature that ever was born,' said my aunt.

'I knew, from the first moment when I saw her with that poor dear blessed baby of a mother of yours, that she was the most ridiculous of mortals. But there are good points in Barkis!'

Affecting to laugh, she got an opportunity of putting her hand to her eyes. Having availed herself of it, she resumed her toast and her discourse together.

'Ah! Mercy upon us!' sighed my aunt. 'I know all about it, Trot! Barkis and myself had quite a gossip while you were out with Dick. I know all about it. I don't know where these wretched girls expect to go to, for my part. I wonder they don't knock out their brains against--against mantelpieces,' said my aunt; an idea which was probably suggested to her by her contemplation of mine.

'Poor Emily!' said I.

'Oh, don't talk to me about poor,' returned my aunt. 'She should have thought of that, before she caused so much misery! Give me a kiss, Trot. I am sorry for your early experience.'

As I bent forward, she put her tumbler on my knee to detain me, and said:

'Oh, Trot, Trot! And so you fancy yourself in love! Do you?'

'Fancy, aunt!' I exclaimed, as red as I could be. 'I adore her with my whole soul!'

'Dora, indeed!' returned my aunt. 'And you mean to say the little thing

is very fascinating, I suppose?'

'My dear aunt,' I replied, 'no one can form the least idea what she is!'

'Ah! And not silly?' said my aunt.

'Silly, aunt!'

I seriously believe it had never once entered my head for a single moment, to consider whether she was or not. I resented the idea, of course; but I was in a manner struck by it, as a new one altogether.

'Not light-headed?' said my aunt.

'Light-headed, aunt!' I could only repeat this daring speculation with the same kind of feeling with which I had repeated the preceding question.

'Well, well!' said my aunt. 'I only ask. I don't depreciate her. Poor little couple! And so you think you were formed for one another, and are to go through a party-supper-table kind of life, like two pretty pieces of confectionery, do you, Trot?'

She asked me this so kindly, and with such a gentle air, half playful and half sorrowful, that I was quite touched.

'We are young and inexperienced, aunt, I know,' I replied; 'and I dare say we say and think a good deal that is rather foolish. But we love one another truly, I am sure. If I thought Dora could ever love anybody else, or cease to love me; or that I could ever love anybody else, or cease to love her; I don't know what I should do--go out of my mind, I think!'



'Ah, Trot!' said my aunt, shaking her head, and smiling gravely; 'blind, blind, blind!'

'Someone that I know, Trot,' my aunt pursued, after a pause, 'though of a very pliant disposition, has an earnestness of affection in him that reminds me of poor Baby. Earnestness is what that Somebody must look for, to sustain him and improve him, Trot. Deep, downright, faithful earnestness.'

'If you only knew the earnestness of Dora, aunt!' I cried.

'Oh, Trot!' she said again; 'blind, blind!' and without knowing why, I felt a vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a cloud.

'However,' said my aunt, 'I don't want to put two young creatures out of conceit with themselves, or to make them unhappy; so, though it is a girl and boy attachment, and girl and boy attachments very often--mind! I don't say always!--come to nothing, still we'll be serious about it, and hope for a prosperous issue one of these days. There's time enough for it to come to anything!'

This was not upon the whole very comforting to a rapturous lover; but I was glad to have my aunt in my confidence, and I was mindful of her being fatigued. So I thanked her ardently for this mark of her affection, and for all her other kindnesses towards me; and after a tender good night, she took her nightcap into my bedroom.

How miserable I was, when I lay down! How I thought and thought about my being poor, in Mr. Spenlow's eyes; about my not being what I thought I was, when I proposed to Dora; about the chivalrous necessity of telling Dora what my worldly condition was, and releasing her from her engagement if she thought fit; about how I should contrive to live,

during the long term of my articles, when I was earning nothing; about doing something to assist my aunt, and seeing no way of doing anything; about coming down to have no money in my pocket, and to wear a shabby coat, and to be able to carry Dora no little presents, and to ride no gallant greys, and to show myself in no agreeable light! Sordid and selfish as I knew it was, and as I tortured myself by knowing that it was, to let my mind run on my own distress so much, I was so devoted to Dora that I could not help it. I knew that it was base in me not to think more of my aunt, and less of myself; but, so far, selfishness was inseparable from Dora, and I could not put Dora on one side for any mortal creature. How exceedingly miserable I was, that night!

As to sleep, I had dreams of poverty in all sorts of shapes, but I seemed to dream without the previous ceremony of going to sleep. Now I was ragged, wanting to sell Dora matches, six bundles for a halfpenny; now I was at the office in a nightgown and boots, remonstrated with by Mr. Spenlow on appearing before the clients in that airy attire; now I was hungrily picking up the crumbs that fell from old Tiffey's daily biscuit, regularly eaten when St. Paul's struck one; now I was hopelessly endeavouring to get a licence to marry Dora, having nothing but one of Uriah Heep's gloves to offer in exchange, which the whole Commons rejected; and still, more or less conscious of my own room, I was always tossing about like a distressed ship in a sea of bed-clothes.

My aunt was restless, too, for I frequently heard her walking to and fro. Two or three times in the course of the night, attired in a long flannel wrapper in which she looked seven feet high, she appeared, like a disturbed ghost, in my room, and came to the side of the sofa on which I lay. On the first occasion I started up in alarm, to learn that she inferred from a particular light in the sky, that Westminster Abbey was on fire; and to be consulted in reference to the probability of its igniting Buckingham Street, in case the wind changed. Lying still, after that, I found that she sat down near me, whispering to herself 'Poor

boy!' And then it made me twenty times more wretched, to know how unselfishly mindful she was of me, and how selfishly mindful I was of myself.

It was difficult to believe that a night so long to me, could be short to anybody else. This consideration set me thinking and thinking of an imaginary party where people were dancing the hours away, until that became a dream too, and I heard the music incessantly playing one tune, and saw Dora incessantly dancing one dance, without taking the least notice of me. The man who had been playing the harp all night, was trying in vain to cover it with an ordinary-sized nightcap, when I awoke; or I should rather say, when I left off trying to go to sleep, and saw the sun shining in through the window at last.

There was an old Roman bath in those days at the bottom of one of the streets out of the Strand--it may be there still--in which I have had many a cold plunge. Dressing myself as quietly as I could, and leaving Peggotty to look after my aunt, I tumbled head foremost into it, and then went for a walk to Hampstead. I had a hope that this brisk treatment might freshen my wits a little; and I think it did them good, for I soon came to the conclusion that the first step I ought to take was, to try if my articles could be cancelled and the premium recovered. I got some breakfast on the Heath, and walked back to Doctors' Commons, along the watered roads and through a pleasant smell of summer flowers, growing in gardens and carried into town on hucksters' heads, intent on this first effort to meet our altered circumstances.

I arrived at the office so soon, after all, that I had half an hour's loitering about the Commons, before old Tiffey, who was always first, appeared with his key. Then I sat down in my shady corner, looking up at the sunlight on the opposite chimney-pots, and thinking about Dora; until Mr. Spenlow came in, crisp and curly.

'How are you, Copperfield?' said he. 'Fine morning!'

'Beautiful morning, sir,' said I. 'Could I say a word to you before you go into Court?'

'By all means,' said he. 'Come into my room.'

I followed him into his room, and he began putting on his gown, and touching himself up before a little glass he had, hanging inside a closet door.

'I am sorry to say,' said I, 'that I have some rather disheartening intelligence from my aunt.'

'No!' said he. 'Dear me! Not paralysis, I hope?'

'It has no reference to her health, sir,' I replied. 'She has met with some large losses. In fact, she has very little left, indeed.'

'You as-tound me, Copperfield!' cried Mr. Spenlow.

I shook my head. 'Indeed, sir,' said I, 'her affairs are so changed, that I wished to ask you whether it would be possible--at a sacrifice on our part of some portion of the premium, of course,' I put in this, on the spur of the moment, warned by the blank expression of his face--'to cancel my articles?'

What it cost me to make this proposal, nobody knows. It was like asking, as a favour, to be sentenced to transportation from Dora.

'To cancel your articles, Copperfield? Cancel?'

I explained with tolerable firmness, that I really did not know where

my means of subsistence were to come from, unless I could earn them for myself. I had no fear for the future, I said--and I laid great emphasis on that, as if to imply that I should still be decidedly eligible for a son-in-law one of these days--but, for the present, I was thrown upon my own resources. 'I am extremely sorry to hear this, Copperfield,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'Extremely sorry. It is not usual to cancel articles for any such reason. It is not a professional course of proceeding. It is not a convenient precedent at all. Far from it. At the same time--'

'You are very good, sir,' I murmured, anticipating a concession.

'Not at all. Don't mention it,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'At the same time, I was going to say, if it had been my lot to have my hands unfettered--if I had not a partner--Mr. Jorkins--'

My hopes were dashed in a moment, but I made another effort.

'Do you think, sir,' said I, 'if I were to mention it to Mr. Jorkins--'

Mr. Spenlow shook his head discouragingly. 'Heaven forbid, Copperfield,' he replied, 'that I should do any man an injustice: still less, Mr. Jorkins. But I know my partner, Copperfield. Mr. Jorkins is not a man to respond to a proposition of this peculiar nature. Mr. Jorkins is very difficult to move from the beaten track. You know what he is!'

I am sure I knew nothing about him, except that he had originally been alone in the business, and now lived by himself in a house near Montagu Square, which was fearfully in want of painting; that he came very late of a day, and went away very early; that he never appeared to be consulted about anything; and that he had a dingy little black-hole of his own upstairs, where no business was ever done, and where there was a yellow old cartridge-paper pad upon his desk, unsoiled by ink, and reported to be twenty years of age.

'Would you object to my mentioning it to him, sir?' I asked.

'By no means,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'But I have some experience of Mr. Jorkins, Copperfield. I wish it were otherwise, for I should be happy to meet your views in any respect. I cannot have the objection to your mentioning it to Mr. Jorkins, Copperfield, if you think it worth while.'

Availing myself of this permission, which was given with a warm shake of the hand, I sat thinking about Dora, and looking at the sunlight stealing from the chimney-pots down the wall of the opposite house, until Mr. Jorkins came. I then went up to Mr. Jorkins's room, and evidently astonished Mr. Jorkins very much by making my appearance there.

'Come in, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Jorkins. 'Come in!'

I went in, and sat down; and stated my case to Mr. Jorkins pretty much as I had stated it to Mr. Spenlow. Mr. Jorkins was not by any means the awful creature one might have expected, but a large, mild, smooth-faced man of sixty, who took so much snuff that there was a tradition in the Commons that he lived principally on that stimulant, having little room in his system for any other article of diet.

'You have mentioned this to Mr. Spenlow, I suppose?' said Mr. Jorkins; when he had heard me, very restlessly, to an end.

I answered Yes, and told him that Mr. Spenlow had introduced his name.

'He said I should object?' asked Mr. Jorkins.

I was obliged to admit that Mr. Spenlow had considered it probable.

'I am sorry to say, Mr. Copperfield, I can't advance your object,' said Mr. Jorkins, nervously. 'The fact is--but I have an appointment at the Bank, if you'll have the goodness to excuse me.'

With that he rose in a great hurry, and was going out of the room, when I made bold to say that I feared, then, there was no way of arranging the matter?

'No!' said Mr. Jorkins, stopping at the door to shake his head. 'Oh, no! I object, you know,' which he said very rapidly, and went out. 'You must be aware, Mr. Copperfield,' he added, looking restlessly in at the door again, 'if Mr. Spenlow objects--'

'Personally, he does not object, sir,' said I.

'Oh! Personally!' repeated Mr. Jorkins, in an impatient manner. 'I assure you there's an objection, Mr. Copperfield. Hopeless! What you wish to be done, can't be done. I--I really have got an appointment at the Bank.' With that he fairly ran away; and to the best of my knowledge, it was three days before he showed himself in the Commons again.

Being very anxious to leave no stone unturned, I waited until Mr. Spenlow came in, and then described what had passed; giving him to understand that I was not hopeless of his being able to soften the adamant Jorkins, if he would undertake the task.

'Copperfield,' returned Mr. Spenlow, with a gracious smile, 'you have not known my partner, Mr. Jorkins, as long as I have. Nothing is farther from my thoughts than to attribute any degree of artifice to Mr. Jorkins. But Mr. Jorkins has a way of stating his objections which often deceives people. No, Copperfield!' shaking his head. 'Mr. Jorkins is not to be moved, believe me!'

I was completely bewildered between Mr. Spenlow and Mr. Jorkins, as to which of them really was the objecting partner; but I saw with sufficient clearness that there was obduracy somewhere in the firm, and that the recovery of my aunt's thousand pounds was out of the question. In a state of despondency, which I remember with anything but satisfaction, for I know it still had too much reference to myself (though always in connexion with Dora), I left the office, and went homeward.

I was trying to familiarize my mind with the worst, and to present to myself the arrangements we should have to make for the future in their sternest aspect, when a hackney-chariot coming after me, and stopping at my very feet, occasioned me to look up. A fair hand was stretched forth to me from the window; and the face I had never seen without a feeling of serenity and happiness, from the moment when it first turned back on the old oak staircase with the great broad balustrade, and when I associated its softened beauty with the stained-glass window in the church, was smiling on me.

'Agnes!' I joyfully exclaimed. 'Oh, my dear Agnes, of all people in the world, what a pleasure to see you!'

'Is it, indeed?' she said, in her cordial voice.

'I want to talk to you so much!' said I. 'It's such a lightening of my heart, only to look at you! If I had had a conjuror's cap, there is no one I should have wished for but you!'

'What?' returned Agnes.

'Well! perhaps Dora first,' I admitted, with a blush.



'Certainly, Dora first, I hope,' said Agnes, laughing.

'But you next!' said I. 'Where are you going?'

She was going to my rooms to see my aunt. The day being very fine, she was glad to come out of the chariot, which smelt (I had my head in it all this time) like a stable put under a cucumber-frame. I dismissed the coachman, and she took my arm, and we walked on together. She was like Hope embodied, to me. How different I felt in one short minute, having Agnes at my side!

My aunt had written her one of the odd, abrupt notes--very little longer than a Bank note--to which her epistolary efforts were usually limited. She had stated therein that she had fallen into adversity, and was leaving Dover for good, but had quite made up her mind to it, and was so well that nobody need be uncomfortable about her. Agnes had come to London to see my aunt, between whom and herself there had been a mutual liking these many years: indeed, it dated from the time of my taking up my residence in Mr. Wickfield's house. She was not alone, she said. Her papa was with her--and Uriah Heep.

'And now they are partners,' said I. 'Confound him!'

'Yes,' said Agnes. 'They have some business here; and I took advantage of their coming, to come too. You must not think my visit all friendly and disinterested, Trotwood, for--I am afraid I may be cruelly prejudiced--I do not like to let papa go away alone, with him.' 'Does he exercise the same influence over Mr. Wickfield still, Agnes?'

Agnes shook her head. 'There is such a change at home,' said she, 'that you would scarcely know the dear old house. They live with us now.'

'They?' said I.

'Mr. Heep and his mother. He sleeps in your old room,' said Agnes, looking up into my face.

'I wish I had the ordering of his dreams,' said I. 'He wouldn't sleep there long.'

'I keep my own little room,' said Agnes, 'where I used to learn my lessons. How the time goes! You remember? The little panelled room that opens from the drawing-room?'

'Remember, Agnes? When I saw you, for the first time, coming out at the door, with your quaint little basket of keys hanging at your side?'

'It is just the same,' said Agnes, smiling. 'I am glad you think of it so pleasantly. We were very happy.'

'We were, indeed,' said I.

'I keep that room to myself still; but I cannot always desert Mrs. Heep, you know. And so,' said Agnes, quietly, 'I feel obliged to bear her company, when I might prefer to be alone. But I have no other reason to complain of her. If she tires me, sometimes, by her praises of her son, it is only natural in a mother. He is a very good son to her.'

I looked at Agnes when she said these words, without detecting in her any consciousness of Uriah's design. Her mild but earnest eyes met mine with their own beautiful frankness, and there was no change in her gentle face.

'The chief evil of their presence in the house,' said Agnes, 'is that I cannot be as near papa as I could wish--Uriah Heep being so much between us--and cannot watch over him, if that is not too bold a thing to say,

as closely as I would. But if any fraud or treachery is practising against him, I hope that simple love and truth will be strong in the end. I hope that real love and truth are stronger in the end than any evil or misfortune in the world.'

A certain bright smile, which I never saw on any other face, died away, even while I thought how good it was, and how familiar it had once been to me; and she asked me, with a quick change of expression (we were drawing very near my street), if I knew how the reverse in my aunt's circumstances had been brought about. On my replying no, she had not told me yet, Agnes became thoughtful, and I fancied I felt her arm tremble in mine.

We found my aunt alone, in a state of some excitement. A difference of opinion had arisen between herself and Mrs. Crupp, on an abstract question (the propriety of chambers being inhabited by the gentler sex); and my aunt, utterly indifferent to spasms on the part of Mrs. Crupp, had cut the dispute short, by informing that lady that she smelt of my brandy, and that she would trouble her to walk out. Both of these expressions Mrs. Crupp considered actionable, and had expressed her intention of bringing before a 'British Judy'--meaning, it was supposed, the bulwark of our national liberties.

MY aunt, however, having had time to cool, while Peggotty was out showing Mr. Dick the soldiers at the Horse Guards--and being, besides, greatly pleased to see Agnes--rather plumed herself on the affair than otherwise, and received us with unimpaired good humour. When Agnes laid her bonnet on the table, and sat down beside her, I could not but think, looking on her mild eyes and her radiant forehead, how natural it seemed to have her there; how trustfully, although she was so young and inexperienced, my aunt confided in her; how strong she was, indeed, in simple love and truth.

We began to talk about my aunt's losses, and I told them what I had tried to do that morning.

'Which was injudicious, Trot,' said my aunt, 'but well meant. You are a generous boy--I suppose I must say, young man, now--and I am proud of you, my dear. So far, so good. Now, Trot and Agnes, let us look the case of Betsey Trotwood in the face, and see how it stands.'

I observed Agnes turn pale, as she looked very attentively at my aunt. My aunt, patting her cat, looked very attentively at Agnes.

'Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt, who had always kept her money matters to herself. '--I don't mean your sister, Trot, my dear, but myself--had a certain property. It don't matter how much; enough to live on. More; for she had saved a little, and added to it. Betsey funded her property for some time, and then, by the advice of her man of business, laid it out on landed security. That did very well, and returned very good interest, till Betsey was paid off. I am talking of Betsey as if she was a man-of-war. Well! Then, Betsey had to look about her, for a new investment. She thought she was wiser, now, than her man of business, who was not such a good man of business by this time, as he used to be--I am alluding to your father, Agnes--and she took it into her head to lay it out for herself. So she took her pigs,' said my aunt, 'to a foreign market; and a very bad market it turned out to be. First, she lost in the mining way, and then she lost in the diving way--fishing up treasure, or some such Tom Tiddler nonsense,' explained my aunt, rubbing her nose; 'and then she lost in the mining way again, and, last of all, to set the thing entirely to rights, she lost in the banking way. I don't know what the Bank shares were worth for a little while,' said my aunt; 'cent per cent was the lowest of it, I believe; but the Bank was at the other end of the world, and tumbled into space, for what I know; anyhow, it fell to pieces, and never will and never can pay sixpence; and Betsey's sixpences were all there, and there's an end of them. Least

said, soonest mended!'

My aunt concluded this philosophical summary, by fixing her eyes with a kind of triumph on Agnes, whose colour was gradually returning.

'Dear Miss Trotwood, is that all the history?' said Agnes.

'I hope it's enough, child,' said my aunt. 'If there had been more money to lose, it wouldn't have been all, I dare say. Betsey would have contrived to throw that after the rest, and make another chapter, I have little doubt. But there was no more money, and there's no more story.'

Agnes had listened at first with suspended breath. Her colour still came and went, but she breathed more freely. I thought I knew why. I thought she had had some fear that her unhappy father might be in some way to blame for what had happened. My aunt took her hand in hers, and laughed.

'Is that all?' repeated my aunt. 'Why, yes, that's all, except, "And she lived happy ever afterwards." Perhaps I may add that of Betsey yet, one of these days. Now, Agnes, you have a wise head. So have you, Trot, in some things, though I can't compliment you always'; and here my aunt shook her own at me, with an energy peculiar to herself. 'What's to be done? Here's the cottage, taking one time with another, will produce say seventy pounds a year. I think we may safely put it down at that. Well!--That's all we've got,' said my aunt; with whom it was an idiosyncrasy, as it is with some horses, to stop very short when she appeared to be in a fair way of going on for a long while.

'Then,' said my aunt, after a rest, 'there's Dick. He's good for a hundred a-year, but of course that must be expended on himself. I would sooner send him away, though I know I am the only person who appreciates him, than have him, and not spend his money on himself. How can Trot and I do best, upon our means? What do you say, Agnes?'

'I say, aunt,' I interposed, 'that I must do something!'

'Go for a soldier, do you mean?' returned my aunt, alarmed; 'or go to sea? I won't hear of it. You are to be a proctor. We're not going to have any knockings on the head in THIS family, if you please, sir.'

I was about to explain that I was not desirous of introducing that mode of provision into the family, when Agnes inquired if my rooms were held for any long term?

'You come to the point, my dear,' said my aunt. 'They are not to be got rid of, for six months at least, unless they could be underlet, and that I don't believe. The last man died here. Five people out of six would die--of course--of that woman in nankeen with the flannel petticoat. I have a little ready money; and I agree with you, the best thing we can do, is, to live the term out here, and get a bedroom hard by.'

I thought it my duty to hint at the discomfort my aunt would sustain, from living in a continual state of guerilla warfare with Mrs. Crupp; but she disposed of that objection summarily by declaring that, on the first demonstration of hostilities, she was prepared to astonish Mrs. Crupp for the whole remainder of her natural life.

'I have been thinking, Trotwood,' said Agnes, diffidently, 'that if you had time--'

'I have a good deal of time, Agnes. I am always disengaged after four or five o'clock, and I have time early in the morning. In one way and another,' said I, conscious of reddening a little as I thought of the hours and hours I had devoted to fagging about town, and to and fro upon the Norwood Road, 'I have abundance of time.'

'I know you would not mind,' said Agnes, coming to me, and speaking in a low voice, so full of sweet and hopeful consideration that I hear it now, 'the duties of a secretary.'

'Mind, my dear Agnes?'

'Because,' continued Agnes, 'Doctor Strong has acted on his intention of retiring, and has come to live in London; and he asked papa, I know, if he could recommend him one. Don't you think he would rather have his favourite old pupil near him, than anybody else?'

'Dear Agnes!' said I. 'What should I do without you! You are always my good angel. I told you so. I never think of you in any other light.'

Agnes answered with her pleasant laugh, that one good Angel (meaning Dora) was enough; and went on to remind me that the Doctor had been used to occupy himself in his study, early in the morning, and in the evening--and that probably my leisure would suit his requirements very well. I was scarcely more delighted with the prospect of earning my own bread, than with the hope of earning it under my old master; in short, acting on the advice of Agnes, I sat down and wrote a letter to the Doctor, stating my object, and appointing to call on him next day at ten in the forenoon. This I addressed to Highgate--for in that place, so memorable to me, he lived--and went and posted, myself, without losing a minute.

Wherever Agnes was, some agreeable token of her noiseless presence seemed inseparable from the place. When I came back, I found my aunt's birds hanging, just as they had hung so long in the parlour window of the cottage; and my easy-chair imitating my aunt's much easier chair in its position at the open window; and even the round green fan, which my aunt had brought away with her, screwed on to the window-sill. I knew who had done all this, by its seeming to have quietly done itself; and I

should have known in a moment who had arranged my neglected books in the old order of my school days, even if I had supposed Agnes to be miles away, instead of seeing her busy with them, and smiling at the disorder into which they had fallen.

My aunt was quite gracious on the subject of the Thames (it really did look very well with the sun upon it, though not like the sea before the cottage), but she could not relent towards the London smoke, which, she said, 'peppered everything'. A complete revolution, in which Peggotty bore a prominent part, was being effected in every corner of my rooms, in regard of this pepper; and I was looking on, thinking how little even Peggotty seemed to do with a good deal of bustle, and how much Agnes did without any bustle at all, when a knock came at the door.

'I think,' said Agnes, turning pale, 'it's papa. He promised me that he would come.'

I opened the door, and admitted, not only Mr. Wickfield, but Uriah Heep. I had not seen Mr. Wickfield for some time. I was prepared for a great change in him, after what I had heard from Agnes, but his appearance shocked me.

It was not that he looked many years older, though still dressed with the old scrupulous cleanliness; or that there was an unwholesome ruddiness upon his face; or that his eyes were full and bloodshot; or that there was a nervous trembling in his hand, the cause of which I knew, and had for some years seen at work. It was not that he had lost his good looks, or his old bearing of a gentleman--for that he had not--but the thing that struck me most, was, that with the evidences of his native superiority still upon him, he should submit himself to that crawling impersonation of meanness, Uriah Heep. The reversal of the two natures, in their relative positions, Uriah's of power and Mr. Wickfield's of dependence, was a sight more painful to me than I can



express. If I had seen an Ape taking command of a Man, I should hardly have thought it a more degrading spectacle.

He appeared to be only too conscious of it himself. When he came in, he stood still; and with his head bowed, as if he felt it. This was only for a moment; for Agnes softly said to him, 'Papa! Here is Miss Trotwood--and Trotwood, whom you have not seen for a long while!' and then he approached, and constrainedly gave my aunt his hand, and shook hands more cordially with me. In the moment's pause I speak of, I saw Uriah's countenance form itself into a most ill-favoured smile. Agnes saw it too, I think, for she shrank from him.

What my aunt saw, or did not see, I defy the science of physiognomy to have made out, without her own consent. I believe there never was anybody with such an imperturbable countenance when she chose. Her face might have been a dead-wall on the occasion in question, for any light it threw upon her thoughts; until she broke silence with her usual abruptness.

'Well, Wickfield!' said my aunt; and he looked up at her for the first time. 'I have been telling your daughter how well I have been disposing of my money for myself, because I couldn't trust it to you, as you were growing rusty in business matters. We have been taking counsel together, and getting on very well, all things considered. Agnes is worth the whole firm, in my opinion.'

'If I may umbly make the remark,' said Uriah Heep, with a writhe, 'I fully agree with Miss Betsey Trotwood, and should be only too appy if Miss Agnes was a partner.'

'You're a partner yourself, you know,' returned my aunt, 'and that's about enough for you, I expect. How do you find yourself, sir?'

In acknowledgement of this question, addressed to him with extraordinary curtness, Mr. Heep, uncomfortably clutching the blue bag he carried, replied that he was pretty well, he thanked my aunt, and hoped she was the same.

'And you, Master--I should say, Mister Copperfield,' pursued Uriah. 'I hope I see you well! I am rejoiced to see you, Mister Copperfield, even under present circumstances.' I believed that; for he seemed to relish them very much. 'Present circumstances is not what your friends would wish for you, Mister Copperfield, but it isn't money makes the man: it's--I am really unequal with my umble powers to express what it is,' said Uriah, with a fawning jerk, 'but it isn't money!'

Here he shook hands with me: not in the common way, but standing at a good distance from me, and lifting my hand up and down like a pump handle, that he was a little afraid of.

'And how do you think we are looking, Master Copperfield,--I should say, Mister?' fawned Uriah. 'Don't you find Mr. Wickfield blooming, sir? Years don't tell much in our firm, Master Copperfield, except in raising up the umble, namely, mother and self--and in developing,' he added, as an afterthought, 'the beautiful, namely, Miss Agnes.'

He jerked himself about, after this compliment, in such an intolerable manner, that my aunt, who had sat looking straight at him, lost all patience.

'Deuce take the man!' said my aunt, sternly, 'what's he about? Don't be galvanic, sir!'

'I ask your pardon, Miss Trotwood,' returned Uriah; 'I'm aware you're nervous.'

'Go along with you, sir!' said my aunt, anything but appeased. 'Don't presume to say so! I am nothing of the sort. If you're an eel, sir, conduct yourself like one. If you're a man, control your limbs, sir! Good God!' said my aunt, with great indignation, 'I am not going to be serpentine and corkscrewed out of my senses!'

Mr. Heep was rather abashed, as most people might have been, by this explosion; which derived great additional force from the indignant manner in which my aunt afterwards moved in her chair, and shook her head as if she were making snaps or bounces at him. But he said to me aside in a meek voice:

'I am well aware, Master Copperfield, that Miss Trotwood, though an excellent lady, has a quick temper (indeed I think I had the pleasure of knowing her, when I was a numble clerk, before you did, Master Copperfield), and it's only natural, I am sure, that it should be made quicker by present circumstances. The wonder is, that it isn't much worse! I only called to say that if there was anything we could do, in present circumstances, mother or self, or Wickfield and Heep,--we should be really glad. I may go so far?' said Uriah, with a sickly smile at his partner.

'Uriah Heep,' said Mr. Wickfield, in a monotonous forced way, 'is active in the business, Trotwood. What he says, I quite concur in. You know I had an old interest in you. Apart from that, what Uriah says I quite concur in!'

'Oh, what a reward it is,' said Uriah, drawing up one leg, at the risk of bringing down upon himself another visitation from my aunt, 'to be so trusted in! But I hope I am able to do something to relieve him from the fatigues of business, Master Copperfield!'

'Uriah Heep is a great relief to me,' said Mr. Wickfield, in the same

dull voice. 'It's a load off my mind, Trotwood, to have such a partner.'

The red fox made him say all this, I knew, to exhibit him to me in the light he had indicated on the night when he poisoned my rest. I saw the same ill-favoured smile upon his face again, and saw how he watched me.

'You are not going, papa?' said Agnes, anxiously. 'Will you not walk back with Trotwood and me?'

He would have looked to Uriah, I believe, before replying, if that worthy had not anticipated him.

'I am bespoke myself,' said Uriah, 'on business; otherwise I should have been appy to have kept with my friends. But I leave my partner to represent the firm. Miss Agnes, ever yours! I wish you good-day, Master Copperfield, and leave my umble respects for Miss Betsey Trotwood.'

With those words, he retired, kissing his great hand, and leering at us like a mask.

We sat there, talking about our pleasant old Canterbury days, an hour or two. Mr. Wickfield, left to Agnes, soon became more like his former self; though there was a settled depression upon him, which he never shook off. For all that, he brightened; and had an evident pleasure in hearing us recall the little incidents of our old life, many of which he remembered very well. He said it was like those times, to be alone with Agnes and me again; and he wished to Heaven they had never changed. I am sure there was an influence in the placid face of Agnes, and in the very touch of her hand upon his arm, that did wonders for him.

My aunt (who was busy nearly all this while with Peggotty, in the inner room) would not accompany us to the place where they were staying, but insisted on my going; and I went. We dined together. After dinner, Agnes

sat beside him, as of old, and poured out his wine. He took what she gave him, and no more--like a child--and we all three sat together at a window as the evening gathered in. When it was almost dark, he lay down on a sofa, Agnes pillowing his head and bending over him a little while; and when she came back to the window, it was not so dark but I could see tears glittering in her eyes.

I pray Heaven that I never may forget the dear girl in her love and truth, at that time of my life; for if I should, I must be drawing near the end, and then I would desire to remember her best! She filled my heart with such good resolutions, strengthened my weakness so, by her example, so directed--I know not how, she was too modest and gentle to advise me in many words--the wandering ardour and unsettled purpose within me, that all the little good I have done, and all the harm I have forborne, I solemnly believe I may refer to her.

And how she spoke to me of Dora, sitting at the window in the dark; listened to my praises of her; praised again; and round the little fairy-figure shed some glimpses of her own pure light, that made it yet more precious and more innocent to me! Oh, Agnes, sister of my boyhood, if I had known then, what I knew long afterwards--!

There was a beggar in the street, when I went down; and as I turned my head towards the window, thinking of her calm seraphic eyes, he made me start by muttering, as if he were an echo of the morning: 'Blind! Blind! Blind!'

## CHAPTER 36. ENTHUSIASM

I began the next day with another dive into the Roman bath, and then started for Highgate. I was not dispirited now. I was not afraid of the

shabby coat, and had no yearnings after gallant greys. My whole manner of thinking of our late misfortune was changed. What I had to do, was, to show my aunt that her past goodness to me had not been thrown away on an insensible, ungrateful object. What I had to do, was, to turn the painful discipline of my younger days to account, by going to work with a resolute and steady heart. What I had to do, was, to take my woodman's axe in my hand, and clear my own way through the forest of difficulty, by cutting down the trees until I came to Dora. And I went on at a mighty rate, as if it could be done by walking.

When I found myself on the familiar Highgate road, pursuing such a different errand from that old one of pleasure, with which it was associated, it seemed as if a complete change had come on my whole life. But that did not discourage me. With the new life, came new purpose, new intention. Great was the labour; priceless the reward. Dora was the reward, and Dora must be won.

I got into such a transport, that I felt quite sorry my coat was not a little shabby already. I wanted to be cutting at those trees in the forest of difficulty, under circumstances that should prove my strength. I had a good mind to ask an old man, in wire spectacles, who was breaking stones upon the road, to lend me his hammer for a little while, and let me begin to beat a path to Dora out of granite. I stimulated myself into such a heat, and got so out of breath, that I felt as if I had been earning I don't know how much.

In this state, I went into a cottage that I saw was to let, and examined it narrowly,--for I felt it necessary to be practical. It would do for me and Dora admirably: with a little front garden for Jip to run about in, and bark at the tradespeople through the railings, and a capital room upstairs for my aunt. I came out again, hotter and faster than ever, and dashed up to Highgate, at such a rate that I was there an hour too early; and, though I had not been, should have been obliged to

stroll about to cool myself, before I was at all presentable.

My first care, after putting myself under this necessary course of preparation, was to find the Doctor's house. It was not in that part of Highgate where Mrs. Steerforth lived, but quite on the opposite side of the little town. When I had made this discovery, I went back, in an attraction I could not resist, to a lane by Mrs. Steerforth's, and looked over the corner of the garden wall. His room was shut up close. The conservatory doors were standing open, and Rosa Dartle was walking, bareheaded, with a quick, impetuous step, up and down a gravel walk on one side of the lawn. She gave me the idea of some fierce thing, that was dragging the length of its chain to and fro upon a beaten track, and wearing its heart out.

I came softly away from my place of observation, and avoiding that part of the neighbourhood, and wishing I had not gone near it, strolled about until it was ten o'clock. The church with the slender spire, that stands on the top of the hill now, was not there then to tell me the time. An old red-brick mansion, used as a school, was in its place; and a fine old house it must have been to go to school at, as I recollect it.

When I approached the Doctor's cottage--a pretty old place, on which he seemed to have expended some money, if I might judge from the embellishments and repairs that had the look of being just completed--I saw him walking in the garden at the side, gaiters and all, as if he had never left off walking since the days of my pupilage. He had his old companions about him, too; for there were plenty of high trees in the neighbourhood, and two or three rooks were on the grass, looking after him, as if they had been written to about him by the Canterbury rooks, and were observing him closely in consequence.

Knowing the utter hopelessness of attracting his attention from that distance, I made bold to open the gate, and walk after him, so as to

meet him when he should turn round. When he did, and came towards me, he looked at me thoughtfully for a few moments, evidently without thinking about me at all; and then his benevolent face expressed extraordinary pleasure, and he took me by both hands.

'Why, my dear Copperfield,' said the Doctor, 'you are a man! How do you do? I am delighted to see you. My dear Copperfield, how very much you have improved! You are quite--yes--dear me!'

I hoped he was well, and Mrs. Strong too.

'Oh dear, yes!' said the Doctor; 'Annie's quite well, and she'll be delighted to see you. You were always her favourite. She said so, last night, when I showed her your letter. And--yes, to be sure--you recollect Mr. Jack Maldon, Copperfield?'

'Perfectly, sir.'

'Of course,' said the Doctor. 'To be sure. He's pretty well, too.'

'Has he come home, sir?' I inquired.

'From India?' said the Doctor. 'Yes. Mr. Jack Maldon couldn't bear the climate, my dear. Mrs. Markleham--you have not forgotten Mrs. Markleham?'

Forgotten the Old Soldier! And in that short time!

'Mrs. Markleham,' said the Doctor, 'was quite vexed about him, poor thing; so we have got him at home again; and we have bought him a little Patent place, which agrees with him much better.' I knew enough of Mr. Jack Maldon to suspect from this account that it was a place where there was not much to do, and which was pretty well paid. The Doctor, walking



up and down with his hand on my shoulder, and his kind face turned encouragingly to mine, went on:

'Now, my dear Copperfield, in reference to this proposal of yours. It's very gratifying and agreeable to me, I am sure; but don't you think you could do better? You achieved distinction, you know, when you were with us. You are qualified for many good things. You have laid a foundation that any edifice may be raised upon; and is it not a pity that you should devote the spring-time of your life to such a poor pursuit as I can offer?'

I became very glowing again, and, expressing myself in a rhapsodical style, I am afraid, urged my request strongly; reminding the Doctor that I had already a profession.

'Well, well,' said the Doctor, 'that's true. Certainly, your having a profession, and being actually engaged in studying it, makes a difference. But, my good young friend, what's seventy pounds a year?'

'It doubles our income, Doctor Strong,' said I.

'Dear me!' replied the Doctor. 'To think of that! Not that I mean to say it's rigidly limited to seventy pounds a-year, because I have always contemplated making any young friend I might thus employ, a present too. Undoubtedly,' said the Doctor, still walking me up and down with his hand on my shoulder. 'I have always taken an annual present into account.'

'My dear tutor,' said I (now, really, without any nonsense), 'to whom I owe more obligations already than I ever can acknowledge--'

'No, no,' interposed the Doctor. 'Pardon me!'

'If you will take such time as I have, and that is my mornings and evenings, and can think it worth seventy pounds a year, you will do me such a service as I cannot express.'

'Dear me!' said the Doctor, innocently. 'To think that so little should go for so much! Dear, dear! And when you can do better, you will? On your word, now?' said the Doctor,--which he had always made a very grave appeal to the honour of us boys.

'On my word, sir!' I returned, answering in our old school manner.

'Then be it so,' said the Doctor, clapping me on the shoulder, and still keeping his hand there, as we still walked up and down.

'And I shall be twenty times happier, sir,' said I, with a little--I hope innocent--flattery, 'if my employment is to be on the Dictionary.'

The Doctor stopped, smilingly clapped me on the shoulder again, and exclaimed, with a triumph most delightful to behold, as if I had penetrated to the profoundest depths of mortal sagacity, 'My dear young friend, you have hit it. It IS the Dictionary!'

How could it be anything else! His pockets were as full of it as his head. It was sticking out of him in all directions. He told me that since his retirement from scholastic life, he had been advancing with it wonderfully; and that nothing could suit him better than the proposed arrangements for morning and evening work, as it was his custom to walk about in the daytime with his considering cap on. His papers were in a little confusion, in consequence of Mr. Jack Maldon having lately proffered his occasional services as an amanuensis, and not being accustomed to that occupation; but we should soon put right what was amiss, and go on swimmingly. Afterwards, when we were fairly at our work, I found Mr. Jack Maldon's efforts more troublesome to me than

I had expected, as he had not confined himself to making numerous mistakes, but had sketched so many soldiers, and ladies' heads, over the Doctor's manuscript, that I often became involved in labyrinths of obscurity.

The Doctor was quite happy in the prospect of our going to work together on that wonderful performance, and we settled to begin next morning at seven o'clock. We were to work two hours every morning, and two or three hours every night, except on Saturdays, when I was to rest. On Sundays, of course, I was to rest also, and I considered these very easy terms.

Our plans being thus arranged to our mutual satisfaction, the Doctor took me into the house to present me to Mrs. Strong, whom we found in the Doctor's new study, dusting his books,--a freedom which he never permitted anybody else to take with those sacred favourites.

They had postponed their breakfast on my account, and we sat down to table together. We had not been seated long, when I saw an approaching arrival in Mrs. Strong's face, before I heard any sound of it. A gentleman on horseback came to the gate, and leading his horse into the little court, with the bridle over his arm, as if he were quite at home, tied him to a ring in the empty coach-house wall, and came into the breakfast parlour, whip in hand. It was Mr. Jack Maldon; and Mr. Jack Maldon was not at all improved by India, I thought. I was in a state of ferocious virtue, however, as to young men who were not cutting down trees in the forest of difficulty; and my impression must be received with due allowance.

'Mr. Jack!' said the Doctor. 'Copperfield!'

Mr. Jack Maldon shook hands with me; but not very warmly, I believed; and with an air of languid patronage, at which I secretly took great umbrage. But his languor altogether was quite a wonderful sight; except

when he addressed himself to his cousin Annie. 'Have you breakfasted this morning, Mr. Jack?' said the Doctor.

'I hardly ever take breakfast, sir,' he replied, with his head thrown back in an easy-chair. 'I find it bores me.'

'Is there any news today?' inquired the Doctor.

'Nothing at all, sir,' replied Mr. Maldon. 'There's an account about the people being hungry and discontented down in the North, but they are always being hungry and discontented somewhere.'

The Doctor looked grave, and said, as though he wished to change the subject, 'Then there's no news at all; and no news, they say, is good news.'

'There's a long statement in the papers, sir, about a murder,' observed Mr. Maldon. 'But somebody is always being murdered, and I didn't read it.'

A display of indifference to all the actions and passions of mankind was not supposed to be such a distinguished quality at that time, I think, as I have observed it to be considered since. I have known it very fashionable indeed. I have seen it displayed with such success, that I have encountered some fine ladies and gentlemen who might as well have been born caterpillars. Perhaps it impressed me the more then, because it was new to me, but it certainly did not tend to exalt my opinion of, or to strengthen my confidence in, Mr. Jack Maldon.

'I came out to inquire whether Annie would like to go to the opera tonight,' said Mr. Maldon, turning to her. 'It's the last good night there will be, this season; and there's a singer there, whom she really ought to hear. She is perfectly exquisite. Besides which, she is so

charmingly ugly,' relapsing into languor.

The Doctor, ever pleased with what was likely to please his young wife, turned to her and said:

'You must go, Annie. You must go.'

'I would rather not,' she said to the Doctor. 'I prefer to remain at home. I would much rather remain at home.'

Without looking at her cousin, she then addressed me, and asked me about Agnes, and whether she should see her, and whether she was not likely to come that day; and was so much disturbed, that I wondered how even the Doctor, buttering his toast, could be blind to what was so obvious.

But he saw nothing. He told her, good-naturedly, that she was young and ought to be amused and entertained, and must not allow herself to be made dull by a dull old fellow. Moreover, he said, he wanted to hear her sing all the new singer's songs to him; and how could she do that well, unless she went? So the Doctor persisted in making the engagement for her, and Mr. Jack Maldon was to come back to dinner. This concluded, he went to his Patent place, I suppose; but at all events went away on his horse, looking very idle.

I was curious to find out next morning, whether she had been. She had not, but had sent into London to put her cousin off; and had gone out in the afternoon to see Agnes, and had prevailed upon the Doctor to go with her; and they had walked home by the fields, the Doctor told me, the evening being delightful. I wondered then, whether she would have gone if Agnes had not been in town, and whether Agnes had some good influence over her too!

She did not look very happy, I thought; but it was a good face, or a

very false one. I often glanced at it, for she sat in the window all the time we were at work; and made our breakfast, which we took by snatches as we were employed. When I left, at nine o'clock, she was kneeling on the ground at the Doctor's feet, putting on his shoes and gaiters for him. There was a softened shade upon her face, thrown from some green leaves overhanging the open window of the low room; and I thought all the way to Doctors' Commons, of the night when I had seen it looking at him as he read.

I was pretty busy now; up at five in the morning, and home at nine or ten at night. But I had infinite satisfaction in being so closely engaged, and never walked slowly on any account, and felt enthusiastically that the more I tired myself, the more I was doing to deserve Dora. I had not revealed myself in my altered character to Dora yet, because she was coming to see Miss Mills in a few days, and I deferred all I had to tell her until then; merely informing her in my letters (all our communications were secretly forwarded through Miss Mills), that I had much to tell her. In the meantime, I put myself on a short allowance of bear's grease, wholly abandoned scented soap and lavender water, and sold off three waistcoats at a prodigious sacrifice, as being too luxurious for my stern career.

Not satisfied with all these proceedings, but burning with impatience to do something more, I went to see Traddles, now lodging up behind the parapet of a house in Castle Street, Holborn. Mr. Dick, who had been with me to Highgate twice already, and had resumed his companionship with the Doctor, I took with me.

I took Mr. Dick with me, because, acutely sensitive to my aunt's reverses, and sincerely believing that no galley-slave or convict worked as I did, he had begun to fret and worry himself out of spirits and appetite, as having nothing useful to do. In this condition, he felt more incapable of finishing the Memorial than ever; and the harder he

worked at it, the oftener that unlucky head of King Charles the First got into it. Seriously apprehending that his malady would increase, unless we put some innocent deception upon him and caused him to believe that he was useful, or unless we could put him in the way of being really useful (which would be better), I made up my mind to try if Traddles could help us. Before we went, I wrote Traddles a full statement of all that had happened, and Traddles wrote me back a capital answer, expressive of his sympathy and friendship.

We found him hard at work with his inkstand and papers, refreshed by the sight of the flower-pot stand and the little round table in a corner of the small apartment. He received us cordially, and made friends with Mr. Dick in a moment. Mr. Dick professed an absolute certainty of having seen him before, and we both said, 'Very likely.'

The first subject on which I had to consult Traddles was this,--I had heard that many men distinguished in various pursuits had begun life by reporting the debates in Parliament. Traddles having mentioned newspapers to me, as one of his hopes, I had put the two things together, and told Traddles in my letter that I wished to know how I could qualify myself for this pursuit. Traddles now informed me, as the result of his inquiries, that the mere mechanical acquisition necessary, except in rare cases, for thorough excellence in it, that is to say, a perfect and entire command of the mystery of short-hand writing and reading, was about equal in difficulty to the mastery of six languages; and that it might perhaps be attained, by dint of perseverance, in the course of a few years. Traddles reasonably supposed that this would settle the business; but I, only feeling that here indeed were a few tall trees to be hewn down, immediately resolved to work my way on to Dora through this thicket, axe in hand.

'I am very much obliged to you, my dear Traddles!' said I. 'I'll begin tomorrow.'

Traddles looked astonished, as he well might; but he had no notion as yet of my rapturous condition.

'I'll buy a book,' said I, 'with a good scheme of this art in it; I'll work at it at the Commons, where I haven't half enough to do; I'll take down the speeches in our court for practice--Traddles, my dear fellow, I'll master it!'

'Dear me,' said Traddles, opening his eyes, 'I had no idea you were such a determined character, Copperfield!'

I don't know how he should have had, for it was new enough to me. I passed that off, and brought Mr. Dick on the carpet.

'You see,' said Mr. Dick, wistfully, 'if I could exert myself, Mr. Traddles--if I could beat a drum--or blow anything!'

Poor fellow! I have little doubt he would have preferred such an employment in his heart to all others. Traddles, who would not have smiled for the world, replied composedly:

'But you are a very good penman, sir. You told me so, Copperfield?'

'Excellent!' said I. And indeed he was. He wrote with extraordinary neatness.

'Don't you think,' said Traddles, 'you could copy writings, sir, if I got them for you?'

Mr. Dick looked doubtfully at me. 'Eh, Trotwood?'

I shook my head. Mr. Dick shook his, and sighed. 'Tell him about the Memorial,' said Mr. Dick.



I explained to Traddles that there was a difficulty in keeping King Charles the First out of Mr. Dick's manuscripts; Mr. Dick in the meanwhile looking very deferentially and seriously at Traddles, and sucking his thumb.

'But these writings, you know, that I speak of, are already drawn up and finished,' said Traddles after a little consideration. 'Mr. Dick has nothing to do with them. Wouldn't that make a difference, Copperfield? At all events, wouldn't it be well to try?'

This gave us new hope. Traddles and I laying our heads together apart, while Mr. Dick anxiously watched us from his chair, we concocted a scheme in virtue of which we got him to work next day, with triumphant success.

On a table by the window in Buckingham Street, we set out the work Traddles procured for him--which was to make, I forget how many copies of a legal document about some right of way--and on another table we spread the last unfinished original of the great Memorial. Our instructions to Mr. Dick were that he should copy exactly what he had before him, without the least departure from the original; and that when he felt it necessary to make the slightest allusion to King Charles the First, he should fly to the Memorial. We exhorted him to be resolute in this, and left my aunt to observe him. My aunt reported to us, afterwards, that, at first, he was like a man playing the kettle-drums, and constantly divided his attentions between the two; but that, finding this confuse and fatigue him, and having his copy there, plainly before his eyes, he soon sat at it in an orderly business-like manner, and postponed the Memorial to a more convenient time. In a word, although we took great care that he should have no more to do than was good for him, and although he did not begin with the beginning of a week, he earned by the following Saturday night ten shillings and nine-pence; and never,

while I live, shall I forget his going about to all the shops in the neighbourhood to change this treasure into sixpences, or his bringing them to my aunt arranged in the form of a heart upon a waiter, with tears of joy and pride in his eyes. He was like one under the propitious influence of a charm, from the moment of his being usefully employed; and if there were a happy man in the world, that Saturday night, it was the grateful creature who thought my aunt the most wonderful woman in existence, and me the most wonderful young man.

'No starving now, Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, shaking hands with me in a corner. 'I'll provide for her, Sir!' and he flourished his ten fingers in the air, as if they were ten banks.

I hardly know which was the better pleased, Traddles or I. 'It really,' said Traddles, suddenly, taking a letter out of his pocket, and giving it to me, 'put Mr. Micawber quite out of my head!'

The letter (Mr. Micawber never missed any possible opportunity of writing a letter) was addressed to me, 'By the kindness of T. Traddles, Esquire, of the Inner Temple.' It ran thus:--

'MY DEAR COPPERFIELD,

'You may possibly not be unprepared to receive the intimation that something has turned up. I may have mentioned to you on a former occasion that I was in expectation of such an event.

'I am about to establish myself in one of the provincial towns of our favoured island (where the society may be described as a happy admixture of the agricultural and the clerical), in immediate connexion with one of the learned professions. Mrs. Micawber and our offspring will accompany me. Our ashes, at a future period, will probably be found

commingled in the cemetery attached to a venerable pile, for which the spot to which I refer has acquired a reputation, shall I say from China to Peru?

'In bidding adieu to the modern Babylon, where we have undergone many vicissitudes, I trust not ignobly, Mrs. Micawber and myself cannot disguise from our minds that we part, it may be for years and it may be for ever, with an individual linked by strong associations to the altar of our domestic life. If, on the eve of such a departure, you will accompany our mutual friend, Mr. Thomas Traddles, to our present abode, and there reciprocate the wishes natural to the occasion, you will confer a Boon

'On

'One

'Who

'Is

'Ever yours,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

I was glad to find that Mr. Micawber had got rid of his dust and ashes, and that something really had turned up at last. Learning from Traddles that the invitation referred to the evening then wearing away, I expressed my readiness to do honour to it; and we went off together to the lodging which Mr. Micawber occupied as Mr. Mortimer, and which was situated near the top of the Gray's Inn Road.

The resources of this lodging were so limited, that we found the twins, now some eight or nine years old, reposing in a turn-up bedstead in the family sitting-room, where Mr. Micawber had prepared, in a wash-hand-stand jug, what he called 'a Brew' of the agreeable beverage for which he was famous. I had the pleasure, on this occasion, of

renewing the acquaintance of Master Micawber, whom I found a promising boy of about twelve or thirteen, very subject to that restlessness of limb which is not an unfrequent phenomenon in youths of his age. I also became once more known to his sister, Miss Micawber, in whom, as Mr. Micawber told us, 'her mother renewed her youth, like the Phoenix'.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'yourself and Mr. Traddles find us on the brink of migration, and will excuse any little discomforts incidental to that position.'

Glancing round as I made a suitable reply, I observed that the family effects were already packed, and that the amount of luggage was by no means overwhelming. I congratulated Mrs. Micawber on the approaching change.

'My dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'of your friendly interest in all our affairs, I am well assured. My family may consider it banishment, if they please; but I am a wife and mother, and I never will desert Mr. Micawber.'

Traddles, appealed to by Mrs. Micawber's eye, feelingly acquiesced.

'That,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that, at least, is my view, my dear Mr. Copperfield and Mr. Traddles, of the obligation which I took upon myself when I repeated the irrevocable words, "I, Emma, take thee, Wilkins." I read the service over with a flat-candle on the previous night, and the conclusion I derived from it was, that I never could desert Mr. Micawber. And,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'though it is possible I may be mistaken in my view of the ceremony, I never will!'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, a little impatiently, 'I am not conscious that you are expected to do anything of the sort.'

'I am aware, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' pursued Mrs. Micawber, 'that I am now about to cast my lot among strangers; and I am also aware that the various members of my family, to whom Mr. Micawber has written in the most gentlemanly terms, announcing that fact, have not taken the least notice of Mr. Micawber's communication. Indeed I may be superstitious,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'but it appears to me that Mr. Micawber is destined never to receive any answers whatever to the great majority of the communications he writes. I may augur, from the silence of my family, that they object to the resolution I have taken; but I should not allow myself to be swerved from the path of duty, Mr. Copperfield, even by my papa and mama, were they still living.'

I expressed my opinion that this was going in the right direction. 'It may be a sacrifice,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'to immure one's-self in a Cathedral town; but surely, Mr. Copperfield, if it is a sacrifice in me, it is much more a sacrifice in a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities.'

'Oh! You are going to a Cathedral town?' said I.

Mr. Micawber, who had been helping us all, out of the wash-hand-stand jug, replied:

'To Canterbury. In fact, my dear Copperfield, I have entered into arrangements, by virtue of which I stand pledged and contracted to our friend Heep, to assist and serve him in the capacity of--and to be--his confidential clerk.'

I stared at Mr. Micawber, who greatly enjoyed my surprise.

'I am bound to state to you,' he said, with an official air, 'that the business habits, and the prudent suggestions, of Mrs. Micawber, have in a great measure conduced to this result. The gauntlet, to which Mrs. Micawber referred upon a former occasion, being thrown down in the form

of an advertisement, was taken up by my friend Heep, and led to a mutual recognition. Of my friend Heep,' said Mr. Micawber, 'who is a man of remarkable shrewdness, I desire to speak with all possible respect. My friend Heep has not fixed the positive remuneration at too high a figure, but he has made a great deal, in the way of extrication from the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, contingent on the value of my services; and on the value of those services I pin my faith. Such address and intelligence as I chance to possess,' said Mr. Micawber, boastfully disparaging himself, with the old genteel air, 'will be devoted to my friend Heep's service. I have already some acquaintance with the law--as a defendant on civil process--and I shall immediately apply myself to the Commentaries of one of the most eminent and remarkable of our English jurists. I believe it is unnecessary to add that I allude to Mr. justice Blackstone.'

These observations, and indeed the greater part of the observations made that evening, were interrupted by Mrs. Micawber's discovering that Master Micawber was sitting on his boots, or holding his head on with both arms as if he felt it loose, or accidentally kicking Traddles under the table, or shuffling his feet over one another, or producing them at distances from himself apparently outrageous to nature, or lying sideways with his hair among the wine-glasses, or developing his restlessness of limb in some other form incompatible with the general interests of society; and by Master Micawber's receiving those discoveries in a resentful spirit. I sat all the while, amazed by Mr. Micawber's disclosure, and wondering what it meant; until Mrs. Micawber resumed the thread of the discourse, and claimed my attention.

'What I particularly request Mr. Micawber to be careful of, is,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that he does not, my dear Mr. Copperfield, in applying himself to this subordinate branch of the law, place it out of his power to rise, ultimately, to the top of the tree. I am convinced that Mr. Micawber, giving his mind to a profession so adapted to his fertile

resources, and his flow of language, must distinguish himself. Now, for example, Mr. Traddles,' said Mrs. Micawber, assuming a profound air, 'a judge, or even say a Chancellor. Does an individual place himself beyond the pale of those preferments by entering on such an office as Mr. Micawber has accepted?'

'My dear,' observed Mr. Micawber--but glancing inquisitively at Traddles, too; 'we have time enough before us, for the consideration of those questions.'

'Micawber,' she returned, 'no! Your mistake in life is, that you do not look forward far enough. You are bound, in justice to your family, if not to yourself, to take in at a comprehensive glance the extremest point in the horizon to which your abilities may lead you.'

Mr. Micawber coughed, and drank his punch with an air of exceeding satisfaction--still glancing at Traddles, as if he desired to have his opinion.

'Why, the plain state of the case, Mrs. Micawber,' said Traddles, mildly breaking the truth to her. 'I mean the real prosaic fact, you know--'

'Just so,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'my dear Mr. Traddles, I wish to be as prosaic and literal as possible on a subject of so much importance.'

'--Is,' said Traddles, 'that this branch of the law, even if Mr. Micawber were a regular solicitor--'

'Exactly so,' returned Mrs. Micawber. ('Wilkins, you are squinting, and will not be able to get your eyes back.')

'--Has nothing,' pursued Traddles, 'to do with that. Only a barrister is eligible for such preferments; and Mr. Micawber could not be a

barrister, without being entered at an inn of court as a student, for five years.'

'Do I follow you?' said Mrs. Micawber, with her most affable air of business. 'Do I understand, my dear Mr. Traddles, that, at the expiration of that period, Mr. Micawber would be eligible as a Judge or Chancellor?'

'He would be ELIGIBLE,' returned Traddles, with a strong emphasis on that word.

'Thank you,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'That is quite sufficient. If such is the case, and Mr. Micawber forfeits no privilege by entering on these duties, my anxiety is set at rest. I speak,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'as a female, necessarily; but I have always been of opinion that Mr. Micawber possesses what I have heard my papa call, when I lived at home, the judicial mind; and I hope Mr. Micawber is now entering on a field where that mind will develop itself, and take a commanding station.'

I quite believe that Mr. Micawber saw himself, in his judicial mind's eye, on the woolsack. He passed his hand complacently over his bald head, and said with ostentatious resignation:

'My dear, we will not anticipate the decrees of fortune. If I am reserved to wear a wig, I am at least prepared, externally,' in allusion to his baldness, 'for that distinction. I do not,' said Mr. Micawber, 'regret my hair, and I may have been deprived of it for a specific purpose. I cannot say. It is my intention, my dear Copperfield, to educate my son for the Church; I will not deny that I should be happy, on his account, to attain to eminence.'

'For the Church?' said I, still pondering, between whiles, on Uriah Heep.



'Yes,' said Mr. Micawber. 'He has a remarkable head-voice, and will commence as a chorister. Our residence at Canterbury, and our local connexion, will, no doubt, enable him to take advantage of any vacancy that may arise in the Cathedral corps.'

On looking at Master Micawber again, I saw that he had a certain expression of face, as if his voice were behind his eyebrows; where it presently appeared to be, on his singing us (as an alternative between that and bed) 'The Wood-Pecker tapping'. After many compliments on this performance, we fell into some general conversation; and as I was too full of my desperate intentions to keep my altered circumstances to myself, I made them known to Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. I cannot express how extremely delighted they both were, by the idea of my aunt's being in difficulties; and how comfortable and friendly it made them.

When we were nearly come to the last round of the punch, I addressed myself to Traddles, and reminded him that we must not separate, without wishing our friends health, happiness, and success in their new career. I begged Mr. Micawber to fill us bumpers, and proposed the toast in due form: shaking hands with him across the table, and kissing Mrs. Micawber, to commemorate that eventful occasion. Traddles imitated me in the first particular, but did not consider himself a sufficiently old friend to venture on the second.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, rising with one of his thumbs in each of his waistcoat pockets, 'the companion of my youth: if I may be allowed the expression--and my esteemed friend Traddles: if I may be permitted to call him so--will allow me, on the part of Mrs. Micawber, myself, and our offspring, to thank them in the warmest and most uncompromising terms for their good wishes. It may be expected that on the eve of a migration which will consign us to a perfectly new existence,' Mr. Micawber spoke as if they were going five hundred

thousand miles, 'I should offer a few valedictory remarks to two such friends as I see before me. But all that I have to say in this way, I have said. Whatever station in society I may attain, through the medium of the learned profession of which I am about to become an unworthy member, I shall endeavour not to disgrace, and Mrs. Micawber will be safe to adorn. Under the temporary pressure of pecuniary liabilities, contracted with a view to their immediate liquidation, but remaining unliquidated through a combination of circumstances, I have been under the necessity of assuming a garb from which my natural instincts recoil--I allude to spectacles--and possessing myself of a cognomen, to which I can establish no legitimate pretensions. All I have to say on that score is, that the cloud has passed from the dreary scene, and the God of Day is once more high upon the mountain tops. On Monday next, on the arrival of the four o'clock afternoon coach at Canterbury, my foot will be on my native heath--my name, Micawber!'

Mr. Micawber resumed his seat on the close of these remarks, and drank two glasses of punch in grave succession. He then said with much solemnity:

'One thing more I have to do, before this separation is complete, and that is to perform an act of justice. My friend Mr. Thomas Traddles has, on two several occasions, "put his name", if I may use a common expression, to bills of exchange for my accommodation. On the first occasion Mr. Thomas Traddles was left--let me say, in short, in the lurch. The fulfilment of the second has not yet arrived. The amount of the first obligation,' here Mr. Micawber carefully referred to papers, 'was, I believe, twenty-three, four, nine and a half, of the second, according to my entry of that transaction, eighteen, six, two. These sums, united, make a total, if my calculation is correct, amounting to forty-one, ten, eleven and a half. My friend Copperfield will perhaps do me the favour to check that total?'

I did so and found it correct.

'To leave this metropolis,' said Mr. Micawber, 'and my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles, without acquitting myself of the pecuniary part of this obligation, would weigh upon my mind to an insupportable extent. I have, therefore, prepared for my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles, and I now hold in my hand, a document, which accomplishes the desired object. I beg to hand to my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles my I.O.U. for forty-one, ten, eleven and a half, and I am happy to recover my moral dignity, and to know that I can once more walk erect before my fellow man!'

With this introduction (which greatly affected him), Mr. Micawber placed his I.O.U. in the hands of Traddles, and said he wished him well in every relation of life. I am persuaded, not only that this was quite the same to Mr. Micawber as paying the money, but that Traddles himself hardly knew the difference until he had had time to think about it. Mr. Micawber walked so erect before his fellow man, on the strength of this virtuous action, that his chest looked half as broad again when he lighted us downstairs. We parted with great heartiness on both sides; and when I had seen Traddles to his own door, and was going home alone, I thought, among the other odd and contradictory things I mused upon, that, slippery as Mr. Micawber was, I was probably indebted to some compassionate recollection he retained of me as his boy-lodger, for never having been asked by him for money. I certainly should not have had the moral courage to refuse it; and I have no doubt he knew that (to his credit be it written), quite as well as I did.

## CHAPTER 37. A LITTLE COLD WATER

My new life had lasted for more than a week, and I was stronger than

ever in those tremendous practical resolutions that I felt the crisis required. I continued to walk extremely fast, and to have a general idea that I was getting on. I made it a rule to take as much out of myself as I possibly could, in my way of doing everything to which I applied my energies. I made a perfect victim of myself. I even entertained some idea of putting myself on a vegetable diet, vaguely conceiving that, in becoming a graminivorous animal, I should sacrifice to Dora.

As yet, little Dora was quite unconscious of my desperate firmness, otherwise than as my letters darkly shadowed it forth. But another Saturday came, and on that Saturday evening she was to be at Miss Mills's; and when Mr. Mills had gone to his whist-club (telegraphed to me in the street, by a bird-cage in the drawing-room middle window), I was to go there to tea.

By this time, we were quite settled down in Buckingham Street, where Mr. Dick continued his copying in a state of absolute felicity. My aunt had obtained a signal victory over Mrs. Crupp, by paying her off, throwing the first pitcher she planted on the stairs out of window, and protecting in person, up and down the staircase, a supernumerary whom she engaged from the outer world. These vigorous measures struck such terror to the breast of Mrs. Crupp, that she subsided into her own kitchen, under the impression that my aunt was mad. My aunt being supremely indifferent to Mrs. Crupp's opinion and everybody else's, and rather favouring than discouraging the idea, Mrs. Crupp, of late the bold, became within a few days so faint-hearted, that rather than encounter my aunt upon the staircase, she would endeavour to hide her portly form behind doors--leaving visible, however, a wide margin of flannel petticoat--or would shrink into dark corners. This gave my aunt such unspeakable satisfaction, that I believe she took a delight in prowling up and down, with her bonnet insanelly perched on the top of her head, at times when Mrs. Crupp was likely to be in the way.

My aunt, being uncommonly neat and ingenious, made so many little improvements in our domestic arrangements, that I seemed to be richer instead of poorer. Among the rest, she converted the pantry into a dressing-room for me; and purchased and embellished a bedstead for my occupation, which looked as like a bookcase in the daytime as a bedstead could. I was the object of her constant solicitude; and my poor mother herself could not have loved me better, or studied more how to make me happy.

Peggotty had considered herself highly privileged in being allowed to participate in these labours; and, although she still retained something of her old sentiment of awe in reference to my aunt, had received so many marks of encouragement and confidence, that they were the best friends possible. But the time had now come (I am speaking of the Saturday when I was to take tea at Miss Mills's) when it was necessary for her to return home, and enter on the discharge of the duties she had undertaken in behalf of Ham. 'So good-bye, Barkis,' said my aunt, 'and take care of yourself! I am sure I never thought I could be sorry to lose you!'

I took Peggotty to the coach office and saw her off. She cried at parting, and confided her brother to my friendship as Ham had done. We had heard nothing of him since he went away, that sunny afternoon.

'And now, my own dear Davy,' said Peggotty, 'if, while you're a prentice, you should want any money to spend; or if, when you're out of your time, my dear, you should want any to set you up (and you must do one or other, or both, my darling); who has such a good right to ask leave to lend it you, as my sweet girl's own old stupid me!'

I was not so savagely independent as to say anything in reply, but that if ever I borrowed money of anyone, I would borrow it of her. Next to accepting a large sum on the spot, I believe this gave Peggotty more

comfort than anything I could have done.

'And, my dear!' whispered Peggotty, 'tell the pretty little angel that I should so have liked to see her, only for a minute! And tell her that before she marries my boy, I'll come and make your house so beautiful for you, if you'll let me!'

I declared that nobody else should touch it; and this gave Peggotty such delight that she went away in good spirits.

I fatigued myself as much as I possibly could in the Commons all day, by a variety of devices, and at the appointed time in the evening repaired to Mr. Mills's street. Mr. Mills, who was a terrible fellow to fall asleep after dinner, had not yet gone out, and there was no bird-cage in the middle window.

He kept me waiting so long, that I fervently hoped the Club would fine him for being late. At last he came out; and then I saw my own Dora hang up the bird-cage, and peep into the balcony to look for me, and run in again when she saw I was there, while Jip remained behind, to bark injuriously at an immense butcher's dog in the street, who could have taken him like a pill.

Dora came to the drawing-room door to meet me; and Jip came scrambling out, tumbling over his own growls, under the impression that I was a Bandit; and we all three went in, as happy and loving as could be. I soon carried desolation into the bosom of our joys--not that I meant to do it, but that I was so full of the subject--by asking Dora, without the smallest preparation, if she could love a beggar?

My pretty, little, startled Dora! Her only association with the word was a yellow face and a nightcap, or a pair of crutches, or a wooden leg, or a dog with a decanter-stand in his mouth, or something of that kind; and

she stared at me with the most delightful wonder.

'How can you ask me anything so foolish?' pouted Dora. 'Love a beggar!'

'Dora, my own dearest!' said I. 'I am a beggar!'

'How can you be such a silly thing,' replied Dora, slapping my hand, 'as to sit there, telling such stories? I'll make Jip bite you!'

Her childish way was the most delicious way in the world to me, but it was necessary to be explicit, and I solemnly repeated:

'Dora, my own life, I am your ruined David!'

'I declare I'll make Jip bite you!' said Dora, shaking her curls, 'if you are so ridiculous.'

But I looked so serious, that Dora left off shaking her curls, and laid her trembling little hand upon my shoulder, and first looked scared and anxious, then began to cry. That was dreadful. I fell upon my knees before the sofa, caressing her, and imploring her not to rend my heart; but, for some time, poor little Dora did nothing but exclaim Oh dear! Oh dear! And oh, she was so frightened! And where was Julia Mills! And oh, take her to Julia Mills, and go away, please! until I was almost beside myself.

At last, after an agony of supplication and protestation, I got Dora to look at me, with a horrified expression of face, which I gradually soothed until it was only loving, and her soft, pretty cheek was lying against mine. Then I told her, with my arms clasped round her, how I loved her, so dearly, and so dearly; how I felt it right to offer to release her from her engagement, because now I was poor; how I never could bear it, or recover it, if I lost her; how I had no fears of

poverty, if she had none, my arm being nerved and my heart inspired by her; how I was already working with a courage such as none but lovers knew; how I had begun to be practical, and look into the future; how a crust well earned was sweeter far than a feast inherited; and much more to the same purpose, which I delivered in a burst of passionate eloquence quite surprising to myself, though I had been thinking about it, day and night, ever since my aunt had astonished me.

'Is your heart mine still, dear Dora?' said I, rapturously, for I knew by her clinging to me that it was.

'Oh, yes!' cried Dora. 'Oh, yes, it's all yours. Oh, don't be dreadful!'

I dreadful! To Dora!

'Don't talk about being poor, and working hard!' said Dora, nestling closer to me. 'Oh, don't, don't!'

'My dearest love,' said I, 'the crust well-earned--'

'Oh, yes; but I don't want to hear any more about crusts!' said Dora. 'And Jip must have a mutton-chop every day at twelve, or he'll die.'

I was charmed with her childish, winning way. I fondly explained to Dora that Jip should have his mutton-chop with his accustomed regularity. I drew a picture of our frugal home, made independent by my labour--sketching in the little house I had seen at Highgate, and my aunt in her room upstairs.

'I am not dreadful now, Dora?' said I, tenderly.

'Oh, no, no!' cried Dora. 'But I hope your aunt will keep in her own room a good deal. And I hope she's not a scolding old thing!'



If it were possible for me to love Dora more than ever, I am sure I did. But I felt she was a little impracticable. It damped my new-born ardour, to find that ardour so difficult of communication to her. I made another trial. When she was quite herself again, and was curling Jip's ears, as he lay upon her lap, I became grave, and said:

'My own! May I mention something?'

'Oh, please don't be practical!' said Dora, coaxingly. 'Because it frightens me so!'

'Sweetheart!' I returned; 'there is nothing to alarm you in all this. I want you to think of it quite differently. I want to make it nerve you, and inspire you, Dora!'

'Oh, but that's so shocking!' cried Dora.

'My love, no. Perseverance and strength of character will enable us to bear much worse things.' 'But I haven't got any strength at all,' said Dora, shaking her curls. 'Have I, Jip? Oh, do kiss Jip, and be agreeable!'

It was impossible to resist kissing Jip, when she held him up to me for that purpose, putting her own bright, rosy little mouth into kissing form, as she directed the operation, which she insisted should be performed symmetrically, on the centre of his nose. I did as she bade me--rewarding myself afterwards for my obedience--and she charmed me out of my graver character for I don't know how long.

'But, Dora, my beloved!' said I, at last resuming it; 'I was going to mention something.'

The judge of the Prerogative Court might have fallen in love with her, to see her fold her little hands and hold them up, begging and praying me not to be dreadful any more.

'Indeed I am not going to be, my darling!' I assured her. 'But, Dora, my love, if you will sometimes think,--not despondingly, you know; far from that!--but if you will sometimes think--just to encourage yourself--that you are engaged to a poor man--'

'Don't, don't! Pray don't!' cried Dora. 'It's so very dreadful!'

'My soul, not at all!' said I, cheerfully. 'If you will sometimes think of that, and look about now and then at your papa's housekeeping, and endeavour to acquire a little habit--of accounts, for instance--'

Poor little Dora received this suggestion with something that was half a sob and half a scream.

'--It would be so useful to us afterwards,' I went on. 'And if you would promise me to read a little--a little Cookery Book that I would send you, it would be so excellent for both of us. For our path in life, my Dora,' said I, warming with the subject, 'is stony and rugged now, and it rests with us to smooth it. We must fight our way onward. We must be brave. There are obstacles to be met, and we must meet, and crush them!'

I was going on at a great rate, with a clenched hand, and a most enthusiastic countenance; but it was quite unnecessary to proceed. I had said enough. I had done it again. Oh, she was so frightened! Oh, where was Julia Mills! Oh, take her to Julia Mills, and go away, please! So that, in short, I was quite distracted, and raved about the drawing-room.

I thought I had killed her, this time. I sprinkled water on her face.

I went down on my knees. I plucked at my hair. I denounced myself as a remorseless brute and a ruthless beast. I implored her forgiveness.

I besought her to look up. I ravaged Miss Mills's work-box for a smelling-bottle, and in my agony of mind applied an ivory needle-case instead, and dropped all the needles over Dora. I shook my fists at Jip, who was as frantic as myself. I did every wild extravagance that could be done, and was a long way beyond the end of my wits when Miss Mills came into the room.

'Who has done this?' exclaimed Miss Mills, succouring her friend.

I replied, 'I, Miss Mills! I have done it! Behold the destroyer!'--or words to that effect--and hid my face from the light, in the sofa cushion.

At first Miss Mills thought it was a quarrel, and that we were verging on the Desert of Sahara; but she soon found out how matters stood, for my dear affectionate little Dora, embracing her, began exclaiming that I was 'a poor labourer'; and then cried for me, and embraced me, and asked me would I let her give me all her money to keep, and then fell on Miss Mills's neck, sobbing as if her tender heart were broken.

Miss Mills must have been born to be a blessing to us. She ascertained from me in a few words what it was all about, comforted Dora, and gradually convinced her that I was not a labourer--from my manner of stating the case I believe Dora concluded that I was a navigator, and went balancing myself up and down a plank all day with a wheelbarrow--and so brought us together in peace. When we were quite composed, and Dora had gone up-stairs to put some rose-water to her eyes, Miss Mills rang for tea. In the ensuing interval, I told Miss Mills that she was evermore my friend, and that my heart must cease to vibrate ere I could forget her sympathy.

I then expounded to Miss Mills what I had endeavoured, so very unsuccessfully, to expound to Dora. Miss Mills replied, on general principles, that the Cottage of content was better than the Palace of cold splendour, and that where love was, all was.

I said to Miss Mills that this was very true, and who should know it better than I, who loved Dora with a love that never mortal had experienced yet? But on Miss Mills observing, with despondency, that it were well indeed for some hearts if this were so, I explained that I begged leave to restrict the observation to mortals of the masculine gender.

I then put it to Miss Mills, to say whether she considered that there was or was not any practical merit in the suggestion I had been anxious to make, concerning the accounts, the housekeeping, and the Cookery Book?

Miss Mills, after some consideration, thus replied:

'Mr. Copperfield, I will be plain with you. Mental suffering and trial supply, in some natures, the place of years, and I will be as plain with you as if I were a Lady Abbess. No. The suggestion is not appropriate to our Dora. Our dearest Dora is a favourite child of nature. She is a thing of light, and airiness, and joy. I am free to confess that if it could be done, it might be well, but--' And Miss Mills shook her head.

I was encouraged by this closing admission on the part of Miss Mills to ask her, whether, for Dora's sake, if she had any opportunity of luring her attention to such preparations for an earnest life, she would avail herself of it? Miss Mills replied in the affirmative so readily, that I further asked her if she would take charge of the Cookery Book; and, if she ever could insinuate it upon Dora's acceptance, without frightening her, undertake to do me that crowning service. Miss Mills accepted this

trust, too; but was not sanguine.

And Dora returned, looking such a lovely little creature, that I really doubted whether she ought to be troubled with anything so ordinary. And she loved me so much, and was so captivating (particularly when she made Jip stand on his hind legs for toast, and when she pretended to hold that nose of his against the hot teapot for punishment because he wouldn't), that I felt like a sort of Monster who had got into a Fairy's bower, when I thought of having frightened her, and made her cry.

After tea we had the guitar; and Dora sang those same dear old French songs about the impossibility of ever on any account leaving off dancing, La ra la, La ra la, until I felt a much greater Monster than before.

We had only one check to our pleasure, and that happened a little while before I took my leave, when, Miss Mills chancing to make some allusion to tomorrow morning, I unluckily let out that, being obliged to exert myself now, I got up at five o'clock. Whether Dora had any idea that I was a Private Watchman, I am unable to say; but it made a great impression on her, and she neither played nor sang any more.

It was still on her mind when I bade her adieu; and she said to me, in her pretty coaxing way--as if I were a doll, I used to think:

'Now don't get up at five o'clock, you naughty boy. It's so nonsensical!'

'My love,' said I, 'I have work to do.'

'But don't do it!' returned Dora. 'Why should you?'

It was impossible to say to that sweet little surprised face, otherwise

than lightly and playfully, that we must work to live.

'Oh! How ridiculous!' cried Dora.

'How shall we live without, Dora?' said I.

'How? Any how!' said Dora.

She seemed to think she had quite settled the question, and gave me such a triumphant little kiss, direct from her innocent heart, that I would hardly have put her out of conceit with her answer, for a fortune.

Well! I loved her, and I went on loving her, most absorbingly, entirely, and completely. But going on, too, working pretty hard, and busily keeping red-hot all the irons I now had in the fire, I would sit sometimes of a night, opposite my aunt, thinking how I had frightened Dora that time, and how I could best make my way with a guitar-case through the forest of difficulty, until I used to fancy that my head was turning quite grey.

#### CHAPTER 38. A DISSOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP

I did not allow my resolution, with respect to the Parliamentary Debates, to cool. It was one of the irons I began to heat immediately, and one of the irons I kept hot, and hammered at, with a perseverance I may honestly admire. I bought an approved scheme of the noble art and mystery of stenography (which cost me ten and sixpence); and plunged into a sea of perplexity that brought me, in a few weeks, to the confines of distraction. The changes that were rung upon dots, which in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position

something else, entirely different; the wonderful vagaries that were played by circles; the unaccountable consequences that resulted from marks like flies' legs; the tremendous effects of a curve in a wrong place; not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in my sleep. When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties, and had mastered the alphabet, which was an Egyptian Temple in itself, there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters; the most despotic characters I have ever known; who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb, meant expectation, and that a pen-and-ink sky-rocket, stood for disadvantageous. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I found that they had driven everything else out of it; then, beginning again, I forgot them; while I was picking them up, I dropped the other fragments of the system; in short, it was almost heart-breaking.

It might have been quite heart-breaking, but for Dora, who was the stay and anchor of my tempest-driven bark. Every scratch in the scheme was a gnarled oak in the forest of difficulty, and I went on cutting them down, one after another, with such vigour, that in three or four months I was in a condition to make an experiment on one of our crack speakers in the Commons. Shall I ever forget how the crack speaker walked off from me before I began, and left my imbecile pencil staggering about the paper as if it were in a fit!

This would not do, it was quite clear. I was flying too high, and should never get on, so. I resorted to Traddles for advice; who suggested that he should dictate speeches to me, at a pace, and with occasional stoppages, adapted to my weakness. Very grateful for this friendly aid, I accepted the proposal; and night after night, almost every night, for a long time, we had a sort of Private Parliament in Buckingham Street, after I came home from the Doctor's.

I should like to see such a Parliament anywhere else! My aunt and Mr.

Dick represented the Government or the Opposition (as the case might be), and Traddles, with the assistance of Enfield's Speakers, or a volume of parliamentary orations, thundered astonishing invectives against them. Standing by the table, with his finger in the page to keep the place, and his right arm flourishing above his head, Traddles, as Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Burke, Lord Castlereagh, Viscount Sidmouth, or Mr. Canning, would work himself into the most violent heats, and deliver the most withering denunciations of the profligacy and corruption of my aunt and Mr. Dick; while I used to sit, at a little distance, with my notebook on my knee, fagging after him with all my might and main. The inconsistency and recklessness of Traddles were not to be exceeded by any real politician. He was for any description of policy, in the compass of a week; and nailed all sorts of colours to every denomination of mast. My aunt, looking very like an immovable Chancellor of the Exchequer, would occasionally throw in an interruption or two, as 'Hear!' or 'No!' or 'Oh!' when the text seemed to require it: which was always a signal to Mr. Dick (a perfect country gentleman) to follow lustily with the same cry. But Mr. Dick got taxed with such things in the course of his Parliamentary career, and was made responsible for such awful consequences, that he became uncomfortable in his mind sometimes. I believe he actually began to be afraid he really had been doing something, tending to the annihilation of the British constitution, and the ruin of the country.

Often and often we pursued these debates until the clock pointed to midnight, and the candles were burning down. The result of so much good practice was, that by and by I began to keep pace with Traddles pretty well, and should have been quite triumphant if I had had the least idea what my notes were about. But, as to reading them after I had got them, I might as well have copied the Chinese inscriptions of an immense collection of tea-chests, or the golden characters on all the great red and green bottles in the chemists' shops!



There was nothing for it, but to turn back and begin all over again. It was very hard, but I turned back, though with a heavy heart, and began laboriously and methodically to plod over the same tedious ground at a snail's pace; stopping to examine minutely every speck in the way, on all sides, and making the most desperate efforts to know these elusive characters by sight wherever I met them. I was always punctual at the office; at the Doctor's too: and I really did work, as the common expression is, like a cart-horse. One day, when I went to the Commons as usual, I found Mr. Spenlow in the doorway looking extremely grave, and talking to himself. As he was in the habit of complaining of pains in his head--he had naturally a short throat, and I do seriously believe he over-starched himself--I was at first alarmed by the idea that he was not quite right in that direction; but he soon relieved my uneasiness.

Instead of returning my 'Good morning' with his usual affability, he looked at me in a distant, ceremonious manner, and coldly requested me to accompany him to a certain coffee-house, which, in those days, had a door opening into the Commons, just within the little archway in St. Paul's Churchyard. I complied, in a very uncomfortable state, and with a warm shooting all over me, as if my apprehensions were breaking out into buds. When I allowed him to go on a little before, on account of the narrowness of the way, I observed that he carried his head with a lofty air that was particularly unpromising; and my mind misgave me that he had found out about my darling Dora.

If I had not guessed this, on the way to the coffee-house, I could hardly have failed to know what was the matter when I followed him into an upstairs room, and found Miss Murdstone there, supported by a background of sideboard, on which were several inverted tumblers sustaining lemons, and two of those extraordinary boxes, all corners and flutings, for sticking knives and forks in, which, happily for mankind, are now obsolete.

Miss Murdstone gave me her chilly finger-nails, and sat severely rigid. Mr. Spenlow shut the door, motioned me to a chair, and stood on the hearth-rug in front of the fireplace.

'Have the goodness to show Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Spenlow, what you have in your reticule, Miss Murdstone.'

I believe it was the old identical steel-clasped reticule of my childhood, that shut up like a bite. Compressing her lips, in sympathy with the snap, Miss Murdstone opened it--opening her mouth a little at the same time--and produced my last letter to Dora, teeming with expressions of devoted affection.

'I believe that is your writing, Mr. Copperfield?' said Mr. Spenlow.

I was very hot, and the voice I heard was very unlike mine, when I said, 'It is, sir!'

'If I am not mistaken,' said Mr. Spenlow, as Miss Murdstone brought a parcel of letters out of her reticule, tied round with the dearest bit of blue ribbon, 'those are also from your pen, Mr. Copperfield?'

I took them from her with a most desolate sensation; and, glancing at such phrases at the top, as 'My ever dearest and own Dora,' 'My best beloved angel,' 'My blessed one for ever,' and the like, blushed deeply, and inclined my head.

'No, thank you!' said Mr. Spenlow, coldly, as I mechanically offered them back to him. 'I will not deprive you of them. Miss Murdstone, be so good as to proceed!'

That gentle creature, after a moment's thoughtful survey of the carpet, delivered herself with much dry unction as follows.

'I must confess to having entertained my suspicions of Miss Spenlow, in reference to David Copperfield, for some time. I observed Miss Spenlow and David Copperfield, when they first met; and the impression made upon me then was not agreeable. The depravity of the human heart is such--'

'You will oblige me, ma'am,' interrupted Mr. Spenlow, 'by confining yourself to facts.'

Miss Murdstone cast down her eyes, shook her head as if protesting against this unseemly interruption, and with frowning dignity resumed:

'Since I am to confine myself to facts, I will state them as dryly as I can. Perhaps that will be considered an acceptable course of proceeding. I have already said, sir, that I have had my suspicions of Miss Spenlow, in reference to David Copperfield, for some time. I have frequently endeavoured to find decisive corroboration of those suspicions, but without effect. I have therefore forborne to mention them to Miss Spenlow's father'; looking severely at him--'knowing how little disposition there usually is in such cases, to acknowledge the conscientious discharge of duty.'

Mr. Spenlow seemed quite cowed by the gentlemanly sternness of Miss Murdstone's manner, and deprecated her severity with a conciliatory little wave of his hand.

'On my return to Norwood, after the period of absence occasioned by my brother's marriage,' pursued Miss Murdstone in a disdainful voice, 'and on the return of Miss Spenlow from her visit to her friend Miss Mills, I imagined that the manner of Miss Spenlow gave me greater occasion for suspicion than before. Therefore I watched Miss Spenlow closely.'

Dear, tender little Dora, so unconscious of this Dragon's eye!

'Still,' resumed Miss Murdstone, 'I found no proof until last night. It appeared to me that Miss Spenlow received too many letters from her friend Miss Mills; but Miss Mills being her friend with her father's full concurrence,' another telling blow at Mr. Spenlow, 'it was not for me to interfere. If I may not be permitted to allude to the natural depravity of the human heart, at least I may--I must--be permitted, so far to refer to misplaced confidence.'

Mr. Spenlow apologetically murmured his assent.

'Last evening after tea,' pursued Miss Murdstone, 'I observed the little dog starting, rolling, and growling about the drawing-room, worrying something. I said to Miss Spenlow, "Dora, what is that the dog has in his mouth? It's paper." Miss Spenlow immediately put her hand to her frock, gave a sudden cry, and ran to the dog. I interposed, and said, "Dora, my love, you must permit me."'

Oh Jip, miserable Spaniel, this wretchedness, then, was your work!

'Miss Spenlow endeavoured,' said Miss Murdstone, 'to bribe me with kisses, work-boxes, and small articles of jewellery--that, of course, I pass over. The little dog retreated under the sofa on my approaching him, and was with great difficulty dislodged by the fire-irons. Even when dislodged, he still kept the letter in his mouth; and on my endeavouring to take it from him, at the imminent risk of being bitten, he kept it between his teeth so pertinaciously as to suffer himself to be held suspended in the air by means of the document. At length I obtained possession of it. After perusing it, I taxed Miss Spenlow with having many such letters in her possession; and ultimately obtained from her the packet which is now in David Copperfield's hand.'

Here she ceased; and snapping her reticule again, and shutting her

mouth, looked as if she might be broken, but could never be bent.

'You have heard Miss Murdstone,' said Mr. Spenlow, turning to me. 'I beg to ask, Mr. Copperfield, if you have anything to say in reply?'

The picture I had before me, of the beautiful little treasure of my heart, sobbing and crying all night--of her being alone, frightened, and wretched, then--of her having so piteously begged and prayed that stony-hearted woman to forgive her--of her having vainly offered her those kisses, work-boxes, and trinkets--of her being in such grievous distress, and all for me--very much impaired the little dignity I had been able to muster. I am afraid I was in a tremulous state for a minute or so, though I did my best to disguise it.

'There is nothing I can say, sir,' I returned, 'except that all the blame is mine. Dora--'

'Miss Spenlow, if you please,' said her father, majestically.

'--was induced and persuaded by me,' I went on, swallowing that colder designation, 'to consent to this concealment, and I bitterly regret it.'

'You are very much to blame, sir,' said Mr. Spenlow, walking to and fro upon the hearth-rug, and emphasizing what he said with his whole body instead of his head, on account of the stiffness of his cravat and spine. 'You have done a stealthy and unbecoming action, Mr. Copperfield. When I take a gentleman to my house, no matter whether he is nineteen, twenty-nine, or ninety, I take him there in a spirit of confidence. If he abuses my confidence, he commits a dishonourable action, Mr. Copperfield.'

'I feel it, sir, I assure you,' I returned. 'But I never thought so, before. Sincerely, honestly, indeed, Mr. Spenlow, I never thought so,

before. I love Miss Spenlow to that extent--'

'Pooh! nonsense!' said Mr. Spenlow, reddening. 'Pray don't tell me to my face that you love my daughter, Mr. Copperfield!'

'Could I defend my conduct if I did not, sir?' I returned, with all humility.

'Can you defend your conduct if you do, sir?' said Mr. Spenlow, stopping short upon the hearth-rug. 'Have you considered your years, and my daughter's years, Mr. Copperfield? Have you considered what it is to undermine the confidence that should subsist between my daughter and myself? Have you considered my daughter's station in life, the projects I may contemplate for her advancement, the testamentary intentions I may have with reference to her? Have you considered anything, Mr. Copperfield?'

'Very little, sir, I am afraid;' I answered, speaking to him as respectfully and sorrowfully as I felt; 'but pray believe me, I have considered my own worldly position. When I explained it to you, we were already engaged--'

'I BEG,' said Mr. Spenlow, more like Punch than I had ever seen him, as he energetically struck one hand upon the other--I could not help noticing that even in my despair; 'that YOU Will NOT talk to me of engagements, Mr. Copperfield!'

The otherwise immovable Miss Murdstone laughed contemptuously in one short syllable.

'When I explained my altered position to you, sir,' I began again, substituting a new form of expression for what was so unpalatable to him, 'this concealment, into which I am so unhappy as to have led Miss

Spenlow, had begun. Since I have been in that altered position, I have strained every nerve, I have exerted every energy, to improve it. I am sure I shall improve it in time. Will you grant me time--any length of time? We are both so young, sir,--'

'You are right,' interrupted Mr. Spenlow, nodding his head a great many times, and frowning very much, 'you are both very young. It's all nonsense. Let there be an end of the nonsense. Take away those letters, and throw them in the fire. Give me Miss Spenlow's letters to throw in the fire; and although our future intercourse must, you are aware, be restricted to the Commons here, we will agree to make no further mention of the past. Come, Mr. Copperfield, you don't want sense; and this is the sensible course.'

No. I couldn't think of agreeing to it. I was very sorry, but there was a higher consideration than sense. Love was above all earthly considerations, and I loved Dora to idolatry, and Dora loved me. I didn't exactly say so; I softened it down as much as I could; but I implied it, and I was resolute upon it. I don't think I made myself very ridiculous, but I know I was resolute.

'Very well, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'I must try my influence with my daughter.'

Miss Murdstone, by an expressive sound, a long drawn respiration, which was neither a sigh nor a moan, but was like both, gave it as her opinion that he should have done this at first.

'I must try,' said Mr. Spenlow, confirmed by this support, 'my influence with my daughter. Do you decline to take those letters, Mr. Copperfield?' For I had laid them on the table.

Yes. I told him I hoped he would not think it wrong, but I couldn't

possibly take them from Miss Murdstone.

'Nor from me?' said Mr. Spenlow.

No, I replied with the profoundest respect; nor from him.

'Very well!' said Mr. Spenlow.

A silence succeeding, I was undecided whether to go or stay. At length I was moving quietly towards the door, with the intention of saying that perhaps I should consult his feelings best by withdrawing: when he said, with his hands in his coat pockets, into which it was as much as he could do to get them; and with what I should call, upon the whole, a decidedly pious air:

'You are probably aware, Mr. Copperfield, that I am not altogether destitute of worldly possessions, and that my daughter is my nearest and dearest relative?'

I hurriedly made him a reply to the effect, that I hoped the error into which I had been betrayed by the desperate nature of my love, did not induce him to think me mercenary too?

'I don't allude to the matter in that light,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'It would be better for yourself, and all of us, if you WERE mercenary, Mr. Copperfield--I mean, if you were more discreet and less influenced by all this youthful nonsense. No. I merely say, with quite another view, you are probably aware I have some property to bequeath to my child?'

I certainly supposed so.

'And you can hardly think,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'having experience of what we see, in the Commons here, every day, of the various unaccountable



and negligent proceedings of men, in respect of their testamentary arrangements--of all subjects, the one on which perhaps the strangest revelations of human inconsistency are to be met with--but that mine are made?'

I inclined my head in acquiescence.

'I should not allow,' said Mr. Spenlow, with an evident increase of pious sentiment, and slowly shaking his head as he poised himself upon his toes and heels alternately, 'my suitable provision for my child to be influenced by a piece of youthful folly like the present. It is mere folly. Mere nonsense. In a little while, it will weigh lighter than any feather. But I might--I might--if this silly business were not completely relinquished altogether, be induced in some anxious moment to guard her from, and surround her with protections against, the consequences of any foolish step in the way of marriage. Now, Mr. Copperfield, I hope that you will not render it necessary for me to open, even for a quarter of an hour, that closed page in the book of life, and unsettle, even for a quarter of an hour, grave affairs long since composed.'

There was a serenity, a tranquillity, a calm sunset air about him, which quite affected me. He was so peaceful and resigned--clearly had his affairs in such perfect train, and so systematically wound up--that he was a man to feel touched in the contemplation of. I really think I saw tears rise to his eyes, from the depth of his own feeling of all this.

But what could I do? I could not deny Dora and my own heart. When he told me I had better take a week to consider of what he had said, how could I say I wouldn't take a week, yet how could I fail to know that no amount of weeks could influence such love as mine?

'In the meantime, confer with Miss Trotwood, or with any person with

any knowledge of life,' said Mr. Spenlow, adjusting his cravat with both hands. 'Take a week, Mr. Copperfield.'

I submitted; and, with a countenance as expressive as I was able to make it of dejected and despairing constancy, came out of the room. Miss Murdstone's heavy eyebrows followed me to the door--I say her eyebrows rather than her eyes, because they were much more important in her face--and she looked so exactly as she used to look, at about that hour of the morning, in our parlour at Blunderstone, that I could have fancied I had been breaking down in my lessons again, and that the dead weight on my mind was that horrible old spelling-book, with oval woodcuts, shaped, to my youthful fancy, like the glasses out of spectacles.

When I got to the office, and, shutting out old Tiffey and the rest of them with my hands, sat at my desk, in my own particular nook, thinking of this earthquake that had taken place so unexpectedly, and in the bitterness of my spirit cursing Jip, I fell into such a state of torment about Dora, that I wonder I did not take up my hat and rush insanely to Norwood. The idea of their frightening her, and making her cry, and of my not being there to comfort her, was so excruciating, that it impelled me to write a wild letter to Mr. Spenlow, beseeching him not to visit upon her the consequences of my awful destiny. I implored him to spare her gentle nature--not to crush a fragile flower--and addressed him generally, to the best of my remembrance, as if, instead of being her father, he had been an Ogre, or the Dragon of Wantley.<sup>3</sup> This letter I sealed and laid upon his desk before he returned; and when he came in, I saw him, through the half-opened door of his room, take it up and read it.

He said nothing about it all the morning; but before he went away in the afternoon he called me in, and told me that I need not make myself at all uneasy about his daughter's happiness. He had assured her, he said,

that it was all nonsense; and he had nothing more to say to her. He believed he was an indulgent father (as indeed he was), and I might spare myself any solicitude on her account.

'You may make it necessary, if you are foolish or obstinate, Mr. Copperfield,' he observed, 'for me to send my daughter abroad again, for a term; but I have a better opinion of you. I hope you will be wiser than that, in a few days. As to Miss Murdstone,' for I had alluded to her in the letter, 'I respect that lady's vigilance, and feel obliged to her; but she has strict charge to avoid the subject. All I desire, Mr. Copperfield, is, that it should be forgotten. All you have got to do, Mr. Copperfield, is to forget it.'

All! In the note I wrote to Miss Mills, I bitterly quoted this sentiment. All I had to do, I said, with gloomy sarcasm, was to forget Dora. That was all, and what was that! I entreated Miss Mills to see me, that evening. If it could not be done with Mr. Mills's sanction and concurrence, I besought a clandestine interview in the back kitchen where the Mangle was. I informed her that my reason was tottering on its throne, and only she, Miss Mills, could prevent its being deposed. I signed myself, hers distractedly; and I couldn't help feeling, while I read this composition over, before sending it by a porter, that it was something in the style of Mr. Micawber.

However, I sent it. At night I repaired to Miss Mills's street, and walked up and down, until I was stealthily fetched in by Miss Mills's maid, and taken the area way to the back kitchen. I have since seen reason to believe that there was nothing on earth to prevent my going in at the front door, and being shown up into the drawing-room, except Miss Mills's love of the romantic and mysterious.

In the back kitchen, I raved as became me. I went there, I suppose, to make a fool of myself, and I am quite sure I did it. Miss Mills had

received a hasty note from Dora, telling her that all was discovered, and saying. 'Oh pray come to me, Julia, do, do!' But Miss Mills, mistrusting the acceptability of her presence to the higher powers, had not yet gone; and we were all benighted in the Desert of Sahara.

Miss Mills had a wonderful flow of words, and liked to pour them out. I could not help feeling, though she mingled her tears with mine, that she had a dreadful luxury in our afflictions. She petted them, as I may say, and made the most of them. A deep gulf, she observed, had opened between Dora and me, and Love could only span it with its rainbow. Love must suffer in this stern world; it ever had been so, it ever would be so. No matter, Miss Mills remarked. Hearts confined by cobwebs would burst at last, and then Love was avenged.

This was small consolation, but Miss Mills wouldn't encourage fallacious hopes. She made me much more wretched than I was before, and I felt (and told her with the deepest gratitude) that she was indeed a friend. We resolved that she should go to Dora the first thing in the morning, and find some means of assuring her, either by looks or words, of my devotion and misery. We parted, overwhelmed with grief; and I think Miss Mills enjoyed herself completely.

I confided all to my aunt when I got home; and in spite of all she could say to me, went to bed despairing. I got up despairing, and went out despairing. It was Saturday morning, and I went straight to the Commons.

I was surprised, when I came within sight of our office-door, to see the ticket-porters standing outside talking together, and some half-dozen stragglers gazing at the windows which were shut up. I quickened my pace, and, passing among them, wondering at their looks, went hurriedly in.

The clerks were there, but nobody was doing anything. Old Tiffey, for

the first time in his life I should think, was sitting on somebody else's stool, and had not hung up his hat.

'This is a dreadful calamity, Mr. Copperfield,' said he, as I entered.

'What is?' I exclaimed. 'What's the matter?'

'Don't you know?' cried Tiffey, and all the rest of them, coming round me.

'No!' said I, looking from face to face.

'Mr. Spenlow,' said Tiffey.

'What about him!'

'Dead!' I thought it was the office reeling, and not I, as one of the clerks caught hold of me. They sat me down in a chair, untied my neck-cloth, and brought me some water. I have no idea whether this took any time.

'Dead?' said I.

'He dined in town yesterday, and drove down in the phaeton by himself,' said Tiffey, 'having sent his own groom home by the coach, as he sometimes did, you know--'

'Well?'

'The phaeton went home without him. The horses stopped at the stable-gate. The man went out with a lantern. Nobody in the carriage.'

'Had they run away?'

'They were not hot,' said Tiffey, putting on his glasses; 'no hotter, I understand, than they would have been, going down at the usual pace. The reins were broken, but they had been dragging on the ground. The house was roused up directly, and three of them went out along the road. They found him a mile off.'

'More than a mile off, Mr. Tiffey,' interposed a junior.

'Was it? I believe you are right,' said Tiffey,--'more than a mile off--not far from the church--lying partly on the roadside, and partly on the path, upon his face. Whether he fell out in a fit, or got out, feeling ill before the fit came on--or even whether he was quite dead then, though there is no doubt he was quite insensible--no one appears to know. If he breathed, certainly he never spoke. Medical assistance was got as soon as possible, but it was quite useless.'

I cannot describe the state of mind into which I was thrown by this intelligence. The shock of such an event happening so suddenly, and happening to one with whom I had been in any respect at variance--the appalling vacancy in the room he had occupied so lately, where his chair and table seemed to wait for him, and his handwriting of yesterday was like a ghost--the in--definable impossibility of separating him from the place, and feeling, when the door opened, as if he might come in--the lazy hush and rest there was in the office, and the insatiable relish with which our people talked about it, and other people came in and out all day, and gorged themselves with the subject--this is easily intelligible to anyone. What I cannot describe is, how, in the innermost recesses of my own heart, I had a lurking jealousy even of Death. How I felt as if its might would push me from my ground in Dora's thoughts. How I was, in a grudging way I have no words for, envious of her grief. How it made me restless to think of her weeping to others, or being consoled by others. How I had a grasping, avaricious wish to shut out

everybody from her but myself, and to be all in all to her, at that unseasonable time of all times.

In the trouble of this state of mind--not exclusively my own, I hope, but known to others--I went down to Norwood that night; and finding from one of the servants, when I made my inquiries at the door, that Miss Mills was there, got my aunt to direct a letter to her, which I wrote. I deplored the untimely death of Mr. Spenlow, most sincerely, and shed tears in doing so. I entreated her to tell Dora, if Dora were in a state to hear it, that he had spoken to me with the utmost kindness and consideration; and had coupled nothing but tenderness, not a single or reproachful word, with her name. I know I did this selfishly, to have my name brought before her; but I tried to believe it was an act of justice to his memory. Perhaps I did believe it.

My aunt received a few lines next day in reply; addressed, outside, to her; within, to me. Dora was overcome by grief; and when her friend had asked her should she send her love to me, had only cried, as she was always crying, 'Oh, dear papa! oh, poor papa!' But she had not said No, and that I made the most of.

Mr. Jorkins, who had been at Norwood since the occurrence, came to the office a few days afterwards. He and Tiffey were closeted together for some few moments, and then Tiffey looked out at the door and beckoned me in.

'Oh!' said Mr. Jorkins. 'Mr. Tiffey and myself, Mr. Copperfield, are about to examine the desks, the drawers, and other such repositories of the deceased, with the view of sealing up his private papers, and searching for a Will. There is no trace of any, elsewhere. It may be as well for you to assist us, if you please.'

I had been in agony to obtain some knowledge of the circumstances

in which my Dora would be placed--as, in whose guardianship, and so forth--and this was something towards it. We began the search at once; Mr. Jorkins unlocking the drawers and desks, and we all taking out the papers. The office-papers we placed on one side, and the private papers (which were not numerous) on the other. We were very grave; and when we came to a stray seal, or pencil-case, or ring, or any little article of that kind which we associated personally with him, we spoke very low.

We had sealed up several packets; and were still going on dustily and quietly, when Mr. Jorkins said to us, applying exactly the same words to his late partner as his late partner had applied to him:

'Mr. Spenlow was very difficult to move from the beaten track. You know what he was! I am disposed to think he had made no will.'

'Oh, I know he had!' said I.

They both stopped and looked at me. 'On the very day when I last saw him,' said I, 'he told me that he had, and that his affairs were long since settled.'

Mr. Jorkins and old Tiffey shook their heads with one accord.

'That looks unpromising,' said Tiffey.

'Very unpromising,' said Mr. Jorkins.

'Surely you don't doubt--' I began.

'My good Mr. Copperfield!' said Tiffey, laying his hand upon my arm, and shutting up both his eyes as he shook his head: 'if you had been in the Commons as long as I have, you would know that there is no subject on which men are so inconsistent, and so little to be trusted.'



'Why, bless my soul, he made that very remark!' I replied persistently.

'I should call that almost final,' observed Tiffey. 'My opinion is--no will.'

It appeared a wonderful thing to me, but it turned out that there was no will. He had never so much as thought of making one, so far as his papers afforded any evidence; for there was no kind of hint, sketch, or memorandum, of any testamentary intention whatever. What was scarcely less astonishing to me, was, that his affairs were in a most disordered state. It was extremely difficult, I heard, to make out what he owed, or what he had paid, or of what he died possessed. It was considered likely that for years he could have had no clear opinion on these subjects himself. By little and little it came out, that, in the competition on all points of appearance and gentility then running high in the Commons, he had spent more than his professional income, which was not a very large one, and had reduced his private means, if they ever had been great (which was exceedingly doubtful), to a very low ebb indeed. There was a sale of the furniture and lease, at Norwood; and Tiffey told me, little thinking how interested I was in the story, that, paying all the just debts of the deceased, and deducting his share of outstanding bad and doubtful debts due to the firm, he wouldn't give a thousand pounds for all the assets remaining.

This was at the expiration of about six weeks. I had suffered tortures all the time; and thought I really must have laid violent hands upon myself, when Miss Mills still reported to me, that my broken-hearted little Dora would say nothing, when I was mentioned, but 'Oh, poor papa! Oh, dear papa!' Also, that she had no other relations than two aunts, maiden sisters of Mr. Spewlow, who lived at Putney, and who had not held any other than chance communication with their brother for many years. Not that they had ever quarrelled (Miss Mills informed me); but that

having been, on the occasion of Dora's christening, invited to tea, when they considered themselves privileged to be invited to dinner, they had expressed their opinion in writing, that it was 'better for the happiness of all parties' that they should stay away. Since which they had gone their road, and their brother had gone his.

These two ladies now emerged from their retirement, and proposed to take Dora to live at Putney. Dora, clinging to them both, and weeping, exclaimed, 'O yes, aunts! Please take Julia Mills and me and Jip to Putney!' So they went, very soon after the funeral.

How I found time to haunt Putney, I am sure I don't know; but I contrived, by some means or other, to prowl about the neighbourhood pretty often. Miss Mills, for the more exact discharge of the duties of friendship, kept a journal; and she used to meet me sometimes, on the Common, and read it, or (if she had not time to do that) lend it to me. How I treasured up the entries, of which I subjoin a sample--!

'Monday. My sweet D. still much depressed. Headache. Called attention to J. as being beautifully sleek. D. fondled J. Associations thus awakened, opened floodgates of sorrow. Rush of grief admitted. (Are tears the dewdrops of the heart? J. M.)

'Tuesday. D. weak and nervous. Beautiful in pallor. (Do we not remark this in moon likewise? J. M.) D., J. M. and J. took airing in carriage. J. looking out of window, and barking violently at dustman, occasioned smile to overspread features of D. (Of such slight links is chain of life composed! J. M.)

'Wednesday. D. comparatively cheerful. Sang to her, as congenial melody, "Evening Bells". Effect not soothing, but reverse. D. inexpressibly affected. Found sobbing afterwards, in own room. Quoted verses respecting self and young Gazelle. Ineffectually. Also referred to

Patience on Monument. (Qy. Why on monument? J. M.)

'Thursday. D. certainly improved. Better night. Slight tinge of damask revisiting cheek. Resolved to mention name of D. C. Introduced same, cautiously, in course of airing. D. immediately overcome. "Oh, dear, dear Julia! Oh, I have been a naughty and undutiful child!" Soothed and caressed. Drew ideal picture of D. C. on verge of tomb. D. again overcome. "Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do? Oh, take me somewhere!" Much alarmed. Fainting of D. and glass of water from public-house. (Poetical affinity. Chequered sign on door-post; chequered human life. Alas! J. M.)

'Friday. Day of incident. Man appears in kitchen, with blue bag, "for lady's boots left out to heel". Cook replies, "No such orders." Man argues point. Cook withdraws to inquire, leaving man alone with J. On Cook's return, man still argues point, but ultimately goes. J. missing. D. distracted. Information sent to police. Man to be identified by broad nose, and legs like balustrades of bridge. Search made in every direction. No J. D. weeping bitterly, and inconsolable. Renewed reference to young Gazelle. Appropriate, but unavailing. Towards evening, strange boy calls. Brought into parlour. Broad nose, but no balustrades. Says he wants a pound, and knows a dog. Declines to explain further, though much pressed. Pound being produced by D. takes Cook to little house, where J. alone tied up to leg of table. Joy of D. who dances round J. while he eats his supper. Emboldened by this happy change, mention D. C. upstairs. D. weeps afresh, cries piteously, "Oh, don't, don't, don't! It is so wicked to think of anything but poor papa!"--embraces J. and sobs herself to sleep. (Must not D. C. confine himself to the broad pinions of Time? J. M.)'

Miss Mills and her journal were my sole consolation at this period. To see her, who had seen Dora but a little while before--to trace the initial letter of Dora's name through her sympathetic pages--to be made

more and more miserable by her--were my only comforts. I felt as if I had been living in a palace of cards, which had tumbled down, leaving only Miss Mills and me among the ruins; I felt as if some grim enchanter had drawn a magic circle round the innocent goddess of my heart, which nothing indeed but those same strong pinions, capable of carrying so many people over so much, would enable me to enter!

#### CHAPTER 39. WICKFIELD AND HEEP

My aunt, beginning, I imagine, to be made seriously uncomfortable by my prolonged dejection, made a pretence of being anxious that I should go to Dover, to see that all was working well at the cottage, which was let; and to conclude an agreement, with the same tenant, for a longer term of occupation. Janet was drafted into the service of Mrs. Strong, where I saw her every day. She had been undecided, on leaving Dover, whether or no to give the finishing touch to that renunciation of mankind in which she had been educated, by marrying a pilot; but she decided against that venture. Not so much for the sake of principle, I believe, as because she happened not to like him.

Although it required an effort to leave Miss Mills, I fell rather willingly into my aunt's pretence, as a means of enabling me to pass a few tranquil hours with Agnes. I consulted the good Doctor relative to an absence of three days; and the Doctor wishing me to take that relaxation,--he wished me to take more; but my energy could not bear that,--I made up my mind to go.

As to the Commons, I had no great occasion to be particular about my duties in that quarter. To say the truth, we were getting in no very good odour among the tip-top proctors, and were rapidly sliding down

to but a doubtful position. The business had been indifferent under Mr. Jorkins, before Mr. Spenlow's time; and although it had been quickened by the infusion of new blood, and by the display which Mr. Spenlow made, still it was not established on a sufficiently strong basis to bear, without being shaken, such a blow as the sudden loss of its active manager. It fell off very much. Mr. Jorkins, notwithstanding his reputation in the firm, was an easy-going, incapable sort of man, whose reputation out of doors was not calculated to back it up. I was turned over to him now, and when I saw him take his snuff and let the business go, I regretted my aunt's thousand pounds more than ever.

But this was not the worst of it. There were a number of hangers-on and outsiders about the Commons, who, without being proctors themselves, dabbled in common-form business, and got it done by real proctors, who lent their names in consideration of a share in the spoil;--and there were a good many of these too. As our house now wanted business on any terms, we joined this noble band; and threw out lures to the hangers-on and outsiders, to bring their business to us. Marriage licences and small probates were what we all looked for, and what paid us best; and the competition for these ran very high indeed. Kidnappers and inveiglers were planted in all the avenues of entrance to the Commons, with instructions to do their utmost to cut off all persons in mourning, and all gentlemen with anything bashful in their appearance, and entice them to the offices in which their respective employers were interested; which instructions were so well observed, that I myself, before I was known by sight, was twice hustled into the premises of our principal opponent. The conflicting interests of these touting gentlemen being of a nature to irritate their feelings, personal collisions took place; and the Commons was even scandalized by our principal inveigler (who had formerly been in the wine trade, and afterwards in the sworn brokery line) walking about for some days with a black eye. Any one of these scouts used to think nothing of politely assisting an old lady in black out of a vehicle, killing any proctor whom she inquired for,

representing his employer as the lawful successor and representative of that proctor, and bearing the old lady off (sometimes greatly affected) to his employer's office. Many captives were brought to me in this way. As to marriage licences, the competition rose to such a pitch, that a shy gentleman in want of one, had nothing to do but submit himself to the first inveigler, or be fought for, and become the prey of the strongest. One of our clerks, who was an outsider, used, in the height of this contest, to sit with his hat on, that he might be ready to rush out and swear before a surrogate any victim who was brought in. The system of inveigling continues, I believe, to this day. The last time I was in the Commons, a civil able-bodied person in a white apron pounced out upon me from a doorway, and whispering the word 'Marriage-licence' in my ear, was with great difficulty prevented from taking me up in his arms and lifting me into a proctor's. From this digression, let me proceed to Dover.

I found everything in a satisfactory state at the cottage; and was enabled to gratify my aunt exceedingly by reporting that the tenant inherited her feud, and waged incessant war against donkeys. Having settled the little business I had to transact there, and slept there one night, I walked on to Canterbury early in the morning. It was now winter again; and the fresh, cold windy day, and the sweeping downland, brightened up my hopes a little.

Coming into Canterbury, I loitered through the old streets with a sober pleasure that calmed my spirits, and eased my heart. There were the old signs, the old names over the shops, the old people serving in them. It appeared so long, since I had been a schoolboy there, that I wondered the place was so little changed, until I reflected how little I was changed myself. Strange to say, that quiet influence which was inseparable in my mind from Agnes, seemed to pervade even the city where she dwelt. The venerable cathedral towers, and the old jackdaws and rooks whose airy voices made them more retired than perfect silence

would have done; the battered gateways, one stuck full with statues, long thrown down, and crumbled away, like the reverential pilgrims who had gazed upon them; the still nooks, where the ivied growth of centuries crept over gabled ends and ruined walls; the ancient houses, the pastoral landscape of field, orchard, and garden; everywhere--on everything--I felt the same serener air, the same calm, thoughtful, softening spirit.

Arrived at Mr. Wickfield's house, I found, in the little lower room on the ground floor, where Uriah Heep had been of old accustomed to sit, Mr. Micawber plying his pen with great assiduity. He was dressed in a legal-looking suit of black, and loomed, burly and large, in that small office.

Mr. Micawber was extremely glad to see me, but a little confused too. He would have conducted me immediately into the presence of Uriah, but I declined.

'I know the house of old, you recollect,' said I, 'and will find my way upstairs. How do you like the law, Mr. Micawber?'

'My dear Copperfield,' he replied. 'To a man possessed of the higher imaginative powers, the objection to legal studies is the amount of detail which they involve. Even in our professional correspondence,' said Mr. Micawber, glancing at some letters he was writing, 'the mind is not at liberty to soar to any exalted form of expression. Still, it is a great pursuit. A great pursuit!'

He then told me that he had become the tenant of Uriah Heep's old house; and that Mrs. Micawber would be delighted to receive me, once more, under her own roof.

'It is humble,' said Mr. Micawber, '--to quote a favourite expression

of my friend Heep; but it may prove the stepping-stone to more ambitious domiciliary accommodation.'

I asked him whether he had reason, so far, to be satisfied with his friend Heep's treatment of him? He got up to ascertain if the door were close shut, before he replied, in a lower voice:

'My dear Copperfield, a man who labours under the pressure of pecuniary embarrassments, is, with the generality of people, at a disadvantage. That disadvantage is not diminished, when that pressure necessitates the drawing of stipendiary emoluments, before those emoluments are strictly due and payable. All I can say is, that my friend Heep has responded to appeals to which I need not more particularly refer, in a manner calculated to redound equally to the honour of his head, and of his heart.'

'I should not have supposed him to be very free with his money either,' I observed.

'Pardon me!' said Mr. Micawber, with an air of constraint, 'I speak of my friend Heep as I have experience.'

'I am glad your experience is so favourable,' I returned.

'You are very obliging, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber; and hummed a tune.

'Do you see much of Mr. Wickfield?' I asked, to change the subject.

'Not much,' said Mr. Micawber, slightly. 'Mr. Wickfield is, I dare say, a man of very excellent intentions; but he is--in short, he is obsolete.'



'I am afraid his partner seeks to make him so,' said I.

'My dear Copperfield!' returned Mr. Micawber, after some uneasy evolutions on his stool, 'allow me to offer a remark! I am here, in a capacity of confidence. I am here, in a position of trust. The discussion of some topics, even with Mrs. Micawber herself (so long the partner of my various vicissitudes, and a woman of a remarkable lucidity of intellect), is, I am led to consider, incompatible with the functions now devolving on me. I would therefore take the liberty of suggesting that in our friendly intercourse--which I trust will never be disturbed!--we draw a line. On one side of this line,' said Mr. Micawber, representing it on the desk with the office ruler, 'is the whole range of the human intellect, with a trifling exception; on the other, IS that exception; that is to say, the affairs of Messrs Wickfield and Heep, with all belonging and appertaining thereunto. I trust I give no offence to the companion of my youth, in submitting this proposition to his cooler judgement?'

Though I saw an uneasy change in Mr. Micawber, which sat tightly on him, as if his new duties were a misfit, I felt I had no right to be offended. My telling him so, appeared to relieve him; and he shook hands with me.

'I am charmed, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'let me assure you, with Miss Wickfield. She is a very superior young lady, of very remarkable attractions, graces, and virtues. Upon my honour,' said Mr. Micawber, indefinitely kissing his hand and bowing with his genteelest air, 'I do Homage to Miss Wickfield! Hem!' 'I am glad of that, at least,' said I.

'If you had not assured us, my dear Copperfield, on the occasion of that agreeable afternoon we had the happiness of passing with you, that D. was your favourite letter,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I should unquestionably have supposed that A. had been so.'

We have all some experience of a feeling, that comes over us occasionally, of what we are saying and doing having been said and done before, in a remote time--of our having been surrounded, dim ages ago, by the same faces, objects, and circumstances--of our knowing perfectly what will be said next, as if we suddenly remembered it! I never had this mysterious impression more strongly in my life, than before he uttered those words.

I took my leave of Mr. Micawber, for the time, charging him with my best remembrances to all at home. As I left him, resuming his stool and his pen, and rolling his head in his stock, to get it into easier writing order, I clearly perceived that there was something interposed between him and me, since he had come into his new functions, which prevented our getting at each other as we used to do, and quite altered the character of our intercourse.

There was no one in the quaint old drawing-room, though it presented tokens of Mrs. Heep's whereabouts. I looked into the room still belonging to Agnes, and saw her sitting by the fire, at a pretty old-fashioned desk she had, writing.

My darkening the light made her look up. What a pleasure to be the cause of that bright change in her attentive face, and the object of that sweet regard and welcome!

'Ah, Agnes!' said I, when we were sitting together, side by side; 'I have missed you so much, lately!'

'Indeed?' she replied. 'Again! And so soon?'

I shook my head.

'I don't know how it is, Agnes; I seem to want some faculty of mind that I ought to have. You were so much in the habit of thinking for me, in the happy old days here, and I came so naturally to you for counsel and support, that I really think I have missed acquiring it.'

'And what is it?' said Agnes, cheerfully.

'I don't know what to call it,' I replied. 'I think I am earnest and persevering?'

'I am sure of it,' said Agnes.

'And patient, Agnes?' I inquired, with a little hesitation.

'Yes,' returned Agnes, laughing. 'Pretty well.'

'And yet,' said I, 'I get so miserable and worried, and am so unsteady and irresolute in my power of assuring myself, that I know I must want--shall I call it--reliance, of some kind?'

'Call it so, if you will,' said Agnes.

'Well!' I returned. 'See here! You come to London, I rely on you, and I have an object and a course at once. I am driven out of it, I come here, and in a moment I feel an altered person. The circumstances that distressed me are not changed, since I came into this room; but an influence comes over me in that short interval that alters me, oh, how much for the better! What is it? What is your secret, Agnes?'

Her head was bent down, looking at the fire.

'It's the old story,' said I. 'Don't laugh, when I say it was always the same in little things as it is in greater ones. My old troubles were

nonsense, and now they are serious; but whenever I have gone away from my adopted sister--'

Agnes looked up--with such a Heavenly face!--and gave me her hand, which I kissed.

'Whenever I have not had you, Agnes, to advise and approve in the beginning, I have seemed to go wild, and to get into all sorts of difficulty. When I have come to you, at last (as I have always done), I have come to peace and happiness. I come home, now, like a tired traveller, and find such a blessed sense of rest!'

I felt so deeply what I said, it affected me so sincerely, that my voice failed, and I covered my face with my hand, and broke into tears. I write the truth. Whatever contradictions and inconsistencies there were within me, as there are within so many of us; whatever might have been so different, and so much better; whatever I had done, in which I had perversely wandered away from the voice of my own heart; I knew nothing of. I only knew that I was fervently in earnest, when I felt the rest and peace of having Agnes near me.

In her placid sisterly manner; with her beaming eyes; with her tender voice; and with that sweet composure, which had long ago made the house that held her quite a sacred place to me; she soon won me from this weakness, and led me on to tell all that had happened since our last meeting.

'And there is not another word to tell, Agnes,' said I, when I had made an end of my confidence. 'Now, my reliance is on you.'

'But it must not be on me, Trotwood,' returned Agnes, with a pleasant smile. 'It must be on someone else.'

'On Dora?' said I.

'Assuredly.'

'Why, I have not mentioned, Agnes,' said I, a little embarrassed, 'that Dora is rather difficult to--I would not, for the world, say, to rely upon, because she is the soul of purity and truth--but rather difficult to--I hardly know how to express it, really, Agnes. She is a timid little thing, and easily disturbed and frightened. Some time ago, before her father's death, when I thought it right to mention to her--but I'll tell you, if you will bear with me, how it was.'

Accordingly, I told Agnes about my declaration of poverty, about the cookery-book, the housekeeping accounts, and all the rest of it.

'Oh, Trotwood!' she remonstrated, with a smile. 'Just your old headlong way! You might have been in earnest in striving to get on in the world, without being so very sudden with a timid, loving, inexperienced girl. Poor Dora!'

I never heard such sweet forbearing kindness expressed in a voice, as she expressed in making this reply. It was as if I had seen her admiringly and tenderly embracing Dora, and tacitly reproving me, by her considerate protection, for my hot haste in fluttering that little heart. It was as if I had seen Dora, in all her fascinating artlessness, caressing Agnes, and thanking her, and coaxingly appealing against me, and loving me with all her childish innocence.

I felt so grateful to Agnes, and admired her so! I saw those two together, in a bright perspective, such well-associated friends, each adorning the other so much!

'What ought I to do then, Agnes?' I inquired, after looking at the fire

a little while. 'What would it be right to do?'

'I think,' said Agnes, 'that the honourable course to take, would be to write to those two ladies. Don't you think that any secret course is an unworthy one?'

'Yes. If YOU think so,' said I.

'I am poorly qualified to judge of such matters,' replied Agnes, with a modest hesitation, 'but I certainly feel--in short, I feel that your being secret and clandestine, is not being like yourself.'

'Like myself, in the too high opinion you have of me, Agnes, I am afraid,' said I.

'Like yourself, in the candour of your nature,' she returned; 'and therefore I would write to those two ladies. I would relate, as plainly and as openly as possible, all that has taken place; and I would ask their permission to visit sometimes, at their house. Considering that you are young, and striving for a place in life, I think it would be well to say that you would readily abide by any conditions they might impose upon you. I would entreat them not to dismiss your request, without a reference to Dora; and to discuss it with her when they should think the time suitable. I would not be too vehement,' said Agnes, gently, 'or propose too much. I would trust to my fidelity and perseverance--and to Dora.'

'But if they were to frighten Dora again, Agnes, by speaking to her,' said I. 'And if Dora were to cry, and say nothing about me!'

'Is that likely?' inquired Agnes, with the same sweet consideration in her face.

'God bless her, she is as easily scared as a bird,' said I. 'It might be! Or if the two Miss Spenlows (elderly ladies of that sort are odd characters sometimes) should not be likely persons to address in that way!'

'I don't think, Trotwood,' returned Agnes, raising her soft eyes to mine, 'I would consider that. Perhaps it would be better only to consider whether it is right to do this; and, if it is, to do it.'

I had no longer any doubt on the subject. With a lightened heart, though with a profound sense of the weighty importance of my task, I devoted the whole afternoon to the composition of the draft of this letter; for which great purpose, Agnes relinquished her desk to me. But first I went downstairs to see Mr. Wickfield and Uriah Heep.

I found Uriah in possession of a new, plaster-smelling office, built out in the garden; looking extraordinarily mean, in the midst of a quantity of books and papers. He received me in his usual fawning way, and pretended not to have heard of my arrival from Mr. Micawber; a pretence I took the liberty of disbelieving. He accompanied me into Mr. Wickfield's room, which was the shadow of its former self--having been divested of a variety of conveniences, for the accommodation of the new partner--and stood before the fire, warming his back, and shaving his chin with his bony hand, while Mr. Wickfield and I exchanged greetings.

'You stay with us, Trotwood, while you remain in Canterbury?' said Mr. Wickfield, not without a glance at Uriah for his approval.

'Is there room for me?' said I.

'I am sure, Master Copperfield--I should say Mister, but the other comes so natural,' said Uriah,--'I would turn out of your old room with pleasure, if it would be agreeable.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Why should you be inconvenienced? There's another room. There's another room.' 'Oh, but you know,' returned Uriah, with a grin, 'I should really be delighted!'

To cut the matter short, I said I would have the other room or none at all; so it was settled that I should have the other room; and, taking my leave of the firm until dinner, I went upstairs again.

I had hoped to have no other companion than Agnes. But Mrs. Heep had asked permission to bring herself and her knitting near the fire, in that room; on pretence of its having an aspect more favourable for her rheumatics, as the wind then was, than the drawing-room or dining-parlour. Though I could almost have consigned her to the mercies of the wind on the topmost pinnacle of the Cathedral, without remorse, I made a virtue of necessity, and gave her a friendly salutation.

'I'm umbly thankful to you, sir,' said Mrs. Heep, in acknowledgement of my inquiries concerning her health, 'but I'm only pretty well. I haven't much to boast of. If I could see my Uriah well settled in life, I couldn't expect much more I think. How do you think my Ury looking, sir?'

I thought him looking as villainous as ever, and I replied that I saw no change in him.

'Oh, don't you think he's changed?' said Mrs. Heep. 'There I must umbly beg leave to differ from you. Don't you see a thinness in him?'

'Not more than usual,' I replied.

'Don't you though!' said Mrs. Heep. 'But you don't take notice of him with a mother's eye!'



His mother's eye was an evil eye to the rest of the world, I thought as it met mine, howsoever affectionate to him; and I believe she and her son were devoted to one another. It passed me, and went on to Agnes.

'Don't YOU see a wasting and a wearing in him, Miss Wickfield?' inquired Mrs. Heep.

'No,' said Agnes, quietly pursuing the work on which she was engaged. 'You are too solicitous about him. He is very well.'

Mrs. Heep, with a prodigious sniff, resumed her knitting.

She never left off, or left us for a moment. I had arrived early in the day, and we had still three or four hours before dinner; but she sat there, plying her knitting-needles as monotonously as an hour-glass might have poured out its sands. She sat on one side of the fire; I sat at the desk in front of it; a little beyond me, on the other side, sat Agnes. Whensoever, slowly pondering over my letter, I lifted up my eyes, and meeting the thoughtful face of Agnes, saw it clear, and beam encouragement upon me, with its own angelic expression, I was conscious presently of the evil eye passing me, and going on to her, and coming back to me again, and dropping furtively upon the knitting. What the knitting was, I don't know, not being learned in that art; but it looked like a net; and as she worked away with those Chinese chopsticks of knitting-needles, she showed in the firelight like an ill-looking enchantress, baulked as yet by the radiant goodness opposite, but getting ready for a cast of her net by and by.

At dinner she maintained her watch, with the same unwinking eyes. After dinner, her son took his turn; and when Mr. Wickfield, himself, and I were left alone together, leered at me, and writhed until I could hardly bear it. In the drawing-room, there was the mother knitting and watching

again. All the time that Agnes sang and played, the mother sat at the piano. Once she asked for a particular ballad, which she said her Ury (who was yawning in a great chair) doted on; and at intervals she looked round at him, and reported to Agnes that he was in raptures with the music. But she hardly ever spoke--I question if she ever did--without making some mention of him. It was evident to me that this was the duty assigned to her.

This lasted until bedtime. To have seen the mother and son, like two great bats hanging over the whole house, and darkening it with their ugly forms, made me so uncomfortable, that I would rather have remained downstairs, knitting and all, than gone to bed. I hardly got any sleep. Next day the knitting and watching began again, and lasted all day.

I had not an opportunity of speaking to Agnes, for ten minutes. I could barely show her my letter. I proposed to her to walk out with me; but Mrs. Heep repeatedly complaining that she was worse, Agnes charitably remained within, to bear her company. Towards the twilight I went out by myself, musing on what I ought to do, and whether I was justified in withholding from Agnes, any longer, what Uriah Heep had told me in London; for that began to trouble me again, very much.

I had not walked out far enough to be quite clear of the town, upon the Ramsgate road, where there was a good path, when I was hailed, through the dust, by somebody behind me. The shambling figure, and the scanty great-coat, were not to be mistaken. I stopped, and Uriah Heep came up.

'Well?' said I.

'How fast you walk!' said he. 'My legs are pretty long, but you've given 'em quite a job.'

'Where are you going?' said I.

'I am going with you, Master Copperfield, if you'll allow me the pleasure of a walk with an old acquaintance.' Saying this, with a jerk of his body, which might have been either propitiatory or derisive, he fell into step beside me.

'Uriah!' said I, as civilly as I could, after a silence.

'Master Copperfield!' said Uriah.

'To tell you the truth (at which you will not be offended), I came Out to walk alone, because I have had so much company.'

He looked at me sideways, and said with his hardest grin, 'You mean mother.'

'Why yes, I do,' said I.

'Ah! But you know we're so very umble,' he returned. 'And having such a knowledge of our own umbleness, we must really take care that we're not pushed to the wall by them as isn't umble. All stratagems are fair in love, sir.'

Raising his great hands until they touched his chin, he rubbed them softly, and softly chuckled; looking as like a malevolent baboon, I thought, as anything human could look.

'You see,' he said, still hugging himself in that unpleasant way, and shaking his head at me, 'you're quite a dangerous rival, Master Copperfield. You always was, you know.'

'Do you set a watch upon Miss Wickfield, and make her home no home, because of me?' said I.

'Oh! Master Copperfield! Those are very arsh words,' he replied.

'Put my meaning into any words you like,' said I. 'You know what it is, Uriah, as well as I do.'

'Oh no! You must put it into words,' he said. 'Oh, really! I couldn't myself.'

'Do you suppose,' said I, constraining myself to be very temperate and quiet with him, on account of Agnes, 'that I regard Miss Wickfield otherwise than as a very dear sister?'

'Well, Master Copperfield,' he replied, 'you perceive I am not bound to answer that question. You may not, you know. But then, you see, you may!'

Anything to equal the low cunning of his visage, and of his shadowless eyes without the ghost of an eyelash, I never saw.

'Come then!' said I. 'For the sake of Miss Wickfield--'

'My Agnes!' he exclaimed, with a sickly, angular contortion of himself. 'Would you be so good as call her Agnes, Master Copperfield!'

'For the sake of Agnes Wickfield--Heaven bless her!'

'Thank you for that blessing, Master Copperfield!' he interposed.

'I will tell you what I should, under any other circumstances, as soon have thought of telling to--Jack Ketch.'

'To who, sir?' said Uriah, stretching out his neck, and shading his ear

with his hand.

'To the hangman,' I returned. 'The most unlikely person I could think of,'--though his own face had suggested the allusion quite as a natural sequence. 'I am engaged to another young lady. I hope that contents you.'

'Upon your soul?' said Uriah.

I was about indignantly to give my assertion the confirmation he required, when he caught hold of my hand, and gave it a squeeze.

'Oh, Master Copperfield!' he said. 'If you had only had the condescension to return my confidence when I poured out the fulness of my art, the night I put you so much out of the way by sleeping before your sitting-room fire, I never should have doubted you. As it is, I'm sure I'll take off mother directly, and only too appy. I know you'll excuse the precautions of affection, won't you? What a pity, Master Copperfield, that you didn't condescend to return my confidence! I'm sure I gave you every opportunity. But you never have condescended to me, as much as I could have wished. I know you have never liked me, as I have liked you!'

All this time he was squeezing my hand with his damp fishy fingers, while I made every effort I decently could to get it away. But I was quite unsuccessful. He drew it under the sleeve of his mulberry-coloured great-coat, and I walked on, almost upon compulsion, arm-in-arm with him.

'Shall we turn?' said Uriah, by and by wheeling me face about towards the town, on which the early moon was now shining, silvering the distant windows.

'Before we leave the subject, you ought to understand,' said I, breaking a pretty long silence, 'that I believe Agnes Wickfield to be as far above you, and as far removed from all your aspirations, as that moon herself!'

'Peaceful! Ain't she!' said Uriah. 'Very! Now confess, Master Copperfield, that you haven't liked me quite as I have liked you. All along you've thought me too umble now, I shouldn't wonder?'

'I am not fond of professions of humility,' I returned, 'or professions of anything else.' 'There now!' said Uriah, looking flabby and lead-coloured in the moonlight. 'Didn't I know it! But how little you think of the rightful umbleness of a person in my station, Master Copperfield! Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness--not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters! Father got the monitor-medal by being umble. So did I. Father got made a sexton by being umble. He had the character, among the gentlefolks, of being such a well-behaved man, that they were determined to bring him in. "Be umble, Uriah," says father to me, "and you'll get on. It was what was always being dinned into you and me at school; it's what goes down best. Be umble," says father, "and you'll do!" And really it ain't done bad!'

It was the first time it had ever occurred to me, that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family. I had seen the harvest, but had never thought of the seed.

'When I was quite a young boy,' said Uriah, 'I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I

stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, "Hold hard!" When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. "People like to be above you," says father, "keep yourself down." I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power!'

And he said all this--I knew, as I saw his face in the moonlight--that I might understand he was resolved to recompense himself by using his power. I had never doubted his meanness, his craft and malice; but I fully comprehended now, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit, must have been engendered by this early, and this long, suppression.

His account of himself was so far attended with an agreeable result, that it led to his withdrawing his hand in order that he might have another hug of himself under the chin. Once apart from him, I was determined to keep apart; and we walked back, side by side, saying very little more by the way. Whether his spirits were elevated by the communication I had made to him, or by his having indulged in this retrospect, I don't know; but they were raised by some influence. He talked more at dinner than was usual with him; asked his mother (off duty, from the moment of our re-entering the house) whether he was not growing too old for a bachelor; and once looked at Agnes so, that I would have given all I had, for leave to knock him down.

When we three males were left alone after dinner, he got into a more adventurous state. He had taken little or no wine; and I presume it was the mere insolence of triumph that was upon him, flushed perhaps by the temptation my presence furnished to its exhibition.

I had observed yesterday, that he tried to entice Mr. Wickfield to drink; and, interpreting the look which Agnes had given me as she went out, had limited myself to one glass, and then proposed that we should follow her. I would have done so again today; but Uriah was too quick

for me.

'We seldom see our present visitor, sir,' he said, addressing Mr. Wickfield, sitting, such a contrast to him, at the end of the table, 'and I should propose to give him welcome in another glass or two of wine, if you have no objections. Mr. Copperfield, your elth and appiness!'

I was obliged to make a show of taking the hand he stretched across to me; and then, with very different emotions, I took the hand of the broken gentleman, his partner.

'Come, fellow-partner,' said Uriah, 'if I may take the liberty,--now, suppose you give us something or another appropriate to Copperfield!'

I pass over Mr. Wickfield's proposing my aunt, his proposing Mr. Dick, his proposing Doctors' Commons, his proposing Uriah, his drinking everything twice; his consciousness of his own weakness, the ineffectual effort that he made against it; the struggle between his shame in Uriah's deportment, and his desire to conciliate him; the manifest exultation with which Uriah twisted and turned, and held him up before me. It made me sick at heart to see, and my hand recoils from writing it.

'Come, fellow-partner!' said Uriah, at last, 'I'll give you another one, and I umbly ask for bumpers, seeing I intend to make it the divinest of her sex.'

Her father had his empty glass in his hand. I saw him set it down, look at the picture she was so like, put his hand to his forehead, and shrink back in his elbow-chair.

'I'm an umble individual to give you her elth,' proceeded Uriah, 'but I



admire--adore her.'

No physical pain that her father's grey head could have borne, I think, could have been more terrible to me, than the mental endurance I saw compressed now within both his hands.

'Agnes,' said Uriah, either not regarding him, or not knowing what the nature of his action was, 'Agnes Wickfield is, I am safe to say, the divinest of her sex. May I speak out, among friends? To be her father is a proud distinction, but to be her usband--'

Spare me from ever again hearing such a cry, as that with which her father rose up from the table! 'What's the matter?' said Uriah, turning of a deadly colour. 'You are not gone mad, after all, Mr. Wickfield, I hope? If I say I've an ambition to make your Agnes my Agnes, I have as good a right to it as another man. I have a better right to it than any other man!'

I had my arms round Mr. Wickfield, imploring him by everything that I could think of, oftenest of all by his love for Agnes, to calm himself a little. He was mad for the moment; tearing out his hair, beating his head, trying to force me from him, and to force himself from me, not answering a word, not looking at or seeing anyone; blindly striving for he knew not what, his face all staring and distorted--a frightful spectacle.

I conjured him, incoherently, but in the most impassioned manner, not to abandon himself to this wildness, but to hear me. I besought him to think of Agnes, to connect me with Agnes, to recollect how Agnes and I had grown up together, how I honoured her and loved her, how she was his pride and joy. I tried to bring her idea before him in any form; I even reproached him with not having firmness to spare her the knowledge of such a scene as this. I may have effected something, or his wildness may

have spent itself; but by degrees he struggled less, and began to look at me--strangely at first, then with recognition in his eyes. At length he said, 'I know, Trotwood! My darling child and you--I know! But look at him!'

He pointed to Uriah, pale and glowering in a corner, evidently very much out in his calculations, and taken by surprise.

'Look at my torturer,' he replied. 'Before him I have step by step abandoned name and reputation, peace and quiet, house and home.'

'I have kept your name and reputation for you, and your peace and quiet, and your house and home too,' said Uriah, with a sulky, hurried, defeated air of compromise. 'Don't be foolish, Mr. Wickfield. If I have gone a little beyond what you were prepared for, I can go back, I suppose? There's no harm done.'

'I looked for single motives in everyone,' said Mr. Wickfield, and I was satisfied I had bound him to me by motives of interest. But see what he is--oh, see what he is!'

'You had better stop him, Copperfield, if you can,' cried Uriah, with his long forefinger pointing towards me. 'He'll say something presently--mind you!--he'll be sorry to have said afterwards, and you'll be sorry to have heard!'

'I'll say anything!' cried Mr. Wickfield, with a desperate air. 'Why should I not be in all the world's power if I am in yours?'

'Mind! I tell you!' said Uriah, continuing to warn me. 'If you don't stop his mouth, you're not his friend! Why shouldn't you be in all the world's power, Mr. Wickfield? Because you have got a daughter. You and me know what we know, don't we? Let sleeping dogs lie--who wants to

rouse 'em? I don't. Can't you see I am as umble as I can be? I tell you, if I've gone too far, I'm sorry. What would you have, sir?'

'Oh, Trotwood, Trotwood!' exclaimed Mr. Wickfield, wringing his hands.

'What I have come down to be, since I first saw you in this house! I was on my downward way then, but the dreary, dreary road I have traversed since! Weak indulgence has ruined me. Indulgence in remembrance, and indulgence in forgetfulness. My natural grief for my child's mother turned to disease; my natural love for my child turned to disease. I have infected everything I touched. I have brought misery on what I dearly love, I know--you know! I thought it possible that I could truly love one creature in the world, and not love the rest; I thought it possible that I could truly mourn for one creature gone out of the world, and not have some part in the grief of all who mourned. Thus the lessons of my life have been perverted! I have preyed on my own morbid coward heart, and it has preyed on me. Sordid in my grief, sordid in my love, sordid in my miserable escape from the darker side of both, oh see the ruin I am, and hate me, shun me!'

He dropped into a chair, and weakly sobbed. The excitement into which he had been roused was leaving him. Uriah came out of his corner.

'I don't know all I have done, in my fatuity,' said Mr. Wickfield, putting out his hands, as if to deprecate my condemnation. 'He knows best,' meaning Uriah Heep, 'for he has always been at my elbow, whispering me. You see the millstone that he is about my neck. You find him in my house, you find him in my business. You heard him, but a little time ago. What need have I to say more!'

'You haven't need to say so much, nor half so much, nor anything at all,' observed Uriah, half defiant, and half fawning. 'You wouldn't have took it up so, if it hadn't been for the wine. You'll think better of it tomorrow, sir. If I have said too much, or more than I meant, what of

it? I haven't stood by it!'

The door opened, and Agnes, gliding in, without a vestige of colour in her face, put her arm round his neck, and steadily said, 'Papa, you are not well. Come with me!'

He laid his head upon her shoulder, as if he were oppressed with heavy shame, and went out with her. Her eyes met mine for but an instant, yet I saw how much she knew of what had passed.

'I didn't expect he'd cut up so rough, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'But it's nothing. I'll be friends with him tomorrow. It's for his good. I'm umbly anxious for his good.'

I gave him no answer, and went upstairs into the quiet room where Agnes had so often sat beside me at my books. Nobody came near me until late at night. I took up a book, and tried to read. I heard the clocks strike twelve, and was still reading, without knowing what I read, when Agnes touched me.

'You will be going early in the morning, Trotwood! Let us say good-bye, now!'

She had been weeping, but her face then was so calm and beautiful!

'Heaven bless you!' she said, giving me her hand.

'Dearest Agnes!' I returned, 'I see you ask me not to speak of tonight--but is there nothing to be done?'

'There is God to trust in!' she replied.

'Can I do nothing--I, who come to you with my poor sorrows?'

'And make mine so much lighter,' she replied. 'Dear Trotwood, no!'

'Dear Agnes,' I said, 'it is presumptuous for me, who am so poor in all in which you are so rich--goodness, resolution, all noble qualities--to doubt or direct you; but you know how much I love you, and how much I owe you. You will never sacrifice yourself to a mistaken sense of duty, Agnes?'

More agitated for a moment than I had ever seen her, she took her hands from me, and moved a step back.

'Say you have no such thought, dear Agnes! Much more than sister! Think of the priceless gift of such a heart as yours, of such a love as yours!'

Oh! long, long afterwards, I saw that face rise up before me, with its momentary look, not wondering, not accusing, not regretting. Oh, long, long afterwards, I saw that look subside, as it did now, into the lovely smile, with which she told me she had no fear for herself--I need have none for her--and parted from me by the name of Brother, and was gone!

It was dark in the morning, when I got upon the coach at the inn door. The day was just breaking when we were about to start, and then, as I sat thinking of her, came struggling up the coach side, through the mingled day and night, Uriah's head.

'Copperfield!' said he, in a croaking whisper, as he hung by the iron on the roof, 'I thought you'd be glad to hear before you went off, that there are no squares broke between us. I've been into his room already, and we've made it all smooth. Why, though I'm umble, I'm useful to him, you know; and he understands his interest when he isn't in liquor! What an agreeable man he is, after all, Master Copperfield!'

I obliged myself to say that I was glad he had made his apology.

'Oh, to be sure!' said Uriah. 'When a person's umble, you know, what's an apology? So easy! I say! I suppose,' with a jerk, 'you have sometimes plucked a pear before it was ripe, Master Copperfield?'

'I suppose I have,' I replied.

'I did that last night,' said Uriah; 'but it'll ripen yet! It only wants attending to. I can wait!'

Profuse in his farewells, he got down again as the coachman got up. For anything I know, he was eating something to keep the raw morning air out; but he made motions with his mouth as if the pear were ripe already, and he were smacking his lips over it.

#### CHAPTER 40. THE WANDERER

We had a very serious conversation in Buckingham Street that night, about the domestic occurrences I have detailed in the last chapter. My aunt was deeply interested in them, and walked up and down the room with her arms folded, for more than two hours afterwards. Whenever she was particularly discomposed, she always performed one of these pedestrian feats; and the amount of her discomposure might always be estimated by the duration of her walk. On this occasion she was so much disturbed in mind as to find it necessary to open the bedroom door, and make a course for herself, comprising the full extent of the bedrooms from wall to wall; and while Mr. Dick and I sat quietly by the fire, she kept passing in and out, along this measured track, at an unchanging pace, with the

regularity of a clock-pendulum.

When my aunt and I were left to ourselves by Mr. Dick's going out to bed, I sat down to write my letter to the two old ladies. By that time she was tired of walking, and sat by the fire with her dress tucked up as usual. But instead of sitting in her usual manner, holding her glass upon her knee, she suffered it to stand neglected on the chimney-piece; and, resting her left elbow on her right arm, and her chin on her left hand, looked thoughtfully at me. As often as I raised my eyes from what I was about, I met hers. 'I am in the lovingest of tempers, my dear,' she would assure me with a nod, 'but I am fidgeted and sorry!'

I had been too busy to observe, until after she was gone to bed, that she had left her night-mixture, as she always called it, untasted on the chimney-piece. She came to her door, with even more than her usual affection of manner, when I knocked to acquaint her with this discovery; but only said, 'I have not the heart to take it, Trot, tonight,' and shook her head, and went in again.

She read my letter to the two old ladies, in the morning, and approved of it. I posted it, and had nothing to do then, but wait, as patiently as I could, for the reply. I was still in this state of expectation, and had been, for nearly a week; when I left the Doctor's one snowy night, to walk home.

It had been a bitter day, and a cutting north-east wind had blown for some time. The wind had gone down with the light, and so the snow had come on. It was a heavy, settled fall, I recollect, in great flakes; and it lay thick. The noise of wheels and tread of people were as hushed, as if the streets had been strewn that depth with feathers.

My shortest way home,--and I naturally took the shortest way on such a night--was through St. Martin's Lane. Now, the church which gives its

name to the lane, stood in a less free situation at that time; there being no open space before it, and the lane winding down to the Strand. As I passed the steps of the portico, I encountered, at the corner, a woman's face. It looked in mine, passed across the narrow lane, and disappeared. I knew it. I had seen it somewhere. But I could not remember where. I had some association with it, that struck upon my heart directly; but I was thinking of anything else when it came upon me, and was confused.

On the steps of the church, there was the stooping figure of a man, who had put down some burden on the smooth snow, to adjust it; my seeing the face, and my seeing him, were simultaneous. I don't think I had stopped in my surprise; but, in any case, as I went on, he rose, turned, and came down towards me. I stood face to face with Mr. Peggotty!

Then I remembered the woman. It was Martha, to whom Emily had given the money that night in the kitchen. Martha Endell--side by side with whom, he would not have seen his dear niece, Ham had told me, for all the treasures wrecked in the sea.

We shook hands heartily. At first, neither of us could speak a word.

'Mas'r Davy!' he said, gripping me tight, 'it do my art good to see you, sir. Well met, well met!'

'Well met, my dear old friend!' said I.

'I had my thowts o' coming to make inquisition for you, sir, tonight,' he said, 'but knowing as your aunt was living along wi' you--fur I've been down yonder--Yarmouth way--I was afeerd it was too late. I should have come early in the morning, sir, afore going away.'

'Again?' said I.



'Yes, sir,' he replied, patiently shaking his head, 'I'm away tomorrow.'

'Where were you going now?' I asked.

'Well!' he replied, shaking the snow out of his long hair, 'I was a-going to turn in somewheers.'

In those days there was a side-entrance to the stable-yard of the Golden Cross, the inn so memorable to me in connexion with his misfortune, nearly opposite to where we stood. I pointed out the gateway, put my arm through his, and we went across. Two or three public-rooms opened out of the stable-yard; and looking into one of them, and finding it empty, and a good fire burning, I took him in there.

When I saw him in the light, I observed, not only that his hair was long and ragged, but that his face was burnt dark by the sun. He was greyer, the lines in his face and forehead were deeper, and he had every appearance of having toiled and wandered through all varieties of weather; but he looked very strong, and like a man upheld by steadfastness of purpose, whom nothing could tire out. He shook the snow from his hat and clothes, and brushed it away from his face, while I was inwardly making these remarks. As he sat down opposite to me at a table, with his back to the door by which we had entered, he put out his rough hand again, and grasped mine warmly.

'I'll tell you, Mas'r Davy,' he said,--'wheer all I've been, and what-all we've heerd. I've been fur, and we've heerd little; but I'll tell you!'

I rang the bell for something hot to drink. He would have nothing stronger than ale; and while it was being brought, and being warmed at the fire, he sat thinking. There was a fine, massive gravity in his

face, I did not venture to disturb.

'When she was a child,' he said, lifting up his head soon after we were left alone, 'she used to talk to me a deal about the sea, and about them coasts where the sea got to be dark blue, and to lay a-shining and a-shining in the sun. I thowt, odd times, as her father being drowned made her think on it so much. I doen't know, you see, but maybe she believed--or hoped--he had drifted out to them parts, where the flowers is always a-blowing, and the country bright.'

'It is likely to have been a childish fancy,' I replied.

'When she was--lost,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I know'd in my mind, as he would take her to them countries. I know'd in my mind, as he'd have told her wonders of 'em, and how she was to be a lady theer, and how he got her to listen to him fust, along o' sech like. When we see his mother, I know'd quite well as I was right. I went across-channel to France, and landed theer, as if I'd fell down from the sky.'

I saw the door move, and the snow drift in. I saw it move a little more, and a hand softly interpose to keep it open.

'I found out an English gen'leman as was in authority,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and told him I was a-going to seek my niece. He got me them papers as I wanted fur to carry me through--I doen't rightly know how they're called--and he would have give me money, but that I was thankful to have no need on. I thank him kind, for all he done, I'm sure! "I've wrote afore you," he says to me, "and I shall speak to many as will come that way, and many will know you, fur distant from here, when you're a-travelling alone." I told him, best as I was able, what my gratitooode was, and went away through France.'

'Alone, and on foot?' said I.

'Mostly a-foot,' he rejoined; 'sometimes in carts along with people going to market; sometimes in empty coaches. Many mile a day a-foot, and often with some poor soldier or another, travelling to see his friends. I couldn't talk to him,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'nor he to me; but we was company for one another, too, along the dusty roads.'

I should have known that by his friendly tone.

'When I come to any town,' he pursued, 'I found the inn, and waited about the yard till someone turned up (someone mostly did) as know'd English. Then I told how that I was on my way to seek my niece, and they told me what manner of gentlefolks was in the house, and I waited to see any as seemed like her, going in or out. When it warn't Em'ly, I went on agen. By little and little, when I come to a new village or that, among the poor people, I found they know'd about me. They would set me down at their cottage doors, and give me what-not fur to eat and drink, and show me where to sleep; and many a woman, Mas'r Davy, as has had a daughter of about Em'ly's age, I've found a-waiting fur me, at Our Saviour's Cross outside the village, fur to do me sim'lar kindnesses. Some has had daughters as was dead. And God only knows how good them mothers was to me!'

It was Martha at the door. I saw her haggard, listening face distinctly. My dread was lest he should turn his head, and see her too.

'They would often put their children--particular their little girls,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'upon my knee; and many a time you might have seen me sitting at their doors, when night was coming in, a'most as if they'd been my Darling's children. Oh, my Darling!'

Overpowered by sudden grief, he sobbed aloud. I laid my trembling hand upon the hand he put before his face. 'Thankee, sir,' he said, 'doen't

take no notice.'

In a very little while he took his hand away and put it on his breast, and went on with his story. 'They often walked with me,' he said, 'in the morning, maybe a mile or two upon my road; and when we parted, and I said, "I'm very thankful to you! God bless you!" they always seemed to understand, and answered pleasant. At last I come to the sea. It warn't hard, you may suppose, for a seafaring man like me to work his way over to Italy. When I got theer, I wandered on as I had done afore. The people was just as good to me, and I should have gone from town to town, maybe the country through, but that I got news of her being seen among them Swiss mountains yonder. One as know'd his servant see 'em there, all three, and told me how they travelled, and where they was. I made fur them mountains, Mas'r Davy, day and night. Ever so fur as I went, ever so fur the mountains seemed to shift away from me. But I come up with 'em, and I crossed 'em. When I got nigh the place as I had been told of, I began to think within my own self, "What shall I do when I see her?"'

The listening face, insensible to the inclement night, still drooped at the door, and the hands begged me--prayed me--not to cast it forth.

'I never doubted her,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'No! Not a bit! On'y let her see my face--on'y let her hear my voice--on'y let my stanning still afore her bring to her thoughts the home she had fled away from, and the child she had been--and if she had growed to be a royal lady, she'd have fell down at my feet! I know'd it well! Many a time in my sleep had I heerd her cry out, "Uncle!" and seen her fall like death afore me. Many a time in my sleep had I raised her up, and whispered to her, "Em'ly, my dear, I am come fur to bring forgiveness, and to take you home!"'

He stopped and shook his head, and went on with a sigh.

'He was nowt to me now. Em'ly was all. I bought a country dress to put upon her; and I know'd that, once found, she would walk beside me over them stony roads, go where I would, and never, never, leave me more. To put that dress upon her, and to cast off what she wore--to take her on my arm again, and wander towards home--to stop sometimes upon the road, and heal her bruised feet and her worse-bruised heart--was all that I thowt of now. I doen't believe I should have done so much as look at him. But, Mas'r Davy, it warn't to be--not yet! I was too late, and they was gone. Wheer, I couldn't learn. Some said beer, some said theer. I travelled beer, and I travelled theer, but I found no Em'ly, and I travelled home.'

'How long ago?' I asked.

'A matter o' fower days,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I sighted the old boat arter dark, and the light a-shining in the winder. When I come nigh and looked in through the glass, I see the faithful creetur Missis Gummidge sittin' by the fire, as we had fixed upon, alone. I called out, "Doen't be afeerd! It's Dan'!" and I went in. I never could have thowt the old boat would have been so strange!' From some pocket in his breast, he took out, with a very careful hand a small paper bundle containing two or three letters or little packets, which he laid upon the table.

'This fust one come,' he said, selecting it from the rest, 'afore I had been gone a week. A fifty pound Bank note, in a sheet of paper, directed to me, and put underneath the door in the night. She tried to hide her writing, but she couldn't hide it from Me!'

He folded up the note again, with great patience and care, in exactly the same form, and laid it on one side.

'This come to Missis Gummidge,' he said, opening another, 'two or three months ago.' After looking at it for some moments, he gave it to me, and

added in a low voice, 'Be so good as read it, sir.'

I read as follows:

'Oh what will you feel when you see this writing, and know it comes from my wicked hand! But try, try--not for my sake, but for uncle's goodness, try to let your heart soften to me, only for a little little time! Try, pray do, to relent towards a miserable girl, and write down on a bit of paper whether he is well, and what he said about me before you left off ever naming me among yourselves--and whether, of a night, when it is my old time of coming home, you ever see him look as if he thought of one he used to love so dear. Oh, my heart is breaking when I think about it! I am kneeling down to you, begging and praying you not to be as hard with me as I deserve--as I well, well, know I deserve--but to be so gentle and so good, as to write down something of him, and to send it to me. You need not call me Little, you need not call me by the name I have disgraced; but oh, listen to my agony, and have mercy on me so far as to write me some word of uncle, never, never to be seen in this world by my eyes again!

'Dear, if your heart is hard towards me--justly hard, I know--but, listen, if it is hard, dear, ask him I have wronged the most--him whose wife I was to have been--before you quite decide against my poor poor prayer! If he should be so compassionate as to say that you might write something for me to read--I think he would, oh, I think he would, if you would only ask him, for he always was so brave and so forgiving--tell him then (but not else), that when I hear the wind blowing at night, I feel as if it was passing angrily from seeing him and uncle, and was going up to God against me. Tell him that if I was to die tomorrow (and oh, if I was fit, I would be so glad to die!) I would bless him and uncle with my last words, and pray for his happy home with my last breath!'

Some money was enclosed in this letter also. Five pounds. It was untouched like the previous sum, and he refolded it in the same way. Detailed instructions were added relative to the address of a reply, which, although they betrayed the intervention of several hands, and made it difficult to arrive at any very probable conclusion in reference to her place of concealment, made it at least not unlikely that she had written from that spot where she was stated to have been seen.

'What answer was sent?' I inquired of Mr. Peggotty.

'Missis Gummidge,' he returned, 'not being a good scholar, sir, Ham kindly drawed it out, and she made a copy on it. They told her I was gone to seek her, and what my parting words was.'

'Is that another letter in your hand?' said I.

'It's money, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, unfolding it a little way. 'Ten pound, you see. And wrote inside, "From a true friend," like the fust. But the fust was put underneath the door, and this come by the post, day afore yesterday. I'm a-going to seek her at the post-mark.'

He showed it to me. It was a town on the Upper Rhine. He had found out, at Yarmouth, some foreign dealers who knew that country, and they had drawn him a rude map on paper, which he could very well understand. He laid it between us on the table; and, with his chin resting on one hand, tracked his course upon it with the other.

I asked him how Ham was? He shook his head.

'He works,' he said, 'as bold as a man can. His name's as good, in all that part, as any man's is, anywheres in the wureld. Anyone's hand is

ready to help him, you understand, and his is ready to help them. He's never been heerd fur to complain. But my sister's belief is ('twixt ourselves) as it has cut him deep.'

'Poor fellow, I can believe it!'

'He ain't no care, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty in a solemn whisper--'kinder no care no-how for his life. When a man's wanted for rough sarvice in rough weather, he's theer. When there's hard duty to be done with danger in it, he steps for'ard afore all his mates. And yet he's as gentle as any child. There ain't a child in Yarmouth that doesn't know him.'

He gathered up the letters thoughtfully, smoothing them with his hand; put them into their little bundle; and placed it tenderly in his breast again. The face was gone from the door. I still saw the snow drifting in; but nothing else was there.

'Well!' he said, looking to his bag, 'having seen you tonight, Mas'r Davy (and that doos me good!), I shall away betimes tomorrow morning. You have seen what I've got heer'; putting his hand on where the little packet lay; 'all that troubles me is, to think that any harm might come to me, afore that money was give back. If I was to die, and it was lost, or stole, or elseways made away with, and it was never know'd by him but what I'd took it, I believe the t'other wureld wouldn't hold me! I believe I must come back!'

He rose, and I rose too; we grasped each other by the hand again, before going out.

'I'd go ten thousand mile,' he said, 'I'd go till I dropped dead, to lay that money down afore him. If I do that, and find my Em'ly, I'm content. If I doen't find her, maybe she'll come to hear, sometime, as her loving



uncle only ended his search for her when he ended his life; and if I know her, even that will turn her home at last!'

As he went out into the rigorous night, I saw the lonely figure flit away before us. I turned him hastily on some pretence, and held him in conversation until it was gone.

He spoke of a traveller's house on the Dover Road, where he knew he could find a clean, plain lodging for the night. I went with him over Westminster Bridge, and parted from him on the Surrey shore. Everything seemed, to my imagination, to be hushed in reverence for him, as he resumed his solitary journey through the snow.

I returned to the inn yard, and, impressed by my remembrance of the face, looked awfully around for it. It was not there. The snow had covered our late footprints; my new track was the only one to be seen; and even that began to die away (it snowed so fast) as I looked back over my shoulder.

#### CHAPTER 41. DORA'S AUNTS

At last, an answer came from the two old ladies. They presented their compliments to Mr. Copperfield, and informed him that they had given his letter their best consideration, 'with a view to the happiness of both parties'--which I thought rather an alarming expression, not only because of the use they had made of it in relation to the family difference before-mentioned, but because I had (and have all my life) observed that conventional phrases are a sort of fireworks, easily let off, and liable to take a great variety of shapes and colours not at all suggested by their original form. The Misses Spenlow added that they

begged to forbear expressing, 'through the medium of correspondence', an opinion on the subject of Mr. Copperfield's communication; but that if Mr. Copperfield would do them the favour to call, upon a certain day (accompanied, if he thought proper, by a confidential friend), they would be happy to hold some conversation on the subject.

To this favour, Mr. Copperfield immediately replied, with his respectful compliments, that he would have the honour of waiting on the Misses Spenlow, at the time appointed; accompanied, in accordance with their kind permission, by his friend Mr. Thomas Traddles of the Inner Temple. Having dispatched which missive, Mr. Copperfield fell into a condition of strong nervous agitation; and so remained until the day arrived.

It was a great augmentation of my uneasiness to be bereaved, at this eventful crisis, of the inestimable services of Miss Mills. But Mr. Mills, who was always doing something or other to annoy me--or I felt as if he were, which was the same thing--had brought his conduct to a climax, by taking it into his head that he would go to India. Why should he go to India, except to harass me? To be sure he had nothing to do with any other part of the world, and had a good deal to do with that part; being entirely in the India trade, whatever that was (I had floating dreams myself concerning golden shawls and elephants' teeth); having been at Calcutta in his youth; and designing now to go out there again, in the capacity of resident partner. But this was nothing to me. However, it was so much to him that for India he was bound, and Julia with him; and Julia went into the country to take leave of her relations; and the house was put into a perfect suit of bills, announcing that it was to be let or sold, and that the furniture (Mangle and all) was to be taken at a valuation. So, here was another earthquake of which I became the sport, before I had recovered from the shock of its predecessor!

I was in several minds how to dress myself on the important day; being

divided between my desire to appear to advantage, and my apprehensions of putting on anything that might impair my severely practical character in the eyes of the Misses Spenlow. I endeavoured to hit a happy medium between these two extremes; my aunt approved the result; and Mr. Dick threw one of his shoes after Traddles and me, for luck, as we went downstairs.

Excellent fellow as I knew Traddles to be, and warmly attached to him as I was, I could not help wishing, on that delicate occasion, that he had never contracted the habit of brushing his hair so very upright. It gave him a surprised look--not to say a hearth-broomy kind of expression--which, my apprehensions whispered, might be fatal to us.

I took the liberty of mentioning it to Traddles, as we were walking to Putney; and saying that if he WOULD smooth it down a little--

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, lifting off his hat, and rubbing his hair all kinds of ways, 'nothing would give me greater pleasure. But it won't.'

'Won't be smoothed down?' said I.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Nothing will induce it. If I was to carry a half-hundred-weight upon it, all the way to Putney, it would be up again the moment the weight was taken off. You have no idea what obstinate hair mine is, Copperfield. I am quite a fretful porcupine.'

I was a little disappointed, I must confess, but thoroughly charmed by his good-nature too. I told him how I esteemed his good-nature; and said that his hair must have taken all the obstinacy out of his character, for he had none.

'Oh!' returned Traddles, laughing. 'I assure you, it's quite an old

story, my unfortunate hair. My uncle's wife couldn't bear it. She said it exasperated her. It stood very much in my way, too, when I first fell in love with Sophy. Very much!'

'Did she object to it?'

'SHE didn't,' rejoined Traddles; 'but her eldest sister--the one that's the Beauty--quite made game of it, I understand. In fact, all the sisters laugh at it.'

'Agreeable!' said I.

'Yes,' returned Traddles with perfect innocence, 'it's a joke for us. They pretend that Sophy has a lock of it in her desk, and is obliged to shut it in a clasped book, to keep it down. We laugh about it.'

'By the by, my dear Traddles,' said I, 'your experience may suggest something to me. When you became engaged to the young lady whom you have just mentioned, did you make a regular proposal to her family? Was there anything like--what we are going through today, for instance?' I added, nervously.

'Why,' replied Traddles, on whose attentive face a thoughtful shade had stolen, 'it was rather a painful transaction, Copperfield, in my case. You see, Sophy being of so much use in the family, none of them could endure the thought of her ever being married. Indeed, they had quite settled among themselves that she never was to be married, and they called her the old maid. Accordingly, when I mentioned it, with the greatest precaution, to Mrs. Crewler--'

'The mama?' said I.

'The mama,' said Traddles--'Reverend Horace Crewler--when I mentioned it

with every possible precaution to Mrs. Crewler, the effect upon her was such that she gave a scream and became insensible. I couldn't approach the subject again, for months.'

'You did at last?' said I.

'Well, the Reverend Horace did,' said Traddles. 'He is an excellent man, most exemplary in every way; and he pointed out to her that she ought, as a Christian, to reconcile herself to the sacrifice (especially as it was so uncertain), and to bear no uncharitable feeling towards me. As to myself, Copperfield, I give you my word, I felt a perfect bird of prey towards the family.'

'The sisters took your part, I hope, Traddles?'

'Why, I can't say they did,' he returned. 'When we had comparatively reconciled Mrs. Crewler to it, we had to break it to Sarah. You recollect my mentioning Sarah, as the one that has something the matter with her spine?'

'Perfectly!'

'She clenched both her hands,' said Traddles, looking at me in dismay; 'shut her eyes; turned lead-colour; became perfectly stiff; and took nothing for two days but toast-and-water, administered with a tea-spoon.'

'What a very unpleasant girl, Traddles!' I remarked.

'Oh, I beg your pardon, Copperfield!' said Traddles. 'She is a very charming girl, but she has a great deal of feeling. In fact, they all have. Sophy told me afterwards, that the self-reproach she underwent while she was in attendance upon Sarah, no words could describe. I know

it must have been severe, by my own feelings, Copperfield; which were like a criminal's. After Sarah was restored, we still had to break it to the other eight; and it produced various effects upon them of a most pathetic nature. The two little ones, whom Sophy educates, have only just left off de-testing me.'

'At any rate, they are all reconciled to it now, I hope?' said I.

'Ye-yes, I should say they were, on the whole, resigned to it,' said Traddles, doubtfully. 'The fact is, we avoid mentioning the subject; and my unsettled prospects and indifferent circumstances are a great consolation to them. There will be a deplorable scene, whenever we are married. It will be much more like a funeral, than a wedding. And they'll all hate me for taking her away!'

His honest face, as he looked at me with a serio-comic shake of his head, impresses me more in the remembrance than it did in the reality, for I was by this time in a state of such excessive trepidation and wandering of mind, as to be quite unable to fix my attention on anything. On our approaching the house where the Misses Spenlow lived, I was at such a discount in respect of my personal looks and presence of mind, that Traddles proposed a gentle stimulant in the form of a glass of ale. This having been administered at a neighbouring public-house, he conducted me, with tottering steps, to the Misses Spenlow's door.

I had a vague sensation of being, as it were, on view, when the maid opened it; and of wavering, somehow, across a hall with a weather-glass in it, into a quiet little drawing-room on the ground-floor, commanding a neat garden. Also of sitting down here, on a sofa, and seeing Traddles's hair start up, now his hat was removed, like one of those obtrusive little figures made of springs, that fly out of fictitious snuff-boxes when the lid is taken off. Also of hearing an old-fashioned clock ticking away on the chimney-piece, and trying to make it keep time

to the jerking of my heart,--which it wouldn't. Also of looking round the room for any sign of Dora, and seeing none. Also of thinking that Jip once barked in the distance, and was instantly choked by somebody. Ultimately I found myself backing Traddles into the fireplace, and bowing in great confusion to two dry little elderly ladies, dressed in black, and each looking wonderfully like a preparation in chip or tan of the late Mr. Spenlow.

'Pray,' said one of the two little ladies, 'be seated.'

When I had done tumbling over Traddles, and had sat upon something which was not a cat--my first seat was--I so far recovered my sight, as to perceive that Mr. Spenlow had evidently been the youngest of the family; that there was a disparity of six or eight years between the two sisters; and that the younger appeared to be the manager of the conference, inasmuch as she had my letter in her hand--so familiar as it looked to me, and yet so odd!--and was referring to it through an eye-glass. They were dressed alike, but this sister wore her dress with a more youthful air than the other; and perhaps had a trifle more frill, or tucker, or brooch, or bracelet, or some little thing of that kind, which made her look more lively. They were both upright in their carriage, formal, precise, composed, and quiet. The sister who had not my letter, had her arms crossed on her breast, and resting on each other, like an Idol.

'Mr. Copperfield, I believe,' said the sister who had got my letter, addressing herself to Traddles.

This was a frightful beginning. Traddles had to indicate that I was Mr. Copperfield, and I had to lay claim to myself, and they had to divest themselves of a preconceived opinion that Traddles was Mr. Copperfield, and altogether we were in a nice condition. To improve it, we all distinctly heard Jip give two short barks, and receive another choke.

'Mr. Copperfield!' said the sister with the letter.

I did something--bowed, I suppose--and was all attention, when the other sister struck in.

'My sister Lavinia,' said she 'being conversant with matters of this nature, will state what we consider most calculated to promote the happiness of both parties.'

I discovered afterwards that Miss Lavinia was an authority in affairs of the heart, by reason of there having anciently existed a certain Mr. Pidger, who played short whist, and was supposed to have been enamoured of her. My private opinion is, that this was entirely a gratuitous assumption, and that Pidger was altogether innocent of any such sentiments--to which he had never given any sort of expression that I could ever hear of. Both Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa had a superstition, however, that he would have declared his passion, if he had not been cut short in his youth (at about sixty) by over-drinking his constitution, and over-doing an attempt to set it right again by swilling Bath water. They had a lurking suspicion even, that he died of secret love; though I must say there was a picture of him in the house with a damask nose, which concealment did not appear to have ever preyed upon.

'We will not,' said Miss Lavinia, 'enter on the past history of this matter. Our poor brother Francis's death has cancelled that.'

'We had not,' said Miss Clarissa, 'been in the habit of frequent association with our brother Francis; but there was no decided division or disunion between us. Francis took his road; we took ours. We considered it conducive to the happiness of all parties that it should be so. And it was so.'



Each of the sisters leaned a little forward to speak, shook her head after speaking, and became upright again when silent. Miss Clarissa never moved her arms. She sometimes played tunes upon them with her fingers--minuets and marches I should think--but never moved them.

'Our niece's position, or supposed position, is much changed by our brother Francis's death,' said Miss Lavinia; 'and therefore we consider our brother's opinions as regarded her position as being changed too. We have no reason to doubt, Mr. Copperfield, that you are a young gentleman possessed of good qualities and honourable character; or that you have an affection--or are fully persuaded that you have an affection--for our niece.'

I replied, as I usually did whenever I had a chance, that nobody had ever loved anybody else as I loved Dora. Traddles came to my assistance with a confirmatory murmur.

Miss Lavinia was going on to make some rejoinder, when Miss Clarissa, who appeared to be incessantly beset by a desire to refer to her brother Francis, struck in again:

'If Dora's mama,' she said, 'when she married our brother Francis, had at once said that there was not room for the family at the dinner-table, it would have been better for the happiness of all parties.'

'Sister Clarissa,' said Miss Lavinia. 'Perhaps we needn't mind that now.'

'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, 'it belongs to the subject. With your branch of the subject, on which alone you are competent to speak, I should not think of interfering. On this branch of the subject I have a voice and an opinion. It would have been better for the happiness of

all parties, if Dora's mama, when she married our brother Francis, had mentioned plainly what her intentions were. We should then have known what we had to expect. We should have said "Pray do not invite us, at any time"; and all possibility of misunderstanding would have been avoided.'

When Miss Clarissa had shaken her head, Miss Lavinia resumed: again referring to my letter through her eye-glass. They both had little bright round twinkling eyes, by the way, which were like birds' eyes. They were not unlike birds, altogether; having a sharp, brisk, sudden manner, and a little short, spruce way of adjusting themselves, like canaries.

Miss Lavinia, as I have said, resumed:

'You ask permission of my sister Clarissa and myself, Mr. Copperfield, to visit here, as the accepted suitor of our niece.'

'If our brother Francis,' said Miss Clarissa, breaking out again, if I may call anything so calm a breaking out, 'wished to surround himself with an atmosphere of Doctors' Commons, and of Doctors' Commons only, what right or desire had we to object? None, I am sure. We have ever been far from wishing to obtrude ourselves on anyone. But why not say so? Let our brother Francis and his wife have their society. Let my sister Lavinia and myself have our society. We can find it for ourselves, I hope.'

As this appeared to be addressed to Traddles and me, both Traddles and I made some sort of reply. Traddles was inaudible. I think I observed, myself, that it was highly creditable to all concerned. I don't in the least know what I meant.

'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, having now relieved her mind, 'you

can go on, my dear.'

Miss Lavinia proceeded:

'Mr. Copperfield, my sister Clarissa and I have been very careful indeed in considering this letter; and we have not considered it without finally showing it to our niece, and discussing it with our niece. We have no doubt that you think you like her very much.'

'Think, ma'am,' I rapturously began, 'oh!--'

But Miss Clarissa giving me a look (just like a sharp canary), as requesting that I would not interrupt the oracle, I begged pardon.

'Affection,' said Miss Lavinia, glancing at her sister for corroboration, which she gave in the form of a little nod to every clause, 'mature affection, homage, devotion, does not easily express itself. Its voice is low. It is modest and retiring, it lies in ambush, waits and waits. Such is the mature fruit. Sometimes a life glides away, and finds it still ripening in the shade.'

Of course I did not understand then that this was an allusion to her supposed experience of the stricken Pidger; but I saw, from the gravity with which Miss Clarissa nodded her head, that great weight was attached to these words.

'The light--for I call them, in comparison with such sentiments, the light--inclinations of very young people,' pursued Miss Lavinia, 'are dust, compared to rocks. It is owing to the difficulty of knowing whether they are likely to endure or have any real foundation, that my sister Clarissa and myself have been very undecided how to act, Mr. Copperfield, and Mr.--'

'Traddles,' said my friend, finding himself looked at.

'I beg pardon. Of the Inner Temple, I believe?' said Miss Clarissa, again glancing at my letter.

Traddles said 'Exactly so,' and became pretty red in the face.

Now, although I had not received any express encouragement as yet, I fancied that I saw in the two little sisters, and particularly in Miss Lavinia, an intensified enjoyment of this new and fruitful subject of domestic interest, a settling down to make the most of it, a disposition to pet it, in which there was a good bright ray of hope. I thought I perceived that Miss Lavinia would have uncommon satisfaction in superintending two young lovers, like Dora and me; and that Miss Clarissa would have hardly less satisfaction in seeing her superintend us, and in chiming in with her own particular department of the subject whenever that impulse was strong upon her. This gave me courage to protest most vehemently that I loved Dora better than I could tell, or anyone believe; that all my friends knew how I loved her; that my aunt, Agnes, Traddles, everyone who knew me, knew how I loved her, and how earnest my love had made me. For the truth of this, I appealed to Traddles. And Traddles, firing up as if he were plunging into a Parliamentary Debate, really did come out nobly: confirming me in good round terms, and in a plain sensible practical manner, that evidently made a favourable impression.

'I speak, if I may presume to say so, as one who has some little experience of such things,' said Traddles, 'being myself engaged to a young lady--one of ten, down in Devonshire--and seeing no probability, at present, of our engagement coming to a termination.'

'You may be able to confirm what I have said, Mr. Traddles,' observed Miss Lavinia, evidently taking a new interest in him, 'of the affection

that is modest and retiring; that waits and waits?'

'Entirely, ma'am,' said Traddles.

Miss Clarissa looked at Miss Lavinia, and shook her head gravely. Miss Lavinia looked consciously at Miss Clarissa, and heaved a little sigh.

'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, 'take my smelling-bottle.'

Miss Lavinia revived herself with a few whiffs of aromatic vinegar--Traddles and I looking on with great solicitude the while; and then went on to say, rather faintly:

'My sister and myself have been in great doubt, Mr. Traddles, what course we ought to take in reference to the likings, or imaginary likings, of such very young people as your friend Mr. Copperfield and our niece.'

'Our brother Francis's child,' remarked Miss Clarissa. 'If our brother Francis's wife had found it convenient in her lifetime (though she had an unquestionable right to act as she thought best) to invite the family to her dinner-table, we might have known our brother Francis's child better at the present moment. Sister Lavinia, proceed.'

Miss Lavinia turned my letter, so as to bring the superscription towards herself, and referred through her eye-glass to some orderly-looking notes she had made on that part of it.

'It seems to us,' said she, 'prudent, Mr. Traddles, to bring these feelings to the test of our own observation. At present we know nothing of them, and are not in a situation to judge how much reality there may be in them. Therefore we are inclined so far to accede to Mr. Copperfield's proposal, as to admit his visits here.'

'I shall never, dear ladies,' I exclaimed, relieved of an immense load of apprehension, 'forget your kindness!'

'But,' pursued Miss Lavinia,--'but, we would prefer to regard those visits, Mr. Traddles, as made, at present, to us. We must guard ourselves from recognizing any positive engagement between Mr. Copperfield and our niece, until we have had an opportunity--'

'Until YOU have had an opportunity, sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa.

'Be it so,' assented Miss Lavinia, with a sigh--'until I have had an opportunity of observing them.'

'Copperfield,' said Traddles, turning to me, 'you feel, I am sure, that nothing could be more reasonable or considerate.'

'Nothing!' cried I. 'I am deeply sensible of it.'

'In this position of affairs,' said Miss Lavinia, again referring to her notes, 'and admitting his visits on this understanding only, we must require from Mr. Copperfield a distinct assurance, on his word of honour, that no communication of any kind shall take place between him and our niece without our knowledge. That no project whatever shall be entertained with regard to our niece, without being first submitted to us--' 'To you, sister Lavinia,' Miss Clarissa interposed.

'Be it so, Clarissa!' assented Miss Lavinia resignedly--'to me--and receiving our concurrence. We must make this a most express and serious stipulation, not to be broken on any account. We wished Mr. Copperfield to be accompanied by some confidential friend today,' with an inclination of her head towards Traddles, who bowed, 'in order that there might be no doubt or misconception on this subject. If Mr. Copperfield, or if you, Mr. Traddles, feel the least scruple, in giving

this promise, I beg you to take time to consider it.'

I exclaimed, in a state of high ecstatic fervour, that not a moment's consideration could be necessary. I bound myself by the required promise, in a most impassioned manner; called upon Traddles to witness it; and denounced myself as the most atrocious of characters if I ever swerved from it in the least degree.

'Stay!' said Miss Lavinia, holding up her hand; 'we resolved, before we had the pleasure of receiving you two gentlemen, to leave you alone for a quarter of an hour, to consider this point. You will allow us to retire.'

It was in vain for me to say that no consideration was necessary. They persisted in withdrawing for the specified time. Accordingly, these little birds hopped out with great dignity; leaving me to receive the congratulations of Traddles, and to feel as if I were translated to regions of exquisite happiness. Exactly at the expiration of the quarter of an hour, they reappeared with no less dignity than they had disappeared. They had gone rustling away as if their little dresses were made of autumn-leaves: and they came rustling back, in like manner.

I then bound myself once more to the prescribed conditions.

'Sister Clarissa,' said Miss Lavinia, 'the rest is with you.'

Miss Clarissa, unfolding her arms for the first time, took the notes and glanced at them.

'We shall be happy,' said Miss Clarissa, 'to see Mr. Copperfield to dinner, every Sunday, if it should suit his convenience. Our hour is three.'

I bowed.

'In the course of the week,' said Miss Clarissa, 'we shall be happy to see Mr. Copperfield to tea. Our hour is half-past six.'

I bowed again.

'Twice in the week,' said Miss Clarissa, 'but, as a rule, not oftener.'

I bowed again.

'Miss Trotwood,' said Miss Clarissa, 'mentioned in Mr. Copperfield's letter, will perhaps call upon us. When visiting is better for the happiness of all parties, we are glad to receive visits, and return them. When it is better for the happiness of all parties that no visiting should take place, (as in the case of our brother Francis, and his establishment) that is quite different.'

I intimated that my aunt would be proud and delighted to make their acquaintance; though I must say I was not quite sure of their getting on very satisfactorily together. The conditions being now closed, I expressed my acknowledgements in the warmest manner; and, taking the hand, first of Miss Clarissa, and then of Miss Lavinia, pressed it, in each case, to my lips.

Miss Lavinia then arose, and begging Mr. Traddles to excuse us for a minute, requested me to follow her. I obeyed, all in a tremble, and was conducted into another room. There I found my blessed darling stopping her ears behind the door, with her dear little face against the wall; and Jip in the plate-warmer with his head tied up in a towel.

Oh! How beautiful she was in her black frock, and how she sobbed and cried at first, and wouldn't come out from behind the door! How fond we



were of one another, when she did come out at last; and what a state of bliss I was in, when we took Jip out of the plate-warmer, and restored him to the light, sneezing very much, and were all three reunited!

'My dearest Dora! Now, indeed, my own for ever!'

'Oh, DON'T!' pleaded Dora. 'Please!'

'Are you not my own for ever, Dora?'

'Oh yes, of course I am!' cried Dora, 'but I am so frightened!'

'Frightened, my own?'

'Oh yes! I don't like him,' said Dora. 'Why don't he go?'

'Who, my life?'

'Your friend,' said Dora. 'It isn't any business of his. What a stupid he must be!'

'My love!' (There never was anything so coaxing as her childish ways.)

'He is the best creature!'

'Oh, but we don't want any best creatures!' pouted Dora.

'My dear,' I argued, 'you will soon know him well, and like him of all things. And here is my aunt coming soon; and you'll like her of all things too, when you know her.'

'No, please don't bring her!' said Dora, giving me a horrified little kiss, and folding her hands. 'Don't. I know she's a naughty, mischief-making old thing! Don't let her come here, Doady!' which was a

corruption of David.

Remonstrance was of no use, then; so I laughed, and admired, and was very much in love and very happy; and she showed me Jip's new trick of standing on his hind legs in a corner--which he did for about the space of a flash of lightning, and then fell down--and I don't know how long I should have stayed there, oblivious of Traddles, if Miss Lavinia had not come in to take me away. Miss Lavinia was very fond of Dora (she told me Dora was exactly like what she had been herself at her age--she must have altered a good deal), and she treated Dora just as if she had been a toy. I wanted to persuade Dora to come and see Traddles, but on my proposing it she ran off to her own room and locked herself in; so I went to Traddles without her, and walked away with him on air.

'Nothing could be more satisfactory,' said Traddles; 'and they are very agreeable old ladies, I am sure. I shouldn't be at all surprised if you were to be married years before me, Copperfield.'

'Does your Sophy play on any instrument, Traddles?' I inquired, in the pride of my heart.

'She knows enough of the piano to teach it to her little sisters,' said Traddles.

'Does she sing at all?' I asked.

'Why, she sings ballads, sometimes, to freshen up the others a little when they're out of spirits,' said Traddles. 'Nothing scientific.'

'She doesn't sing to the guitar?' said I.

'Oh dear no!' said Traddles.

'Paint at all?'

'Not at all,' said Traddles.

I promised Traddles that he should hear Dora sing, and see some of her flower-painting. He said he should like it very much, and we went home arm in arm in great good humour and delight. I encouraged him to talk about Sophy, on the way; which he did with a loving reliance on her that I very much admired. I compared her in my mind with Dora, with considerable inward satisfaction; but I candidly admitted to myself that she seemed to be an excellent kind of girl for Traddles, too.

Of course my aunt was immediately made acquainted with the successful issue of the conference, and with all that had been said and done in the course of it. She was happy to see me so happy, and promised to call on Dora's aunts without loss of time. But she took such a long walk up and down our rooms that night, while I was writing to Agnes, that I began to think she meant to walk till morning.

My letter to Agnes was a fervent and grateful one, narrating all the good effects that had resulted from my following her advice. She wrote, by return of post, to me. Her letter was hopeful, earnest, and cheerful. She was always cheerful from that time.

I had my hands more full than ever, now. My daily journeys to Highgate considered, Putney was a long way off; and I naturally wanted to go there as often as I could. The proposed tea-drinkings being quite impracticable, I compounded with Miss Lavinia for permission to visit every Saturday afternoon, without detriment to my privileged Sundays. So, the close of every week was a delicious time for me; and I got through the rest of the week by looking forward to it.

I was wonderfully relieved to find that my aunt and Dora's aunts

rubbed on, all things considered, much more smoothly than I could have expected. My aunt made her promised visit within a few days of the conference; and within a few more days, Dora's aunts called upon her, in due state and form. Similar but more friendly exchanges took place afterwards, usually at intervals of three or four weeks. I know that my aunt distressed Dora's aunts very much, by utterly setting at naught the dignity of fly-conveyance, and walking out to Putney at extraordinary times, as shortly after breakfast or just before tea; likewise by wearing her bonnet in any manner that happened to be comfortable to her head, without at all deferring to the prejudices of civilization on that subject. But Dora's aunts soon agreed to regard my aunt as an eccentric and somewhat masculine lady, with a strong understanding; and although my aunt occasionally ruffled the feathers of Dora's aunts, by expressing heretical opinions on various points of ceremony, she loved me too well not to sacrifice some of her little peculiarities to the general harmony.

The only member of our small society who positively refused to adapt himself to circumstances, was Jip. He never saw my aunt without immediately displaying every tooth in his head, retiring under a chair, and growling incessantly: with now and then a doleful howl, as if she really were too much for his feelings. All kinds of treatment were tried with him, coaxing, scolding, slapping, bringing him to Buckingham Street (where he instantly dashed at the two cats, to the terror of all beholders); but he never could prevail upon himself to bear my aunt's society. He would sometimes think he had got the better of his objection, and be amiable for a few minutes; and then would put up his snub nose, and howl to that extent, that there was nothing for it but to blind him and put him in the plate-warmer. At length, Dora regularly muffled him in a towel and shut him up there, whenever my aunt was reported at the door.

One thing troubled me much, after we had fallen into this quiet train.

It was, that Dora seemed by one consent to be regarded like a pretty toy or plaything. My aunt, with whom she gradually became familiar, always called her Little Blossom; and the pleasure of Miss Lavinia's life was to wait upon her, curl her hair, make ornaments for her, and treat her like a pet child. What Miss Lavinia did, her sister did as a matter of course. It was very odd to me; but they all seemed to treat Dora, in her degree, much as Dora treated Jip in his.

I made up my mind to speak to Dora about this; and one day when we were out walking (for we were licensed by Miss Lavinia, after a while, to go out walking by ourselves), I said to her that I wished she could get them to behave towards her differently.

'Because you know, my darling,' I remonstrated, 'you are not a child.'

'There!' said Dora. 'Now you're going to be cross!'

'Cross, my love?'

'I am sure they're very kind to me,' said Dora, 'and I am very happy--'

'Well! But my dearest life!' said I, 'you might be very happy, and yet be treated rationally.'

Dora gave me a reproachful look--the prettiest look!--and then began to sob, saying, if I didn't like her, why had I ever wanted so much to be engaged to her? And why didn't I go away, now, if I couldn't bear her?

What could I do, but kiss away her tears, and tell her how I doted on her, after that!

'I am sure I am very affectionate,' said Dora; 'you oughtn't to be cruel to me, Doady!'

'Cruel, my precious love! As if I would--or could--be cruel to you, for the world!'

'Then don't find fault with me,' said Dora, making a rosebud of her mouth; 'and I'll be good.'

I was charmed by her presently asking me, of her own accord, to give her that cookery-book I had once spoken of, and to show her how to keep accounts as I had once promised I would. I brought the volume with me on my next visit (I got it prettily bound, first, to make it look less dry and more inviting); and as we strolled about the Common, I showed her an old housekeeping-book of my aunt's, and gave her a set of tablets, and a pretty little pencil-case and box of leads, to practise housekeeping with.

But the cookery-book made Dora's head ache, and the figures made her cry. They wouldn't add up, she said. So she rubbed them out, and drew little nosegays and likenesses of me and Jip, all over the tablets.

Then I playfully tried verbal instruction in domestic matters, as we walked about on a Saturday afternoon. Sometimes, for example, when we passed a butcher's shop, I would say:

'Now suppose, my pet, that we were married, and you were going to buy a shoulder of mutton for dinner, would you know how to buy it?'

My pretty little Dora's face would fall, and she would make her mouth into a bud again, as if she would very much prefer to shut mine with a kiss.

'Would you know how to buy it, my darling?' I would repeat, perhaps, if I were very inflexible.

Dora would think a little, and then reply, perhaps, with great triumph:

'Why, the butcher would know how to sell it, and what need I know? Oh, you silly boy!'

So, when I once asked Dora, with an eye to the cookery-book, what she would do, if we were married, and I were to say I should like a nice Irish stew, she replied that she would tell the servant to make it; and then clapped her little hands together across my arm, and laughed in such a charming manner that she was more delightful than ever.

Consequently, the principal use to which the cookery-book was devoted, was being put down in the corner for Jip to stand upon. But Dora was so pleased, when she had trained him to stand upon it without offering to come off, and at the same time to hold the pencil-case in his mouth, that I was very glad I had bought it.

And we fell back on the guitar-case, and the flower-painting, and the songs about never leaving off dancing, Ta ra la! and were as happy as the week was long. I occasionally wished I could venture to hint to Miss Lavinia, that she treated the darling of my heart a little too much like a plaything; and I sometimes awoke, as it were, wondering to find that I had fallen into the general fault, and treated her like a plaything too--but not often.

## CHAPTER 42. MISCHIEF

I feel as if it were not for me to record, even though this manuscript is intended for no eyes but mine, how hard I worked at that tremendous short-hand, and all improvement appertaining to it, in my sense of

responsibility to Dora and her aunts. I will only add, to what I have already written of my perseverance at this time of my life, and of a patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured within me, and which I know to be the strong part of my character, if it have any strength at all, that there, on looking back, I find the source of my success. I have been very fortunate in worldly matters; many men have worked much harder, and not succeeded half so well; but I never could have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon its heels, which I then formed. Heaven knows I write this, in no spirit of self-laudation. The man who reviews his own life, as I do mine, in going on here, from page to page, had need to have been a good man indeed, if he would be spared the sharp consciousness of many talents neglected, many opportunities wasted, many erratic and perverted feelings constantly at war within his breast, and defeating him. I do not hold one natural gift, I dare say, that I have not abused. My meaning simply is, that whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well; that whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely; that in great aims and in small, I have always been thoroughly in earnest. I have never believed it possible that any natural or improved ability can claim immunity from the companionship of the steady, plain, hard-working qualities, and hope to gain its end. There is no such thing as such fulfilment on this earth. Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the two sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear; and there is no substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. Never to put one hand to anything, on which I could throw my whole self; and never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was; I find, now, to have been my golden rules.

How much of the practice I have just reduced to precept, I owe to Agnes,



I will not repeat here. My narrative proceeds to Agnes, with a thankful love.

She came on a visit of a fortnight to the Doctor's. Mr. Wickfield was the Doctor's old friend, and the Doctor wished to talk with him, and do him good. It had been matter of conversation with Agnes when she was last in town, and this visit was the result. She and her father came together. I was not much surprised to hear from her that she had engaged to find a lodging in the neighbourhood for Mrs. Heep, whose rheumatic complaint required change of air, and who would be charmed to have it in such company. Neither was I surprised when, on the very next day, Uriah, like a dutiful son, brought his worthy mother to take possession.

'You see, Master Copperfield,' said he, as he forced himself upon my company for a turn in the Doctor's garden, 'where a person loves, a person is a little jealous--leastways, anxious to keep an eye on the beloved one.'

'Of whom are you jealous, now?' said I.

'Thanks to you, Master Copperfield,' he returned, 'of no one in particular just at present--no male person, at least.'

'Do you mean that you are jealous of a female person?'

He gave me a sidelong glance out of his sinister red eyes, and laughed.

'Really, Master Copperfield,' he said, '--I should say Mister, but I know you'll excuse the abit I've got into--you're so insinuating, that you draw me like a corkscrew! Well, I don't mind telling you,' putting his fish-like hand on mine, 'I'm not a lady's man in general, sir, and I never was, with Mrs. Strong.'

His eyes looked green now, as they watched mine with a rascally cunning.

'What do you mean?' said I.

'Why, though I am a lawyer, Master Copperfield,' he replied, with a dry grin, 'I mean, just at present, what I say.'

'And what do you mean by your look?' I retorted, quietly.

'By my look? Dear me, Copperfield, that's sharp practice! What do I mean by my look?'

'Yes,' said I. 'By your look.'

He seemed very much amused, and laughed as heartily as it was in his nature to laugh. After some scraping of his chin with his hand, he went on to say, with his eyes cast downward--still scraping, very slowly:

'When I was but an umble clerk, she always looked down upon me. She was for ever having my Agnes backwards and forwards at her ouse, and she was for ever being a friend to you, Master Copperfield; but I was too far beneath her, myself, to be noticed.'

'Well?' said I; 'suppose you were!'

'--And beneath him too,' pursued Uriah, very distinctly, and in a meditative tone of voice, as he continued to scrape his chin.

'Don't you know the Doctor better,' said I, 'than to suppose him conscious of your existence, when you were not before him?'

He directed his eyes at me in that sidelong glance again, and he made his face very lantern-jawed, for the greater convenience of scraping, as

he answered:

'Oh dear, I am not referring to the Doctor! Oh no, poor man! I mean Mr. Maldon!'

My heart quite died within me. All my old doubts and apprehensions on that subject, all the Doctor's happiness and peace, all the mingled possibilities of innocence and compromise, that I could not unravel, I saw, in a moment, at the mercy of this fellow's twisting.

'He never could come into the office, without ordering and shoving me about,' said Uriah. 'One of your fine gentlemen he was! I was very meek and umble--and I am. But I didn't like that sort of thing--and I don't!'

He left off scraping his chin, and sucked in his cheeks until they seemed to meet inside; keeping his sidelong glance upon me all the while.

'She is one of your lovely women, she is,' he pursued, when he had slowly restored his face to its natural form; 'and ready to be no friend to such as me, I know. She's just the person as would put my Agnes up to higher sort of game. Now, I ain't one of your lady's men, Master Copperfield; but I've had eyes in my ed, a pretty long time back. We umble ones have got eyes, mostly speaking--and we look out of 'em.'

I endeavoured to appear unconscious and not disquieted, but, I saw in his face, with poor success.

'Now, I'm not a-going to let myself be run down, Copperfield,' he continued, raising that part of his countenance, where his red eyebrows would have been if he had had any, with malignant triumph, 'and I shall do what I can to put a stop to this friendship. I don't approve of it. I don't mind acknowledging to you that I've got rather a grudging

disposition, and want to keep off all intruders. I ain't a-going, if I know it, to run the risk of being plotted against.'

'You are always plotting, and delude yourself into the belief that everybody else is doing the like, I think,' said I.

'Perhaps so, Master Copperfield,' he replied. 'But I've got a motive, as my fellow-partner used to say; and I go at it tooth and nail. I mustn't be put upon, as a numble person, too much. I can't allow people in my way. Really they must come out of the cart, Master Copperfield!'

'I don't understand you,' said I.

'Don't you, though?' he returned, with one of his jerks. 'I'm astonished at that, Master Copperfield, you being usually so quick! I'll try to be plainer, another time.---Is that Mr. Maldon a-norseback, ringing at the gate, sir?'

'It looks like him,' I replied, as carelessly as I could.

Uriah stopped short, put his hands between his great knobs of knees, and doubled himself up with laughter. With perfectly silent laughter. Not a sound escaped from him. I was so repelled by his odious behaviour, particularly by this concluding instance, that I turned away without any ceremony; and left him doubled up in the middle of the garden, like a scarecrow in want of support.

It was not on that evening; but, as I well remember, on the next evening but one, which was a Sunday; that I took Agnes to see Dora. I had arranged the visit, beforehand, with Miss Lavinia; and Agnes was expected to tea.

I was in a flutter of pride and anxiety; pride in my dear little

betrotthed, and anxiety that Agnes should like her. All the way to Putney, Agnes being inside the stage-coach, and I outside, I pictured Dora to myself in every one of the pretty looks I knew so well; now making up my mind that I should like her to look exactly as she looked at such a time, and then doubting whether I should not prefer her looking as she looked at such another time; and almost worrying myself into a fever about it.

I was troubled by no doubt of her being very pretty, in any case; but it fell out that I had never seen her look so well. She was not in the drawing-room when I presented Agnes to her little aunts, but was shyly keeping out of the way. I knew where to look for her, now; and sure enough I found her stopping her ears again, behind the same dull old door.

At first she wouldn't come at all; and then she pleaded for five minutes by my watch. When at length she put her arm through mine, to be taken to the drawing-room, her charming little face was flushed, and had never been so pretty. But, when we went into the room, and it turned pale, she was ten thousand times prettier yet.

Dora was afraid of Agnes. She had told me that she knew Agnes was 'too clever'. But when she saw her looking at once so cheerful and so earnest, and so thoughtful, and so good, she gave a faint little cry of pleased surprise, and just put her affectionate arms round Agnes's neck, and laid her innocent cheek against her face.

I never was so happy. I never was so pleased as when I saw those two sit down together, side by side. As when I saw my little darling looking up so naturally to those cordial eyes. As when I saw the tender, beautiful regard which Agnes cast upon her.

Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa partook, in their way, of my joy. It was

the pleasantest tea-table in the world. Miss Clarissa presided. I cut and handed the sweet seed-cake--the little sisters had a bird-like fondness for picking up seeds and pecking at sugar; Miss Lavinia looked on with benignant patronage, as if our happy love were all her work; and we were perfectly contented with ourselves and one another.

The gentle cheerfulness of Agnes went to all their hearts. Her quiet interest in everything that interested Dora; her manner of making acquaintance with Jip (who responded instantly); her pleasant way, when Dora was ashamed to come over to her usual seat by me; her modest grace and ease, eliciting a crowd of blushing little marks of confidence from Dora; seemed to make our circle quite complete.

'I am so glad,' said Dora, after tea, 'that you like me. I didn't think you would; and I want, more than ever, to be liked, now Julia Mills is gone.'

I have omitted to mention it, by the by. Miss Mills had sailed, and Dora and I had gone aboard a great East Indiaman at Gravesend to see her; and we had had preserved ginger, and guava, and other delicacies of that sort for lunch; and we had left Miss Mills weeping on a camp-stool on the quarter-deck, with a large new diary under her arm, in which the original reflections awakened by the contemplation of Ocean were to be recorded under lock and key.

Agnes said she was afraid I must have given her an unpromising character; but Dora corrected that directly.

'Oh no!' she said, shaking her curls at me; 'it was all praise. He thinks so much of your opinion, that I was quite afraid of it.'

'My good opinion cannot strengthen his attachment to some people whom he knows,' said Agnes, with a smile; 'it is not worth their having.'

'But please let me have it,' said Dora, in her coaxing way, 'if you can!'

We made merry about Dora's wanting to be liked, and Dora said I was a goose, and she didn't like me at any rate, and the short evening flew away on gossamer-wings. The time was at hand when the coach was to call for us. I was standing alone before the fire, when Dora came stealing softly in, to give me that usual precious little kiss before I went.

'Don't you think, if I had had her for a friend a long time ago, Doady,' said Dora, her bright eyes shining very brightly, and her little right hand idly busying itself with one of the buttons of my coat, 'I might have been more clever perhaps?'

'My love!' said I, 'what nonsense!'

'Do you think it is nonsense?' returned Dora, without looking at me. 'Are you sure it is?'

'Of course I am!' 'I have forgotten,' said Dora, still turning the button round and round, 'what relation Agnes is to you, you dear bad boy.'

'No blood-relation,' I replied; 'but we were brought up together, like brother and sister.'

'I wonder why you ever fell in love with me?' said Dora, beginning on another button of my coat.

'Perhaps because I couldn't see you, and not love you, Dora!'

'Suppose you had never seen me at all,' said Dora, going to another

button.

'Suppose we had never been born!' said I, gaily.

I wondered what she was thinking about, as I glanced in admiring silence at the little soft hand travelling up the row of buttons on my coat, and at the clustering hair that lay against my breast, and at the lashes of her downcast eyes, slightly rising as they followed her idle fingers. At length her eyes were lifted up to mine, and she stood on tiptoe to give me, more thoughtfully than usual, that precious little kiss--once, twice, three times--and went out of the room.

They all came back together within five minutes afterwards, and Dora's unusual thoughtfulness was quite gone then. She was laughingly resolved to put Jip through the whole of his performances, before the coach came. They took some time (not so much on account of their variety, as Jip's reluctance), and were still unfinished when it was heard at the door. There was a hurried but affectionate parting between Agnes and herself; and Dora was to write to Agnes (who was not to mind her letters being foolish, she said), and Agnes was to write to Dora; and they had a second parting at the coach door, and a third when Dora, in spite of the remonstrances of Miss Lavinia, would come running out once more to remind Agnes at the coach window about writing, and to shake her curls at me on the box.

The stage-coach was to put us down near Covent Garden, where we were to take another stage-coach for Highgate. I was impatient for the short walk in the interval, that Agnes might praise Dora to me. Ah! what praise it was! How lovingly and fervently did it commend the pretty creature I had won, with all her artless graces best displayed, to my most gentle care! How thoughtfully remind me, yet with no pretence of doing so, of the trust in which I held the orphan child!



Never, never, had I loved Dora so deeply and truly, as I loved her that night. When we had again alighted, and were walking in the starlight along the quiet road that led to the Doctor's house, I told Agnes it was her doing.

'When you were sitting by her,' said I, 'you seemed to be no less her guardian angel than mine; and you seem so now, Agnes.'

'A poor angel,' she returned, 'but faithful.'

The clear tone of her voice, going straight to my heart, made it natural to me to say:

'The cheerfulness that belongs to you, Agnes (and to no one else that ever I have seen), is so restored, I have observed today, that I have begun to hope you are happier at home?'

'I am happier in myself,' she said; 'I am quite cheerful and light-hearted.'

I glanced at the serene face looking upward, and thought it was the stars that made it seem so noble.

'There has been no change at home,' said Agnes, after a few moments.

'No fresh reference,' said I, 'to--I wouldn't distress you, Agnes, but I cannot help asking--to what we spoke of, when we parted last?'

'No, none,' she answered.

'I have thought so much about it.'

'You must think less about it. Remember that I confide in simple love

and truth at last. Have no apprehensions for me, Trotwood,' she added, after a moment; 'the step you dread my taking, I shall never take.'

Although I think I had never really feared it, in any season of cool reflection, it was an unspeakable relief to me to have this assurance from her own truthful lips. I told her so, earnestly.

'And when this visit is over,' said I,--'for we may not be alone another time,--how long is it likely to be, my dear Agnes, before you come to London again?'

'Probably a long time,' she replied; 'I think it will be best--for papa's sake--to remain at home. We are not likely to meet often, for some time to come; but I shall be a good correspondent of Dora's, and we shall frequently hear of one another that way.'

We were now within the little courtyard of the Doctor's cottage. It was growing late. There was a light in the window of Mrs. Strong's chamber, and Agnes, pointing to it, bade me good night.

'Do not be troubled,' she said, giving me her hand, 'by our misfortunes and anxieties. I can be happier in nothing than in your happiness. If you can ever give me help, rely upon it I will ask you for it. God bless you always!' In her beaming smile, and in these last tones of her cheerful voice, I seemed again to see and hear my little Dora in her company. I stood awhile, looking through the porch at the stars, with a heart full of love and gratitude, and then walked slowly forth. I had engaged a bed at a decent alehouse close by, and was going out at the gate, when, happening to turn my head, I saw a light in the Doctor's study. A half-reproachful fancy came into my mind, that he had been working at the Dictionary without my help. With the view of seeing if this were so, and, in any case, of bidding him good night, if he were yet sitting among his books, I turned back, and going softly across the

hall, and gently opening the door, looked in.

The first person whom I saw, to my surprise, by the sober light of the shaded lamp, was Uriah. He was standing close beside it, with one of his skeleton hands over his mouth, and the other resting on the Doctor's table. The Doctor sat in his study chair, covering his face with his hands. Mr. Wickfield, sorely troubled and distressed, was leaning forward, irresolutely touching the Doctor's arm.

For an instant, I supposed that the Doctor was ill. I hastily advanced a step under that impression, when I met Uriah's eye, and saw what was the matter. I would have withdrawn, but the Doctor made a gesture to detain me, and I remained.

'At any rate,' observed Uriah, with a writhe of his ungainly person, 'we may keep the door shut. We needn't make it known to ALL the town.'

Saying which, he went on his toes to the door, which I had left open, and carefully closed it. He then came back, and took up his former position. There was an obtrusive show of compassionate zeal in his voice and manner, more intolerable--at least to me--than any demeanour he could have assumed.

'I have felt it incumbent upon me, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'to point out to Doctor Strong what you and me have already talked about. You didn't exactly understand me, though?'

I gave him a look, but no other answer; and, going to my good old master, said a few words that I meant to be words of comfort and encouragement. He put his hand upon my shoulder, as it had been his custom to do when I was quite a little fellow, but did not lift his grey head.

'As you didn't understand me, Master Copperfield,' resumed Uriah in the same officious manner, 'I may take the liberty of umbly mentioning, being among friends, that I have called Doctor Strong's attention to the goings-on of Mrs. Strong. It's much against the grain with me, I assure you, Copperfield, to be concerned in anything so unpleasant; but really, as it is, we're all mixing ourselves up with what oughtn't to be. That was what my meaning was, sir, when you didn't understand me.' I wonder now, when I recall his leer, that I did not collar him, and try to shake the breath out of his body.

'I dare say I didn't make myself very clear,' he went on, 'nor you neither. Naturally, we was both of us inclined to give such a subject a wide berth. Hows'ever, at last I have made up my mind to speak plain; and I have mentioned to Doctor Strong that--did you speak, sir?'

This was to the Doctor, who had moaned. The sound might have touched any heart, I thought, but it had no effect upon Uriah's.

'--mentioned to Doctor Strong,' he proceeded, 'that anyone may see that Mr. Maldon, and the lovely and agreeable lady as is Doctor Strong's wife, are too sweet on one another. Really the time is come (we being at present all mixing ourselves up with what oughtn't to be), when Doctor Strong must be told that this was full as plain to everybody as the sun, before Mr. Maldon went to India; that Mr. Maldon made excuses to come back, for nothing else; and that he's always here, for nothing else. When you come in, sir, I was just putting it to my fellow-partner,' towards whom he turned, 'to say to Doctor Strong upon his word and honour, whether he'd ever been of this opinion long ago, or not. Come, Mr. Wickfield, sir! Would you be so good as tell us? Yes or no, sir? Come, partner!'

'For God's sake, my dear Doctor,' said Mr. Wickfield again laying his irresolute hand upon the Doctor's arm, 'don't attach too much weight to

any suspicions I may have entertained.'

'There!' cried Uriah, shaking his head. 'What a melancholy confirmation: ain't it? Him! Such an old friend! Bless your soul, when I was nothing but a clerk in his office, Copperfield, I've seen him twenty times, if I've seen him once, quite in a taking about it--quite put out, you know (and very proper in him as a father; I'm sure I can't blame him), to think that Miss Agnes was mixing herself up with what oughtn't to be.'

'My dear Strong,' said Mr. Wickfield in a tremulous voice, 'my good friend, I needn't tell you that it has been my vice to look for some one master motive in everybody, and to try all actions by one narrow test. I may have fallen into such doubts as I have had, through this mistake.'

'You have had doubts, Wickfield,' said the Doctor, without lifting up his head. 'You have had doubts.'

'Speak up, fellow-partner,' urged Uriah.

'I had, at one time, certainly,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'I--God forgive me--I thought YOU had.'

'No, no, no!' returned the Doctor, in a tone of most pathetic grief.

'I thought, at one time,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'that you wished to send Maldon abroad to effect a desirable separation.'

'No, no, no!' returned the Doctor. 'To give Annie pleasure, by making some provision for the companion of her childhood. Nothing else.'

'So I found,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'I couldn't doubt it, when you told me so. But I thought--I implore you to remember the narrow construction which has been my besetting sin--that, in a case where there was so much disparity in point of years--'

'That's the way to put it, you see, Master Copperfield!' observed Uriah, with fawning and offensive pity.

'--a lady of such youth, and such attractions, however real her respect for you, might have been influenced in marrying, by worldly considerations only. I make no allowance for innumerable feelings and circumstances that may have all tended to good. For Heaven's sake remember that!'

'How kind he puts it!' said Uriah, shaking his head.

'Always observing her from one point of view,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'but by all that is dear to you, my old friend, I entreat you to consider what it was; I am forced to confess now, having no escape-'

'No! There's no way out of it, Mr. Wickfield, sir,' observed Uriah, 'when it's got to this.'

'--that I did,' said Mr. Wickfield, glancing helplessly and distractedly at his partner, 'that I did doubt her, and think her wanting in her duty to you; and that I did sometimes, if I must say all, feel averse to Agnes being in such a familiar relation towards her, as to see what I saw, or in my diseased theory fancied that I saw. I never mentioned this to anyone. I never meant it to be known to anyone. And though it is terrible to you to hear,' said Mr. Wickfield, quite subdued, 'if you knew how terrible it is for me to tell, you would feel compassion for me!'

The Doctor, in the perfect goodness of his nature, put out his hand. Mr. Wickfield held it for a little while in his, with his head bowed down.

'I am sure,' said Uriah, writhing himself into the silence like a

Conger-eel, 'that this is a subject full of unpleasantness to everybody. But since we have got so far, I ought to take the liberty of mentioning that Copperfield has noticed it too.'

I turned upon him, and asked him how he dared refer to me!

'Oh! it's very kind of you, Copperfield,' returned Uriah, undulating all over, 'and we all know what an amiable character yours is; but you know that the moment I spoke to you the other night, you knew what I meant. You know you knew what I meant, Copperfield. Don't deny it! You deny it with the best intentions; but don't do it, Copperfield.'

I saw the mild eye of the good old Doctor turned upon me for a moment, and I felt that the confession of my old misgivings and remembrances was too plainly written in my face to be overlooked. It was of no use raging. I could not undo that. Say what I would, I could not unsay it.

We were silent again, and remained so, until the Doctor rose and walked twice or thrice across the room. Presently he returned to where his chair stood; and, leaning on the back of it, and occasionally putting his handkerchief to his eyes, with a simple honesty that did him more honour, to my thinking, than any disguise he could have effected, said:

'I have been much to blame. I believe I have been very much to blame. I have exposed one whom I hold in my heart, to trials and aspersions--I call them aspersions, even to have been conceived in anybody's inmost mind--of which she never, but for me, could have been the object.'

Uriah Heep gave a kind of snivel. I think to express sympathy.

'Of which my Annie,' said the Doctor, 'never, but for me, could have been the object. Gentlemen, I am old now, as you know; I do not feel, tonight, that I have much to live for. But my life--my Life--upon the

truth and honour of the dear lady who has been the subject of this conversation!'

I do not think that the best embodiment of chivalry, the realization of the handsomest and most romantic figure ever imagined by painter, could have said this, with a more impressive and affecting dignity than the plain old Doctor did.

'But I am not prepared,' he went on, 'to deny--perhaps I may have been, without knowing it, in some degree prepared to admit--that I may have unwittingly ensnared that lady into an unhappy marriage. I am a man quite unaccustomed to observe; and I cannot but believe that the observation of several people, of different ages and positions, all too plainly tending in one direction (and that so natural), is better than mine.'

I had often admired, as I have elsewhere described, his benignant manner towards his youthful wife; but the respectful tenderness he manifested in every reference to her on this occasion, and the almost reverential manner in which he put away from him the lightest doubt of her integrity, exalted him, in my eyes, beyond description.

'I married that lady,' said the Doctor, 'when she was extremely young. I took her to myself when her character was scarcely formed. So far as it was developed, it had been my happiness to form it. I knew her father well. I knew her well. I had taught her what I could, for the love of all her beautiful and virtuous qualities. If I did her wrong; as I fear I did, in taking advantage (but I never meant it) of her gratitude and her affection; I ask pardon of that lady, in my heart!'

He walked across the room, and came back to the same place; holding the chair with a grasp that trembled, like his subdued voice, in its earnestness.



'I regarded myself as a refuge, for her, from the dangers and vicissitudes of life. I persuaded myself that, unequal though we were in years, she would live tranquilly and contentedly with me. I did not shut out of my consideration the time when I should leave her free, and still young and still beautiful, but with her judgement more matured--no, gentlemen--upon my truth!'

His homely figure seemed to be lightened up by his fidelity and generosity. Every word he uttered had a force that no other grace could have imparted to it.

'My life with this lady has been very happy. Until tonight, I have had uninterrupted occasion to bless the day on which I did her great injustice.'

His voice, more and more faltering in the utterance of these words, stopped for a few moments; then he went on:

'Once awakened from my dream--I have been a poor dreamer, in one way or other, all my life--I see how natural it is that she should have some regretful feeling towards her old companion and her equal. That she does regard him with some innocent regret, with some blameless thoughts of what might have been, but for me, is, I fear, too true. Much that I have seen, but not noted, has come back upon me with new meaning, during this last trying hour. But, beyond this, gentlemen, the dear lady's name never must be coupled with a word, a breath, of doubt.'

For a little while, his eye kindled and his voice was firm; for a little while he was again silent. Presently, he proceeded as before:

'It only remains for me, to bear the knowledge of the unhappiness I have occasioned, as submissively as I can. It is she who should reproach; not

I. To save her from misconception, cruel misconception, that even my friends have not been able to avoid, becomes my duty. The more retired we live, the better I shall discharge it. And when the time comes--may it come soon, if it be His merciful pleasure!--when my death shall release her from constraint, I shall close my eyes upon her honoured face, with unbounded confidence and love; and leave her, with no sorrow then, to happier and brighter days.'

I could not see him for the tears which his earnestness and goodness, so adorned by, and so adorning, the perfect simplicity of his manner, brought into my eyes. He had moved to the door, when he added:

'Gentlemen, I have shown you my heart. I am sure you will respect it. What we have said tonight is never to be said more. Wickfield, give me an old friend's arm upstairs!'

Mr. Wickfield hastened to him. Without interchanging a word they went slowly out of the room together, Uriah looking after them.

'Well, Master Copperfield!' said Uriah, meekly turning to me. 'The thing hasn't took quite the turn that might have been expected, for the old Scholar--what an excellent man!--is as blind as a brickbat; but this family's out of the cart, I think!'

I needed but the sound of his voice to be so madly enraged as I never was before, and never have been since.

'You villain,' said I, 'what do you mean by entrapping me into your schemes? How dare you appeal to me just now, you false rascal, as if we had been in discussion together?'

As we stood, front to front, I saw so plainly, in the stealthy exultation of his face, what I already so plainly knew; I mean that he

forced his confidence upon me, expressly to make me miserable, and had set a deliberate trap for me in this very matter; that I couldn't bear it. The whole of his lank cheek was invitingly before me, and I struck it with my open hand with that force that my fingers tingled as if I had burnt them.

He caught the hand in his, and we stood in that connexion, looking at each other. We stood so, a long time; long enough for me to see the white marks of my fingers die out of the deep red of his cheek, and leave it a deeper red.

'Copperfield,' he said at length, in a breathless voice, 'have you taken leave of your senses?'

'I have taken leave of you,' said I, wresting my hand away. 'You dog, I'll know no more of you.'

'Won't you?' said he, constrained by the pain of his cheek to put his hand there. 'Perhaps you won't be able to help it. Isn't this ungrateful of you, now?'

'I have shown you often enough,' said I, 'that I despise you. I have shown you now, more plainly, that I do. Why should I dread your doing your worst to all about you? What else do you ever do?'

He perfectly understood this allusion to the considerations that had hitherto restrained me in my communications with him. I rather think that neither the blow, nor the allusion, would have escaped me, but for the assurance I had had from Agnes that night. It is no matter.

There was another long pause. His eyes, as he looked at me, seemed to take every shade of colour that could make eyes ugly.

'Copperfield,' he said, removing his hand from his cheek, 'you have always gone against me. I know you always used to be against me at Mr. Wickfield's.'

'You may think what you like,' said I, still in a towering rage. 'If it is not true, so much the worthier you.'

'And yet I always liked you, Copperfield!' he rejoined.

I deigned to make him no reply; and, taking up my hat, was going out to bed, when he came between me and the door.

'Copperfield,' he said, 'there must be two parties to a quarrel. I won't be one.'

'You may go to the devil!' said I.

'Don't say that!' he replied. 'I know you'll be sorry afterwards. How can you make yourself so inferior to me, as to show such a bad spirit? But I forgive you.'

'You forgive me!' I repeated disdainfully.

'I do, and you can't help yourself,' replied Uriah. 'To think of your going and attacking me, that have always been a friend to you! But there can't be a quarrel without two parties, and I won't be one. I will be a friend to you, in spite of you. So now you know what you've got to expect.'

The necessity of carrying on this dialogue (his part in which was very slow; mine very quick) in a low tone, that the house might not be disturbed at an unseasonable hour, did not improve my temper; though my passion was cooling down. Merely telling him that I should expect from

him what I always had expected, and had never yet been disappointed in, I opened the door upon him, as if he had been a great walnut put there to be cracked, and went out of the house. But he slept out of the house too, at his mother's lodging; and before I had gone many hundred yards, came up with me.

'You know, Copperfield,' he said, in my ear (I did not turn my head), 'you're in quite a wrong position'; which I felt to be true, and that made me chafe the more; 'you can't make this a brave thing, and you can't help being forgiven. I don't intend to mention it to mother, nor to any living soul. I'm determined to forgive you. But I do wonder that you should lift your hand against a person that you knew to be so umble!'

I felt only less mean than he. He knew me better than I knew myself. If he had retorted or openly exasperated me, it would have been a relief and a justification; but he had put me on a slow fire, on which I lay tormented half the night.

In the morning, when I came out, the early church-bell was ringing, and he was walking up and down with his mother. He addressed me as if nothing had happened, and I could do no less than reply. I had struck him hard enough to give him the toothache, I suppose. At all events his face was tied up in a black silk handkerchief, which, with his hat perched on the top of it, was far from improving his appearance. I heard that he went to a dentist's in London on the Monday morning, and had a tooth out. I hope it was a double one.

The Doctor gave out that he was not quite well; and remained alone, for a considerable part of every day, during the remainder of the visit. Agnes and her father had been gone a week, before we resumed our usual work. On the day preceding its resumption, the Doctor gave me with his own hands a folded note not sealed. It was addressed to myself; and laid

an injunction on me, in a few affectionate words, never to refer to the subject of that evening. I had confided it to my aunt, but to no one else. It was not a subject I could discuss with Agnes, and Agnes certainly had not the least suspicion of what had passed.

Neither, I felt convinced, had Mrs. Strong then. Several weeks elapsed before I saw the least change in her. It came on slowly, like a cloud when there is no wind. At first, she seemed to wonder at the gentle compassion with which the Doctor spoke to her, and at his wish that she should have her mother with her, to relieve the dull monotony of her life. Often, when we were at work, and she was sitting by, I would see her pausing and looking at him with that memorable face. Afterwards, I sometimes observed her rise, with her eyes full of tears, and go out of the room. Gradually, an unhappy shadow fell upon her beauty, and deepened every day. Mrs. Markleham was a regular inmate of the cottage then; but she talked and talked, and saw nothing.

As this change stole on Annie, once like sunshine in the Doctor's house, the Doctor became older in appearance, and more grave; but the sweetness of his temper, the placid kindness of his manner, and his benevolent solicitude for her, if they were capable of any increase, were increased. I saw him once, early on the morning of her birthday, when she came to sit in the window while we were at work (which she had always done, but now began to do with a timid and uncertain air that I thought very touching), take her forehead between his hands, kiss it, and go hurriedly away, too much moved to remain. I saw her stand where he had left her, like a statue; and then bend down her head, and clasp her hands, and weep, I cannot say how sorrowfully.

Sometimes, after that, I fancied that she tried to speak even to me, in intervals when we were left alone. But she never uttered a word. The Doctor always had some new project for her participating in amusements away from home, with her mother; and Mrs. Markleham, who was very fond

of amusements, and very easily dissatisfied with anything else, entered into them with great good-will, and was loud in her commendations. But Annie, in a spiritless unhappy way, only went whither she was led, and seemed to have no care for anything.

I did not know what to think. Neither did my aunt; who must have walked, at various times, a hundred miles in her uncertainty. What was strangest of all was, that the only real relief which seemed to make its way into the secret region of this domestic unhappiness, made its way there in the person of Mr. Dick.

What his thoughts were on the subject, or what his observation was, I am as unable to explain, as I dare say he would have been to assist me in the task. But, as I have recorded in the narrative of my school days, his veneration for the Doctor was unbounded; and there is a subtlety of perception in real attachment, even when it is borne towards man by one of the lower animals, which leaves the highest intellect behind. To this mind of the heart, if I may call it so, in Mr. Dick, some bright ray of the truth shot straight.

He had proudly resumed his privilege, in many of his spare hours, of walking up and down the garden with the Doctor; as he had been accustomed to pace up and down The Doctor's Walk at Canterbury. But matters were no sooner in this state, than he devoted all his spare time (and got up earlier to make it more) to these perambulations. If he had never been so happy as when the Doctor read that marvellous performance, the Dictionary, to him; he was now quite miserable unless the Doctor pulled it out of his pocket, and began. When the Doctor and I were engaged, he now fell into the custom of walking up and down with Mrs. Strong, and helping her to trim her favourite flowers, or weed the beds. I dare say he rarely spoke a dozen words in an hour: but his quiet interest, and his wistful face, found immediate response in both their breasts; each knew that the other liked him, and that he loved both; and

he became what no one else could be--a link between them.

When I think of him, with his impenetrably wise face, walking up and down with the Doctor, delighted to be battered by the hard words in the Dictionary; when I think of him carrying huge watering-pots after Annie; kneeling down, in very pairs of gloves, at patient microscopic work among the little leaves; expressing as no philosopher could have expressed, in everything he did, a delicate desire to be her friend; showering sympathy, trustfulness, and affection, out of every hole in the watering-pot; when I think of him never wandering in that better mind of his to which unhappiness addressed itself, never bringing the unfortunate King Charles into the garden, never wavering in his grateful service, never diverted from his knowledge that there was something wrong, or from his wish to set it right--I really feel almost ashamed of having known that he was not quite in his wits, taking account of the utmost I have done with mine.

'Nobody but myself, Trot, knows what that man is!' my aunt would proudly remark, when we conversed about it. 'Dick will distinguish himself yet!'

I must refer to one other topic before I close this chapter. While the visit at the Doctor's was still in progress, I observed that the postman brought two or three letters every morning for Uriah Heep, who remained at Highgate until the rest went back, it being a leisure time; and that these were always directed in a business-like manner by Mr. Micawber, who now assumed a round legal hand. I was glad to infer, from these slight premises, that Mr. Micawber was doing well; and consequently was much surprised to receive, about this time, the following letter from his amiable wife.

'CANTERBURY, Monday Evening.



'You will doubtless be surprised, my dear Mr. Copperfield, to receive this communication. Still more so, by its contents. Still more so, by the stipulation of implicit confidence which I beg to impose. But my feelings as a wife and mother require relief; and as I do not wish to consult my family (already obnoxious to the feelings of Mr. Micawber), I know no one of whom I can better ask advice than my friend and former lodger.

'You may be aware, my dear Mr. Copperfield, that between myself and Mr. Micawber (whom I will never desert), there has always been preserved a spirit of mutual confidence. Mr. Micawber may have occasionally given a bill without consulting me, or he may have misled me as to the period when that obligation would become due. This has actually happened. But, in general, Mr. Micawber has had no secrets from the bosom of affection--I allude to his wife--and has invariably, on our retirement to rest, recalled the events of the day.

'You will picture to yourself, my dear Mr. Copperfield, what the poignancy of my feelings must be, when I inform you that Mr. Micawber is entirely changed. He is reserved. He is secret. His life is a mystery to the partner of his joys and sorrows--I again allude to his wife--and if I should assure you that beyond knowing that it is passed from morning to night at the office, I now know less of it than I do of the man in the south, connected with whose mouth the thoughtless children repeat an idle tale respecting cold plum porridge, I should adopt a popular fallacy to express an actual fact.

'But this is not all. Mr. Micawber is morose. He is severe. He is estranged from our eldest son and daughter, he has no pride in his twins, he looks with an eye of coldness even on the unoffending stranger who last became a member of our circle. The pecuniary means of meeting our expenses, kept down to the utmost farthing, are obtained from him

with great difficulty, and even under fearful threats that he will settle himself (the exact expression); and he inexorably refuses to give any explanation whatever of this distracting policy.

'This is hard to bear. This is heart-breaking. If you will advise me, knowing my feeble powers such as they are, how you think it will be best to exert them in a dilemma so unwonted, you will add another friendly obligation to the many you have already rendered me. With loves from the children, and a smile from the happily-unconscious stranger, I remain, dear Mr. Copperfield,

Your afflicted,

'EMMA MICAWBER.'

I did not feel justified in giving a wife of Mrs. Micawber's experience any other recommendation, than that she should try to reclaim Mr. Micawber by patience and kindness (as I knew she would in any case); but the letter set me thinking about him very much.

#### CHAPTER 43. ANOTHER RETROSPECT

Once again, let me pause upon a memorable period of my life. Let me stand aside, to see the phantoms of those days go by me, accompanying the shadow of myself, in dim procession.

Weeks, months, seasons, pass along. They seem little more than a summer day and a winter evening. Now, the Common where I walk with Dora is all in bloom, a field of bright gold; and now the unseen heather lies in

mounds and bunches underneath a covering of snow. In a breath, the river that flows through our Sunday walks is sparkling in the summer sun, is ruffled by the winter wind, or thickened with drifting heaps of ice. Faster than ever river ran towards the sea, it flashes, darkens, and rolls away.

Not a thread changes, in the house of the two little bird-like ladies. The clock ticks over the fireplace, the weather-glass hangs in the hall. Neither clock nor weather-glass is ever right; but we believe in both, devoutly.

I have come legally to man's estate. I have attained the dignity of twenty-one. But this is a sort of dignity that may be thrust upon one. Let me think what I have achieved.

I have tamed that savage stenographic mystery. I make a respectable income by it. I am in high repute for my accomplishment in all pertaining to the art, and am joined with eleven others in reporting the debates in Parliament for a Morning Newspaper. Night after night, I record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify. I wallow in words. Britannia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a trussed fowl: skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape. I am sufficiently behind the scenes to know the worth of political life. I am quite an Infidel about it, and shall never be converted.

My dear old Traddles has tried his hand at the same pursuit, but it is not in Traddles's way. He is perfectly good-humoured respecting his failure, and reminds me that he always did consider himself slow. He has occasional employment on the same newspaper, in getting up the facts of dry subjects, to be written about and embellished by more fertile minds. He is called to the bar; and with admirable industry and self-denial

has scraped another hundred pounds together, to fee a Conveyancer whose chambers he attends. A great deal of very hot port wine was consumed at his call; and, considering the figure, I should think the Inner Temple must have made a profit by it.

I have come out in another way. I have taken with fear and trembling to authorship. I wrote a little something, in secret, and sent it to a magazine, and it was published in the magazine. Since then, I have taken heart to write a good many trifling pieces. Now, I am regularly paid for them. Altogether, I am well off, when I tell my income on the fingers of my left hand, I pass the third finger and take in the fourth to the middle joint.

We have removed, from Buckingham Street, to a pleasant little cottage very near the one I looked at, when my enthusiasm first came on. My aunt, however (who has sold the house at Dover, to good advantage), is not going to remain here, but intends removing herself to a still more tiny cottage close at hand. What does this portend? My marriage? Yes!

Yes! I am going to be married to Dora! Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa have given their consent; and if ever canary birds were in a flutter, they are. Miss Lavinia, self-charged with the superintendence of my darling's wardrobe, is constantly cutting out brown-paper cuirasses, and differing in opinion from a highly respectable young man, with a long bundle, and a yard measure under his arm. A dressmaker, always stabbed in the breast with a needle and thread, boards and lodges in the house; and seems to me, eating, drinking, or sleeping, never to take her thimble off. They make a lay-figure of my dear. They are always sending for her to come and try something on. We can't be happy together for five minutes in the evening, but some intrusive female knocks at the door, and says, 'Oh, if you please, Miss Dora, would you step upstairs!'

Miss Clarissa and my aunt roam all over London, to find out articles of

furniture for Dora and me to look at. It would be better for them to buy the goods at once, without this ceremony of inspection; for, when we go to see a kitchen fender and meat-screen, Dora sees a Chinese house for Jip, with little bells on the top, and prefers that. And it takes a long time to accustom Jip to his new residence, after we have bought it; whenever he goes in or out, he makes all the little bells ring, and is horribly frightened.

Peggotty comes up to make herself useful, and falls to work immediately. Her department appears to be, to clean everything over and over again. She rubs everything that can be rubbed, until it shines, like her own honest forehead, with perpetual friction. And now it is, that I begin to see her solitary brother passing through the dark streets at night, and looking, as he goes, among the wandering faces. I never speak to him at such an hour. I know too well, as his grave figure passes onward, what he seeks, and what he dreads.

Why does Traddles look so important when he calls upon me this afternoon in the Commons--where I still occasionally attend, for form's sake, when I have time? The realization of my boyish day-dreams is at hand. I am going to take out the licence.

It is a little document to do so much; and Traddles contemplates it, as it lies upon my desk, half in admiration, half in awe. There are the names, in the sweet old visionary connexion, David Copperfield and Dora Spenlow; and there, in the corner, is that Parental Institution, the Stamp Office, which is so benignantly interested in the various transactions of human life, looking down upon our Union; and there is the Archbishop of Canterbury invoking a blessing on us in print, and doing it as cheap as could possibly be expected.

Nevertheless, I am in a dream, a flustered, happy, hurried dream. I can't believe that it is going to be; and yet I can't believe but that

everyone I pass in the street, must have some kind of perception, that I am to be married the day after tomorrow. The Surrogate knows me, when I go down to be sworn; and disposes of me easily, as if there were a Masonic understanding between us. Traddles is not at all wanted, but is in attendance as my general backer.

'I hope the next time you come here, my dear fellow,' I say to Traddles, 'it will be on the same errand for yourself. And I hope it will be soon.'

'Thank you for your good wishes, my dear Copperfield,' he replies. 'I hope so too. It's a satisfaction to know that she'll wait for me any length of time, and that she really is the dearest girl--'

'When are you to meet her at the coach?' I ask.

'At seven,' says Traddles, looking at his plain old silver watch--the very watch he once took a wheel out of, at school, to make a water-mill. 'That is about Miss Wickfield's time, is it not?'

'A little earlier. Her time is half past eight.' 'I assure you, my dear boy,' says Traddles, 'I am almost as pleased as if I were going to be married myself, to think that this event is coming to such a happy termination. And really the great friendship and consideration of personally associating Sophy with the joyful occasion, and inviting her to be a bridesmaid in conjunction with Miss Wickfield, demands my warmest thanks. I am extremely sensible of it.'

I hear him, and shake hands with him; and we talk, and walk, and dine, and so on; but I don't believe it. Nothing is real.

Sophy arrives at the house of Dora's aunts, in due course. She has the most agreeable of faces,--not absolutely beautiful, but extraordinarily

pleasant,--and is one of the most genial, unaffected, frank, engaging creatures I have ever seen. Traddles presents her to us with great pride; and rubs his hands for ten minutes by the clock, with every individual hair upon his head standing on tiptoe, when I congratulate him in a corner on his choice.

I have brought Agnes from the Canterbury coach, and her cheerful and beautiful face is among us for the second time. Agnes has a great liking for Traddles, and it is capital to see them meet, and to observe the glory of Traddles as he commends the dearest girl in the world to her acquaintance.

Still I don't believe it. We have a delightful evening, and are supremely happy; but I don't believe it yet. I can't collect myself. I can't check off my happiness as it takes place. I feel in a misty and unsettled kind of state; as if I had got up very early in the morning a week or two ago, and had never been to bed since. I can't make out when yesterday was. I seem to have been carrying the licence about, in my pocket, many months.

Next day, too, when we all go in a flock to see the house--our house--Dora's and mine--I am quite unable to regard myself as its master. I seem to be there, by permission of somebody else. I half expect the real master to come home presently, and say he is glad to see me. Such a beautiful little house as it is, with everything so bright and new; with the flowers on the carpets looking as if freshly gathered, and the green leaves on the paper as if they had just come out; with the spotless muslin curtains, and the blushing rose-coloured furniture, and Dora's garden hat with the blue ribbon--do I remember, now, how I loved her in such another hat when I first knew her!--already hanging on its little peg; the guitar-case quite at home on its heels in a corner; and everybody tumbling over Jip's pagoda, which is much too big for the establishment. Another happy evening, quite as unreal as all the rest

of it, and I steal into the usual room before going away. Dora is not there. I suppose they have not done trying on yet. Miss Lavinia peeps in, and tells me mysteriously that she will not be long. She is rather long, notwithstanding; but by and by I hear a rustling at the door, and someone taps.

I say, 'Come in!' but someone taps again.

I go to the door, wondering who it is; there, I meet a pair of bright eyes, and a blushing face; they are Dora's eyes and face, and Miss Lavinia has dressed her in tomorrow's dress, bonnet and all, for me to see. I take my little wife to my heart; and Miss Lavinia gives a little scream because I tumble the bonnet, and Dora laughs and cries at once, because I am so pleased; and I believe it less than ever.

'Do you think it pretty, Doady?' says Dora.

Pretty! I should rather think I did.

'And are you sure you like me very much?' says Dora.

The topic is fraught with such danger to the bonnet, that Miss Lavinia gives another little scream, and begs me to understand that Dora is only to be looked at, and on no account to be touched. So Dora stands in a delightful state of confusion for a minute or two, to be admired; and then takes off her bonnet--looking so natural without it!--and runs away with it in her hand; and comes dancing down again in her own familiar dress, and asks Jip if I have got a beautiful little wife, and whether he'll forgive her for being married, and kneels down to make him stand upon the cookery-book, for the last time in her single life.

I go home, more incredulous than ever, to a lodging that I have had by; and get up very early in the morning, to ride to the Highgate road and



fetch my aunt.

I have never seen my aunt in such state. She is dressed in lavender-coloured silk, and has a white bonnet on, and is amazing. Janet has dressed her, and is there to look at me. Peggotty is ready to go to church, intending to behold the ceremony from the gallery. Mr. Dick, who is to give my darling to me at the altar, has had his hair curled. Traddles, whom I have taken up by appointment at the turnpike, presents a dazzling combination of cream colour and light blue; and both he and Mr. Dick have a general effect about them of being all gloves.

No doubt I see this, because I know it is so; but I am astray, and seem to see nothing. Nor do I believe anything whatever. Still, as we drive along in an open carriage, this fairy marriage is real enough to fill me with a sort of wondering pity for the unfortunate people who have no part in it, but are sweeping out the shops, and going to their daily occupations.

My aunt sits with my hand in hers all the way. When we stop a little way short of the church, to put down Peggotty, whom we have brought on the box, she gives it a squeeze, and me a kiss.

'God bless you, Trot! My own boy never could be dearer. I think of poor dear Baby this morning.' 'So do I. And of all I owe to you, dear aunt.'

'Tut, child!' says my aunt; and gives her hand in overflowing cordiality to Traddles, who then gives his to Mr. Dick, who then gives his to me, who then gives mine to Traddles, and then we come to the church door.

The church is calm enough, I am sure; but it might be a steam-power loom in full action, for any sedative effect it has on me. I am too far gone for that.

The rest is all a more or less incoherent dream.

A dream of their coming in with Dora; of the pew-opener arranging us, like a drill-sergeant, before the altar rails; of my wondering, even then, why pew-openers must always be the most disagreeable females procurable, and whether there is any religious dread of a disastrous infection of good-humour which renders it indispensable to set those vessels of vinegar upon the road to Heaven.

Of the clergyman and clerk appearing; of a few boatmen and some other people strolling in; of an ancient mariner behind me, strongly flavouring the church with rum; of the service beginning in a deep voice, and our all being very attentive.

Of Miss Lavinia, who acts as a semi-auxiliary bridesmaid, being the first to cry, and of her doing homage (as I take it) to the memory of Pidger, in sobs; of Miss Clarissa applying a smelling-bottle; of Agnes taking care of Dora; of my aunt endeavouring to represent herself as a model of sternness, with tears rolling down her face; of little Dora trembling very much, and making her responses in faint whispers.

Of our kneeling down together, side by side; of Dora's trembling less and less, but always clasping Agnes by the hand; of the service being got through, quietly and gravely; of our all looking at each other in an April state of smiles and tears, when it is over; of my young wife being hysterical in the vestry, and crying for her poor papa, her dear papa.

Of her soon cheering up again, and our signing the register all round. Of my going into the gallery for Peggotty to bring her to sign it; of Peggotty's hugging me in a corner, and telling me she saw my own dear mother married; of its being over, and our going away.

Of my walking so proudly and lovingly down the aisle with my sweet wife

upon my arm, through a mist of half-seen people, pulpits, monuments, pews, fonts, organs, and church windows, in which there flutter faint airs of association with my childish church at home, so long ago.

Of their whispering, as we pass, what a youthful couple we are, and what a pretty little wife she is. Of our all being so merry and talkative in the carriage going back. Of Sophy telling us that when she saw Traddles (whom I had entrusted with the licence) asked for it, she almost fainted, having been convinced that he would contrive to lose it, or to have his pocket picked. Of Agnes laughing gaily; and of Dora being so fond of Agnes that she will not be separated from her, but still keeps her hand.

Of there being a breakfast, with abundance of things, pretty and substantial, to eat and drink, whereof I partake, as I should do in any other dream, without the least perception of their flavour; eating and drinking, as I may say, nothing but love and marriage, and no more believing in the viands than in anything else.

Of my making a speech in the same dreamy fashion, without having an idea of what I want to say, beyond such as may be comprehended in the full conviction that I haven't said it. Of our being very sociably and simply happy (always in a dream though); and of Jip's having wedding cake, and its not agreeing with him afterwards.

Of the pair of hired post-horses being ready, and of Dora's going away to change her dress. Of my aunt and Miss Clarissa remaining with us; and our walking in the garden; and my aunt, who has made quite a speech at breakfast touching Dora's aunts, being mightily amused with herself, but a little proud of it too.

Of Dora's being ready, and of Miss Lavinia's hovering about her, loth to lose the pretty toy that has given her so much pleasant occupation.

Of Dora's making a long series of surprised discoveries that she has forgotten all sorts of little things; and of everybody's running everywhere to fetch them.

Of their all closing about Dora, when at last she begins to say good-bye, looking, with their bright colours and ribbons, like a bed of flowers. Of my darling being almost smothered among the flowers, and coming out, laughing and crying both together, to my jealous arms.

Of my wanting to carry Jip (who is to go along with us), and Dora's saying no, that she must carry him, or else he'll think she don't like him any more, now she is married, and will break his heart. Of our going, arm in arm, and Dora stopping and looking back, and saying, 'If I have ever been cross or ungrateful to anybody, don't remember it!' and bursting into tears.

Of her waving her little hand, and our going away once more. Of her once more stopping, and looking back, and hurrying to Agnes, and giving Agnes, above all the others, her last kisses and farewells.

We drive away together, and I awake from the dream. I believe it at last. It is my dear, dear, little wife beside me, whom I love so well!

'Are you happy now, you foolish boy?' says Dora, 'and sure you don't repent?'

I have stood aside to see the phantoms of those days go by me. They are gone, and I resume the journey of my story.

It was a strange condition of things, the honeymoon being over, and the bridesmaids gone home, when I found myself sitting down in my own small house with Dora; quite thrown out of employment, as I may say, in respect of the delicious old occupation of making love.

It seemed such an extraordinary thing to have Dora always there. It was so unaccountable not to be obliged to go out to see her, not to have any occasion to be tormenting myself about her, not to have to write to her, not to be scheming and devising opportunities of being alone with her. Sometimes of an evening, when I looked up from my writing, and saw her seated opposite, I would lean back in my chair, and think how queer it was that there we were, alone together as a matter of course--nobody's business any more--all the romance of our engagement put away upon a shelf, to rust--no one to please but one another--one another to please, for life.

When there was a debate, and I was kept out very late, it seemed so strange to me, as I was walking home, to think that Dora was at home! It was such a wonderful thing, at first, to have her coming softly down to talk to me as I ate my supper. It was such a stupendous thing to know for certain that she put her hair in papers. It was altogether such an astonishing event to see her do it!

I doubt whether two young birds could have known less about keeping house, than I and my pretty Dora did. We had a servant, of course. She kept house for us. I have still a latent belief that she must have been Mrs. Crupp's daughter in disguise, we had such an awful time of it with Mary Anne.

Her name was Paragon. Her nature was represented to us, when we engaged her, as being feebly expressed in her name. She had a written character,

as large as a proclamation; and, according to this document, could do everything of a domestic nature that ever I heard of, and a great many things that I never did hear of. She was a woman in the prime of life; of a severe countenance; and subject (particularly in the arms) to a sort of perpetual measles or fiery rash. She had a cousin in the Life-Guards, with such long legs that he looked like the afternoon shadow of somebody else. His shell-jacket was as much too little for him as he was too big for the premises. He made the cottage smaller than it need have been, by being so very much out of proportion to it. Besides which, the walls were not thick, and, whenever he passed the evening at our house, we always knew of it by hearing one continual growl in the kitchen.

Our treasure was warranted sober and honest. I am therefore willing to believe that she was in a fit when we found her under the boiler; and that the deficient tea-spoons were attributable to the dustman.

But she preyed upon our minds dreadfully. We felt our inexperience, and were unable to help ourselves. We should have been at her mercy, if she had had any; but she was a remorseless woman, and had none. She was the cause of our first little quarrel.

'My dearest life,' I said one day to Dora, 'do you think Mary Anne has any idea of time?'

'Why, Doady?' inquired Dora, looking up, innocently, from her drawing.

'My love, because it's five, and we were to have dined at four.'

Dora glanced wistfully at the clock, and hinted that she thought it was too fast.

'On the contrary, my love,' said I, referring to my watch, 'it's a few

minutes too slow.'

My little wife came and sat upon my knee, to coax me to be quiet, and drew a line with her pencil down the middle of my nose; but I couldn't dine off that, though it was very agreeable.

'Don't you think, my dear,' said I, 'it would be better for you to remonstrate with Mary Anne?'

'Oh no, please! I couldn't, Doady!' said Dora.

'Why not, my love?' I gently asked.

'Oh, because I am such a little goose,' said Dora, 'and she knows I am!'

I thought this sentiment so incompatible with the establishment of any system of check on Mary Anne, that I frowned a little.

'Oh, what ugly wrinkles in my bad boy's forehead!' said Dora, and still being on my knee, she traced them with her pencil; putting it to her rosy lips to make it mark blacker, and working at my forehead with a quaint little mockery of being industrious, that quite delighted me in spite of myself.

'There's a good child,' said Dora, 'it makes its face so much prettier to laugh.' 'But, my love,' said I.

'No, no! please!' cried Dora, with a kiss, 'don't be a naughty Blue Beard! Don't be serious!'

'My precious wife,' said I, 'we must be serious sometimes. Come! Sit down on this chair, close beside me! Give me the pencil! There! Now let us talk sensibly. You know, dear'; what a little hand it was to hold,

and what a tiny wedding-ring it was to see! 'You know, my love, it is not exactly comfortable to have to go out without one's dinner. Now, is it?'

'N-n-no!' replied Dora, faintly.

'My love, how you tremble!'

'Because I KNOW you're going to scold me,' exclaimed Dora, in a piteous voice.

'My sweet, I am only going to reason.'

'Oh, but reasoning is worse than scolding!' exclaimed Dora, in despair. 'I didn't marry to be reasoned with. If you meant to reason with such a poor little thing as I am, you ought to have told me so, you cruel boy!'

I tried to pacify Dora, but she turned away her face, and shook her curls from side to side, and said, 'You cruel, cruel boy!' so many times, that I really did not exactly know what to do: so I took a few turns up and down the room in my uncertainty, and came back again.

'Dora, my darling!'

'No, I am not your darling. Because you must be sorry that you married me, or else you wouldn't reason with me!' returned Dora.

I felt so injured by the inconsequential nature of this charge, that it gave me courage to be grave.

'Now, my own Dora,' said I, 'you are very childish, and are talking nonsense. You must remember, I am sure, that I was obliged to go out yesterday when dinner was half over; and that, the day before, I was



made quite unwell by being obliged to eat underdone veal in a hurry; today, I don't dine at all--and I am afraid to say how long we waited for breakfast--and then the water didn't boil. I don't mean to reproach you, my dear, but this is not comfortable.'

'Oh, you cruel, cruel boy, to say I am a disagreeable wife!' cried Dora.

'Now, my dear Dora, you must know that I never said that!'

'You said, I wasn't comfortable!' cried Dora. 'I said the housekeeping was not comfortable!'

'It's exactly the same thing!' cried Dora. And she evidently thought so, for she wept most grievously.

I took another turn across the room, full of love for my pretty wife, and distracted by self-accusatory inclinations to knock my head against the door. I sat down again, and said:

'I am not blaming you, Dora. We have both a great deal to learn. I am only trying to show you, my dear, that you must--you really must' (I was resolved not to give this up)--'accustom yourself to look after Mary Anne. Likewise to act a little for yourself, and me.'

'I wonder, I do, at your making such ungrateful speeches,' sobbed Dora. 'When you know that the other day, when you said you would like a little bit of fish, I went out myself, miles and miles, and ordered it, to surprise you.'

'And it was very kind of you, my own darling,' said I. 'I felt it so much that I wouldn't on any account have even mentioned that you bought a Salmon--which was too much for two. Or that it cost one pound six--which was more than we can afford.'

'You enjoyed it very much,' sobbed Dora. 'And you said I was a Mouse.'

'And I'll say so again, my love,' I returned, 'a thousand times!'

But I had wounded Dora's soft little heart, and she was not to be comforted. She was so pathetic in her sobbing and bewailing, that I felt as if I had said I don't know what to hurt her. I was obliged to hurry away; I was kept out late; and I felt all night such pangs of remorse as made me miserable. I had the conscience of an assassin, and was haunted by a vague sense of enormous wickedness.

It was two or three hours past midnight when I got home. I found my aunt, in our house, sitting up for me.

'Is anything the matter, aunt?' said I, alarmed.

'Nothing, Trot,' she replied. 'Sit down, sit down. Little Blossom has been rather out of spirits, and I have been keeping her company. That's all.'

I leaned my head upon my hand; and felt more sorry and downcast, as I sat looking at the fire, than I could have supposed possible so soon after the fulfilment of my brightest hopes. As I sat thinking, I happened to meet my aunt's eyes, which were resting on my face. There was an anxious expression in them, but it cleared directly.

'I assure you, aunt,' said I, 'I have been quite unhappy myself all night, to think of Dora's being so. But I had no other intention than to speak to her tenderly and lovingly about our home-affairs.'

MY aunt nodded encouragement.

'You must have patience, Trot,' said she.

'Of course. Heaven knows I don't mean to be unreasonable, aunt!'

'No, no,' said my aunt. 'But Little Blossom is a very tender little blossom, and the wind must be gentle with her.'

I thanked my good aunt, in my heart, for her tenderness towards my wife; and I was sure that she knew I did.

'Don't you think, aunt,' said I, after some further contemplation of the fire, 'that you could advise and counsel Dora a little, for our mutual advantage, now and then?'

'Trot,' returned my aunt, with some emotion, 'no! Don't ask me such a thing.'

Her tone was so very earnest that I raised my eyes in surprise.

'I look back on my life, child,' said my aunt, 'and I think of some who are in their graves, with whom I might have been on kinder terms. If I judged harshly of other people's mistakes in marriage, it may have been because I had bitter reason to judge harshly of my own. Let that pass. I have been a grumpy, frumpy, wayward sort of a woman, a good many years. I am still, and I always shall be. But you and I have done one another some good, Trot,--at all events, you have done me good, my dear; and division must not come between us, at this time of day.'

'Division between us!' cried I.

'Child, child!' said my aunt, smoothing her dress, 'how soon it might come between us, or how unhappy I might make our Little Blossom, if I meddled in anything, a prophet couldn't say. I want our pet to like me,

and be as gay as a butterfly. Remember your own home, in that second marriage; and never do both me and her the injury you have hinted at!'

I comprehended, at once, that my aunt was right; and I comprehended the full extent of her generous feeling towards my dear wife.

'These are early days, Trot,' she pursued, 'and Rome was not built in a day, nor in a year. You have chosen freely for yourself'; a cloud passed over her face for a moment, I thought; 'and you have chosen a very pretty and a very affectionate creature. It will be your duty, and it will be your pleasure too--of course I know that; I am not delivering a lecture--to estimate her (as you chose her) by the qualities she has, and not by the qualities she may not have. The latter you must develop in her, if you can. And if you cannot, child,' here my aunt rubbed her nose, 'you must just accustom yourself to do without 'em. But remember, my dear, your future is between you two. No one can assist you; you are to work it out for yourselves. This is marriage, Trot; and Heaven bless you both, in it, for a pair of babes in the wood as you are!'

My aunt said this in a sprightly way, and gave me a kiss to ratify the blessing.

'Now,' said she, 'light my little lantern, and see me into my bandbox by the garden path'; for there was a communication between our cottages in that direction. 'Give Betsey Trotwood's love to Blossom, when you come back; and whatever you do, Trot, never dream of setting Betsey up as a scarecrow, for if I ever saw her in the glass, she's quite grim enough and gaunt enough in her private capacity!'

With this my aunt tied her head up in a handkerchief, with which she was accustomed to make a bundle of it on such occasions; and I escorted her home. As she stood in her garden, holding up her little lantern to light me back, I thought her observation of me had an anxious air again; but

I was too much occupied in pondering on what she had said, and too much impressed--for the first time, in reality--by the conviction that Dora and I had indeed to work out our future for ourselves, and that no one could assist us, to take much notice of it.

Dora came stealing down in her little slippers, to meet me, now that I was alone; and cried upon my shoulder, and said I had been hard-hearted and she had been naughty; and I said much the same thing in effect, I believe; and we made it up, and agreed that our first little difference was to be our last, and that we were never to have another if we lived a hundred years.

The next domestic trial we went through, was the Ordeal of Servants. Mary Anne's cousin deserted into our coal-hole, and was brought out, to our great amazement, by a piquet of his companions in arms, who took him away handcuffed in a procession that covered our front-garden with ignominy. This nerved me to get rid of Mary Anne, who went so mildly, on receipt of wages, that I was surprised, until I found out about the tea-spoons, and also about the little sums she had borrowed in my name of the tradespeople without authority. After an interval of Mrs. Kidgerbury--the oldest inhabitant of Kentish Town, I believe, who went out charring, but was too feeble to execute her conceptions of that art--we found another treasure, who was one of the most amiable of women, but who generally made a point of falling either up or down the kitchen stairs with the tray, and almost plunged into the parlour, as into a bath, with the tea-things. The ravages committed by this unfortunate, rendering her dismissal necessary, she was succeeded (with intervals of Mrs. Kidgerbury) by a long line of Incapables; terminating in a young person of genteel appearance, who went to Greenwich Fair in Dora's bonnet. After whom I remember nothing but an average equality of failure.

Everybody we had anything to do with seemed to cheat us. Our appearance

in a shop was a signal for the damaged goods to be brought out immediately. If we bought a lobster, it was full of water. All our meat turned out to be tough, and there was hardly any crust to our loaves. In search of the principle on which joints ought to be roasted, to be roasted enough, and not too much, I myself referred to the Cookery Book, and found it there established as the allowance of a quarter of an hour to every pound, and say a quarter over. But the principle always failed us by some curious fatality, and we never could hit any medium between redness and cinders.

I had reason to believe that in accomplishing these failures we incurred a far greater expense than if we had achieved a series of triumphs. It appeared to me, on looking over the tradesmen's books, as if we might have kept the basement storey paved with butter, such was the extensive scale of our consumption of that article. I don't know whether the Excise returns of the period may have exhibited any increase in the demand for pepper; but if our performances did not affect the market, I should say several families must have left off using it. And the most wonderful fact of all was, that we never had anything in the house.

As to the washerwoman pawning the clothes, and coming in a state of penitent intoxication to apologize, I suppose that might have happened several times to anybody. Also the chimney on fire, the parish engine, and perjury on the part of the Beadle. But I apprehend that we were personally fortunate in engaging a servant with a taste for cordials, who swelled our running account for porter at the public-house by such inexplicable items as 'quartern rum shrub (Mrs. C.)'; 'Half-quartern gin and cloves (Mrs. C.)'; 'Glass rum and peppermint (Mrs. C.)'--the parentheses always referring to Dora, who was supposed, it appeared on explanation, to have imbibed the whole of these refreshments.

One of our first feats in the housekeeping way was a little dinner to Traddles. I met him in town, and asked him to walk out with me that

afternoon. He readily consenting, I wrote to Dora, saying I would bring him home. It was pleasant weather, and on the road we made my domestic happiness the theme of conversation. Traddles was very full of it; and said, that, picturing himself with such a home, and Sophy waiting and preparing for him, he could think of nothing wanting to complete his bliss.

I could not have wished for a prettier little wife at the opposite end of the table, but I certainly could have wished, when we sat down, for a little more room. I did not know how it was, but though there were only two of us, we were at once always cramped for room, and yet had always room enough to lose everything in. I suspect it may have been because nothing had a place of its own, except Jip's pagoda, which invariably blocked up the main thoroughfare. On the present occasion, Traddles was so hemmed in by the pagoda and the guitar-case, and Dora's flower-painting, and my writing-table, that I had serious doubts of the possibility of his using his knife and fork; but he protested, with his own good-humour, 'Oceans of room, Copperfield! I assure you, Oceans!'

There was another thing I could have wished, namely, that Jip had never been encouraged to walk about the tablecloth during dinner. I began to think there was something disorderly in his being there at all, even if he had not been in the habit of putting his foot in the salt or the melted butter. On this occasion he seemed to think he was introduced expressly to keep Traddles at bay; and he barked at my old friend, and made short runs at his plate, with such undaunted pertinacity, that he may be said to have engrossed the conversation.

However, as I knew how tender-hearted my dear Dora was, and how sensitive she would be to any slight upon her favourite, I hinted no objection. For similar reasons I made no allusion to the skirmishing plates upon the floor; or to the disreputable appearance of the castors, which were all at sixes and sevens, and looked drunk; or to the further

blockade of Traddles by wandering vegetable dishes and jugs. I could not help wondering in my own mind, as I contemplated the boiled leg of mutton before me, previous to carving it, how it came to pass that our joints of meat were of such extraordinary shapes--and whether our butcher contracted for all the deformed sheep that came into the world; but I kept my reflections to myself.

'My love,' said I to Dora, 'what have you got in that dish?'

I could not imagine why Dora had been making tempting little faces at me, as if she wanted to kiss me.

'Oysters, dear,' said Dora, timidly.

'Was that YOUR thought?' said I, delighted.

'Ye-yes, Doady,' said Dora.

'There never was a happier one!' I exclaimed, laying down the carving-knife and fork. 'There is nothing Traddles likes so much!'

'Ye-yes, Doady,' said Dora, 'and so I bought a beautiful little barrel of them, and the man said they were very good. But I--I am afraid there's something the matter with them. They don't seem right.' Here Dora shook her head, and diamonds twinkled in her eyes.

'They are only opened in both shells,' said I. 'Take the top one off, my love.'

'But it won't come off!' said Dora, trying very hard, and looking very much distressed.

'Do you know, Copperfield,' said Traddles, cheerfully examining the



dish, 'I think it is in consequence--they are capital oysters, but I think it is in consequence--of their never having been opened.'

They never had been opened; and we had no oyster-knives--and couldn't have used them if we had; so we looked at the oysters and ate the mutton. At least we ate as much of it as was done, and made up with capers. If I had permitted him, I am satisfied that Traddles would have made a perfect savage of himself, and eaten a plateful of raw meat, to express enjoyment of the repast; but I would hear of no such immolation on the altar of friendship, and we had a course of bacon instead; there happening, by good fortune, to be cold bacon in the larder.

My poor little wife was in such affliction when she thought I should be annoyed, and in such a state of joy when she found I was not, that the discomfiture I had subdued, very soon vanished, and we passed a happy evening; Dora sitting with her arm on my chair while Traddles and I discussed a glass of wine, and taking every opportunity of whispering in my ear that it was so good of me not to be a cruel, cross old boy. By and by she made tea for us; which it was so pretty to see her do, as if she was busying herself with a set of doll's tea-things, that I was not particular about the quality of the beverage. Then Traddles and I played a game or two at cribbage; and Dora singing to the guitar the while, it seemed to me as if our courtship and marriage were a tender dream of mine, and the night when I first listened to her voice were not yet over.

When Traddles went away, and I came back into the parlour from seeing him out, my wife planted her chair close to mine, and sat down by my side. 'I am very sorry,' she said. 'Will you try to teach me, Doady?'

'I must teach myself first, Dora,' said I. 'I am as bad as you, love.'

'Ah! But you can learn,' she returned; 'and you are a clever, clever

man!'

'Nonsense, mouse!' said I.

'I wish,' resumed my wife, after a long silence, 'that I could have gone down into the country for a whole year, and lived with Agnes!'

Her hands were clasped upon my shoulder, and her chin rested on them, and her blue eyes looked quietly into mine.

'Why so?' I asked.

'I think she might have improved me, and I think I might have learned from her,' said Dora.

'All in good time, my love. Agnes has had her father to take care of for these many years, you should remember. Even when she was quite a child, she was the Agnes whom we know,' said I.

'Will you call me a name I want you to call me?' inquired Dora, without moving.

'What is it?' I asked with a smile.

'It's a stupid name,' she said, shaking her curls for a moment.

'Child-wife.'

I laughingly asked my child-wife what her fancy was in desiring to be so called. She answered without moving, otherwise than as the arm I twined about her may have brought her blue eyes nearer to me:

'I don't mean, you silly fellow, that you should use the name instead of Dora. I only mean that you should think of me that way. When you are

going to be angry with me, say to yourself, "it's only my child-wife!" When I am very disappointing, say, "I knew, a long time ago, that she would make but a child-wife!" When you miss what I should like to be, and I think can never be, say, "still my foolish child-wife loves me!" For indeed I do.'

I had not been serious with her; having no idea until now, that she was serious herself. But her affectionate nature was so happy in what I now said to her with my whole heart, that her face became a laughing one before her glittering eyes were dry. She was soon my child-wife indeed; sitting down on the floor outside the Chinese House, ringing all the little bells one after another, to punish Jip for his recent bad behaviour; while Jip lay blinking in the doorway with his head out, even too lazy to be teased.

This appeal of Dora's made a strong impression on me. I look back on the time I write of; I invoke the innocent figure that I dearly loved, to come out from the mists and shadows of the past, and turn its gentle head towards me once again; and I can still declare that this one little speech was constantly in my memory. I may not have used it to the best account; I was young and inexperienced; but I never turned a deaf ear to its artless pleading.

Dora told me, shortly afterwards, that she was going to be a wonderful housekeeper. Accordingly, she polished the tablets, pointed the pencil, bought an immense account-book, carefully stitched up with a needle and thread all the leaves of the Cookery Book which Jip had torn, and made quite a desperate little attempt 'to be good', as she called it. But the figures had the old obstinate propensity--they WOULD NOT add up. When she had entered two or three laborious items in the account-book, Jip would walk over the page, wagging his tail, and smear them all out. Her own little right-hand middle finger got steeped to the very bone in ink; and I think that was the only decided result obtained.

Sometimes, of an evening, when I was at home and at work--for I wrote a good deal now, and was beginning in a small way to be known as a writer--I would lay down my pen, and watch my child-wife trying to be good. First of all, she would bring out the immense account-book, and lay it down upon the table, with a deep sigh. Then she would open it at the place where Jip had made it illegible last night, and call Jip up, to look at his misdeeds. This would occasion a diversion in Jip's favour, and some inking of his nose, perhaps, as a penalty. Then she would tell Jip to lie down on the table instantly, 'like a lion'--which was one of his tricks, though I cannot say the likeness was striking--and, if he were in an obedient humour, he would obey. Then she would take up a pen, and begin to write, and find a hair in it. Then she would take up another pen, and begin to write, and find that it spluttered. Then she would take up another pen, and begin to write, and say in a low voice, 'Oh, it's a talking pen, and will disturb Doady!' And then she would give it up as a bad job, and put the account-book away, after pretending to crush the lion with it.

Or, if she were in a very sedate and serious state of mind, she would sit down with the tablets, and a little basket of bills and other documents, which looked more like curl-papers than anything else, and endeavour to get some result out of them. After severely comparing one with another, and making entries on the tablets, and blotting them out, and counting all the fingers of her left hand over and over again, backwards and forwards, she would be so vexed and discouraged, and would look so unhappy, that it gave me pain to see her bright face clouded--and for me!--and I would go softly to her, and say:

'What's the matter, Dora?'

Dora would look up hopelessly, and reply, 'They won't come right. They make my head ache so. And they won't do anything I want!'

Then I would say, 'Now let us try together. Let me show you, Dora.'

Then I would commence a practical demonstration, to which Dora would pay profound attention, perhaps for five minutes; when she would begin to be dreadfully tired, and would lighten the subject by curling my hair, or trying the effect of my face with my shirt-collar turned down. If I tacitly checked this playfulness, and persisted, she would look so scared and disconsolate, as she became more and more bewildered, that the remembrance of her natural gaiety when I first strayed into her path, and of her being my child-wife, would come reproachfully upon me; and I would lay the pencil down, and call for the guitar.

I had a great deal of work to do, and had many anxieties, but the same considerations made me keep them to myself. I am far from sure, now, that it was right to do this, but I did it for my child-wife's sake. I search my breast, and I commit its secrets, if I know them, without any reservation to this paper. The old unhappy loss or want of something had, I am conscious, some place in my heart; but not to the embitterment of my life. When I walked alone in the fine weather, and thought of the summer days when all the air had been filled with my boyish enchantment, I did miss something of the realization of my dreams; but I thought it was a softened glory of the Past, which nothing could have thrown upon the present time. I did feel, sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had been my counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; but I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness, that never had been meant to be, and never could have been.

I was a boyish husband as to years. I had known the softening influence of no other sorrows or experiences than those recorded in these leaves. If I did any wrong, as I may have done much, I did it in mistaken love,

and in my want of wisdom. I write the exact truth. It would avail me nothing to extenuate it now.

Thus it was that I took upon myself the toils and cares of our life, and had no partner in them. We lived much as before, in reference to our scrambling household arrangements; but I had got used to those, and Dora I was pleased to see was seldom vexed now. She was bright and cheerful in the old childish way, loved me dearly, and was happy with her old trifles.

When the debates were heavy--I mean as to length, not quality, for in the last respect they were not often otherwise--and I went home late, Dora would never rest when she heard my footsteps, but would always come downstairs to meet me. When my evenings were unoccupied by the pursuit for which I had qualified myself with so much pains, and I was engaged in writing at home, she would sit quietly near me, however late the hour, and be so mute, that I would often think she had dropped asleep. But generally, when I raised my head, I saw her blue eyes looking at me with the quiet attention of which I have already spoken.

'Oh, what a weary boy!' said Dora one night, when I met her eyes as I was shutting up my desk.

'What a weary girl!' said I. 'That's more to the purpose. You must go to bed another time, my love. It's far too late for you.'

'No, don't send me to bed!' pleaded Dora, coming to my side. 'Pray, don't do that!'

'Dora!' To my amazement she was sobbing on my neck. 'Not well, my dear! not happy!'

'Yes! quite well, and very happy!' said Dora. 'But say you'll let me

stop, and see you write.'

'Why, what a sight for such bright eyes at midnight!' I replied.

'Are they bright, though?' returned Dora, laughing. 'I'm so glad they're bright.' 'Little Vanity!' said I.

But it was not vanity; it was only harmless delight in my admiration. I knew that very well, before she told me so.

'If you think them pretty, say I may always stop, and see you write!' said Dora. 'Do you think them pretty?'

'Very pretty.'

'Then let me always stop and see you write.'

'I am afraid that won't improve their brightness, Dora.'

'Yes, it will! Because, you clever boy, you'll not forget me then, while you are full of silent fancies. Will you mind it, if I say something very, very silly?---more than usual?' inquired Dora, peeping over my shoulder into my face.

'What wonderful thing is that?' said I.

'Please let me hold the pens,' said Dora. 'I want to have something to do with all those many hours when you are so industrious. May I hold the pens?'

The remembrance of her pretty joy when I said yes, brings tears into my eyes. The next time I sat down to write, and regularly afterwards, she sat in her old place, with a spare bundle of pens at her side. Her

triumph in this connexion with my work, and her delight when I wanted a new pen--which I very often feigned to do--suggested to me a new way of pleasing my child-wife. I occasionally made a pretence of wanting a page or two of manuscript copied. Then Dora was in her glory. The preparations she made for this great work, the aprons she put on, the bibs she borrowed from the kitchen to keep off the ink, the time she took, the innumerable stoppages she made to have a laugh with Jip as if he understood it all, her conviction that her work was incomplete unless she signed her name at the end, and the way in which she would bring it to me, like a school-copy, and then, when I praised it, clasp me round the neck, are touching recollections to me, simple as they might appear to other men.

She took possession of the keys soon after this, and went jingling about the house with the whole bunch in a little basket, tied to her slender waist. I seldom found that the places to which they belonged were locked, or that they were of any use except as a plaything for Jip--but Dora was pleased, and that pleased me. She was quite satisfied that a good deal was effected by this make-belief of housekeeping; and was as merry as if we had been keeping a baby-house, for a joke.

So we went on. Dora was hardly less affectionate to my aunt than to me, and often told her of the time when she was afraid she was 'a cross old thing'. I never saw my aunt unbend more systematically to anyone. She courted Jip, though Jip never responded; listened, day after day, to the guitar, though I am afraid she had no taste for music; never attacked the Incapables, though the temptation must have been severe; went wonderful distances on foot to purchase, as surprises, any trifles that she found out Dora wanted; and never came in by the garden, and missed her from the room, but she would call out, at the foot of the stairs, in a voice that sounded cheerfully all over the house:

'Where's Little Blossom?'



## CHAPTER 45. MR. DICK FULFILS MY AUNT'S PREDICTIONS

It was some time now, since I had left the Doctor. Living in his neighbourhood, I saw him frequently; and we all went to his house on two or three occasions to dinner or tea. The Old Soldier was in permanent quarters under the Doctor's roof. She was exactly the same as ever, and the same immortal butterflies hovered over her cap.

Like some other mothers, whom I have known in the course of my life, Mrs. Markleham was far more fond of pleasure than her daughter was. She required a great deal of amusement, and, like a deep old soldier, pretended, in consulting her own inclinations, to be devoting herself to her child. The Doctor's desire that Annie should be entertained, was therefore particularly acceptable to this excellent parent; who expressed unqualified approval of his discretion.

I have no doubt, indeed, that she probed the Doctor's wound without knowing it. Meaning nothing but a certain matured frivolity and selfishness, not always inseparable from full-blown years, I think she confirmed him in his fear that he was a constraint upon his young wife, and that there was no congeniality of feeling between them, by so strongly commending his design of lightening the load of her life.

'My dear soul,' she said to him one day when I was present, 'you know there is no doubt it would be a little pokey for Annie to be always shut up here.'

The Doctor nodded his benevolent head. 'When she comes to her mother's age,' said Mrs. Markleham, with a flourish of her fan, 'then it'll be

another thing. You might put ME into a Jail, with genteel society and a rubber, and I should never care to come out. But I am not Annie, you know; and Annie is not her mother.'

'Surely, surely,' said the Doctor.

'You are the best of creatures--no, I beg your pardon!' for the Doctor made a gesture of deprecation, 'I must say before your face, as I always say behind your back, you are the best of creatures; but of course you don't--now do you?---enter into the same pursuits and fancies as Annie?'

'No,' said the Doctor, in a sorrowful tone.

'No, of course not,' retorted the Old Soldier. 'Take your Dictionary, for example. What a useful work a Dictionary is! What a necessary work! The meanings of words! Without Doctor Johnson, or somebody of that sort, we might have been at this present moment calling an Italian-iron, a bedstead. But we can't expect a Dictionary--especially when it's making--to interest Annie, can we?'

The Doctor shook his head.

'And that's why I so much approve,' said Mrs. Markleham, tapping him on the shoulder with her shut-up fan, 'of your thoughtfulness. It shows that you don't expect, as many elderly people do expect, old heads on young shoulders. You have studied Annie's character, and you understand it. That's what I find so charming!'

Even the calm and patient face of Doctor Strong expressed some little sense of pain, I thought, under the infliction of these compliments.

'Therefore, my dear Doctor,' said the Old Soldier, giving him several affectionate taps, 'you may command me, at all times and seasons. Now,

do understand that I am entirely at your service. I am ready to go with Annie to operas, concerts, exhibitions, all kinds of places; and you shall never find that I am tired. Duty, my dear Doctor, before every consideration in the universe!'

She was as good as her word. She was one of those people who can bear a great deal of pleasure, and she never flinched in her perseverance in the cause. She seldom got hold of the newspaper (which she settled herself down in the softest chair in the house to read through an eye-glass, every day, for two hours), but she found out something that she was certain Annie would like to see. It was in vain for Annie to protest that she was weary of such things. Her mother's remonstrance always was, 'Now, my dear Annie, I am sure you know better; and I must tell you, my love, that you are not making a proper return for the kindness of Doctor Strong.'

This was usually said in the Doctor's presence, and appeared to me to constitute Annie's principal inducement for withdrawing her objections when she made any. But in general she resigned herself to her mother, and went where the Old Soldier would.

It rarely happened now that Mr. Maldon accompanied them. Sometimes my aunt and Dora were invited to do so, and accepted the invitation. Sometimes Dora only was asked. The time had been, when I should have been uneasy in her going; but reflection on what had passed that former night in the Doctor's study, had made a change in my mistrust. I believed that the Doctor was right, and I had no worse suspicions.

My aunt rubbed her nose sometimes when she happened to be alone with me, and said she couldn't make it out; she wished they were happier; she didn't think our military friend (so she always called the Old Soldier) mended the matter at all. My aunt further expressed her opinion, 'that if our military friend would cut off those butterflies, and give 'em to

the chimney-sweepers for May-day, it would look like the beginning of something sensible on her part.'

But her abiding reliance was on Mr. Dick. That man had evidently an idea in his head, she said; and if he could only once pen it up into a corner, which was his great difficulty, he would distinguish himself in some extraordinary manner.

Unconscious of this prediction, Mr. Dick continued to occupy precisely the same ground in reference to the Doctor and to Mrs. Strong. He seemed neither to advance nor to recede. He appeared to have settled into his original foundation, like a building; and I must confess that my faith in his ever Moving, was not much greater than if he had been a building.

But one night, when I had been married some months, Mr. Dick put his head into the parlour, where I was writing alone (Dora having gone out with my aunt to take tea with the two little birds), and said, with a significant cough:

'You couldn't speak to me without inconveniencing yourself, Trotwood, I am afraid?'

'Certainly, Mr. Dick,' said I; 'come in!'

'Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, laying his finger on the side of his nose, after he had shaken hands with me. 'Before I sit down, I wish to make an observation. You know your aunt?'

'A little,' I replied.

'She is the most wonderful woman in the world, sir!'

After the delivery of this communication, which he shot out of himself

as if he were loaded with it, Mr. Dick sat down with greater gravity than usual, and looked at me.

'Now, boy,' said Mr. Dick, 'I am going to put a question to you.'

'As many as you please,' said I.

'What do you consider me, sir?' asked Mr. Dick, folding his arms.

'A dear old friend,' said I. 'Thank you, Trotwood,' returned Mr. Dick, laughing, and reaching across in high glee to shake hands with me. 'But I mean, boy,' resuming his gravity, 'what do you consider me in this respect?' touching his forehead.

I was puzzled how to answer, but he helped me with a word.

'Weak?' said Mr. Dick.

'Well,' I replied, dubiously. 'Rather so.'

'Exactly!' cried Mr. Dick, who seemed quite enchanted by my reply. 'That is, Trotwood, when they took some of the trouble out of you-know-who's head, and put it you know where, there was a--' Mr. Dick made his two hands revolve very fast about each other a great number of times, and then brought them into collision, and rolled them over and over one another, to express confusion. 'There was that sort of thing done to me somehow. Eh?'

I nodded at him, and he nodded back again.

'In short, boy,' said Mr. Dick, dropping his voice to a whisper, 'I am simple.'

I would have qualified that conclusion, but he stopped me.

'Yes, I am! She pretends I am not. She won't hear of it; but I am. I know I am. If she hadn't stood my friend, sir, I should have been shut up, to lead a dismal life these many years. But I'll provide for her! I never spend the copying money. I put it in a box. I have made a will. I'll leave it all to her. She shall be rich--noble!'

Mr. Dick took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his eyes. He then folded it up with great care, pressed it smooth between his two hands, put it in his pocket, and seemed to put my aunt away with it.

'Now you are a scholar, Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick. 'You are a fine scholar. You know what a learned man, what a great man, the Doctor is. You know what honour he has always done me. Not proud in his wisdom. Humble, humble--condescending even to poor Dick, who is simple and knows nothing. I have sent his name up, on a scrap of paper, to the kite, along the string, when it has been in the sky, among the larks. The kite has been glad to receive it, sir, and the sky has been brighter with it.'

I delighted him by saying, most heartily, that the Doctor was deserving of our best respect and highest esteem.

'And his beautiful wife is a star,' said Mr. Dick. 'A shining star. I have seen her shine, sir. But,' bringing his chair nearer, and laying one hand upon my knee--'clouds, sir--clouds.'

I answered the solicitude which his face expressed, by conveying the same expression into my own, and shaking my head.

'What clouds?' said Mr. Dick.

He looked so wistfully into my face, and was so anxious to understand, that I took great pains to answer him slowly and distinctly, as I might have entered on an explanation to a child.

'There is some unfortunate division between them,' I replied. 'Some unhappy cause of separation. A secret. It may be inseparable from the discrepancy in their years. It may have grown up out of almost nothing.'

Mr. Dick, who had told off every sentence with a thoughtful nod, paused when I had done, and sat considering, with his eyes upon my face, and his hand upon my knee.

'Doctor not angry with her, Trotwood?' he said, after some time.

'No. Devoted to her.'

'Then, I have got it, boy!' said Mr. Dick.

The sudden exultation with which he slapped me on the knee, and leaned back in his chair, with his eyebrows lifted up as high as he could possibly lift them, made me think him farther out of his wits than ever. He became as suddenly grave again, and leaning forward as before, said--first respectfully taking out his pocket-handkerchief, as if it really did represent my aunt:

'Most wonderful woman in the world, Trotwood. Why has she done nothing to set things right?'

'Too delicate and difficult a subject for such interference,' I replied.

'Fine scholar,' said Mr. Dick, touching me with his finger. 'Why has HE done nothing?'

'For the same reason,' I returned.

'Then, I have got it, boy!' said Mr. Dick. And he stood up before me, more exultingly than before, nodding his head, and striking himself repeatedly upon the breast, until one might have supposed that he had nearly nodded and struck all the breath out of his body.

'A poor fellow with a craze, sir,' said Mr. Dick, 'a simpleton, a weak-minded person--present company, you know!' striking himself again, 'may do what wonderful people may not do. I'll bring them together, boy. I'll try. They'll not blame me. They'll not object to me. They'll not mind what I do, if it's wrong. I'm only Mr. Dick. And who minds Dick? Dick's nobody! Whoo!' He blew a slight, contemptuous breath, as if he blew himself away.

It was fortunate he had proceeded so far with his mystery, for we heard the coach stop at the little garden gate, which brought my aunt and Dora home.

'Not a word, boy!' he pursued in a whisper; 'leave all the blame with Dick--simple Dick--mad Dick. I have been thinking, sir, for some time, that I was getting it, and now I have got it. After what you have said to me, I am sure I have got it. All right!' Not another word did Mr. Dick utter on the subject; but he made a very telegraph of himself for the next half-hour (to the great disturbance of my aunt's mind), to enjoin inviolable secrecy on me.

To my surprise, I heard no more about it for some two or three weeks, though I was sufficiently interested in the result of his endeavours; descriing a strange gleam of good sense--I say nothing of good feeling, for that he always exhibited--in the conclusion to which he had come. At last I began to believe, that, in the flighty and unsettled state of his mind, he had either forgotten his intention or abandoned it.



One fair evening, when Dora was not inclined to go out, my aunt and I strolled up to the Doctor's cottage. It was autumn, when there were no debates to vex the evening air; and I remember how the leaves smelt like our garden at Blunderstone as we trod them under foot, and how the old, unhappy feeling, seemed to go by, on the sighing wind.

It was twilight when we reached the cottage. Mrs. Strong was just coming out of the garden, where Mr. Dick yet lingered, busy with his knife, helping the gardener to point some stakes. The Doctor was engaged with someone in his study; but the visitor would be gone directly, Mrs. Strong said, and begged us to remain and see him. We went into the drawing-room with her, and sat down by the darkening window. There was never any ceremony about the visits of such old friends and neighbours as we were.

We had not sat here many minutes, when Mrs. Markleham, who usually contrived to be in a fuss about something, came bustling in, with her newspaper in her hand, and said, out of breath, 'My goodness gracious, Annie, why didn't you tell me there was someone in the Study!'

'My dear mama,' she quietly returned, 'how could I know that you desired the information?'

'Desired the information!' said Mrs. Markleham, sinking on the sofa. 'I never had such a turn in all my life!'

'Have you been to the Study, then, mama?' asked Annie.

'BEEN to the Study, my dear!' she returned emphatically. 'Indeed I have! I came upon the amiable creature--if you'll imagine my feelings, Miss Trotwood and David--in the act of making his will.'

Her daughter looked round from the window quickly.

'In the act, my dear Annie,' repeated Mrs. Markleham, spreading the newspaper on her lap like a table-cloth, and patting her hands upon it, 'of making his last Will and Testament. The foresight and affection of the dear! I must tell you how it was. I really must, in justice to the darling--for he is nothing less!--tell you how it was. Perhaps you know, Miss Trotwood, that there is never a candle lighted in this house, until one's eyes are literally falling out of one's head with being stretched to read the paper. And that there is not a chair in this house, in which a paper can be what I call, read, except one in the Study. This took me to the Study, where I saw a light. I opened the door. In company with the dear Doctor were two professional people, evidently connected with the law, and they were all three standing at the table: the darling Doctor pen in hand. "This simply expresses then," said the Doctor--Annie, my love, attend to the very words--"this simply expresses then, gentlemen, the confidence I have in Mrs. Strong, and gives her all unconditionally?" One of the professional people replied, "And gives her all unconditionally." Upon that, with the natural feelings of a mother, I said, "Good God, I beg your pardon!" fell over the door-step, and came away through the little back passage where the pantry is.'

Mrs. Strong opened the window, and went out into the verandah, where she stood leaning against a pillar.

'But now isn't it, Miss Trotwood, isn't it, David, invigorating,' said Mrs. Markleham, mechanically following her with her eyes, 'to find a man at Doctor Strong's time of life, with the strength of mind to do this kind of thing? It only shows how right I was. I said to Annie, when Doctor Strong paid a very flattering visit to myself, and made her the subject of a declaration and an offer, I said, "My dear, there is no doubt whatever, in my opinion, with reference to a suitable provision for you, that Doctor Strong will do more than he binds himself to do."'

Here the bell rang, and we heard the sound of the visitors' feet as they went out.

'It's all over, no doubt,' said the Old Soldier, after listening; 'the dear creature has signed, sealed, and delivered, and his mind's at rest. Well it may be! What a mind! Annie, my love, I am going to the Study with my paper, for I am a poor creature without news. Miss Trotwood, David, pray come and see the Doctor.'

I was conscious of Mr. Dick's standing in the shadow of the room, shutting up his knife, when we accompanied her to the Study; and of my aunt's rubbing her nose violently, by the way, as a mild vent for her intolerance of our military friend; but who got first into the Study, or how Mrs. Markleham settled herself in a moment in her easy-chair, or how my aunt and I came to be left together near the door (unless her eyes were quicker than mine, and she held me back), I have forgotten, if I ever knew. But this I know,--that we saw the Doctor before he saw us, sitting at his table, among the folio volumes in which he delighted, resting his head calmly on his hand. That, in the same moment, we saw Mrs. Strong glide in, pale and trembling. That Mr. Dick supported her on his arm. That he laid his other hand upon the Doctor's arm, causing him to look up with an abstracted air. That, as the Doctor moved his head, his wife dropped down on one knee at his feet, and, with her hands imploringly lifted, fixed upon his face the memorable look I had never forgotten. That at this sight Mrs. Markleham dropped the newspaper, and stared more like a figure-head intended for a ship to be called The Astonishment, than anything else I can think of.

The gentleness of the Doctor's manner and surprise, the dignity that mingled with the supplicating attitude of his wife, the amiable concern of Mr. Dick, and the earnestness with which my aunt said to herself, 'That man mad!' (triumphantly expressive of the misery from which she

had saved him)--I see and hear, rather than remember, as I write about it.

'Doctor!' said Mr. Dick. 'What is it that's amiss? Look here!'

'Annie!' cried the Doctor. 'Not at my feet, my dear!'

'Yes!' she said. 'I beg and pray that no one will leave the room! Oh, my husband and father, break this long silence. Let us both know what it is that has come between us!'

Mrs. Markleham, by this time recovering the power of speech, and seeming to swell with family pride and motherly indignation, here exclaimed, 'Annie, get up immediately, and don't disgrace everybody belonging to you by humbling yourself like that, unless you wish to see me go out of my mind on the spot!'

'Mama!' returned Annie. 'Waste no words on me, for my appeal is to my husband, and even you are nothing here.'

'Nothing!' exclaimed Mrs. Markleham. 'Me, nothing! The child has taken leave of her senses. Please to get me a glass of water!'

I was too attentive to the Doctor and his wife, to give any heed to this request; and it made no impression on anybody else; so Mrs. Markleham panted, stared, and fanned herself.

'Annie!' said the Doctor, tenderly taking her in his hands. 'My dear! If any unavoidable change has come, in the sequence of time, upon our married life, you are not to blame. The fault is mine, and only mine. There is no change in my affection, admiration, and respect. I wish to make you happy. I truly love and honour you. Rise, Annie, pray!'

But she did not rise. After looking at him for a little while, she sank down closer to him, laid her arm across his knee, and dropping her head upon it, said:

'If I have any friend here, who can speak one word for me, or for my husband in this matter; if I have any friend here, who can give a voice to any suspicion that my heart has sometimes whispered to me; if I have any friend here, who honours my husband, or has ever cared for me, and has anything within his knowledge, no matter what it is, that may help to mediate between us, I implore that friend to speak!'

There was a profound silence. After a few moments of painful hesitation, I broke the silence.

'Mrs. Strong,' I said, 'there is something within my knowledge, which I have been earnestly entreated by Doctor Strong to conceal, and have concealed until tonight. But, I believe the time has come when it would be mistaken faith and delicacy to conceal it any longer, and when your appeal absolves me from his injunction.'

She turned her face towards me for a moment, and I knew that I was right. I could not have resisted its entreaty, if the assurance that it gave me had been less convincing.

'Our future peace,' she said, 'may be in your hands. I trust it confidently to your not suppressing anything. I know beforehand that nothing you, or anyone, can tell me, will show my husband's noble heart in any other light than one. Howsoever it may seem to you to touch me, disregard that. I will speak for myself, before him, and before God afterwards.'

Thus earnestly besought, I made no reference to the Doctor for his permission, but, without any other compromise of the truth than a little

softening of the coarseness of Uriah Heep, related plainly what had passed in that same room that night. The staring of Mrs. Markleham during the whole narration, and the shrill, sharp interjections with which she occasionally interrupted it, defy description.

When I had finished, Annie remained, for some few moments, silent, with her head bent down, as I have described. Then, she took the Doctor's hand (he was sitting in the same attitude as when we had entered the room), and pressed it to her breast, and kissed it. Mr. Dick softly raised her; and she stood, when she began to speak, leaning on him, and looking down upon her husband--from whom she never turned her eyes.

'All that has ever been in my mind, since I was married,' she said in a low, submissive, tender voice, 'I will lay bare before you. I could not live and have one reservation, knowing what I know now.'

'Nay, Annie,' said the Doctor, mildly, 'I have never doubted you, my child. There is no need; indeed there is no need, my dear.'

'There is great need,' she answered, in the same way, 'that I should open my whole heart before the soul of generosity and truth, whom, year by year, and day by day, I have loved and venerated more and more, as Heaven knows!'

'Really,' interrupted Mrs. Markleham, 'if I have any discretion at all--'

('Which you haven't, you Marplot,' observed my aunt, in an indignant whisper.) --'I must be permitted to observe that it cannot be requisite to enter into these details.'

'No one but my husband can judge of that, mama,' said Annie without removing her eyes from his face, 'and he will hear me. If I say anything

to give you pain, mama, forgive me. I have borne pain first, often and long, myself.'

'Upon my word!' gasped Mrs. Markleham.

'When I was very young,' said Annie, 'quite a little child, my first associations with knowledge of any kind were inseparable from a patient friend and teacher--the friend of my dead father--who was always dear to me. I can remember nothing that I know, without remembering him. He stored my mind with its first treasures, and stamped his character upon them all. They never could have been, I think, as good as they have been to me, if I had taken them from any other hands.'

'Makes her mother nothing!' exclaimed Mrs. Markleham.

'Not so mama,' said Annie; 'but I make him what he was. I must do that. As I grew up, he occupied the same place still. I was proud of his interest: deeply, fondly, gratefully attached to him. I looked up to him, I can hardly describe how--as a father, as a guide, as one whose praise was different from all other praise, as one in whom I could have trusted and confided, if I had doubted all the world. You know, mama, how young and inexperienced I was, when you presented him before me, of a sudden, as a lover.'

'I have mentioned the fact, fifty times at least, to everybody here!' said Mrs. Markleham.

('Then hold your tongue, for the Lord's sake, and don't mention it any more!' muttered my aunt.)

'It was so great a change: so great a loss, I felt it, at first,' said Annie, still preserving the same look and tone, 'that I was agitated and distressed. I was but a girl; and when so great a change came in the

character in which I had so long looked up to him, I think I was sorry. But nothing could have made him what he used to be again; and I was proud that he should think me so worthy, and we were married.' '--At Saint Alphege, Canterbury,' observed Mrs. Markleham.

('Confound the woman!' said my aunt, 'she WON'T be quiet!')

'I never thought,' proceeded Annie, with a heightened colour, 'of any worldly gain that my husband would bring to me. My young heart had no room in its homage for any such poor reference. Mama, forgive me when I say that it was you who first presented to my mind the thought that anyone could wrong me, and wrong him, by such a cruel suspicion.'

'Me!' cried Mrs. Markleham.

('Ah! You, to be sure!' observed my aunt, 'and you can't fan it away, my military friend!')

'It was the first unhappiness of my new life,' said Annie. 'It was the first occasion of every unhappy moment I have known. These moments have been more, of late, than I can count; but not--my generous husband!--not for the reason you suppose; for in my heart there is not a thought, a recollection, or a hope, that any power could separate from you!'

She raised her eyes, and clasped her hands, and looked as beautiful and true, I thought, as any Spirit. The Doctor looked on her, henceforth, as steadfastly as she on him.

'Mama is blameless,' she went on, 'of having ever urged you for herself, and she is blameless in intention every way, I am sure,--but when I saw how many importunate claims were pressed upon you in my name; how you were traded on in my name; how generous you were, and how Mr. Wickfield, who had your welfare very much at heart, resented it; the first sense



of my exposure to the mean suspicion that my tenderness was bought--and sold to you, of all men on earth--fell upon me like unmerited disgrace, in which I forced you to participate. I cannot tell you what it was--mama cannot imagine what it was--to have this dread and trouble always on my mind, yet know in my own soul that on my marriage-day I crowned the love and honour of my life!'

'A specimen of the thanks one gets,' cried Mrs. Markleham, in tears, 'for taking care of one's family! I wish I was a Turk!'

('I wish you were, with all my heart--and in your native country!' said my aunt.)

'It was at that time that mama was most solicitous about my Cousin Maldon. I had liked him': she spoke softly, but without any hesitation: 'very much. We had been little lovers once. If circumstances had not happened otherwise, I might have come to persuade myself that I really loved him, and might have married him, and been most wretched. There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.'

I pondered on those words, even while I was studiously attending to what followed, as if they had some particular interest, or some strange application that I could not divine. 'There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose'--'no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.'

'There is nothing,' said Annie, 'that we have in common. I have long found that there is nothing. If I were thankful to my husband for no more, instead of for so much, I should be thankful to him for having saved me from the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart.'

She stood quite still, before the Doctor, and spoke with an earnestness that thrilled me. Yet her voice was just as quiet as before.

'When he was waiting to be the object of your munificence, so freely bestowed for my sake, and when I was unhappy in the mercenary shape I was made to wear, I thought it would have become him better to have worked his own way on. I thought that if I had been he, I would have tried to do it, at the cost of almost any hardship. But I thought no worse of him, until the night of his departure for India. That night I knew he had a false and thankless heart. I saw a double meaning, then, in Mr. Wickfield's scrutiny of me. I perceived, for the first time, the dark suspicion that shadowed my life.'

'Suspicion, Annie!' said the Doctor. 'No, no, no!'

'In your mind there was none, I know, my husband!' she returned. 'And when I came to you, that night, to lay down all my load of shame and grief, and knew that I had to tell that, underneath your roof, one of my own kindred, to whom you had been a benefactor, for the love of me, had spoken to me words that should have found no utterance, even if I had been the weak and mercenary wretch he thought me--my mind revolted from the taint the very tale conveyed. It died upon my lips, and from that hour till now has never passed them.'

Mrs. Markleham, with a short groan, leaned back in her easy-chair; and retired behind her fan, as if she were never coming out any more.

'I have never, but in your presence, interchanged a word with him from that time; then, only when it has been necessary for the avoidance of this explanation. Years have passed since he knew, from me, what his situation here was. The kindnesses you have secretly done for his advancement, and then disclosed to me, for my surprise and pleasure, have been, you will believe, but aggravations of the unhappiness and burden of my secret.'

She sunk down gently at the Doctor's feet, though he did his utmost to prevent her; and said, looking up, tearfully, into his face:

'Do not speak to me yet! Let me say a little more! Right or wrong, if this were to be done again, I think I should do just the same. You never can know what it was to be devoted to you, with those old associations; to find that anyone could be so hard as to suppose that the truth of my heart was bartered away, and to be surrounded by appearances confirming that belief. I was very young, and had no adviser. Between mama and me, in all relating to you, there was a wide division. If I shrunk into myself, hiding the disrespect I had undergone, it was because I honoured you so much, and so much wished that you should honour me!'

'Annie, my pure heart!' said the Doctor, 'my dear girl!'

'A little more! a very few words more! I used to think there were so many whom you might have married, who would not have brought such charge and trouble on you, and who would have made your home a worthier home. I used to be afraid that I had better have remained your pupil, and almost your child. I used to fear that I was so unsuited to your learning and wisdom. If all this made me shrink within myself (as indeed it did), when I had that to tell, it was still because I honoured you so much, and hoped that you might one day honour me.'

'That day has shone this long time, Annie,' said the Doctor, and can have but one long night, my dear.'

'Another word! I afterwards meant--steadfastly meant, and purposed to myself--to bear the whole weight of knowing the unworthiness of one to whom you had been so good. And now a last word, dearest and best of friends! The cause of the late change in you, which I have seen with so much pain and sorrow, and have sometimes referred to my old apprehension--at other times to lingering suppositions nearer to the

truth--has been made clear tonight; and by an accident I have also come to know, tonight, the full measure of your noble trust in me, even under that mistake. I do not hope that any love and duty I may render in return, will ever make me worthy of your priceless confidence; but with all this knowledge fresh upon me, I can lift my eyes to this dear face, revered as a father's, loved as a husband's, sacred to me in my childhood as a friend's, and solemnly declare that in my lightest thought I have never wronged you; never wavered in the love and the fidelity I owe you!'

She had her arms around the Doctor's neck, and he leant his head down over her, mingling his grey hair with her dark brown tresses.

'Oh, hold me to your heart, my husband! Never cast me out! Do not think or speak of disparity between us, for there is none, except in all my many imperfections. Every succeeding year I have known this better, as I have esteemed you more and more. Oh, take me to your heart, my husband, for my love was founded on a rock, and it endures!'

In the silence that ensued, my aunt walked gravely up to Mr. Dick, without at all hurrying herself, and gave him a hug and a sounding kiss. And it was very fortunate, with a view to his credit, that she did so; for I am confident that I detected him at that moment in the act of making preparations to stand on one leg, as an appropriate expression of delight.

'You are a very remarkable man, Dick!' said my aunt, with an air of unqualified approbation; 'and never pretend to be anything else, for I know better!'

With that, my aunt pulled him by the sleeve, and nodded to me; and we three stole quietly out of the room, and came away.

'That's a settler for our military friend, at any rate,' said my aunt, on the way home. 'I should sleep the better for that, if there was nothing else to be glad of!'

'She was quite overcome, I am afraid,' said Mr. Dick, with great commiseration.

'What! Did you ever see a crocodile overcome?' inquired my aunt.

'I don't think I ever saw a crocodile,' returned Mr. Dick, mildly.

'There never would have been anything the matter, if it hadn't been for that old Animal,' said my aunt, with strong emphasis. 'It's very much to be wished that some mothers would leave their daughters alone after marriage, and not be so violently affectionate. They seem to think the only return that can be made them for bringing an unfortunate young woman into the world--God bless my soul, as if she asked to be brought, or wanted to come!--is full liberty to worry her out of it again. What are you thinking of, Trot?'

I was thinking of all that had been said. My mind was still running on some of the expressions used. 'There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.' 'The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart.' 'My love was founded on a rock.' But we were at home; and the trodden leaves were lying under-foot, and the autumn wind was blowing.

## CHAPTER 46. INTELLIGENCE

I must have been married, if I may trust to my imperfect memory for

dates, about a year or so, when one evening, as I was returning from a solitary walk, thinking of the book I was then writing--for my success had steadily increased with my steady application, and I was engaged at that time upon my first work of fiction--I came past Mrs. Steerforth's house. I had often passed it before, during my residence in that neighbourhood, though never when I could choose another road. Howbeit, it did sometimes happen that it was not easy to find another, without making a long circuit; and so I had passed that way, upon the whole, pretty often.

I had never done more than glance at the house, as I went by with a quickened step. It had been uniformly gloomy and dull. None of the best rooms abutted on the road; and the narrow, heavily-framed old-fashioned windows, never cheerful under any circumstances, looked very dismal, close shut, and with their blinds always drawn down. There was a covered way across a little paved court, to an entrance that was never used; and there was one round staircase window, at odds with all the rest, and the only one unshaded by a blind, which had the same unoccupied blank look. I do not remember that I ever saw a light in all the house. If I had been a casual passer-by, I should have probably supposed that some childless person lay dead in it. If I had happily possessed no knowledge of the place, and had seen it often in that changeless state, I should have pleased my fancy with many ingenious speculations, I dare say.

As it was, I thought as little of it as I might. But my mind could not go by it and leave it, as my body did; and it usually awakened a long train of meditations. Coming before me, on this particular evening that I mention, mingled with the childish recollections and later fancies, the ghosts of half-formed hopes, the broken shadows of disappointments dimly seen and understood, the blending of experience and imagination, incidental to the occupation with which my thoughts had been busy, it was more than commonly suggestive. I fell into a brown study as I walked on, and a voice at my side made me start.

It was a woman's voice, too. I was not long in recollecting Mrs. Steerforth's little parlour-maid, who had formerly worn blue ribbons in her cap. She had taken them out now, to adapt herself, I suppose, to the altered character of the house; and wore but one or two disconsolate bows of sober brown.

'If you please, sir, would you have the goodness to walk in, and speak to Miss Dartle?'

'Has Miss Dartle sent you for me?' I inquired.

'Not tonight, sir, but it's just the same. Miss Dartle saw you pass a night or two ago; and I was to sit at work on the staircase, and when I saw you pass again, to ask you to step in and speak to her.'

I turned back, and inquired of my conductor, as we went along, how Mrs. Steerforth was. She said her lady was but poorly, and kept her own room a good deal.

When we arrived at the house, I was directed to Miss Dartle in the garden, and left to make my presence known to her myself. She was sitting on a seat at one end of a kind of terrace, overlooking the great city. It was a sombre evening, with a lurid light in the sky; and as I saw the prospect scowling in the distance, with here and there some larger object starting up into the sullen glare, I fancied it was no inapt companion to the memory of this fierce woman.

She saw me as I advanced, and rose for a moment to receive me. I thought her, then, still more colourless and thin than when I had seen her last; the flashing eyes still brighter, and the scar still plainer.

Our meeting was not cordial. We had parted angrily on the last occasion;

and there was an air of disdain about her, which she took no pains to conceal.

'I am told you wish to speak to me, Miss Dartle,' said I, standing near her, with my hand upon the back of the seat, and declining her gesture of invitation to sit down.

'If you please,' said she. 'Pray has this girl been found?'

'No.'

'And yet she has run away!'

I saw her thin lips working while she looked at me, as if they were eager to load her with reproaches.

'Run away?' I repeated.

'Yes! From him,' she said, with a laugh. 'If she is not found, perhaps she never will be found. She may be dead!'

The vaunting cruelty with which she met my glance, I never saw expressed in any other face that ever I have seen.

'To wish her dead,' said I, 'may be the kindest wish that one of her own sex could bestow upon her. I am glad that time has softened you so much, Miss Dartle.'

She condescended to make no reply, but, turning on me with another scornful laugh, said:

'The friends of this excellent and much-injured young lady are friends of yours. You are their champion, and assert their rights. Do you wish



to know what is known of her?'

'Yes,' said I.

She rose with an ill-favoured smile, and taking a few steps towards a wall of holly that was near at hand, dividing the lawn from a kitchen-garden, said, in a louder voice, 'Come here!--as if she were calling to some unclean beast.

'You will restrain any demonstrative championship or vengeance in this place, of course, Mr. Copperfield?' said she, looking over her shoulder at me with the same expression.

I inclined my head, without knowing what she meant; and she said, 'Come here!' again; and returned, followed by the respectable Mr. Littimer, who, with undiminished respectability, made me a bow, and took up his position behind her. The air of wicked grace: of triumph, in which, strange to say, there was yet something feminine and alluring: with which she reclined upon the seat between us, and looked at me, was worthy of a cruel Princess in a Legend.

'Now,' said she, imperiously, without glancing at him, and touching the old wound as it throbbed: perhaps, in this instance, with pleasure rather than pain. 'Tell Mr. Copperfield about the flight.'

'Mr. James and myself, ma'am--'

'Don't address yourself to me!' she interrupted with a frown.

'Mr. James and myself, sir--'

'Nor to me, if you please,' said I.

Mr. Littimer, without being at all discomposed, signified by a slight obeisance, that anything that was most agreeable to us was most agreeable to him; and began again.

'Mr. James and myself have been abroad with the young woman, ever since she left Yarmouth under Mr. James's protection. We have been in a variety of places, and seen a deal of foreign country. We have been in France, Switzerland, Italy, in fact, almost all parts.'

He looked at the back of the seat, as if he were addressing himself to that; and softly played upon it with his hands, as if he were striking chords upon a dumb piano.

'Mr. James took quite uncommonly to the young woman; and was more settled, for a length of time, than I have known him to be since I have been in his service. The young woman was very improvable, and spoke the languages; and wouldn't have been known for the same country-person. I noticed that she was much admired wherever we went.'

Miss Dartle put her hand upon her side. I saw him steal a glance at her, and slightly smile to himself.

'Very much admired, indeed, the young woman was. What with her dress; what with the air and sun; what with being made so much of; what with this, that, and the other; her merits really attracted general notice.'

He made a short pause. Her eyes wandered restlessly over the distant prospect, and she bit her nether lip to stop that busy mouth.

Taking his hands from the seat, and placing one of them within the other, as he settled himself on one leg, Mr. Littimer proceeded, with his eyes cast down, and his respectable head a little advanced, and a little on one side:

'The young woman went on in this manner for some time, being occasionally low in her spirits, until I think she began to weary Mr. James by giving way to her low spirits and tempers of that kind; and things were not so comfortable. Mr. James he began to be restless again. The more restless he got, the worse she got; and I must say, for myself, that I had a very difficult time of it indeed between the two. Still matters were patched up here, and made good there, over and over again; and altogether lasted, I am sure, for a longer time than anybody could have expected.'

Recalling her eyes from the distance, she looked at me again now, with her former air. Mr. Littimer, clearing his throat behind his hand with a respectable short cough, changed legs, and went on:

'At last, when there had been, upon the whole, a good many words and reproaches, Mr. James he set off one morning, from the neighbourhood of Naples, where we had a villa (the young woman being very partial to the sea), and, under pretence of coming back in a day or so, left it in charge with me to break it out, that, for the general happiness of all concerned, he was'--here an interruption of the short cough--'gone. But Mr. James, I must say, certainly did behave extremely honourable; for he proposed that the young woman should marry a very respectable person, who was fully prepared to overlook the past, and who was, at least, as good as anybody the young woman could have aspired to in a regular way: her connexions being very common.'

He changed legs again, and wetted his lips. I was convinced that the scoundrel spoke of himself, and I saw my conviction reflected in Miss Dartle's face.

'This I also had it in charge to communicate. I was willing to do anything to relieve Mr. James from his difficulty, and to restore

harmony between himself and an affectionate parent, who has undergone so much on his account. Therefore I undertook the commission. The young woman's violence when she came to, after I broke the fact of his departure, was beyond all expectations. She was quite mad, and had to be held by force; or, if she couldn't have got to a knife, or got to the sea, she'd have beaten her head against the marble floor.'

Miss Dartle, leaning back upon the seat, with a light of exultation in her face, seemed almost to caress the sounds this fellow had uttered.

'But when I came to the second part of what had been entrusted to me,' said Mr. Littimer, rubbing his hands uneasily, 'which anybody might have supposed would have been, at all events, appreciated as a kind intention, then the young woman came out in her true colours. A more outrageous person I never did see. Her conduct was surprisingly bad. She had no more gratitude, no more feeling, no more patience, no more reason in her, than a stock or a stone. If I hadn't been upon my guard, I am convinced she would have had my blood.'

'I think the better of her for it,' said I, indignantly.

Mr. Littimer bent his head, as much as to say, 'Indeed, sir? But you're young!' and resumed his narrative.

'It was necessary, in short, for a time, to take away everything nigh her, that she could do herself, or anybody else, an injury with, and to shut her up close. Notwithstanding which, she got out in the night; forced the lattice of a window, that I had nailed up myself; dropped on a vine that was trailed below; and never has been seen or heard of, to my knowledge, since.'

'She is dead, perhaps,' said Miss Dartle, with a smile, as if she could have spurned the body of the ruined girl.

'She may have drowned herself, miss,' returned Mr. Littimer, catching at an excuse for addressing himself to somebody. 'It's very possible. Or, she may have had assistance from the boatmen, and the boatmen's wives and children. Being given to low company, she was very much in the habit of talking to them on the beach, Miss Dartle, and sitting by their boats. I have known her do it, when Mr. James has been away, whole days. Mr. James was far from pleased to find out, once, that she had told the children she was a boatman's daughter, and that in her own country, long ago, she had roamed about the beach, like them.'

Oh, Emily! Unhappy beauty! What a picture rose before me of her sitting on the far-off shore, among the children like herself when she was innocent, listening to little voices such as might have called her Mother had she been a poor man's wife; and to the great voice of the sea, with its eternal 'Never more!'

'When it was clear that nothing could be done, Miss Dartle--'

'Did I tell you not to speak to me?' she said, with stern contempt.

'You spoke to me, miss,' he replied. 'I beg your pardon. But it is my service to obey.'

'Do your service,' she returned. 'Finish your story, and go!'

'When it was clear,' he said, with infinite respectability and an obedient bow, 'that she was not to be found, I went to Mr. James, at the place where it had been agreed that I should write to him, and informed him of what had occurred. Words passed between us in consequence, and I felt it due to my character to leave him. I could bear, and I have borne, a great deal from Mr. James; but he insulted me too far. He hurt me. Knowing the unfortunate difference between himself and his mother,

and what her anxiety of mind was likely to be, I took the liberty of coming home to England, and relating--'

'For money which I paid him,' said Miss Dartle to me.

'Just so, ma'am--and relating what I knew. I am not aware,' said Mr. Littimer, after a moment's reflection, 'that there is anything else. I am at present out of employment, and should be happy to meet with a respectable situation.'

Miss Dartle glanced at me, as though she would inquire if there were anything that I desired to ask. As there was something which had occurred to my mind, I said in reply:

'I could wish to know from this--creature,' I could not bring myself to utter any more conciliatory word, 'whether they intercepted a letter that was written to her from home, or whether he supposes that she received it.'

He remained calm and silent, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and the tip of every finger of his right hand delicately poised against the tip of every finger of his left.

Miss Dartle turned her head disdainfully towards him.

'I beg your pardon, miss,' he said, awakening from his abstraction, 'but, however submissive to you, I have my position, though a servant. Mr. Copperfield and you, miss, are different people. If Mr. Copperfield wishes to know anything from me, I take the liberty of reminding Mr. Copperfield that he can put a question to me. I have a character to maintain.'

After a momentary struggle with myself, I turned my eyes upon him, and

said, 'You have heard my question. Consider it addressed to yourself, if you choose. What answer do you make?'

'Sir,' he rejoined, with an occasional separation and reunion of those delicate tips, 'my answer must be qualified; because, to betray Mr. James's confidence to his mother, and to betray it to you, are two different actions. It is not probable, I consider, that Mr. James would encourage the receipt of letters likely to increase low spirits and unpleasantness; but further than that, sir, I should wish to avoid going.'

'Is that all?' inquired Miss Dartle of me.

I indicated that I had nothing more to say. 'Except,' I added, as I saw him moving off, 'that I understand this fellow's part in the wicked story, and that, as I shall make it known to the honest man who has been her father from her childhood, I would recommend him to avoid going too much into public.'

He had stopped the moment I began, and had listened with his usual repose of manner.

'Thank you, sir. But you'll excuse me if I say, sir, that there are neither slaves nor slave-drivers in this country, and that people are not allowed to take the law into their own hands. If they do, it is more to their own peril, I believe, than to other people's. Consequently speaking, I am not at all afraid of going wherever I may wish, sir.'

With that, he made a polite bow; and, with another to Miss Dartle, went away through the arch in the wall of holly by which he had come. Miss Dartle and I regarded each other for a little while in silence; her manner being exactly what it was, when she had produced the man.

'He says besides,' she observed, with a slow curling of her lip, 'that his master, as he hears, is coasting Spain; and this done, is away to gratify his seafaring tastes till he is weary. But this is of no interest to you. Between these two proud persons, mother and son, there is a wider breach than before, and little hope of its healing, for they are one at heart, and time makes each more obstinate and imperious. Neither is this of any interest to you; but it introduces what I wish to say. This devil whom you make an angel of. I mean this low girl whom he picked out of the tide-mud,' with her black eyes full upon me, and her passionate finger up, 'may be alive,--for I believe some common things are hard to die. If she is, you will desire to have a pearl of such price found and taken care of. We desire that, too; that he may not by any chance be made her prey again. So far, we are united in one interest; and that is why I, who would do her any mischief that so coarse a wretch is capable of feeling, have sent for you to hear what you have heard.'

I saw, by the change in her face, that someone was advancing behind me. It was Mrs. Steerforth, who gave me her hand more coldly than of yore, and with an augmentation of her former stateliness of manner, but still, I perceived--and I was touched by it--with an ineffaceable remembrance of my old love for her son. She was greatly altered. Her fine figure was far less upright, her handsome face was deeply marked, and her hair was almost white. But when she sat down on the seat, she was a handsome lady still; and well I knew the bright eye with its lofty look, that had been a light in my very dreams at school.

'Is Mr. Copperfield informed of everything, Rosa?'

'Yes.'

'And has he heard Littimer himself?'



'Yes; I have told him why you wished it.' 'You are a good girl. I have had some slight correspondence with your former friend, sir,' addressing me, 'but it has not restored his sense of duty or natural obligation. Therefore I have no other object in this, than what Rosa has mentioned. If, by the course which may relieve the mind of the decent man you brought here (for whom I am sorry--I can say no more), my son may be saved from again falling into the snares of a designing enemy, well!'

She drew herself up, and sat looking straight before her, far away.

'Madam,' I said respectfully, 'I understand. I assure you I am in no danger of putting any strained construction on your motives. But I must say, even to you, having known this injured family from childhood, that if you suppose the girl, so deeply wronged, has not been cruelly deluded, and would not rather die a hundred deaths than take a cup of water from your son's hand now, you cherish a terrible mistake.'

'Well, Rosa, well!' said Mrs. Steerforth, as the other was about to interpose, 'it is no matter. Let it be. You are married, sir, I am told?'

I answered that I had been some time married.

'And are doing well? I hear little in the quiet life I lead, but I understand you are beginning to be famous.'

'I have been very fortunate,' I said, 'and find my name connected with some praise.'

'You have no mother?'--in a softened voice.

'No.'

'It is a pity,' she returned. 'She would have been proud of you. Good night!'

I took the hand she held out with a dignified, unbending air, and it was as calm in mine as if her breast had been at peace. Her pride could still its very pulses, it appeared, and draw the placid veil before her face, through which she sat looking straight before her on the far distance.

As I moved away from them along the terrace, I could not help observing how steadily they both sat gazing on the prospect, and how it thickened and closed around them. Here and there, some early lamps were seen to twinkle in the distant city; and in the eastern quarter of the sky the lurid light still hovered. But, from the greater part of the broad valley interposed, a mist was rising like a sea, which, mingling with the darkness, made it seem as if the gathering waters would encompass them. I have reason to remember this, and think of it with awe; for before I looked upon those two again, a stormy sea had risen to their feet.

Reflecting on what had been thus told me, I felt it right that it should be communicated to Mr. Peggotty. On the following evening I went into London in quest of him. He was always wandering about from place to place, with his one object of recovering his niece before him; but was more in London than elsewhere. Often and often, now, had I seen him in the dead of night passing along the streets, searching, among the few who loitered out of doors at those untimely hours, for what he dreaded to find.

He kept a lodging over the little chandler's shop in Hungerford Market, which I have had occasion to mention more than once, and from which he first went forth upon his errand of mercy. Hither I directed my walk. On making inquiry for him, I learned from the people of the house that he

had not gone out yet, and I should find him in his room upstairs.

He was sitting reading by a window in which he kept a few plants. The room was very neat and orderly. I saw in a moment that it was always kept prepared for her reception, and that he never went out but he thought it possible he might bring her home. He had not heard my tap at the door, and only raised his eyes when I laid my hand upon his shoulder.

'Mas'r Davy! Thankee, sir! thankee hearty, for this visit! Sit ye down. You're kindly welcome, sir!'

'Mr. Peggotty,' said I, taking the chair he handed me, 'don't expect much! I have heard some news.'

'Of Em'ly!'

He put his hand, in a nervous manner, on his mouth, and turned pale, as he fixed his eyes on mine.

'It gives no clue to where she is; but she is not with him.'

He sat down, looking intently at me, and listened in profound silence to all I had to tell. I well remember the sense of dignity, beauty even, with which the patient gravity of his face impressed me, when, having gradually removed his eyes from mine, he sat looking downward, leaning his forehead on his hand. He offered no interruption, but remained throughout perfectly still. He seemed to pursue her figure through the narrative, and to let every other shape go by him, as if it were nothing.

When I had done, he shaded his face, and continued silent. I looked out of the window for a little while, and occupied myself with the plants.

'How do you fare to feel about it, Mas'r Davy?' he inquired at length.

'I think that she is living,' I replied.

'I doesn't know. Maybe the first shock was too rough, and in the wildness of her art--! That there blue water as she used to speak on. Could she have thowt o' that so many year, because it was to be her grave!'

He said this, musing, in a low, frightened voice; and walked across the little room.

'And yet,' he added, 'Mas'r Davy, I have felt so sure as she was living--I have know'd, awake and sleeping, as it was so trew that I should find her--I have been so led on by it, and held up by it--that I doesn't believe I can have been deceived. No! Em'ly's alive!'

He put his hand down firmly on the table, and set his sunburnt face into a resolute expression.

'My niece, Em'ly, is alive, sir!' he said, steadfastly. 'I doesn't know wheer it comes from, or how 'tis, but I am told as she's alive!'

He looked almost like a man inspired, as he said it. I waited for a few moments, until he could give me his undivided attention; and then proceeded to explain the precaution, that, it had occurred to me last night, it would be wise to take.

'Now, my dear friend--'I began.

'Thankee, thankee, kind sir,' he said, grasping my hand in both of his.

'If she should make her way to London, which is likely--for where could

she lose herself so readily as in this vast city; and what would she wish to do, but lose and hide herself, if she does not go home?--'

'And she won't go home,' he interposed, shaking his head mournfully. 'If she had left of her own accord, she might; not as It was, sir.'

'If she should come here,' said I, 'I believe there is one person, here, more likely to discover her than any other in the world. Do you remember--hear what I say, with fortitude--think of your great object!--do you remember Martha?'

'Of our town?'

I needed no other answer than his face.

'Do you know that she is in London?'

'I have seen her in the streets,' he answered, with a shiver.

'But you don't know,' said I, 'that Emily was charitable to her, with Ham's help, long before she fled from home. Nor, that, when we met one night, and spoke together in the room yonder, over the way, she listened at the door.'

'Mas'r Davy!' he replied in astonishment. 'That night when it snowed so hard?'

'That night. I have never seen her since. I went back, after parting from you, to speak to her, but she was gone. I was unwilling to mention her to you then, and I am now; but she is the person of whom I speak, and with whom I think we should communicate. Do you understand?'

'Too well, sir,' he replied. We had sunk our voices, almost to a

whisper, and continued to speak in that tone.

'You say you have seen her. Do you think that you could find her? I could only hope to do so by chance.'

'I think, Mas'r Davy, I know wheer to look.'

'It is dark. Being together, shall we go out now, and try to find her tonight?'

He assented, and prepared to accompany me. Without appearing to observe what he was doing, I saw how carefully he adjusted the little room, put a candle ready and the means of lighting it, arranged the bed, and finally took out of a drawer one of her dresses (I remember to have seen her wear it), neatly folded with some other garments, and a bonnet, which he placed upon a chair. He made no allusion to these clothes, neither did I. There they had been waiting for her, many and many a night, no doubt.

'The time was, Mas'r Davy,' he said, as we came downstairs, 'when I thowt this girl, Martha, a'most like the dirt underneath my Em'ly's feet. God forgive me, theer's a difference now!'

As we went along, partly to hold him in conversation, and partly to satisfy myself, I asked him about Ham. He said, almost in the same words as formerly, that Ham was just the same, 'wearing away his life with kiender no care nohow for 't; but never murmuring, and liked by all'.

I asked him what he thought Ham's state of mind was, in reference to the cause of their misfortunes? Whether he believed it was dangerous? What he supposed, for example, Ham would do, if he and Steerforth ever should encounter?

'I doesn't know, sir,' he replied. 'I have thowt of it oftentimes, but I can't awize myself of it, no matters.'

I recalled to his remembrance the morning after her departure, when we were all three on the beach. 'Do you recollect,' said I, 'a certain wild way in which he looked out to sea, and spoke about "the end of it"?''

'Sure I do!' said he.

'What do you suppose he meant?'

'Mas'r Davy,' he replied, 'I've put the question to myself a mort o' times, and never found no answer. And theer's one curious thing--that, though he is so pleasant, I wouldn't fare to feel comfortable to try and get his mind upon 't. He never said a wured to me as warn't as dootiful as dootiful could be, and it ain't likely as he'd begin to speak any other ways now; but it's fur from being fleet water in his mind, where them thowts lays. It's deep, sir, and I can't see down.'

'You are right,' said I, 'and that has sometimes made me anxious.'

'And me too, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined. 'Even more so, I do assure you, than his ventersome ways, though both belongs to the alteration in him. I doesn't know as he'd do violence under any circumstances, but I hope as them two may be kep asunders.'

We had come, through Temple Bar, into the city. Conversing no more now, and walking at my side, he yielded himself up to the one aim of his devoted life, and went on, with that hushed concentration of his faculties which would have made his figure solitary in a multitude. We were not far from Blackfriars Bridge, when he turned his head and pointed to a solitary female figure flitting along the opposite side of the street. I knew it, readily, to be the figure that we sought.

We crossed the road, and were pressing on towards her, when it occurred to me that she might be more disposed to feel a woman's interest in the lost girl, if we spoke to her in a quieter place, aloof from the crowd, and where we should be less observed. I advised my companion, therefore, that we should not address her yet, but follow her; consulting in this, likewise, an indistinct desire I had, to know where she went.

He acquiescing, we followed at a distance: never losing sight of her, but never caring to come very near, as she frequently looked about. Once, she stopped to listen to a band of music; and then we stopped too.

She went on a long way. Still we went on. It was evident, from the manner in which she held her course, that she was going to some fixed destination; and this, and her keeping in the busy streets, and I suppose the strange fascination in the secrecy and mystery of so following anyone, made me adhere to my first purpose. At length she turned into a dull, dark street, where the noise and crowd were lost; and I said, 'We may speak to her now'; and, mending our pace, we went after her.

#### CHAPTER 47. MARTHA

We were now down in Westminster. We had turned back to follow her, having encountered her coming towards us; and Westminster Abbey was the point at which she passed from the lights and noise of the leading streets. She proceeded so quickly, when she got free of the two currents of passengers setting towards and from the bridge, that, between this and the advance she had of us when she struck off, we were in the narrow water-side street by Millbank before we came up with her. At that moment she crossed the road, as if to avoid the footsteps that she heard so



close behind; and, without looking back, passed on even more rapidly.

A glimpse of the river through a dull gateway, where some waggons were housed for the night, seemed to arrest my feet. I touched my companion without speaking, and we both forbore to cross after her, and both followed on that opposite side of the way; keeping as quietly as we could in the shadow of the houses, but keeping very near her.

There was, and is when I write, at the end of that low-lying street, a dilapidated little wooden building, probably an obsolete old ferry-house. Its position is just at that point where the street ceases, and the road begins to lie between a row of houses and the river. As soon as she came here, and saw the water, she stopped as if she had come to her destination; and presently went slowly along by the brink of the river, looking intently at it.

All the way here, I had supposed that she was going to some house; indeed, I had vaguely entertained the hope that the house might be in some way associated with the lost girl. But that one dark glimpse of the river, through the gateway, had instinctively prepared me for her going no farther.

The neighbourhood was a dreary one at that time; as oppressive, sad, and solitary by night, as any about London. There were neither wharves nor houses on the melancholy waste of road near the great blank Prison. A sluggish ditch deposited its mud at the prison walls. Coarse grass and rank weeds straggled over all the marshy land in the vicinity. In one part, carcasses of houses, inauspiciously begun and never finished, rotted away. In another, the ground was cumbered with rusty iron monsters of steam-boilers, wheels, cranks, pipes, furnaces, paddles, anchors, diving-bells, windmill-sails, and I know not what strange objects, accumulated by some speculator, and grovelling in the dust, underneath which--having sunk into the soil of their own weight in wet

weather--they had the appearance of vainly trying to hide themselves. The clash and glare of sundry fiery Works upon the river-side, arose by night to disturb everything except the heavy and unbroken smoke that poured out of their chimneys. Slimy gaps and causeways, winding among old wooden piles, with a sickly substance clinging to the latter, like green hair, and the rags of last year's handbills offering rewards for drowned men fluttering above high-water mark, led down through the ooze and slush to the ebb-tide. There was a story that one of the pits dug for the dead in the time of the Great Plague was hereabout; and a blighting influence seemed to have proceeded from it over the whole place. Or else it looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that nightmare condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream.

As if she were a part of the refuse it had cast out, and left to corruption and decay, the girl we had followed strayed down to the river's brink, and stood in the midst of this night-picture, lonely and still, looking at the water.

There were some boats and barges astrand in the mud, and these enabled us to come within a few yards of her without being seen. I then signed to Mr. Peggotty to remain where he was, and emerged from their shade to speak to her. I did not approach her solitary figure without trembling; for this gloomy end to her determined walk, and the way in which she stood, almost within the cavernous shadow of the iron bridge, looking at the lights crookedly reflected in the strong tide, inspired a dread within me.

I think she was talking to herself. I am sure, although absorbed in gazing at the water, that her shawl was off her shoulders, and that she was muffling her hands in it, in an unsettled and bewildered way, more like the action of a sleep-walker than a waking person. I know, and never can forget, that there was that in her wild manner which gave me no assurance but that she would sink before my eyes, until I had her arm

within my grasp.

At the same moment I said 'Martha!'

She uttered a terrified scream, and struggled with me with such strength that I doubt if I could have held her alone. But a stronger hand than mine was laid upon her; and when she raised her frightened eyes and saw whose it was, she made but one more effort and dropped down between us. We carried her away from the water to where there were some dry stones, and there laid her down, crying and moaning. In a little while she sat among the stones, holding her wretched head with both her hands.

'Oh, the river!' she cried passionately. 'Oh, the river!'

'Hush, hush!' said I. 'Calm yourself.'

But she still repeated the same words, continually exclaiming, 'Oh, the river!' over and over again.

'I know it's like me!' she exclaimed. 'I know that I belong to it. I know that it's the natural company of such as I am! It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it--and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable--and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea, that is always troubled--and I feel that I must go with it!' I have never known what despair was, except in the tone of those words.

'I can't keep away from it. I can't forget it. It haunts me day and night. It's the only thing in all the world that I am fit for, or that's fit for me. Oh, the dreadful river!'

The thought passed through my mind that in the face of my companion, as he looked upon her without speech or motion, I might have read his

niece's history, if I had known nothing of it. I never saw, in any painting or reality, horror and compassion so impressively blended. He shook as if he would have fallen; and his hand--I touched it with my own, for his appearance alarmed me--was deadly cold.

'She is in a state of frenzy,' I whispered to him. 'She will speak differently in a little time.'

I don't know what he would have said in answer. He made some motion with his mouth, and seemed to think he had spoken; but he had only pointed to her with his outstretched hand.

A new burst of crying came upon her now, in which she once more hid her face among the stones, and lay before us, a prostrate image of humiliation and ruin. Knowing that this state must pass, before we could speak to her with any hope, I ventured to restrain him when he would have raised her, and we stood by in silence until she became more tranquil.

'Martha,' said I then, leaning down, and helping her to rise--she seemed to want to rise as if with the intention of going away, but she was weak, and leaned against a boat. 'Do you know who this is, who is with me?'

She said faintly, 'Yes.'

'Do you know that we have followed you a long way tonight?'

She shook her head. She looked neither at him nor at me, but stood in a humble attitude, holding her bonnet and shawl in one hand, without appearing conscious of them, and pressing the other, clenched, against her forehead.

'Are you composed enough,' said I, 'to speak on the subject which so interested you--I hope Heaven may remember it!--that snowy night?'

Her sobs broke out afresh, and she murmured some inarticulate thanks to me for not having driven her away from the door.

'I want to say nothing for myself,' she said, after a few moments. 'I am bad, I am lost. I have no hope at all. But tell him, sir,' she had shrunk away from him, 'if you don't feel too hard to me to do it, that I never was in any way the cause of his misfortune.' 'It has never been attributed to you,' I returned, earnestly responding to her earnestness.

'It was you, if I don't deceive myself,' she said, in a broken voice, 'that came into the kitchen, the night she took such pity on me; was so gentle to me; didn't shrink away from me like all the rest, and gave me such kind help! Was it you, sir?'

'It was,' said I.

'I should have been in the river long ago,' she said, glancing at it with a terrible expression, 'if any wrong to her had been upon my mind. I never could have kept out of it a single winter's night, if I had not been free of any share in that!'

'The cause of her flight is too well understood,' I said. 'You are innocent of any part in it, we thoroughly believe,--we know.'

'Oh, I might have been much the better for her, if I had had a better heart!' exclaimed the girl, with most forlorn regret; 'for she was always good to me! She never spoke a word to me but what was pleasant and right. Is it likely I would try to make her what I am myself, knowing what I am myself, so well? When I lost everything that makes life dear, the worst of all my thoughts was that I was parted for ever

from her!'

Mr. Peggotty, standing with one hand on the gunwale of the boat, and his eyes cast down, put his disengaged hand before his face.

'And when I heard what had happened before that snowy night, from some belonging to our town,' cried Martha, 'the bitterest thought in all my mind was, that the people would remember she once kept company with me, and would say I had corrupted her! When, Heaven knows, I would have died to have brought back her good name!'

Long unused to any self-control, the piercing agony of her remorse and grief was terrible.

'To have died, would not have been much--what can I say?--I would have lived!' she cried. 'I would have lived to be old, in the wretched streets--and to wander about, avoided, in the dark--and to see the day break on the ghastly line of houses, and remember how the same sun used to shine into my room, and wake me once--I would have done even that, to save her!'

Sinking on the stones, she took some in each hand, and clenched them up, as if she would have ground them. She writhed into some new posture constantly: stiffening her arms, twisting them before her face, as though to shut out from her eyes the little light there was, and drooping her head, as if it were heavy with insupportable recollections.

'What shall I ever do!' she said, fighting thus with her despair. 'How can I go on as I am, a solitary curse to myself, a living disgrace to everyone I come near!' Suddenly she turned to my companion. 'Stamp upon me, kill me! When she was your pride, you would have thought I had done her harm if I had brushed against her in the street. You can't believe--why should you?--a syllable that comes out of my lips. It

would be a burning shame upon you, even now, if she and I exchanged a word. I don't complain. I don't say she and I are alike--I know there is a long, long way between us. I only say, with all my guilt and wretchedness upon my head, that I am grateful to her from my soul, and love her. Oh, don't think that all the power I had of loving anything is quite worn out! Throw me away, as all the world does. Kill me for being what I am, and having ever known her; but don't think that of me!

He looked upon her, while she made this supplication, in a wild distracted manner; and, when she was silent, gently raised her.

'Martha,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'God forbid as I should judge you. Forbid as I, of all men, should do that, my girl! You doesn't know half the change that's come, in course of time, upon me, when you think it likely. Well!' he paused a moment, then went on. 'You doesn't understand how 'tis that this here gentleman and me has wished to speak to you. You doesn't understand what 'tis we has afore us. Listen now!'

His influence upon her was complete. She stood, shrinkingly, before him, as if she were afraid to meet his eyes; but her passionate sorrow was quite hushed and mute.

'If you heerd,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'owt of what passed between Mas'r Davy and me, th' night when it sned so hard, you know as I have been--wheer not--fur to seek my dear niece. My dear niece,' he repeated steadily. 'Fur she's more dear to me now, Martha, than she was dear afore.'

She put her hands before her face; but otherwise remained quiet.

'I have heerd her tell,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'as you was early left fatherless and motherless, with no friend fur to take, in a rough seafaring-way, their place. Maybe you can guess that if you'd had such

a friend, you'd have got into a way of being fond of him in course of time, and that my niece was kinder daughter-like to me.'

As she was silently trembling, he put her shawl carefully about her, taking it up from the ground for that purpose.

'Whereby,' said he, 'I know, both as she would go to the world's furthest end with me, if she could once see me again; and that she would fly to the world's furthest end to keep off seeing me. For though she ain't no call to doubt my love, and doesn't--and doesn't,' he repeated, with a quiet assurance of the truth of what he said, 'there's shame steps in, and keeps betwixt us.'

I read, in every word of his plain impressive way of delivering himself, new evidence of his having thought of this one topic, in every feature it presented.

'According to our reckoning,' he proceeded, 'Mas'r Davy's here, and mine, she is like, one day, to make her own poor solitary course to London. We believe--Mas'r Davy, me, and all of us--that you are as innocent of everything that has befallen her, as the unborn child. You've spoke of her being pleasant, kind, and gentle to you. Bless her, I knew she was! I knew she always was, to all. You're thankful to her, and you love her. Help us all you can to find her, and may Heaven reward you!'

She looked at him hastily, and for the first time, as if she were doubtful of what he had said.

'Will you trust me?' she asked, in a low voice of astonishment.

'Full and free!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'To speak to her, if I should ever find her; shelter her, if I have any



shelter to divide with her; and then, without her knowledge, come to you, and bring you to her?' she asked hurriedly.

We both replied together, 'Yes!'

She lifted up her eyes, and solemnly declared that she would devote herself to this task, fervently and faithfully. That she would never waver in it, never be diverted from it, never relinquish it, while there was any chance of hope. If she were not true to it, might the object she now had in life, which bound her to something devoid of evil, in its passing away from her, leave her more forlorn and more despairing, if that were possible, than she had been upon the river's brink that night; and then might all help, human and Divine, renounce her evermore!

She did not raise her voice above her breath, or address us, but said this to the night sky; then stood profoundly quiet, looking at the gloomy water.

We judged it expedient, now, to tell her all we knew; which I recounted at length. She listened with great attention, and with a face that often changed, but had the same purpose in all its varying expressions. Her eyes occasionally filled with tears, but those she repressed. It seemed as if her spirit were quite altered, and she could not be too quiet.

She asked, when all was told, where we were to be communicated with, if occasion should arise. Under a dull lamp in the road, I wrote our two addresses on a leaf of my pocket-book, which I tore out and gave to her, and which she put in her poor bosom. I asked her where she lived herself. She said, after a pause, in no place long. It were better not to know.

Mr. Peggotty suggesting to me, in a whisper, what had already occurred to myself, I took out my purse; but I could not prevail upon her to

accept any money, nor could I exact any promise from her that she would do so at another time. I represented to her that Mr. Peggotty could not be called, for one in his condition, poor; and that the idea of her engaging in this search, while depending on her own resources, shocked us both. She continued steadfast. In this particular, his influence upon her was equally powerless with mine. She gratefully thanked him but remained inexorable.

'There may be work to be got,' she said. 'I'll try.'

'At least take some assistance,' I returned, 'until you have tried.'

'I could not do what I have promised, for money,' she replied. 'I could not take it, if I was starving. To give me money would be to take away your trust, to take away the object that you have given me, to take away the only certain thing that saves me from the river.'

'In the name of the great judge,' said I, 'before whom you and all of us must stand at His dread time, dismiss that terrible idea! We can all do some good, if we will.'

She trembled, and her lip shook, and her face was paler, as she answered:

'It has been put into your hearts, perhaps, to save a wretched creature for repentance. I am afraid to think so; it seems too bold. If any good should come of me, I might begin to hope; for nothing but harm has ever come of my deeds yet. I am to be trusted, for the first time in a long while, with my miserable life, on account of what you have given me to try for. I know no more, and I can say no more.'

Again she repressed the tears that had begun to flow; and, putting out her trembling hand, and touching Mr. Peggotty, as if there was some

healing virtue in him, went away along the desolate road. She had been ill, probably for a long time. I observed, upon that closer opportunity of observation, that she was worn and haggard, and that her sunken eyes expressed privation and endurance.

We followed her at a short distance, our way lying in the same direction, until we came back into the lighted and populous streets. I had such implicit confidence in her declaration, that I then put it to Mr. Peggotty, whether it would not seem, in the onset, like distrusting her, to follow her any farther. He being of the same mind, and equally reliant on her, we suffered her to take her own road, and took ours, which was towards Highgate. He accompanied me a good part of the way; and when we parted, with a prayer for the success of this fresh effort, there was a new and thoughtful compassion in him that I was at no loss to interpret.

It was midnight when I arrived at home. I had reached my own gate, and was standing listening for the deep bell of St. Paul's, the sound of which I thought had been borne towards me among the multitude of striking clocks, when I was rather surprised to see that the door of my aunt's cottage was open, and that a faint light in the entry was shining out across the road.

Thinking that my aunt might have relapsed into one of her old alarms, and might be watching the progress of some imaginary conflagration in the distance, I went to speak to her. It was with very great surprise that I saw a man standing in her little garden.

He had a glass and bottle in his hand, and was in the act of drinking. I stopped short, among the thick foliage outside, for the moon was up now, though obscured; and I recognized the man whom I had once supposed to be a delusion of Mr. Dick's, and had once encountered with my aunt in the streets of the city.

He was eating as well as drinking, and seemed to eat with a hungry appetite. He seemed curious regarding the cottage, too, as if it were the first time he had seen it. After stooping to put the bottle on the ground, he looked up at the windows, and looked about; though with a covert and impatient air, as if he was anxious to be gone.

The light in the passage was obscured for a moment, and my aunt came out. She was agitated, and told some money into his hand. I heard it chink.

'What's the use of this?' he demanded.

'I can spare no more,' returned my aunt.

'Then I can't go,' said he. 'Here! You may take it back!'

'You bad man,' returned my aunt, with great emotion; 'how can you use me so? But why do I ask? It is because you know how weak I am! What have I to do, to free myself for ever of your visits, but to abandon you to your deserts?'

'And why don't you abandon me to my deserts?' said he.

'You ask me why!' returned my aunt. 'What a heart you must have!'

He stood moodily rattling the money, and shaking his head, until at length he said:

'Is this all you mean to give me, then?'

'It is all I CAN give you,' said my aunt. 'You know I have had losses, and am poorer than I used to be. I have told you so. Having got it, why

do you give me the pain of looking at you for another moment, and seeing what you have become?'

'I have become shabby enough, if you mean that,' he said. 'I lead the life of an owl.'

'You stripped me of the greater part of all I ever had,' said my aunt. 'You closed my heart against the whole world, years and years. You treated me falsely, ungratefully, and cruelly. Go, and repent of it. Don't add new injuries to the long, long list of injuries you have done me!'

'Aye!' he returned. 'It's all very fine--Well! I must do the best I can, for the present, I suppose.'

In spite of himself, he appeared abashed by my aunt's indignant tears, and came slouching out of the garden. Taking two or three quick steps, as if I had just come up, I met him at the gate, and went in as he came out. We eyed one another narrowly in passing, and with no favour.

'Aunt,' said I, hurriedly. 'This man alarming you again! Let me speak to him. Who is he?'

'Child,' returned my aunt, taking my arm, 'come in, and don't speak to me for ten minutes.'

We sat down in her little parlour. My aunt retired behind the round green fan of former days, which was screwed on the back of a chair, and occasionally wiped her eyes, for about a quarter of an hour. Then she came out, and took a seat beside me.

'Trot,' said my aunt, calmly, 'it's my husband.'

'Your husband, aunt? I thought he had been dead!'

'Dead to me,' returned my aunt, 'but living.'

I sat in silent amazement.

'Betsey Trotwood don't look a likely subject for the tender passion,' said my aunt, composedly, 'but the time was, Trot, when she believed in that man most entirely. When she loved him, Trot, right well. When there was no proof of attachment and affection that she would not have given him. He repaid her by breaking her fortune, and nearly breaking her heart. So she put all that sort of sentiment, once and for ever, in a grave, and filled it up, and flattened it down.'

'My dear, good aunt!'

'I left him,' my aunt proceeded, laying her hand as usual on the back of mine, 'generously. I may say at this distance of time, Trot, that I left him generously. He had been so cruel to me, that I might have effected a separation on easy terms for myself; but I did not. He soon made ducks and drakes of what I gave him, sank lower and lower, married another woman, I believe, became an adventurer, a gambler, and a cheat. What he is now, you see. But he was a fine-looking man when I married him,' said my aunt, with an echo of her old pride and admiration in her tone; 'and I believed him--I was a fool!--to be the soul of honour!'

She gave my hand a squeeze, and shook her head.

'He is nothing to me now, Trot--less than nothing. But, sooner than have him punished for his offences (as he would be if he prowled about in this country), I give him more money than I can afford, at intervals when he reappears, to go away. I was a fool when I married him; and I am so far an incurable fool on that subject, that, for the sake of what

I once believed him to be, I wouldn't have even this shadow of my idle fancy hardly dealt with. For I was in earnest, Trot, if ever a woman was.'

MY aunt dismissed the matter with a heavy sigh, and smoothed her dress.

'There, my dear!' she said. 'Now you know the beginning, middle, and end, and all about it. We won't mention the subject to one another any more; neither, of course, will you mention it to anybody else. This is my grumpy, frumpy story, and we'll keep it to ourselves, Trot!'

#### CHAPTER 48. DOMESTIC

I laboured hard at my book, without allowing it to interfere with the punctual discharge of my newspaper duties; and it came out and was very successful. I was not stunned by the praise which sounded in my ears, notwithstanding that I was keenly alive to it, and thought better of my own performance, I have little doubt, than anybody else did. It has always been in my observation of human nature, that a man who has any good reason to believe in himself never flourishes himself before the faces of other people in order that they may believe in him. For this reason, I retained my modesty in very self-respect; and the more praise I got, the more I tried to deserve.

It is not my purpose, in this record, though in all other essentials it is my written memory, to pursue the history of my own fictions. They express themselves, and I leave them to themselves. When I refer to them, incidentally, it is only as a part of my progress.

Having some foundation for believing, by this time, that nature and

accident had made me an author, I pursued my vocation with confidence. Without such assurance I should certainly have left it alone, and bestowed my energy on some other endeavour. I should have tried to find out what nature and accident really had made me, and to be that, and nothing else. I had been writing, in the newspaper and elsewhere, so prosperously, that when my new success was achieved, I considered myself reasonably entitled to escape from the dreary debates. One joyful night, therefore, I noted down the music of the parliamentary bagpipes for the last time, and I have never heard it since; though I still recognize the old drone in the newspapers, without any substantial variation (except, perhaps, that there is more of it), all the livelong session.

I now write of the time when I had been married, I suppose, about a year and a half. After several varieties of experiment, we had given up the housekeeping as a bad job. The house kept itself, and we kept a page. The principal function of this retainer was to quarrel with the cook; in which respect he was a perfect Whittington, without his cat, or the remotest chance of being made Lord Mayor.

He appears to me to have lived in a hail of saucepan-lids. His whole existence was a scuffle. He would shriek for help on the most improper occasions,--as when we had a little dinner-party, or a few friends in the evening,--and would come tumbling out of the kitchen, with iron missiles flying after him. We wanted to get rid of him, but he was very much attached to us, and wouldn't go. He was a tearful boy, and broke into such deplorable lamentations, when a cessation of our connexion was hinted at, that we were obliged to keep him. He had no mother--no anything in the way of a relative, that I could discover, except a sister, who fled to America the moment we had taken him off her hands; and he became quartered on us like a horrible young changeling. He had a lively perception of his own unfortunate state, and was always rubbing his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket, or stooping to blow his nose on the extreme corner of a little pocket-handkerchief, which he never would



take completely out of his pocket, but always economized and secreted.

This unlucky page, engaged in an evil hour at six pounds ten per annum, was a source of continual trouble to me. I watched him as he grew--and he grew like scarlet beans--with painful apprehensions of the time when he would begin to shave; even of the days when he would be bald or grey. I saw no prospect of ever getting rid of him; and, projecting myself into the future, used to think what an inconvenience he would be when he was an old man.

I never expected anything less, than this unfortunate's manner of getting me out of my difficulty. He stole Dora's watch, which, like everything else belonging to us, had no particular place of its own; and, converting it into money, spent the produce (he was always a weak-minded boy) in incessantly riding up and down between London and Uxbridge outside the coach. He was taken to Bow Street, as well as I remember, on the completion of his fifteenth journey; when four-and-sixpence, and a second-hand fife which he couldn't play, were found upon his person.

The surprise and its consequences would have been much less disagreeable to me if he had not been penitent. But he was very penitent indeed, and in a peculiar way--not in the lump, but by instalments. For example: the day after that on which I was obliged to appear against him, he made certain revelations touching a hamper in the cellar, which we believed to be full of wine, but which had nothing in it except bottles and corks. We supposed he had now eased his mind, and told the worst he knew of the cook; but, a day or two afterwards, his conscience sustained a new twinge, and he disclosed how she had a little girl, who, early every morning, took away our bread; and also how he himself had been suborned to maintain the milkman in coals. In two or three days more, I was informed by the authorities of his having led to the discovery of sirloins of beef among the kitchen-stuff, and sheets in the rag-bag. A

little while afterwards, he broke out in an entirely new direction, and confessed to a knowledge of burglarious intentions as to our premises, on the part of the pot-boy, who was immediately taken up. I got to be so ashamed of being such a victim, that I would have given him any money to hold his tongue, or would have offered a round bribe for his being permitted to run away. It was an aggravating circumstance in the case that he had no idea of this, but conceived that he was making me amends in every new discovery: not to say, heaping obligations on my head.

At last I ran away myself, whenever I saw an emissary of the police approaching with some new intelligence; and lived a stealthy life until he was tried and ordered to be transported. Even then he couldn't be quiet, but was always writing us letters; and wanted so much to see Dora before he went away, that Dora went to visit him, and fainted when she found herself inside the iron bars. In short, I had no peace of my life until he was expatriated, and made (as I afterwards heard) a shepherd of, 'up the country' somewhere; I have no geographical idea where.

All this led me into some serious reflections, and presented our mistakes in a new aspect; as I could not help communicating to Dora one evening, in spite of my tenderness for her.

'My love,' said I, 'it is very painful to me to think that our want of system and management, involves not only ourselves (which we have got used to), but other people.'

'You have been silent for a long time, and now you are going to be cross!' said Dora.

'No, my dear, indeed! Let me explain to you what I mean.'

'I think I don't want to know,' said Dora.

'But I want you to know, my love. Put Jip down.'

Dora put his nose to mine, and said 'Boh!' to drive my seriousness away; but, not succeeding, ordered him into his Pagoda, and sat looking at me, with her hands folded, and a most resigned little expression of countenance.

'The fact is, my dear,' I began, 'there is contagion in us. We infect everyone about us.'

I might have gone on in this figurative manner, if Dora's face had not admonished me that she was wondering with all her might whether I was going to propose any new kind of vaccination, or other medical remedy, for this unwholesome state of ours. Therefore I checked myself, and made my meaning plainer.

'It is not merely, my pet,' said I, 'that we lose money and comfort, and even temper sometimes, by not learning to be more careful; but that we incur the serious responsibility of spoiling everyone who comes into our service, or has any dealings with us. I begin to be afraid that the fault is not entirely on one side, but that these people all turn out ill because we don't turn out very well ourselves.'

'Oh, what an accusation,' exclaimed Dora, opening her eyes wide; 'to say that you ever saw me take gold watches! Oh!'

'My dearest,' I remonstrated, 'don't talk preposterous nonsense! Who has made the least allusion to gold watches?'

'You did,' returned Dora. 'You know you did. You said I hadn't turned out well, and compared me to him.'

'To whom?' I asked.

'To the page,' sobbed Dora. 'Oh, you cruel fellow, to compare your affectionate wife to a transported page! Why didn't you tell me your opinion of me before we were married? Why didn't you say, you hard-hearted thing, that you were convinced I was worse than a transported page? Oh, what a dreadful opinion to have of me! Oh, my goodness!'

'Now, Dora, my love,' I returned, gently trying to remove the handkerchief she pressed to her eyes, 'this is not only very ridiculous of you, but very wrong. In the first place, it's not true.'

'You always said he was a story-teller,' sobbed Dora. 'And now you say the same of me! Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!'

'My darling girl,' I retorted, 'I really must entreat you to be reasonable, and listen to what I did say, and do say. My dear Dora, unless we learn to do our duty to those whom we employ, they will never learn to do their duty to us. I am afraid we present opportunities to people to do wrong, that never ought to be presented. Even if we were as lax as we are, in all our arrangements, by choice--which we are not--even if we liked it, and found it agreeable to be so--which we don't--I am persuaded we should have no right to go on in this way. We are positively corrupting people. We are bound to think of that. I can't help thinking of it, Dora. It is a reflection I am unable to dismiss, and it sometimes makes me very uneasy. There, dear, that's all. Come now. Don't be foolish!'

Dora would not allow me, for a long time, to remove the handkerchief. She sat sobbing and murmuring behind it, that, if I was uneasy, why had I ever been married? Why hadn't I said, even the day before we went to church, that I knew I should be uneasy, and I would rather not? If I couldn't bear her, why didn't I send her away to her aunts at Putney, or

to Julia Mills in India? Julia would be glad to see her, and would not call her a transported page; Julia never had called her anything of the sort. In short, Dora was so afflicted, and so afflicted me by being in that condition, that I felt it was of no use repeating this kind of effort, though never so mildly, and I must take some other course.

What other course was left to take? To 'form her mind'? This was a common phrase of words which had a fair and promising sound, and I resolved to form Dora's mind.

I began immediately. When Dora was very childish, and I would have infinitely preferred to humour her, I tried to be grave--and disconcerted her, and myself too. I talked to her on the subjects which occupied my thoughts; and I read Shakespeare to her--and fatigued her to the last degree. I accustomed myself to giving her, as it were quite casually, little scraps of useful information, or sound opinion--and she started from them when I let them off, as if they had been crackers. No matter how incidentally or naturally I endeavoured to form my little wife's mind, I could not help seeing that she always had an instinctive perception of what I was about, and became a prey to the keenest apprehensions. In particular, it was clear to me, that she thought Shakespeare a terrible fellow. The formation went on very slowly.

I pressed Traddles into the service without his knowledge; and whenever he came to see us, exploded my mines upon him for the edification of Dora at second hand. The amount of practical wisdom I bestowed upon Traddles in this manner was immense, and of the best quality; but it had no other effect upon Dora than to depress her spirits, and make her always nervous with the dread that it would be her turn next. I found myself in the condition of a schoolmaster, a trap, a pitfall; of always playing spider to Dora's fly, and always pouncing out of my hole to her infinite disturbance.

Still, looking forward through this intermediate stage, to the time when there should be a perfect sympathy between Dora and me, and when I should have 'formed her mind' to my entire satisfaction, I persevered, even for months. Finding at last, however, that, although I had been all this time a very porcupine or hedgehog, bristling all over with determination, I had effected nothing, it began to occur to me that perhaps Dora's mind was already formed.

On further consideration this appeared so likely, that I abandoned my scheme, which had had a more promising appearance in words than in action; resolving henceforth to be satisfied with my child-wife, and to try to change her into nothing else by any process. I was heartily tired of being sagacious and prudent by myself, and of seeing my darling under restraint; so I bought a pretty pair of ear-rings for her, and a collar for Jip, and went home one day to make myself agreeable.

Dora was delighted with the little presents, and kissed me joyfully; but there was a shadow between us, however slight, and I had made up my mind that it should not be there. If there must be such a shadow anywhere, I would keep it for the future in my own breast.

I sat down by my wife on the sofa, and put the ear-rings in her ears; and then I told her that I feared we had not been quite as good company lately, as we used to be, and that the fault was mine. Which I sincerely felt, and which indeed it was.

'The truth is, Dora, my life,' I said; 'I have been trying to be wise.'

'And to make me wise too,' said Dora, timidly. 'Haven't you, Doady?'

I nodded assent to the pretty inquiry of the raised eyebrows, and kissed the parted lips.

'It's of not a bit of use,' said Dora, shaking her head, until the ear-rings rang again. 'You know what a little thing I am, and what I wanted you to call me from the first. If you can't do so, I am afraid you'll never like me. Are you sure you don't think, sometimes, it would have been better to have--'

'Done what, my dear?' For she made no effort to proceed.

'Nothing!' said Dora.

'Nothing?' I repeated.

She put her arms round my neck, and laughed, and called herself by her favourite name of a goose, and hid her face on my shoulder in such a profusion of curls that it was quite a task to clear them away and see it.

'Don't I think it would have been better to have done nothing, than to have tried to form my little wife's mind?' said I, laughing at myself. 'Is that the question? Yes, indeed, I do.'

'Is that what you have been trying?' cried Dora. 'Oh what a shocking boy!'

'But I shall never try any more,' said I. 'For I love her dearly as she is.'

'Without a story--really?' inquired Dora, creeping closer to me.

'Why should I seek to change,' said I, 'what has been so precious to me for so long! You never can show better than as your own natural self, my sweet Dora; and we'll try no conceited experiments, but go back to our old way, and be happy.'

'And be happy!' returned Dora. 'Yes! All day! And you won't mind things going a tiny morsel wrong, sometimes?'

'No, no,' said I. 'We must do the best we can.'

'And you won't tell me, any more, that we make other people bad,' coaxed Dora; 'will you? Because you know it's so dreadfully cross!'

'No, no,' said I.

'It's better for me to be stupid than uncomfortable, isn't it?' said Dora.

'Better to be naturally Dora than anything else in the world.'

'In the world! Ah, Doady, it's a large place!'

She shook her head, turned her delighted bright eyes up to mine, kissed me, broke into a merry laugh, and sprang away to put on Jip's new collar.

So ended my last attempt to make any change in Dora. I had been unhappy in trying it; I could not endure my own solitary wisdom; I could not reconcile it with her former appeal to me as my child-wife. I resolved to do what I could, in a quiet way, to improve our proceedings myself, but I foresaw that my utmost would be very little, or I must degenerate into the spider again, and be for ever lying in wait.

And the shadow I have mentioned, that was not to be between us any more, but was to rest wholly on my own heart? How did that fall?

The old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, if it were



changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever, and addressed me like a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night. I loved my wife dearly, and I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting.

In fulfilment of the compact I have made with myself, to reflect my mind on this paper, I again examine it, closely, and bring its secrets to the light. What I missed, I still regarded--I always regarded--as something that had been a dream of my youthful fancy; that was incapable of realization; that I was now discovering to be so, with some natural pain, as all men did. But that it would have been better for me if my wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which I had no partner; and that this might have been; I knew.

Between these two irreconcilable conclusions: the one, that what I felt was general and unavoidable; the other, that it was particular to me, and might have been different: I balanced curiously, with no distinct sense of their opposition to each other. When I thought of the airy dreams of youth that are incapable of realization, I thought of the better state preceding manhood that I had outgrown; and then the contented days with Agnes, in the dear old house, arose before me, like spectres of the dead, that might have some renewal in another world, but never more could be reanimated here.

Sometimes, the speculation came into my thoughts, What might have happened, or what would have happened, if Dora and I had never known each other? But she was so incorporated with my existence, that it was the idlest of all fancies, and would soon rise out of my reach and sight, like gossamer floating in the air.

I always loved her. What I am describing, slumbered, and half awoke, and slept again, in the innermost recesses of my mind. There was no evidence

of it in me; I know of no influence it had in anything I said or did. I bore the weight of all our little cares, and all my projects; Dora held the pens; and we both felt that our shares were adjusted as the case required. She was truly fond of me, and proud of me; and when Agnes wrote a few earnest words in her letters to Dora, of the pride and interest with which my old friends heard of my growing reputation, and read my book as if they heard me speaking its contents, Dora read them out to me with tears of joy in her bright eyes, and said I was a dear old clever, famous boy.

'The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart.' Those words of Mrs. Strong's were constantly recurring to me, at this time; were almost always present to my mind. I awoke with them, often, in the night; I remember to have even read them, in dreams, inscribed upon the walls of houses. For I knew, now, that my own heart was undisciplined when it first loved Dora; and that if it had been disciplined, it never could have felt, when we were married, what it had felt in its secret experience.

'There can be no disparity in marriage, like unsuitability of mind and purpose.' Those words I remembered too. I had endeavoured to adapt Dora to myself, and found it impracticable. It remained for me to adapt myself to Dora; to share with her what I could, and be happy; to bear on my own shoulders what I must, and be happy still. This was the discipline to which I tried to bring my heart, when I began to think. It made my second year much happier than my first; and, what was better still, made Dora's life all sunshine.

But, as that year wore on, Dora was not strong. I had hoped that lighter hands than mine would help to mould her character, and that a baby-smile upon her breast might change my child-wife to a woman. It was not to be. The spirit fluttered for a moment on the threshold of its little prison, and, unconscious of captivity, took wing.

'When I can run about again, as I used to do, aunt,' said Dora, 'I shall make Jip race. He is getting quite slow and lazy.'

'I suspect, my dear,' said my aunt quietly working by her side, 'he has a worse disorder than that. Age, Dora.'

'Do you think he is old?' said Dora, astonished. 'Oh, how strange it seems that Jip should be old!'

'It's a complaint we are all liable to, Little One, as we get on in life,' said my aunt, cheerfully; 'I don't feel more free from it than I used to be, I assure you.'

'But Jip,' said Dora, looking at him with compassion, 'even little Jip! Oh, poor fellow!'

'I dare say he'll last a long time yet, Blossom,' said my aunt, patting Dora on the cheek, as she leaned out of her couch to look at Jip, who responded by standing on his hind legs, and baulking himself in various asthmatic attempts to scramble up by the head and shoulders. 'He must have a piece of flannel in his house this winter, and I shouldn't wonder if he came out quite fresh again, with the flowers in the spring. Bless the little dog!' exclaimed my aunt, 'if he had as many lives as a cat, and was on the point of losing 'em all, he'd bark at me with his last breath, I believe!'

Dora had helped him up on the sofa; where he really was defying my aunt to such a furious extent, that he couldn't keep straight, but barked himself sideways. The more my aunt looked at him, the more he reproached her; for she had lately taken to spectacles, and for some inscrutable reason he considered the glasses personal.

Dora made him lie down by her, with a good deal of persuasion; and when he was quiet, drew one of his long ears through and through her hand, repeating thoughtfully, 'Even little Jip! Oh, poor fellow!'

'His lungs are good enough,' said my aunt, gaily, 'and his dislikes are not at all feeble. He has a good many years before him, no doubt. But if you want a dog to race with, Little Blossom, he has lived too well for that, and I'll give you one.'

'Thank you, aunt,' said Dora, faintly. 'But don't, please!'

'No?' said my aunt, taking off her spectacles.

'I couldn't have any other dog but Jip,' said Dora. 'It would be so unkind to Jip! Besides, I couldn't be such friends with any other dog but Jip; because he wouldn't have known me before I was married, and wouldn't have barked at Doady when he first came to our house. I couldn't care for any other dog but Jip, I am afraid, aunt.'

'To be sure!' said my aunt, patting her cheek again. 'You are right.'

'You are not offended,' said Dora. 'Are you?'

'Why, what a sensitive pet it is!' cried my aunt, bending over her affectionately. 'To think that I could be offended!'

'No, no, I didn't really think so,' returned Dora; 'but I am a little tired, and it made me silly for a moment--I am always a silly little thing, you know, but it made me more silly--to talk about Jip. He has known me in all that has happened to me, haven't you, Jip? And I couldn't bear to slight him, because he was a little altered--could I, Jip?'

Jip nestled closer to his mistress, and lazily licked her hand.

'You are not so old, Jip, are you, that you'll leave your mistress yet?' said Dora. 'We may keep one another company a little longer!'

My pretty Dora! When she came down to dinner on the ensuing Sunday, and was so glad to see old Traddles (who always dined with us on Sunday), we thought she would be 'running about as she used to do', in a few days. But they said, wait a few days more; and then, wait a few days more; and still she neither ran nor walked. She looked very pretty, and was very merry; but the little feet that used to be so nimble when they danced round Jip, were dull and motionless.

I began to carry her downstairs every morning, and upstairs every night. She would clasp me round the neck and laugh, the while, as if I did it for a wager. Jip would bark and caper round us, and go on before, and look back on the landing, breathing short, to see that we were coming. My aunt, the best and most cheerful of nurses, would trudge after us, a moving mass of shawls and pillows. Mr. Dick would not have relinquished his post of candle-bearer to anyone alive. Traddles would be often at the bottom of the staircase, looking on, and taking charge of sportive messages from Dora to the dearest girl in the world. We made quite a gay procession of it, and my child-wife was the gayest there.

But, sometimes, when I took her up, and felt that she was lighter in my arms, a dead blank feeling came upon me, as if I were approaching to some frozen region yet unseen, that numbed my life. I avoided the recognition of this feeling by any name, or by any communing with myself; until one night, when it was very strong upon me, and my aunt had left her with a parting cry of 'Good night, Little Blossom,' I sat down at my desk alone, and cried to think, Oh what a fatal name it was, and how the blossom withered in its bloom upon the tree!

## CHAPTER 49. I AM INVOLVED IN MYSTERY

I received one morning by the post, the following letter, dated Canterbury, and addressed to me at Doctor's Commons; which I read with some surprise:

'MY DEAR SIR,

'Circumstances beyond my individual control have, for a considerable lapse of time, effected a severance of that intimacy which, in the limited opportunities conceded to me in the midst of my professional duties, of contemplating the scenes and events of the past, tinged by the prismatic hues of memory, has ever afforded me, as it ever must continue to afford, gratifying emotions of no common description. This fact, my dear sir, combined with the distinguished elevation to which your talents have raised you, deters me from presuming to aspire to the liberty of addressing the companion of my youth, by the familiar appellation of Copperfield! It is sufficient to know that the name to which I do myself the honour to refer, will ever be treasured among the muniments of our house (I allude to the archives connected with our former lodgers, preserved by Mrs. Micawber), with sentiments of personal esteem amounting to affection.

'It is not for one, situated, through his original errors and a fortuitous combination of unpropitious events, as is the foundered Bark (if he may be allowed to assume so maritime a denomination), who now takes up the pen to address you--it is not, I repeat, for one so circumstanced, to adopt the language of compliment, or of congratulation. That he leaves to abler and to purer hands.

'If your more important avocations should admit of your ever tracing these imperfect characters thus far--which may be, or may not be, as circumstances arise--you will naturally inquire by what object am I influenced, then, in inditing the present missive? Allow me to say that I fully defer to the reasonable character of that inquiry, and proceed to develop it; premising that it is not an object of a pecuniary nature.

'Without more directly referring to any latent ability that may possibly exist on my part, of wielding the thunderbolt, or directing the devouring and avenging flame in any quarter, I may be permitted to observe, in passing, that my brightest visions are for ever dispelled--that my peace is shattered and my power of enjoyment destroyed--that my heart is no longer in the right place--and that I no more walk erect before my fellow man. The canker is in the flower. The cup is bitter to the brim. The worm is at his work, and will soon dispose of his victim. The sooner the better. But I will not digress.

'Placed in a mental position of peculiar painfulness, beyond the assuaging reach even of Mrs. Micawber's influence, though exercised in the tripartite character of woman, wife, and mother, it is my intention to fly from myself for a short period, and devote a respite of eight-and-forty hours to revisiting some metropolitan scenes of past enjoyment. Among other havens of domestic tranquillity and peace of mind, my feet will naturally tend towards the King's Bench Prison. In stating that I shall be (D. V.) on the outside of the south wall of that place of incarceration on civil process, the day after tomorrow, at seven in the evening, precisely, my object in this epistolary communication is accomplished.

'I do not feel warranted in soliciting my former friend Mr. Copperfield, or my former friend Mr. Thomas Traddles of the Inner Temple, if that gentleman is still existent and forthcoming, to condescend to meet me, and renew (so far as may be) our past relations of the olden time. I confine myself to throwing out the observation, that, at the hour and

place I have indicated, may be found such ruined vestiges as yet

'Remain,

'Of

'A

'Fallen Tower,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.

'P.S. It may be advisable to superadd to the above, the statement that Mrs. Micawber is not in confidential possession of my intentions.'

I read the letter over several times. Making due allowance for Mr. Micawber's lofty style of composition, and for the extraordinary relish with which he sat down and wrote long letters on all possible and impossible occasions, I still believed that something important lay hidden at the bottom of this roundabout communication. I put it down, to think about it; and took it up again, to read it once more; and was still pursuing it, when Traddles found me in the height of my perplexity.

'My dear fellow,' said I, 'I never was better pleased to see you. You come to give me the benefit of your sober judgement at a most opportune time. I have received a very singular letter, Traddles, from Mr. Micawber.'

'No?' cried Traddles. 'You don't say so? And I have received one from Mrs. Micawber!'

With that, Traddles, who was flushed with walking, and whose hair, under the combined effects of exercise and excitement, stood on end as if he saw a cheerful ghost, produced his letter and made an exchange with me. I watched him into the heart of Mr. Micawber's letter, and returned the



elevation of eyebrows with which he said "'Wielding the thunderbolt, or directing the devouring and avenging flame!" Bless me, Copperfield!'"--and then entered on the perusal of Mrs. Micawber's epistle.

It ran thus:

'My best regards to Mr. Thomas Traddles, and if he should still remember one who formerly had the happiness of being well acquainted with him, may I beg a few moments of his leisure time? I assure Mr. T. T. that I would not intrude upon his kindness, were I in any other position than on the confines of distraction.

'Though harrowing to myself to mention, the alienation of Mr. Micawber (formerly so domesticated) from his wife and family, is the cause of my addressing my unhappy appeal to Mr. Traddles, and soliciting his best indulgence. Mr. T. can form no adequate idea of the change in Mr. Micawber's conduct, of his wildness, of his violence. It has gradually augmented, until it assumes the appearance of aberration of intellect. Scarcely a day passes, I assure Mr. Traddles, on which some paroxysm does not take place. Mr. T. will not require me to depict my feelings, when I inform him that I have become accustomed to hear Mr. Micawber assert that he has sold himself to the D. Mystery and secrecy have long been his principal characteristic, have long replaced unlimited confidence. The slightest provocation, even being asked if there is anything he would prefer for dinner, causes him to express a wish for a separation. Last night, on being childishly solicited for twopence, to buy 'lemon-stunners'--a local sweetmeat--he presented an oyster-knife at the twins!

'I entreat Mr. Traddles to bear with me in entering into these details. Without them, Mr. T. would indeed find it difficult to form the faintest

conception of my heart-rending situation.

'May I now venture to confide to Mr. T. the purport of my letter? Will he now allow me to throw myself on his friendly consideration? Oh yes, for I know his heart!

'The quick eye of affection is not easily blinded, when of the female sex. Mr. Micawber is going to London. Though he studiously concealed his hand, this morning before breakfast, in writing the direction-card which he attached to the little brown valise of happier days, the eagle-glance of matrimonial anxiety detected, d, o, n, distinctly traced. The West-End destination of the coach, is the Golden Cross. Dare I fervently implore Mr. T. to see my misguided husband, and to reason with him? Dare I ask Mr. T. to endeavour to step in between Mr. Micawber and his agonized family? Oh no, for that would be too much!

'If Mr. Copperfield should yet remember one unknown to fame, will Mr. T. take charge of my unalterable regards and similar entreaties? In any case, he will have the benevolence to consider this communication strictly private, and on no account whatever to be alluded to, however distantly, in the presence of Mr. Micawber. If Mr. T. should ever reply to it (which I cannot but feel to be most improbable), a letter addressed to M. E., Post Office, Canterbury, will be fraught with less painful consequences than any addressed immediately to one, who subscribes herself, in extreme distress,

'Mr. Thomas Traddles's respectful friend and suppliant,

'EMMA MICAWBER.'

'What do you think of that letter?' said Traddles, casting his eyes upon me, when I had read it twice.

'What do you think of the other?' said I. For he was still reading it with knitted brows.

'I think that the two together, Copperfield,' replied Traddles, 'mean more than Mr. and Mrs. Micawber usually mean in their correspondence--but I don't know what. They are both written in good faith, I have no doubt, and without any collusion. Poor thing!' he was now alluding to Mrs. Micawber's letter, and we were standing side by side comparing the two; 'it will be a charity to write to her, at all events, and tell her that we will not fail to see Mr. Micawber.'

I acceded to this the more readily, because I now reproached myself with having treated her former letter rather lightly. It had set me thinking a good deal at the time, as I have mentioned in its place; but my absorption in my own affairs, my experience of the family, and my hearing nothing more, had gradually ended in my dismissing the subject. I had often thought of the Micawbers, but chiefly to wonder what 'pecuniary liabilities' they were establishing in Canterbury, and to recall how shy Mr. Micawber was of me when he became clerk to Uriah Heep.

However, I now wrote a comforting letter to Mrs. Micawber, in our joint names, and we both signed it. As we walked into town to post it, Traddles and I held a long conference, and launched into a number of speculations, which I need not repeat. We took my aunt into our counsels in the afternoon; but our only decided conclusion was, that we would be very punctual in keeping Mr. Micawber's appointment.

Although we appeared at the stipulated place a quarter of an hour before the time, we found Mr. Micawber already there. He was standing with his arms folded, over against the wall, looking at the spikes on the top, with a sentimental expression, as if they were the interlacing boughs of

trees that had shaded him in his youth.

When we accosted him, his manner was something more confused, and something less genteel, than of yore. He had relinquished his legal suit of black for the purposes of this excursion, and wore the old surtout and tights, but not quite with the old air. He gradually picked up more and more of it as we conversed with him; but, his very eye-glass seemed to hang less easily, and his shirt-collar, though still of the old formidable dimensions, rather drooped.

'Gentlemen!' said Mr. Micawber, after the first salutations, 'you are friends in need, and friends indeed. Allow me to offer my inquiries with reference to the physical welfare of Mrs. Copperfield in esse, and Mrs. Traddles in posse,--presuming, that is to say, that my friend Mr. Traddles is not yet united to the object of his affections, for weal and for woe.'

We acknowledged his politeness, and made suitable replies. He then directed our attention to the wall, and was beginning, 'I assure you, gentlemen,' when I ventured to object to that ceremonious form of address, and to beg that he would speak to us in the old way.

'My dear Copperfield,' he returned, pressing my hand, 'your cordiality overpowers me. This reception of a shattered fragment of the Temple once called Man--if I may be permitted so to express myself--bespeaks a heart that is an honour to our common nature. I was about to observe that I again behold the serene spot where some of the happiest hours of my existence fled by.'

'Made so, I am sure, by Mrs. Micawber,' said I. 'I hope she is well?'

'Thank you,' returned Mr. Micawber, whose face clouded at this reference, 'she is but so-so. And this,' said Mr. Micawber, nodding

his head sorrowfully, 'is the Bench! Where, for the first time in many revolving years, the overwhelming pressure of pecuniary liabilities was not proclaimed, from day to day, by importune voices declining to vacate the passage; where there was no knocker on the door for any creditor to appeal to; where personal service of process was not required, and detainees were merely lodged at the gate! Gentlemen,' said Mr. Micawber, 'when the shadow of that iron-work on the summit of the brick structure has been reflected on the gravel of the Parade, I have seen my children thread the mazes of the intricate pattern, avoiding the dark marks. I have been familiar with every stone in the place. If I betray weakness, you will know how to excuse me.'

'We have all got on in life since then, Mr. Micawber,' said I.

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, bitterly, 'when I was an inmate of that retreat I could look my fellow-man in the face, and punch his head if he offended me. My fellow-man and myself are no longer on those glorious terms!'

Turning from the building in a downcast manner, Mr. Micawber accepted my proffered arm on one side, and the proffered arm of Traddles on the other, and walked away between us.

'There are some landmarks,' observed Mr. Micawber, looking fondly back over his shoulder, 'on the road to the tomb, which, but for the impiety of the aspiration, a man would wish never to have passed. Such is the Bench in my chequered career.'

'Oh, you are in low spirits, Mr. Micawber,' said Traddles.

'I am, sir,' interposed Mr. Micawber.

'I hope,' said Traddles, 'it is not because you have conceived a dislike

to the law--for I am a lawyer myself, you know.'

Mr. Micawber answered not a word.

'How is our friend Heep, Mr. Micawber?' said I, after a silence.

'My dear Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, bursting into a state of much excitement, and turning pale, 'if you ask after my employer as your friend, I am sorry for it; if you ask after him as MY friend, I sardonically smile at it. In whatever capacity you ask after my employer, I beg, without offence to you, to limit my reply to this--that whatever his state of health may be, his appearance is foxy: not to say diabolical. You will allow me, as a private individual, to decline pursuing a subject which has lashed me to the utmost verge of desperation in my professional capacity.'

I expressed my regret for having innocently touched upon a theme that roused him so much. 'May I ask,' said I, 'without any hazard of repeating the mistake, how my old friends Mr. and Miss Wickfield are?'

'Miss Wickfield,' said Mr. Micawber, now turning red, 'is, as she always is, a pattern, and a bright example. My dear Copperfield, she is the only starry spot in a miserable existence. My respect for that young lady, my admiration of her character, my devotion to her for her love and truth, and goodness!--Take me,' said Mr. Micawber, 'down a turning, for, upon my soul, in my present state of mind I am not equal to this!'

We wheeled him off into a narrow street, where he took out his pocket-handkerchief, and stood with his back to a wall. If I looked as gravely at him as Traddles did, he must have found our company by no means inspiriting.

'It is my fate,' said Mr. Micawber, unfeignedly sobbing, but doing even

that, with a shadow of the old expression of doing something genteel; 'it is my fate, gentlemen, that the finer feelings of our nature have become reproaches to me. My homage to Miss Wickfield, is a flight of arrows in my bosom. You had better leave me, if you please, to walk the earth as a vagabond. The worm will settle my business in double-quick time.'

Without attending to this invocation, we stood by, until he put up his pocket-handkerchief, pulled up his shirt-collar, and, to delude any person in the neighbourhood who might have been observing him, hummed a tune with his hat very much on one side. I then mentioned--not knowing what might be lost if we lost sight of him yet--that it would give me great pleasure to introduce him to my aunt, if he would ride out to Highgate, where a bed was at his service.

'You shall make us a glass of your own punch, Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'and forget whatever you have on your mind, in pleasanter reminiscences.'

'Or, if confiding anything to friends will be more likely to relieve you, you shall impart it to us, Mr. Micawber,' said Traddles, prudently.

'Gentlemen,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'do with me as you will! I am a straw upon the surface of the deep, and am tossed in all directions by the elephants--I beg your pardon; I should have said the elements.'

We walked on, arm-in-arm, again; found the coach in the act of starting; and arrived at Highgate without encountering any difficulties by the way. I was very uneasy and very uncertain in my mind what to say or do for the best--so was Traddles, evidently. Mr. Micawber was for the most part plunged into deep gloom. He occasionally made an attempt to smarten himself, and hum the fag-end of a tune; but his relapses into profound melancholy were only made the more impressive by the mockery of a hat

exceedingly on one side, and a shirt-collar pulled up to his eyes.

We went to my aunt's house rather than to mine, because of Dora's not being well. My aunt presented herself on being sent for, and welcomed Mr. Micawber with gracious cordiality. Mr. Micawber kissed her hand, retired to the window, and pulling out his pocket-handkerchief, had a mental wrestle with himself.

Mr. Dick was at home. He was by nature so exceedingly compassionate of anyone who seemed to be ill at ease, and was so quick to find any such person out, that he shook hands with Mr. Micawber, at least half-a-dozen times in five minutes. To Mr. Micawber, in his trouble, this warmth, on the part of a stranger, was so extremely touching, that he could only say, on the occasion of each successive shake, 'My dear sir, you overpower me!' Which gratified Mr. Dick so much, that he went at it again with greater vigour than before.

'The friendliness of this gentleman,' said Mr. Micawber to my aunt, 'if you will allow me, ma'am, to cull a figure of speech from the vocabulary of our coarser national sports--floors me. To a man who is struggling with a complicated burden of perplexity and disquiet, such a reception is trying, I assure you.'

'My friend Mr. Dick,' replied my aunt proudly, 'is not a common man.'

'That I am convinced of,' said Mr. Micawber. 'My dear sir!' for Mr. Dick was shaking hands with him again; 'I am deeply sensible of your cordiality!'

'How do you find yourself?' said Mr. Dick, with an anxious look.

'Indifferent, my dear sir,' returned Mr. Micawber, sighing.



'You must keep up your spirits,' said Mr. Dick, 'and make yourself as comfortable as possible.'

Mr. Micawber was quite overcome by these friendly words, and by finding Mr. Dick's hand again within his own. 'It has been my lot,' he observed, 'to meet, in the diversified panorama of human existence, with an occasional oasis, but never with one so green, so gushing, as the present!'

At another time I should have been amused by this; but I felt that we were all constrained and uneasy, and I watched Mr. Micawber so anxiously, in his vacillations between an evident disposition to reveal something, and a counter-disposition to reveal nothing, that I was in a perfect fever. Traddles, sitting on the edge of his chair, with his eyes wide open, and his hair more emphatically erect than ever, stared by turns at the ground and at Mr. Micawber, without so much as attempting to put in a word. My aunt, though I saw that her shrewdest observation was concentrated on her new guest, had more useful possession of her wits than either of us; for she held him in conversation, and made it necessary for him to talk, whether he liked it or not.

'You are a very old friend of my nephew's, Mr. Micawber,' said my aunt. 'I wish I had had the pleasure of seeing you before.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'I wish I had had the honour of knowing you at an earlier period. I was not always the wreck you at present behold.'

'I hope Mrs. Micawber and your family are well, sir,' said my aunt.

Mr. Micawber inclined his head. 'They are as well, ma'am,' he desperately observed after a pause, 'as Aliens and Outcasts can ever hope to be.'

'Lord bless you, sir!' exclaimed my aunt, in her abrupt way. 'What are you talking about?'

'The subsistence of my family, ma'am,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'trembles in the balance. My employer--'

Here Mr. Micawber provokingly left off; and began to peel the lemons that had been under my directions set before him, together with all the other appliances he used in making punch.

'Your employer, you know,' said Mr. Dick, jogging his arm as a gentle reminder.

'My good sir,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'you recall me, I am obliged to you.' They shook hands again. 'My employer, ma'am--Mr. Heep--once did me the favour to observe to me, that if I were not in the receipt of the stipendiary emoluments appertaining to my engagement with him, I should probably be a mountebank about the country, swallowing a sword-blade, and eating the devouring element. For anything that I can perceive to the contrary, it is still probable that my children may be reduced to seek a livelihood by personal contortion, while Mrs. Micawber abets their unnatural feats by playing the barrel-organ.'

Mr. Micawber, with a random but expressive flourish of his knife, signified that these performances might be expected to take place after he was no more; then resumed his peeling with a desperate air.

My aunt leaned her elbow on the little round table that she usually kept beside her, and eyed him attentively. Notwithstanding the aversion with which I regarded the idea of entrapping him into any disclosure he was not prepared to make voluntarily, I should have taken him up at this point, but for the strange proceedings in which I saw him engaged;

whereof his putting the lemon-peel into the kettle, the sugar into the snuffer-tray, the spirit into the empty jug, and confidently attempting to pour boiling water out of a candlestick, were among the most remarkable. I saw that a crisis was at hand, and it came. He clattered all his means and implements together, rose from his chair, pulled out his pocket-handkerchief, and burst into tears.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, behind his handkerchief, 'this is an occupation, of all others, requiring an untroubled mind, and self-respect. I cannot perform it. It is out of the question.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'what is the matter? Pray speak out. You are among friends.'

'Among friends, sir!' repeated Mr. Micawber; and all he had reserved came breaking out of him. 'Good heavens, it is principally because I AM among friends that my state of mind is what it is. What is the matter, gentlemen? What is NOT the matter? Villainy is the matter; baseness is the matter; deception, fraud, conspiracy, are the matter; and the name of the whole atrocious mass is--HEEP!'

MY aunt clapped her hands, and we all started up as if we were possessed.

'The struggle is over!' said Mr. Micawber violently gesticulating with his pocket-handkerchief, and fairly striking out from time to time with both arms, as if he were swimming under superhuman difficulties. 'I will lead this life no longer. I am a wretched being, cut off from everything that makes life tolerable. I have been under a Taboo in that infernal scoundrel's service. Give me back my wife, give me back my family, substitute Micawber for the petty wretch who walks about in the boots at present on my feet, and call upon me to swallow a sword tomorrow, and I'll do it. With an appetite!'

I never saw a man so hot in my life. I tried to calm him, that we might come to something rational; but he got hotter and hotter, and wouldn't hear a word.

'I'll put my hand in no man's hand,' said Mr. Micawber, gasping, puffing, and sobbing, to that degree that he was like a man fighting with cold water, 'until I have--blown to fragments--the--a--detestable--serpent--HEEP! I'll partake of no one's hospitality, until I have--a--moved Mount Vesuvius--to eruption--on--a--the abandoned rascal--HEEP! Refreshment--a--underneath this roof--particularly punch--would--a--choke me--unless--I had--previously--choked the eyes--out of the head--a--of--interminable cheat, and liar--HEEP! I--a--I'll know nobody--and--a--say nothing--and--a--live nowhere--until I have crushed--to--a--undiscoverable atoms--the--transcendent and immortal hypocrite and perjurer--HEEP!'

I really had some fear of Mr. Micawber's dying on the spot. The manner in which he struggled through these inarticulate sentences, and, whenever he found himself getting near the name of Heep, fought his way on to it, dashed at it in a fainting state, and brought it out with a vehemence little less than marvellous, was frightful; but now, when he sank into a chair, steaming, and looked at us, with every possible colour in his face that had no business there, and an endless procession of lumps following one another in hot haste up his throat, whence they seemed to shoot into his forehead, he had the appearance of being in the last extremity. I would have gone to his assistance, but he waved me off, and wouldn't hear a word.

'No, Copperfield!--No communication--a--until--Miss Wickfield--a--redress from wrongs inflicted by consummate scoundrel--HEEP!' (I am quite convinced he could not have uttered three

words, but for the amazing energy with which this word inspired him when he felt it coming.) 'Inviolable secret--a--from the whole world--a--no exceptions--this day week--a--at breakfast-time--a--everybody present--including aunt--a--and extremely friendly gentleman--to be at the hotel at Canterbury--a--where--Mrs. Micawber and myself--Auld Lang Syne in chorus--and--a--will expose intolerable ruffian--HEEP! No more to say--a--or listen to persuasion--go immediately--not capable--a--bear society--upon the track of devoted and doomed traitor--HEEP!'

With this last repetition of the magic word that had kept him going at all, and in which he surpassed all his previous efforts, Mr. Micawber rushed out of the house; leaving us in a state of excitement, hope, and wonder, that reduced us to a condition little better than his own. But even then his passion for writing letters was too strong to be resisted; for while we were yet in the height of our excitement, hope, and wonder, the following pastoral note was brought to me from a neighbouring tavern, at which he had called to write it:--

'Most secret and confidential.

'MY DEAR SIR,

'I beg to be allowed to convey, through you, my apologies to your excellent aunt for my late excitement. An explosion of a smouldering volcano long suppressed, was the result of an internal contest more easily conceived than described.

'I trust I rendered tolerably intelligible my appointment for the morning of this day week, at the house of public entertainment at Canterbury, where Mrs. Micawber and myself had once the honour of uniting our voices to yours, in the well-known strain of the Immortal exciseman nurtured beyond the Tweed.

'The duty done, and act of reparation performed, which can alone enable me to contemplate my fellow mortal, I shall be known no more. I shall simply require to be deposited in that place of universal resort, where

Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,  
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep,

'--With the plain Inscription,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

#### CHAPTER 50. Mr. PEGGOTTY'S DREAM COMES TRUE

By this time, some months had passed since our interview on the bank of the river with Martha. I had never seen her since, but she had communicated with Mr. Peggotty on several occasions. Nothing had come of her zealous intervention; nor could I infer, from what he told me, that any clue had been obtained, for a moment, to Emily's fate. I confess that I began to despair of her recovery, and gradually to sink deeper and deeper into the belief that she was dead.

His conviction remained unchanged. So far as I know--and I believe his honest heart was transparent to me--he never wavered again, in his solemn certainty of finding her. His patience never tired. And, although I trembled for the agony it might one day be to him to have his strong assurance shivered at a blow, there was something so religious in it, so affectingly expressive of its anchor being in the purest depths of his fine nature, that the respect and honour in which I held him were exalted every day.

His was not a lazy trustfulness that hoped, and did no more. He had been a man of sturdy action all his life, and he knew that in all things wherein he wanted help he must do his own part faithfully, and help himself. I have known him set out in the night, on a misgiving that the light might not be, by some accident, in the window of the old boat, and walk to Yarmouth. I have known him, on reading something in the newspaper that might apply to her, take up his stick, and go forth on a journey of three--or four-score miles. He made his way by sea to Naples, and back, after hearing the narrative to which Miss Dartle had assisted me. All his journeys were ruggedly performed; for he was always steadfast in a purpose of saving money for Emily's sake, when she should be found. In all this long pursuit, I never heard him repine; I never heard him say he was fatigued, or out of heart.

Dora had often seen him since our marriage, and was quite fond of him. I fancy his figure before me now, standing near her sofa, with his rough cap in his hand, and the blue eyes of my child-wife raised, with a timid wonder, to his face. Sometimes of an evening, about twilight, when he came to talk with me, I would induce him to smoke his pipe in the garden, as we slowly paced to and fro together; and then, the picture of his deserted home, and the comfortable air it used to have in my childish eyes of an evening when the fire was burning, and the wind moaning round it, came most vividly into my mind.

One evening, at this hour, he told me that he had found Martha waiting near his lodging on the preceding night when he came out, and that she had asked him not to leave London on any account, until he should have seen her again.

'Did she tell you why?' I inquired.

'I asked her, Mas'r Davy,' he replied, 'but it is but few words as she ever says, and she on'y got my promise and so went away.'

'Did she say when you might expect to see her again?' I demanded.

'No, Mas'r Davy,' he returned, drawing his hand thoughtfully down his face. 'I asked that too; but it was more (she said) than she could tell.'

As I had long forborne to encourage him with hopes that hung on threads, I made no other comment on this information than that I supposed he would see her soon. Such speculations as it engendered within me I kept to myself, and those were faint enough.

I was walking alone in the garden, one evening, about a fortnight afterwards. I remember that evening well. It was the second in Mr. Micawber's week of suspense. There had been rain all day, and there was a damp feeling in the air. The leaves were thick upon the trees, and heavy with wet; but the rain had ceased, though the sky was still dark; and the hopeful birds were singing cheerfully. As I walked to and fro in the garden, and the twilight began to close around me, their little voices were hushed; and that peculiar silence which belongs to such an evening in the country when the lightest trees are quite still, save for the occasional droppings from their boughs, prevailed.

There was a little green perspective of trellis-work and ivy at the side of our cottage, through which I could see, from the garden where I was walking, into the road before the house. I happened to turn my eyes towards this place, as I was thinking of many things; and I saw a figure beyond, dressed in a plain cloak. It was bending eagerly towards me, and beckoning.

'Martha!' said I, going to it.

'Can you come with me?' she inquired, in an agitated whisper. 'I have



been to him, and he is not at home. I wrote down where he was to come, and left it on his table with my own hand. They said he would not be out long. I have tidings for him. Can you come directly?'

My answer was, to pass out at the gate immediately. She made a hasty gesture with her hand, as if to entreat my patience and my silence, and turned towards London, whence, as her dress betokened, she had come expeditiously on foot.

I asked her if that were not our destination? On her motioning Yes, with the same hasty gesture as before, I stopped an empty coach that was coming by, and we got into it. When I asked her where the coachman was to drive, she answered, 'Anywhere near Golden Square! And quick!!--then shrunk into a corner, with one trembling hand before her face, and the other making the former gesture, as if she could not bear a voice.

Now much disturbed, and dazzled with conflicting gleams of hope and dread, I looked at her for some explanation. But seeing how strongly she desired to remain quiet, and feeling that it was my own natural inclination too, at such a time, I did not attempt to break the silence. We proceeded without a word being spoken. Sometimes she glanced out of the window, as though she thought we were going slowly, though indeed we were going fast; but otherwise remained exactly as at first.

We alighted at one of the entrances to the Square she had mentioned, where I directed the coach to wait, not knowing but that we might have some occasion for it. She laid her hand on my arm, and hurried me on to one of the sombre streets, of which there are several in that part, where the houses were once fair dwellings in the occupation of single families, but have, and had, long degenerated into poor lodgings let off in rooms. Entering at the open door of one of these, and releasing my arm, she beckoned me to follow her up the common staircase, which was like a tributary channel to the street.

The house swarmed with inmates. As we went up, doors of rooms were opened and people's heads put out; and we passed other people on the stairs, who were coming down. In glancing up from the outside, before we entered, I had seen women and children lolling at the windows over flower-pots; and we seemed to have attracted their curiosity, for these were principally the observers who looked out of their doors. It was a broad panelled staircase, with massive balustrades of some dark wood; cornices above the doors, ornamented with carved fruit and flowers; and broad seats in the windows. But all these tokens of past grandeur were miserably decayed and dirty; rot, damp, and age, had weakened the flooring, which in many places was unsound and even unsafe. Some attempts had been made, I noticed, to infuse new blood into this dwindling frame, by repairing the costly old wood-work here and there with common deal; but it was like the marriage of a reduced old noble to a plebeian pauper, and each party to the ill-assorted union shrunk away from the other. Several of the back windows on the staircase had been darkened or wholly blocked up. In those that remained, there was scarcely any glass; and, through the crumbling frames by which the bad air seemed always to come in, and never to go out, I saw, through other glassless windows, into other houses in a similar condition, and looked giddily down into a wretched yard, which was the common dust-heap of the mansion.

We proceeded to the top-storey of the house. Two or three times, by the way, I thought I observed in the indistinct light the skirts of a female figure going up before us. As we turned to ascend the last flight of stairs between us and the roof, we caught a full view of this figure pausing for a moment, at a door. Then it turned the handle, and went in.

'What's this!' said Martha, in a whisper. 'She has gone into my room. I don't know her!'

I knew her. I had recognized her with amazement, for Miss Dartle.

I said something to the effect that it was a lady whom I had seen before, in a few words, to my conductress; and had scarcely done so, when we heard her voice in the room, though not, from where we stood, what she was saying. Martha, with an astonished look, repeated her former action, and softly led me up the stairs; and then, by a little back-door which seemed to have no lock, and which she pushed open with a touch, into a small empty garret with a low sloping roof, little better than a cupboard. Between this, and the room she had called hers, there was a small door of communication, standing partly open. Here we stopped, breathless with our ascent, and she placed her hand lightly on my lips. I could only see, of the room beyond, that it was pretty large; that there was a bed in it; and that there were some common pictures of ships upon the walls. I could not see Miss Dartle, or the person whom we had heard her address. Certainly, my companion could not, for my position was the best. A dead silence prevailed for some moments. Martha kept one hand on my lips, and raised the other in a listening attitude.

'It matters little to me her not being at home,' said Rosa Dartle haughtily, 'I know nothing of her. It is you I come to see.'

'Me?' replied a soft voice.

At the sound of it, a thrill went through my frame. For it was Emily's!

'Yes,' returned Miss Dartle, 'I have come to look at you. What? You are not ashamed of the face that has done so much?'

The resolute and unrelenting hatred of her tone, its cold stern sharpness, and its mastered rage, presented her before me, as if I had seen her standing in the light. I saw the flashing black eyes, and the passion-wasted figure; and I saw the scar, with its white track cutting

through her lips, quivering and throbbing as she spoke.

'I have come to see,' she said, 'James Steerforth's fancy; the girl who ran away with him, and is the town-talk of the commonest people of her native place; the bold, flaunting, practised companion of persons like James Steerforth. I want to know what such a thing is like.'

There was a rustle, as if the unhappy girl, on whom she heaped these taunts, ran towards the door, and the speaker swiftly interposed herself before it. It was succeeded by a moment's pause.

When Miss Dartle spoke again, it was through her set teeth, and with a stamp upon the ground.

'Stay there!' she said, 'or I'll proclaim you to the house, and the whole street! If you try to evade me, I'll stop you, if it's by the hair, and raise the very stones against you!'

A frightened murmur was the only reply that reached my ears. A silence succeeded. I did not know what to do. Much as I desired to put an end to the interview, I felt that I had no right to present myself; that it was for Mr. Peggotty alone to see her and recover her. Would he never come? I thought impatiently.

'So!' said Rosa Dartle, with a contemptuous laugh, 'I see her at last! Why, he was a poor creature to be taken by that delicate mock-modesty, and that hanging head!'

'Oh, for Heaven's sake, spare me!' exclaimed Emily. 'Whoever you are, you know my pitiable story, and for Heaven's sake spare me, if you would be spared yourself!'

'If I would be spared!' returned the other fiercely; 'what is there in

common between us, do you think!'

'Nothing but our sex,' said Emily, with a burst of tears.

'And that,' said Rosa Dartle, 'is so strong a claim, preferred by one so infamous, that if I had any feeling in my breast but scorn and abhorrence of you, it would freeze it up. Our sex! You are an honour to our sex!'

'I have deserved this,' said Emily, 'but it's dreadful! Dear, dear lady, think what I have suffered, and how I am fallen! Oh, Martha, come back! Oh, home, home!'

Miss Dartle placed herself in a chair, within view of the door, and looked downward, as if Emily were crouching on the floor before her. Being now between me and the light, I could see her curled lip, and her cruel eyes intently fixed on one place, with a greedy triumph.

'Listen to what I say!' she said; 'and reserve your false arts for your dupes. Do you hope to move me by your tears? No more than you could charm me by your smiles, you purchased slave.'

'Oh, have some mercy on me!' cried Emily. 'Show me some compassion, or I shall die mad!'

'It would be no great penance,' said Rosa Dartle, 'for your crimes. Do you know what you have done? Do you ever think of the home you have laid waste?'

'Oh, is there ever night or day, when I don't think of it!' cried Emily; and now I could just see her, on her knees, with her head thrown back, her pale face looking upward, her hands wildly clasped and held out, and her hair streaming about her. 'Has there ever been a single minute,

waking or sleeping, when it hasn't been before me, just as it used to be in the lost days when I turned my back upon it for ever and for ever! Oh, home, home! Oh dear, dear uncle, if you ever could have known the agony your love would cause me when I fell away from good, you never would have shown it to me so constant, much as you felt it; but would have been angry to me, at least once in my life, that I might have had some comfort! I have none, none, no comfort upon earth, for all of them were always fond of me!' She dropped on her face, before the imperious figure in the chair, with an imploring effort to clasp the skirt of her dress.

Rosa Dartle sat looking down upon her, as inflexible as a figure of brass. Her lips were tightly compressed, as if she knew that she must keep a strong constraint upon herself--I write what I sincerely believe--or she would be tempted to strike the beautiful form with her foot. I saw her, distinctly, and the whole power of her face and character seemed forced into that expression.---Would he never come?

'The miserable vanity of these earth-worms!' she said, when she had so far controlled the angry heavings of her breast, that she could trust herself to speak. 'YOUR home! Do you imagine that I bestow a thought on it, or suppose you could do any harm to that low place, which money would not pay for, and handsomely? YOUR home! You were a part of the trade of your home, and were bought and sold like any other vendible thing your people dealt in.'

'Oh, not that!' cried Emily. 'Say anything of me; but don't visit my disgrace and shame, more than I have done, on folks who are as honourable as you! Have some respect for them, as you are a lady, if you have no mercy for me.'

'I speak,' she said, not deigning to take any heed of this appeal, and drawing away her dress from the contamination of Emily's touch, 'I speak

of HIS home--where I live. Here,' she said, stretching out her hand with her contemptuous laugh, and looking down upon the prostrate girl, 'is a worthy cause of division between lady-mother and gentleman-son; of grief in a house where she wouldn't have been admitted as a kitchen-girl; of anger, and repining, and reproach. This piece of pollution, picked up from the water-side, to be made much of for an hour, and then tossed back to her original place!'

'No! no!' cried Emily, clasping her hands together. 'When he first came into my way--that the day had never dawned upon me, and he had met me being carried to my grave!--I had been brought up as virtuous as you or any lady, and was going to be the wife of as good a man as you or any lady in the world can ever marry. If you live in his home and know him, you know, perhaps, what his power with a weak, vain girl might be. I don't defend myself, but I know well, and he knows well, or he will know when he comes to die, and his mind is troubled with it, that he used all his power to deceive me, and that I believed him, trusted him, and loved him!'

Rosa Dartle sprang up from her seat; recoiled; and in recoiling struck at her, with a face of such malignity, so darkened and disfigured by passion, that I had almost thrown myself between them. The blow, which had no aim, fell upon the air. As she now stood panting, looking at her with the utmost detestation that she was capable of expressing, and trembling from head to foot with rage and scorn, I thought I had never seen such a sight, and never could see such another.

'YOU love him? You?' she cried, with her clenched hand, quivering as if it only wanted a weapon to stab the object of her wrath.

Emily had shrunk out of my view. There was no reply.

'And tell that to ME,' she added, 'with your shameful lips? Why don't

they whip these creatures? If I could order it to be done, I would have this girl whipped to death.'

And so she would, I have no doubt. I would not have trusted her with the rack itself, while that furious look lasted. She slowly, very slowly, broke into a laugh, and pointed at Emily with her hand, as if she were a sight of shame for gods and men.

'SHE love!' she said. 'THAT carrion! And he ever cared for her, she'd tell me. Ha, ha! The liars that these traders are!'

Her mockery was worse than her undisguised rage. Of the two, I would have much preferred to be the object of the latter. But, when she suffered it to break loose, it was only for a moment. She had chained it up again, and however it might tear her within, she subdued it to herself.

'I came here, you pure fountain of love,' she said, 'to see--as I began by telling you--what such a thing as you was like. I was curious. I am satisfied. Also to tell you, that you had best seek that home of yours, with all speed, and hide your head among those excellent people who are expecting you, and whom your money will console. When it's all gone, you can believe, and trust, and love again, you know! I thought you a broken toy that had lasted its time; a worthless spangle that was tarnished, and thrown away. But, finding you true gold, a very lady, and an ill-used innocent, with a fresh heart full of love and trustfulness--which you look like, and is quite consistent with your story!--I have something more to say. Attend to it; for what I say I'll do. Do you hear me, you fairy spirit? What I say, I mean to do!'

Her rage got the better of her again, for a moment; but it passed over her face like a spasm, and left her smiling.



'Hide yourself,' she pursued, 'if not at home, somewhere. Let it be somewhere beyond reach; in some obscure life--or, better still, in some obscure death. I wonder, if your loving heart will not break, you have found no way of helping it to be still! I have heard of such means sometimes. I believe they may be easily found.'

A low crying, on the part of Emily, interrupted her here. She stopped, and listened to it as if it were music.

'I am of a strange nature, perhaps,' Rosa Dartle went on; 'but I can't breathe freely in the air you breathe. I find it sickly. Therefore, I will have it cleared; I will have it purified of you. If you live here tomorrow, I'll have your story and your character proclaimed on the common stair. There are decent women in the house, I am told; and it is a pity such a light as you should be among them, and concealed. If, leaving here, you seek any refuge in this town in any character but your true one (which you are welcome to bear, without molestation from me), the same service shall be done you, if I hear of your retreat. Being assisted by a gentleman who not long ago aspired to the favour of your hand, I am sanguine as to that.'

Would he never, never come? How long was I to bear this? How long could I bear it? 'Oh me, oh me!' exclaimed the wretched Emily, in a tone that might have touched the hardest heart, I should have thought; but there was no relenting in Rosa Dartle's smile. 'What, what, shall I do!'

'Do?' returned the other. 'Live happy in your own reflections! Consecrate your existence to the recollection of James Steerforth's tenderness--he would have made you his serving-man's wife, would he not?---or to feeling grateful to the upright and deserving creature who would have taken you as his gift. Or, if those proud remembrances, and the consciousness of your own virtues, and the honourable position to which they have raised you in the eyes of everything that wears the

human shape, will not sustain you, marry that good man, and be happy in his condescension. If this will not do either, die! There are doorways and dust-heaps for such deaths, and such despair--find one, and take your flight to Heaven!'

I heard a distant foot upon the stairs. I knew it, I was certain. It was his, thank God!

She moved slowly from before the door when she said this, and passed out of my sight.

'But mark!' she added, slowly and sternly, opening the other door to go away, 'I am resolved, for reasons that I have and hatreds that I entertain, to cast you out, unless you withdraw from my reach altogether, or drop your pretty mask. This is what I had to say; and what I say, I mean to do!'

The foot upon the stairs came nearer--nearer--passed her as she went down--rushed into the room!

'Uncle!'

A fearful cry followed the word. I paused a moment, and looking in, saw him supporting her insensible figure in his arms. He gazed for a few seconds in the face; then stooped to kiss it--oh, how tenderly!--and drew a handkerchief before it.

'Mas'r Davy,' he said, in a low tremulous voice, when it was covered, 'I thank my Heav'nly Father as my dream's come true! I thank Him hearty for having guided of me, in His own ways, to my darling!'

With those words he took her up in his arms; and, with the veiled face lying on his bosom, and addressed towards his own, carried her,

motionless and unconscious, down the stairs.

#### CHAPTER 51. THE BEGINNING OF A LONGER JOURNEY

It was yet early in the morning of the following day, when, as I was walking in my garden with my aunt (who took little other exercise now, being so much in attendance on my dear Dora), I was told that Mr. Peggotty desired to speak with me. He came into the garden to meet me half-way, on my going towards the gate; and bared his head, as it was always his custom to do when he saw my aunt, for whom he had a high respect. I had been telling her all that had happened overnight. Without saying a word, she walked up with a cordial face, shook hands with him, and patted him on the arm. It was so expressively done, that she had no need to say a word. Mr. Peggotty understood her quite as well as if she had said a thousand.

'I'll go in now, Trot,' said my aunt, 'and look after Little Blossom, who will be getting up presently.'

'Not along of my being heer, ma'am, I hope?' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Unless my wits is gone a bahd's neezing'--by which Mr. Peggotty meant to say, bird's-nesting--'this morning, 'tis along of me as you're a-going to quit us?'

'You have something to say, my good friend,' returned my aunt, 'and will do better without me.'

'By your leave, ma'am,' returned Mr. Peggotty, 'I should take it kind, pervising you doen't mind my clicketten, if you'd bide heer.'

'Would you?' said my aunt, with short good-nature. 'Then I am sure I will!'

So, she drew her arm through Mr. Peggotty's, and walked with him to a leafy little summer-house there was at the bottom of the garden, where she sat down on a bench, and I beside her. There was a seat for Mr. Peggotty too, but he preferred to stand, leaning his hand on the small rustic table. As he stood, looking at his cap for a little while before beginning to speak, I could not help observing what power and force of character his sinewy hand expressed, and what a good and trusty companion it was to his honest brow and iron-grey hair.

'I took my dear child away last night,' Mr. Peggotty began, as he raised his eyes to ours, 'to my lodging, wheer I have a long time been expecting of her and preparing fur her. It was hours afore she knowed me right; and when she did, she kneeled down at my feet, and kiender said to me, as if it was her prayers, how it all come to be. You may believe me, when I heerd her voice, as I had heerd at home so playful--and see her humbled, as it might be in the dust our Saviour wrote in with his blessed hand--I felt a wownd go to my 'art, in the midst of all its thankfulness.'

He drew his sleeve across his face, without any pretence of concealing why; and then cleared his voice.

'It warn't for long as I felt that; for she was found. I had on'y to think as she was found, and it was gone. I doen't know why I do so much as mention of it now, I'm sure. I didn't have it in my mind a minute ago, to say a word about myself; but it come up so nat'ral, that I yielded to it afore I was aweer.'

'You are a self-denying soul,' said my aunt, 'and will have your reward.'

Mr. Peggotty, with the shadows of the leaves playing athwart his face, made a surprised inclination of the head towards my aunt, as an acknowledgement of her good opinion; then took up the thread he had relinquished.

'When my Em'ly took flight,' he said, in stern wrath for the moment, 'from the house wheer she was made a prisoner by that theer spotted snake as Mas'r Davy see,--and his story's trew, and may GOD confound him!--she took flight in the night. It was a dark night, with a many stars a-shining. She was wild. She ran along the sea beach, believing the old boat was theer; and calling out to us to turn away our faces, for she was a-coming by. She heerd herself a-crying out, like as if it was another person; and cut herself on them sharp-pinted stones and rocks, and felt it no more than if she had been rock herself. Ever so fur she run, and there was fire afore her eyes, and roarings in her ears. Of a sudden--or so she thowt, you unnerstand--the day broke, wet and windy, and she was lying b'low a heap of stone upon the shore, and a woman was a-speaking to her, saying, in the language of that country, what was it as had gone so much amiss?'

He saw everything he related. It passed before him, as he spoke, so vividly, that, in the intensity of his earnestness, he presented what he described to me, with greater distinctness than I can express. I can hardly believe, writing now long afterwards, but that I was actually present in these scenes; they are impressed upon me with such an astonishing air of fidelity.

'As Em'ly's eyes--which was heavy--see this woman better,' Mr. Peggotty went on, 'she know'd as she was one of them as she had often talked to on the beach. Fur, though she had run (as I have said) ever so fur in the night, she had oftentimes wandered long ways, partly afoot, partly in boats and carriages, and know'd all that country, 'long the coast,

miles and miles. She hadn't no children of her own, this woman, being a young wife; but she was a-looking to have one afore long. And may my prayers go up to Heaven that 'twill be a happiness to her, and a comfort, and a honour, all her life! May it love her and be dootiful to her, in her old age; helpful of her at the last; a Angel to her heer, and heerafter!'

'Amen!' said my aunt.

'She had been summat timorous and down,' said Mr. Peggotty, and had sat, at first, a little way off, at her spinning, or such work as it was, when Em'ly talked to the children. But Em'ly had took notice of her, and had gone and spoke to her; and as the young woman was partial to the children herself, they had soon made friends. Sermuchser, that when Em'ly went that way, she always giv Em'ly flowers. This was her as now asked what it was that had gone so much amiss. Em'ly told her, and she--took her home. She did indeed. She took her home,' said Mr. Peggotty, covering his face.

He was more affected by this act of kindness, than I had ever seen him affected by anything since the night she went away. My aunt and I did not attempt to disturb him.

'It was a little cottage, you may suppose,' he said, presently, 'but she found space for Em'ly in it,--her husband was away at sea,--and she kep it secret, and prevailed upon such neighbours as she had (they was not many near) to keep it secret too. Em'ly was took bad with fever, and, what is very strange to me is,--maybe 'tis not so strange to scholars,--the language of that country went out of her head, and she could only speak her own, that no one unnerstood. She recollects, as if she had dreamed it, that she lay there always a-talking her own tongue, always believing as the old boat was round the next pint in the bay, and begging and imploring of 'em to send theer and tell how she was dying,

and bring back a message of forgiveness, if it was on'y a wured. A'most the whole time, she thowt,--now, that him as I made mention on just now was lurking for her unnerneath the winder; now that him as had brought her to this was in the room,--and cried to the good young woman not to give her up, and know'd, at the same time, that she couldn't unnerstand, and dreaded that she must be took away. Likewise the fire was afore her eyes, and the roarings in her ears; and theer was no today, nor yesterday, nor yet tomorrow; but everything in her life as ever had been, or as ever could be, and everything as never had been, and as never could be, was a crowding on her all at once, and nothing clear nor welcome, and yet she sang and laughed about it! How long this lasted, I doen't know; but then theer come a sleep; and in that sleep, from being a many times stronger than her own self, she fell into the weakness of the littlest child.'

Here he stopped, as if for relief from the terrors of his own description. After being silent for a few moments, he pursued his story.

'It was a pleasant arternoon when she awoke; and so quiet, that there warn't a sound but the rippling of that blue sea without a tide, upon the shore. It was her belief, at first, that she was at home upon a Sunday morning; but the vine leaves as she see at the winder, and the hills beyond, warn't home, and contradicted of her. Then, come in her friend to watch alongside of her bed; and then she know'd as the old boat warn't round that next pint in the bay no more, but was fur off; and know'd where she was, and why; and broke out a-crying on that good young woman's bosom, wheer I hope her baby is a-lying now, a-cheering of her with its pretty eyes!'

He could not speak of this good friend of Emily's without a flow of tears. It was in vain to try. He broke down again, endeavouring to bless her!

'That done my Em'ly good,' he resumed, after such emotion as I could not behold without sharing in; and as to my aunt, she wept with all her heart; 'that done Em'ly good, and she begun to mend. But, the language of that country was quite gone from her, and she was forced to make signs. So she went on, getting better from day to day, slow, but sure, and trying to learn the names of common things--names as she seemed never to have heerd in all her life--till one evening come, when she was a-setting at her window, looking at a little girl at play upon the beach. And of a sudden this child held out her hand, and said, what would be in English, "Fisherman's daughter, here's a shell!"--for you are to unnerstand that they used at first to call her "Pretty lady", as the general way in that country is, and that she had taught 'em to call her "Fisherman's daughter" instead. The child says of a sudden, "Fisherman's daughter, here's a shell!" Then Em'ly unnerstands her; and she answers, bursting out a-crying; and it all comes back!

'When Em'ly got strong again,' said Mr. Peggotty, after another short interval of silence, 'she cast about to leave that good young creetur, and get to her own country. The husband was come home, then; and the two together put her aboard a small trader bound to Leghorn, and from that to France. She had a little money, but it was less than little as they would take for all they done. I'm a'most glad on it, though they was so poor! What they done, is laid up wheer neither moth or rust doth corrupt, and wheer thieves do not break through nor steal. Mas'r Davy, it'll outlast all the treasure in the wureld.

'Em'ly got to France, and took service to wait on travelling ladies at a inn in the port. Theer, theer come, one day, that snake. --Let him never come nigh me. I doen't know what hurt I might do him!--Soon as she see him, without him seeing her, all her fear and wildness returned upon her, and she fled afore the very breath he draw'd. She come to England, and was set ashore at Dover.



'I doen't know,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'for sure, when her 'art begun to fail her; but all the way to England she had thowt to come to her dear home. Soon as she got to England she turned her face tow'rds it. But, fear of not being forgiv, fear of being pinted at, fear of some of us being dead along of her, fear of many things, turned her from it, kiender by force, upon the road: "Uncle, uncle," she says to me, "the fear of not being worthy to do what my torn and bleeding breast so longed to do, was the most fright'ning fear of all! I turned back, when my 'art was full of prayers that I might crawl to the old door-step, in the night, kiss it, lay my wicked face upon it, and theer be found dead in the morning."

'She come,' said Mr. Peggotty, dropping his voice to an awe-stricken whisper, 'to London. She--as had never seen it in her life--alone--without a penny--young--so pretty--come to London. A'most the moment as she lighted heer, all so desolate, she found (as she believed) a friend; a decent woman as spoke to her about the needle-work as she had been brought up to do, about finding plenty of it fur her, about a lodging fur the night, and making secret inquisition concerning of me and all at home, tomorrow. When my child,' he said aloud, and with an energy of gratitude that shook him from head to foot, 'stood upon the brink of more than I can say or think on--Martha, trew to her promise, saved her.'

I could not repress a cry of joy.

'Mas'r Davy!' said he, gripping my hand in that strong hand of his, 'it was you as first made mention of her to me. I thankee, sir! She was arnest. She had know'd of her bitter knowledge wheer to watch and what to do. She had done it. And the Lord was above all! She come, white and hurried, upon Em'ly in her sleep. She says to her, "Rise up from worse than death, and come with me!" Them belonging to the house would have stopped her, but they might as soon have stopped the sea. "Stand away

from me," she says, "I am a ghost that calls her from beside her open grave!" She told Em'ly she had seen me, and know'd I loved her, and forgive her. She wrapped her, hasty, in her clothes. She took her, faint and trembling, on her arm. She heeded no more what they said, than if she had had no ears. She walked among 'em with my child, minding only her; and brought her safe out, in the dead of the night, from that black pit of ruin!

'She attended on Em'ly,' said Mr. Peggotty, who had released my hand, and put his own hand on his heaving chest; 'she attended to my Em'ly, lying wearied out, and wandering betwixt whiles, till late next day. Then she went in search of me; then in search of you, Mas'r Davy. She didn't tell Em'ly what she come out fur, lest her 'art should fail, and she should think of hiding of herself. How the cruel lady know'd of her being theer, I can't say. Whether him as I have spoke so much of, chanced to see 'em going theer, or whether (which is most like, to my thinking) he had heerd it from the woman, I doen't greatly ask myself. My niece is found.

'All night long,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'we have been together, Em'ly and me. 'Tis little (considering the time) as she has said, in wureds, through them broken-hearted tears; 'tis less as I have seen of her dear face, as grow'd into a woman's at my hearth. But, all night long, her arms has been about my neck; and her head has laid heer; and we knows full well, as we can put our trust in one another, ever more.'

He ceased to speak, and his hand upon the table rested there in perfect repose, with a resolution in it that might have conquered lions.

'It was a gleam of light upon me, Trot,' said my aunt, drying her eyes, 'when I formed the resolution of being godmother to your sister Betsey Trotwood, who disappointed me; but, next to that, hardly anything would have given me greater pleasure, than to be godmother to that good young

creature's baby!'

Mr. Peggotty nodded his understanding of my aunt's feelings, but could not trust himself with any verbal reference to the subject of her commendation. We all remained silent, and occupied with our own reflections (my aunt drying her eyes, and now sobbing convulsively, and now laughing and calling herself a fool); until I spoke.

'You have quite made up your mind,' said I to Mr. Peggotty, 'as to the future, good friend? I need scarcely ask you.'

'Quite, Mas'r Davy,' he returned; 'and told Em'ly. Theer's mighty countries, fur from heer. Our future life lays over the sea.'

'They will emigrate together, aunt,' said I.

'Yes!' said Mr. Peggotty, with a hopeful smile. 'No one can't reproach my darling in Australia. We will begin a new life over theer!'

I asked him if he yet proposed to himself any time for going away.

'I was down at the Docks early this morning, sir,' he returned, 'to get information concerning of them ships. In about six weeks or two months from now, there'll be one sailing--I see her this morning--went aboard--and we shall take our passage in her.'

'Quite alone?' I asked.

'Aye, Mas'r Davy!' he returned. 'My sister, you see, she's that fond of you and yourn, and that accustomed to think on'y of her own country, that it wouldn't be hardly fair to let her go. Besides which, theer's one she has in charge, Mas'r Davy, as doesn't ought to be forgot.'

'Poor Ham!' said I.

'My good sister takes care of his house, you see, ma'am, and he takes kindly to her,' Mr. Peggotty explained for my aunt's better information. 'He'll set and talk to her, with a calm spirit, wen it's like he couldn't bring himself to open his lips to another. Poor fellow!' said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, 'theer's not so much left him, that he could spare the little as he has!'

'And Mrs. Gummidge?' said I.

'Well, I've had a mort of consideration, I do tell you,' returned Mr. Peggotty, with a perplexed look which gradually cleared as he went on, 'concerning of Missis Gummidge. You see, wen Missis Gummidge falls a-thinking of the old 'un, she an't what you may call good company. Betwixt you and me, Mas'r Davy--and you, ma'am--wen Mrs. Gummidge takes to wimicking, '--our old country word for crying, '--she's liable to be considered to be, by them as didn't know the old 'un, peevish-like. Now I DID know the old 'un,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and I know'd his merits, so I unnerstan' her; but 'tan't entirely so, you see, with others--nat'rally can't be!'

My aunt and I both acquiesced.

'Wheerby,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'my sister might--I doen't say she would, but might--find Missis Gummidge give her a leetle trouble now-and-again. Theerfur 'tan't my intentions to moor Missis Gummidge 'long with them, but to find a Beein' fur her wheer she can fisherate for herself.' (A Beein' signifies, in that dialect, a home, and to fisherate is to provide.) 'Fur which purpose,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I means to make her a 'lowance afore I go, as'll leave her pretty comfort'ble. She's the faithfullest of creeturs. 'Tan't to be expected, of course, at her time of life, and being lone and lorn, as the good old Mawther is to

be knocked about aboardship, and in the woods and wilds of a new and fur-away country. So that's what I'm a-going to do with her.'

He forgot nobody. He thought of everybody's claims and strivings, but his own.

'Em'ly,' he continued, 'will keep along with me--poor child, she's sore in need of peace and rest!--until such time as we goes upon our voyage. She'll work at them clothes, as must be made; and I hope her troubles will begin to seem longer ago than they was, wen she finds herself once more by her rough but loving uncle.'

MY aunt nodded confirmation of this hope, and imparted great satisfaction to Mr. Peggotty.

'Theer's one thing funder, Mas'r Davy,' said he, putting his hand in his breast-pocket, and gravely taking out the little paper bundle I had seen before, which he unrolled on the table. 'Theer's these here banknotes--fifty pound, and ten. To them I wish to add the money as she come away with. I've asked her about that (but not saying why), and have added of it up. I an't a scholar. Would you be so kind as see how 'tis?'

He handed me, apologetically for his scholarship, a piece of paper, and observed me while I looked it over. It was quite right.

'Thankee, sir,' he said, taking it back. 'This money, if you doesn't see objections, Mas'r Davy, I shall put up jest afore I go, in a cover directed to him; and put that up in another, directed to his mother. I shall tell her, in no more wureds than I speak to you, what it's the price on; and that I'm gone, and past receiving of it back.'

I told him that I thought it would be right to do so--that I was thoroughly convinced it would be, since he felt it to be right.

'I said that theer was on'y one thing funder,' he proceeded with a grave smile, when he had made up his little bundle again, and put it in his pocket; 'but theer was two. I warn't sure in my mind, wen I come out this morning, as I could go and break to Ham, of my own self, what had so thankfully happened. So I writ a letter while I was out, and put it in the post-office, telling of 'em how all was as 'tis; and that I should come down tomorrow to unload my mind of what little needs a-doing of down theer, and, most-like, take my farewell leave of Yarmouth.'

'And do you wish me to go with you?' said I, seeing that he left something unsaid.

'If you could do me that kind favour, Mas'r Davy,' he replied. 'I know the sight on you would cheer 'em up a bit.'

My little Dora being in good spirits, and very desirous that I should go--as I found on talking it over with her--I readily pledged myself to accompany him in accordance with his wish. Next morning, consequently, we were on the Yarmouth coach, and again travelling over the old ground.

As we passed along the familiar street at night--Mr. Peggotty, in despite of all my remonstrances, carrying my bag--I glanced into Omer and Joram's shop, and saw my old friend Mr. Omer there, smoking his pipe. I felt reluctant to be present, when Mr. Peggotty first met his sister and Ham; and made Mr. Omer my excuse for lingering behind.

'How is Mr. Omer, after this long time?' said I, going in.

He fanned away the smoke of his pipe, that he might get a better view of me, and soon recognized me with great delight.

'I should get up, sir, to acknowledge such an honour as this visit,'

said he, 'only my limbs are rather out of sorts, and I am wheeled about. With the exception of my limbs and my breath, howsoever, I am as hearty as a man can be, I'm thankful to say.'

I congratulated him on his contented looks and his good spirits, and saw, now, that his easy-chair went on wheels.

'It's an ingenious thing, ain't it?' he inquired, following the direction of my glance, and polishing the elbow with his arm. 'It runs as light as a feather, and tracks as true as a mail-coach. Bless you, my little Minnie--my grand-daughter you know, Minnie's child--puts her little strength against the back, gives it a shove, and away we go, as clever and merry as ever you see anything! And I tell you what--it's a most uncommon chair to smoke a pipe in.'

I never saw such a good old fellow to make the best of a thing, and find out the enjoyment of it, as Mr. Omer. He was as radiant, as if his chair, his asthma, and the failure of his limbs, were the various branches of a great invention for enhancing the luxury of a pipe.

'I see more of the world, I can assure you,' said Mr. Omer, 'in this chair, than ever I see out of it. You'd be surprised at the number of people that looks in of a day to have a chat. You really would! There's twice as much in the newspaper, since I've taken to this chair, as there used to be. As to general reading, dear me, what a lot of it I do get through! That's what I feel so strong, you know! If it had been my eyes, what should I have done? If it had been my ears, what should I have done? Being my limbs, what does it signify? Why, my limbs only made my breath shorter when I used 'em. And now, if I want to go out into the street or down to the sands, I've only got to call Dick, Joram's youngest 'prentice, and away I go in my own carriage, like the Lord Mayor of London.'

He half suffocated himself with laughing here.

'Lord bless you!' said Mr. Omer, resuming his pipe, 'a man must take the fat with the lean; that's what he must make up his mind to, in this life. Joram does a fine business. Ex-cellent business!'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said I.

'I knew you would be,' said Mr. Omer. 'And Joram and Minnie are like Valentines. What more can a man expect? What's his limbs to that!'

His supreme contempt for his own limbs, as he sat smoking, was one of the pleasantest oddities I have ever encountered.

'And since I've took to general reading, you've took to general writing, eh, sir?' said Mr. Omer, surveying me admiringly. 'What a lovely work that was of yours! What expressions in it! I read it every word--every word. And as to feeling sleepy! Not at all!'

I laughingly expressed my satisfaction, but I must confess that I thought this association of ideas significant.

'I give you my word and honour, sir,' said Mr. Omer, 'that when I lay that book upon the table, and look at it outside; compact in three separate and indiividual wollumes--one, two, three; I am as proud as Punch to think that I once had the honour of being connected with your family. And dear me, it's a long time ago, now, ain't it? Over at Blunderstone. With a pretty little party laid along with the other party. And you quite a small party then, yourself. Dear, dear!'

I changed the subject by referring to Emily. After assuring him that I did not forget how interested he had always been in her, and how kindly he had always treated her, I gave him a general account of her



restoration to her uncle by the aid of Martha; which I knew would please the old man. He listened with the utmost attention, and said, feelingly, when I had done:

'I am rejoiced at it, sir! It's the best news I have heard for many a day. Dear, dear, dear! And what's going to be undertook for that unfortunate young woman, Martha, now?'

'You touch a point that my thoughts have been dwelling on since yesterday,' said I, 'but on which I can give you no information yet, Mr. Omer. Mr. Peggotty has not alluded to it, and I have a delicacy in doing so. I am sure he has not forgotten it. He forgets nothing that is disinterested and good.'

'Because you know,' said Mr. Omer, taking himself up, where he had left off, 'whatever is done, I should wish to be a member of. Put me down for anything you may consider right, and let me know. I never could think the girl all bad, and I am glad to find she's not. So will my daughter Minnie be. Young women are contradictory creatures in some things--her mother was just the same as her--but their hearts are soft and kind. It's all show with Minnie, about Martha. Why she should consider it necessary to make any show, I don't undertake to tell you. But it's all show, bless you. She'd do her any kindness in private. So, put me down for whatever you may consider right, will you be so good? and drop me a line where to forward it. Dear me!' said Mr. Omer, 'when a man is drawing on to a time of life, where the two ends of life meet; when he finds himself, however hearty he is, being wheeled about for the second time, in a speeches of go-cart; he should be over-rejoiced to do a kindness if he can. He wants plenty. And I don't speak of myself, particular,' said Mr. Omer, 'because, sir, the way I look at it is, that we are all drawing on to the bottom of the hill, whatever age we are, on account of time never standing still for a single moment. So let us always do a kindness, and be over-rejoiced. To be sure!'

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and put it on a ledge in the back of his chair, expressly made for its reception.

'There's Em'ly's cousin, him that she was to have been married to,' said Mr. Omer, rubbing his hands feebly, 'as fine a fellow as there is in Yarmouth! He'll come and talk or read to me, in the evening, for an hour together sometimes. That's a kindness, I should call it! All his life's a kindness.'

'I am going to see him now,' said I.

'Are you?' said Mr. Omer. 'Tell him I was hearty, and sent my respects. Minnie and Joram's at a ball. They would be as proud to see you as I am, if they was at home. Minnie won't hardly go out at all, you see, "on account of father", as she says. So I swore tonight, that if she didn't go, I'd go to bed at six. In consequence of which,' Mr. Omer shook himself and his chair with laughter at the success of his device, 'she and Joram's at a ball.'

I shook hands with him, and wished him good night.

'Half a minute, sir,' said Mr. Omer. 'If you was to go without seeing my little elephant, you'd lose the best of sights. You never see such a sight! Minnie!' A musical little voice answered, from somewhere upstairs, 'I am coming, grandfather!' and a pretty little girl with long, flaxen, curling hair, soon came running into the shop.

'This is my little elephant, sir,' said Mr. Omer, fondling the child. 'Siamese breed, sir. Now, little elephant!'

The little elephant set the door of the parlour open, enabling me to see that, in these latter days, it was converted into a bedroom for Mr.

Omer who could not be easily conveyed upstairs; and then hid her pretty forehead, and tumbled her long hair, against the back of Mr. Omer's chair.

'The elephant butts, you know, sir,' said Mr. Omer, winking, 'when he goes at a object. Once, elephant. Twice. Three times!'

At this signal, the little elephant, with a dexterity that was next to marvellous in so small an animal, whisked the chair round with Mr. Omer in it, and rattled it off, pell-mell, into the parlour, without touching the door-post: Mr. Omer indescribably enjoying the performance, and looking back at me on the road as if it were the triumphant issue of his life's exertions.

After a stroll about the town I went to Ham's house. Peggotty had now removed here for good; and had let her own house to the successor of Mr. Barkis in the carrying business, who had paid her very well for the good-will, cart, and horse. I believe the very same slow horse that Mr. Barkis drove was still at work.

I found them in the neat kitchen, accompanied by Mrs. Gummidge, who had been fetched from the old boat by Mr. Peggotty himself. I doubt if she could have been induced to desert her post, by anyone else. He had evidently told them all. Both Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge had their aprons to their eyes, and Ham had just stepped out 'to take a turn on the beach'. He presently came home, very glad to see me; and I hope they were all the better for my being there. We spoke, with some approach to cheerfulness, of Mr. Peggotty's growing rich in a new country, and of the wonders he would describe in his letters. We said nothing of Emily by name, but distantly referred to her more than once. Ham was the serenest of the party.

But, Peggotty told me, when she lighted me to a little chamber where the

Crocodile book was lying ready for me on the table, that he always was the same. She believed (she told me, crying) that he was broken-hearted; though he was as full of courage as of sweetness, and worked harder and better than any boat-builder in any yard in all that part. There were times, she said, of an evening, when he talked of their old life in the boat-house; and then he mentioned Emily as a child. But, he never mentioned her as a woman.

I thought I had read in his face that he would like to speak to me alone. I therefore resolved to put myself in his way next evening, as he came home from his work. Having settled this with myself, I fell asleep. That night, for the first time in all those many nights, the candle was taken out of the window, Mr. Peggotty swung in his old hammock in the old boat, and the wind murmured with the old sound round his head.

All next day, he was occupied in disposing of his fishing-boat and tackle; in packing up, and sending to London by waggon, such of his little domestic possessions as he thought would be useful to him; and in parting with the rest, or bestowing them on Mrs. Gummidge. She was with him all day. As I had a sorrowful wish to see the old place once more, before it was locked up, I engaged to meet them there in the evening. But I so arranged it, as that I should meet Ham first.

It was easy to come in his way, as I knew where he worked. I met him at a retired part of the sands, which I knew he would cross, and turned back with him, that he might have leisure to speak to me if he really wished. I had not mistaken the expression of his face. We had walked but a little way together, when he said, without looking at me:

'Mas'r Davy, have you seen her?'

'Only for a moment, when she was in a swoon,' I softly answered.

We walked a little farther, and he said:

'Mas'r Davy, shall you see her, d'ye think?'

'It would be too painful to her, perhaps,' said I.

'I have thowt of that,' he replied. 'So 'twould, sir, so 'twould.'

'But, Ham,' said I, gently, 'if there is anything that I could write to her, for you, in case I could not tell it; if there is anything you would wish to make known to her through me; I should consider it a sacred trust.'

'I am sure on't. I thankee, sir, most kind! I think theer is something I could wish said or wrote.'

'What is it?'

We walked a little farther in silence, and then he spoke.

'Tan't that I forgive her. 'Tan't that so much. 'Tis more as I beg of her to forgive me, for having pressed my affections upon her. Odd times, I think that if I hadn't had her promise fur to marry me, sir, she was that trustful of me, in a friendly way, that she'd have told me what was struggling in her mind, and would have counselled with me, and I might have saved her.'

I pressed his hand. 'Is that all?' 'Theer's yet a something else,' he returned, 'if I can say it, Mas'r Davy.'

We walked on, farther than we had walked yet, before he spoke again. He was not crying when he made the pauses I shall express by lines. He was merely collecting himself to speak very plainly.

'I loved her--and I love the mem'ry of her--too deep--to be able to lead her to believe of my own self as I'm a happy man. I could only be happy--by forgetting of her--and I'm afeerd I couldn't hardly bear as she should be told I done that. But if you, being so full of learning, Mas'r Davy, could think of anything to say as might bring her to believe I wasn't greatly hurt: still loving of her, and mourning for her: anything as might bring her to believe as I was not tired of my life, and yet was hoping fur to see her without blame, wheer the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest--anything as would ease her sorrowful mind, and yet not make her think as I could ever marry, or as 'twas possible that anyone could ever be to me what she was--I should ask of you to say that--with my prayers for her--that was so dear.'

I pressed his manly hand again, and told him I would charge myself to do this as well as I could.

'I thankee, sir,' he answered. ''Twas kind of you to meet me. 'Twas kind of you to bear him company down. Mas'r Davy, I unnerstan' very well, though my aunt will come to Lon'on afore they sail, and they'll unite once more, that I am not like to see him agen. I fare to feel sure on't. We doen't say so, but so 'twill be, and better so. The last you see on him--the very last--will you give him the lovingest duty and thanks of the orphan, as he was ever more than a father to?'

This I also promised, faithfully.

'I thankee agen, sir,' he said, heartily shaking hands. 'I know wheer you're a-going. Good-bye!'

With a slight wave of his hand, as though to explain to me that he could not enter the old place, he turned away. As I looked after his figure, crossing the waste in the moonlight, I saw him turn his face towards a

strip of silvery light upon the sea, and pass on, looking at it, until he was a shadow in the distance.

The door of the boat-house stood open when I approached; and, on entering, I found it emptied of all its furniture, saving one of the old lockers, on which Mrs. Gummidge, with a basket on her knee, was seated, looking at Mr. Peggotty. He leaned his elbow on the rough chimney-piece, and gazed upon a few expiring embers in the grate; but he raised his head, hopefully, on my coming in, and spoke in a cheery manner.

'Come, according to promise, to bid farewell to 't, eh, Mas'r Davy?' he said, taking up the candle. 'Bare enough, now, an't it?' 'Indeed you have made good use of the time,' said I.

'Why, we have not been idle, sir. Missis Gummidge has worked like a--I doesn't know what Missis Gummidge an't worked like,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking at her, at a loss for a sufficiently approving simile.

Mrs. Gummidge, leaning on her basket, made no observation.

'Theer's the very locker that you used to sit on, 'long with Em'ly!' said Mr. Peggotty, in a whisper. 'I'm a-going to carry it away with me, last of all. And heer's your old little bedroom, see, Mas'r Davy! A'most as bleak tonight, as 'art could wish!'

In truth, the wind, though it was low, had a solemn sound, and crept around the deserted house with a whispered wailing that was very mournful. Everything was gone, down to the little mirror with the oyster-shell frame. I thought of myself, lying here, when that first great change was being wrought at home. I thought of the blue-eyed child who had enchanted me. I thought of Steerforth: and a foolish, fearful fancy came upon me of his being near at hand, and liable to be met at any turn.

'Tis like to be long,' said Mr. Peggotty, in a low voice, 'afore the boat finds new tenants. They look upon 't, down beer, as being unfortunate now!'

'Does it belong to anybody in the neighbourhood?' I asked.

'To a mast-maker up town,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I'm a-going to give the key to him tonight.'

We looked into the other little room, and came back to Mrs. Gummidge, sitting on the locker, whom Mr. Peggotty, putting the light on the chimney-piece, requested to rise, that he might carry it outside the door before extinguishing the candle.

'Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge, suddenly deserting her basket, and clinging to his arm 'my dear Dan'l, the parting words I speak in this house is, I mustn't be left behind. Doen't ye think of leaving me behind, Dan'l! Oh, doen't ye ever do it!'

Mr. Peggotty, taken aback, looked from Mrs. Gummidge to me, and from me to Mrs. Gummidge, as if he had been awakened from a sleep.

'Doen't ye, dearest Dan'l, doen't ye!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, fervently. 'Take me 'long with you, Dan'l, take me 'long with you and Em'ly! I'll be your servant, constant and trew. If there's slaves in them parts where you're a-going, I'll be bound to you for one, and happy, but doen't ye leave me behind, Dan'l, that's a deary dear!'

'My good soul,' said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, 'you doen't know what a long voyage, and what a hard life 'tis!' 'Yes, I do, Dan'l! I can guess!' cried Mrs. Gummidge. 'But my parting words under this roof is, I shall go into the house and die, if I am not took. I can dig, Dan'l.



I can work. I can live hard. I can be loving and patient now--more than you think, Dan'l, if you'll on'y try me. I wouldn't touch the 'lowance, not if I was dying of want, Dan'l Peggotty; but I'll go with you and Em'ly, if you'll on'y let me, to the world's end! I know how 'tis; I know you think that I am lone and lorn; but, deary love, 'tan't so no more! I ain't sat here, so long, a-watching, and a-thinking of your trials, without some good being done me. Mas'r Davy, speak to him for me! I knows his ways, and Em'ly's, and I knows their sorrows, and can be a comfort to 'em, some odd times, and labour for 'em allus! Dan'l, deary Dan'l, let me go 'long with you!'

And Mrs. Gummidge took his hand, and kissed it with a homely pathos and affection, in a homely rapture of devotion and gratitude, that he well deserved.

We brought the locker out, extinguished the candle, fastened the door on the outside, and left the old boat close shut up, a dark speck in the cloudy night. Next day, when we were returning to London outside the coach, Mrs. Gummidge and her basket were on the seat behind, and Mrs. Gummidge was happy.

## CHAPTER 52. I ASSIST AT AN EXPLOSION

When the time Mr. Micawber had appointed so mysteriously, was within four-and-twenty hours of being come, my aunt and I consulted how we should proceed; for my aunt was very unwilling to leave Dora. Ah! how easily I carried Dora up and down stairs, now!

We were disposed, notwithstanding Mr. Micawber's stipulation for my aunt's attendance, to arrange that she should stay at home, and be

represented by Mr. Dick and me. In short, we had resolved to take this course, when Dora again unsettled us by declaring that she never would forgive herself, and never would forgive her bad boy, if my aunt remained behind, on any pretence.

'I won't speak to you,' said Dora, shaking her curls at my aunt. 'I'll be disagreeable! I'll make Jip bark at you all day. I shall be sure that you really are a cross old thing, if you don't go!'

'Tut, Blossom!' laughed my aunt. 'You know you can't do without me!'

'Yes, I can,' said Dora. 'You are no use to me at all. You never run up and down stairs for me, all day long. You never sit and tell me stories about Doady, when his shoes were worn out, and he was covered with dust--oh, what a poor little mite of a fellow! You never do anything at all to please me, do you, dear?' Dora made haste to kiss my aunt, and say, 'Yes, you do! I'm only joking!'-lest my aunt should think she really meant it.

'But, aunt,' said Dora, coaxingly, 'now listen. You must go. I shall tease you, 'till you let me have my own way about it. I shall lead my naughty boy such a life, if he don't make you go. I shall make myself so disagreeable--and so will Jip! You'll wish you had gone, like a good thing, for ever and ever so long, if you don't go. Besides,' said Dora, putting back her hair, and looking wonderingly at my aunt and me, 'why shouldn't you both go? I am not very ill indeed. Am I?'

'Why, what a question!' cried my aunt.

'What a fancy!' said I.

'Yes! I know I am a silly little thing!' said Dora, slowly looking from one of us to the other, and then putting up her pretty lips to kiss us

as she lay upon her couch. 'Well, then, you must both go, or I shall not believe you; and then I shall cry!'

I saw, in my aunt's face, that she began to give way now, and Dora brightened again, as she saw it too.

'You'll come back with so much to tell me, that it'll take at least a week to make me understand!' said Dora. 'Because I know I shan't understand, for a length of time, if there's any business in it. And there's sure to be some business in it! If there's anything to add up, besides, I don't know when I shall make it out; and my bad boy will look so miserable all the time. There! Now you'll go, won't you? You'll only be gone one night, and Jip will take care of me while you are gone. Doady will carry me upstairs before you go, and I won't come down again till you come back; and you shall take Agnes a dreadfully scolding letter from me, because she has never been to see us!'

We agreed, without any more consultation, that we would both go, and that Dora was a little Impostor, who feigned to be rather unwell, because she liked to be petted. She was greatly pleased, and very merry; and we four, that is to say, my aunt, Mr. Dick, Traddles, and I, went down to Canterbury by the Dover mail that night.

At the hotel where Mr. Micawber had requested us to await him, which we got into, with some trouble, in the middle of the night, I found a letter, importing that he would appear in the morning punctually at half past nine. After which, we went shivering, at that uncomfortable hour, to our respective beds, through various close passages; which smelt as if they had been steeped, for ages, in a solution of soup and stables.

Early in the morning, I sauntered through the dear old tranquil streets, and again mingled with the shadows of the venerable gateways and churches. The rooks were sailing about the cathedral towers; and the

towers themselves, overlooking many a long unaltered mile of the rich country and its pleasant streams, were cutting the bright morning air, as if there were no such thing as change on earth. Yet the bells, when they sounded, told me sorrowfully of change in everything; told me of their own age, and my pretty Dora's youth; and of the many, never old, who had lived and loved and died, while the reverberations of the bells had hummed through the rusty armour of the Black Prince hanging up within, and, motes upon the deep of Time, had lost themselves in air, as circles do in water.

I looked at the old house from the corner of the street, but did not go nearer to it, lest, being observed, I might unwittingly do any harm to the design I had come to aid. The early sun was striking edgewise on its gables and lattice-windows, touching them with gold; and some beams of its old peace seemed to touch my heart.

I strolled into the country for an hour or so, and then returned by the main street, which in the interval had shaken off its last night's sleep. Among those who were stirring in the shops, I saw my ancient enemy the butcher, now advanced to top-boots and a baby, and in business for himself. He was nursing the baby, and appeared to be a benignant member of society.

We all became very anxious and impatient, when we sat down to breakfast. As it approached nearer and nearer to half past nine o'clock, our restless expectation of Mr. Micawber increased. At last we made no more pretence of attending to the meal, which, except with Mr. Dick, had been a mere form from the first; but my aunt walked up and down the room, Traddles sat upon the sofa affecting to read the paper with his eyes on the ceiling; and I looked out of the window to give early notice of Mr. Micawber's coming. Nor had I long to watch, for, at the first chime of the half hour, he appeared in the street.

'Here he is,' said I, 'and not in his legal attire!'

My aunt tied the strings of her bonnet (she had come down to breakfast in it), and put on her shawl, as if she were ready for anything that was resolute and uncompromising. Traddles buttoned his coat with a determined air. Mr. Dick, disturbed by these formidable appearances, but feeling it necessary to imitate them, pulled his hat, with both hands, as firmly over his ears as he possibly could; and instantly took it off again, to welcome Mr. Micawber.

'Gentlemen, and madam,' said Mr. Micawber, 'good morning! My dear sir,' to Mr. Dick, who shook hands with him violently, 'you are extremely good.'

'Have you breakfasted?' said Mr. Dick. 'Have a chop!'

'Not for the world, my good sir!' cried Mr. Micawber, stopping him on his way to the bell; 'appetite and myself, Mr. Dixon, have long been strangers.'

Mr. Dixon was so well pleased with his new name, and appeared to think it so obliging in Mr. Micawber to confer it upon him, that he shook hands with him again, and laughed rather childishly.

'Dick,' said my aunt, 'attention!'

Mr. Dick recovered himself, with a blush.

'Now, sir,' said my aunt to Mr. Micawber, as she put on her gloves, 'we are ready for Mount Vesuvius, or anything else, as soon as YOU please.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'I trust you will shortly witness an eruption. Mr. Traddles, I have your permission, I believe, to mention

here that we have been in communication together?'

'It is undoubtedly the fact, Copperfield,' said Traddles, to whom I looked in surprise. 'Mr. Micawber has consulted me in reference to what he has in contemplation; and I have advised him to the best of my judgement.'

'Unless I deceive myself, Mr. Traddles,' pursued Mr. Micawber, 'what I contemplate is a disclosure of an important nature.'

'Highly so,' said Traddles.

'Perhaps, under such circumstances, madam and gentlemen,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you will do me the favour to submit yourselves, for the moment, to the direction of one who, however unworthy to be regarded in any other light but as a Waif and Stray upon the shore of human nature, is still your fellow-man, though crushed out of his original form by individual errors, and the accumulative force of a combination of circumstances?'

'We have perfect confidence in you, Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'and will do what you please.'

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'your confidence is not, at the existing juncture, ill-bestowed. I would beg to be allowed a start of five minutes by the clock; and then to receive the present company, inquiring for Miss Wickfield, at the office of Wickfield and Heep, whose Stipendiary I am.'

My aunt and I looked at Traddles, who nodded his approval.

'I have no more,' observed Mr. Micawber, 'to say at present.'

With which, to my infinite surprise, he included us all in a comprehensive bow, and disappeared; his manner being extremely distant, and his face extremely pale.

Traddles only smiled, and shook his head (with his hair standing upright on the top of it), when I looked to him for an explanation; so I took out my watch, and, as a last resource, counted off the five minutes. My aunt, with her own watch in her hand, did the like. When the time was expired, Traddles gave her his arm; and we all went out together to the old house, without saying one word on the way.

We found Mr. Micawber at his desk, in the turret office on the ground floor, either writing, or pretending to write, hard. The large office-ruler was stuck into his waistcoat, and was not so well concealed but that a foot or more of that instrument protruded from his bosom, like a new kind of shirt-frill.

As it appeared to me that I was expected to speak, I said aloud:

'How do you do, Mr. Micawber?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, gravely, 'I hope I see you well?'

'Is Miss Wickfield at home?' said I.

'Mr. Wickfield is unwell in bed, sir, of a rheumatic fever,' he returned; 'but Miss Wickfield, I have no doubt, will be happy to see old friends. Will you walk in, sir?'

He preceded us to the dining-room--the first room I had entered in that house--and flinging open the door of Mr. Wickfield's former office, said, in a sonorous voice:

'Miss Trotwood, Mr. David Copperfield, Mr. Thomas Traddles, and Mr. Dixon!'

I had not seen Uriah Heep since the time of the blow. Our visit astonished him, evidently; not the less, I dare say, because it astonished ourselves. He did not gather his eyebrows together, for he had none worth mentioning; but he frowned to that degree that he almost closed his small eyes, while the hurried raising of his grisly hand to his chin betrayed some trepidation or surprise. This was only when we were in the act of entering his room, and when I caught a glance at him over my aunt's shoulder. A moment afterwards, he was as fawning and as humble as ever.

'Well, I am sure,' he said. 'This is indeed an unexpected pleasure! To have, as I may say, all friends round St. Paul's at once, is a treat unlooked for! Mr. Copperfield, I hope I see you well, and--if I may umbly express myself so--friendly towards them as is ever your friends, whether or not. Mrs. Copperfield, sir, I hope she's getting on. We have been made quite uneasy by the poor accounts we have had of her state, lately, I do assure you.'

I felt ashamed to let him take my hand, but I did not know yet what else to do.

'Things are changed in this office, Miss Trotwood, since I was an umble clerk, and held your pony; ain't they?' said Uriah, with his sickliest smile. 'But I am not changed, Miss Trotwood.'

'Well, sir,' returned my aunt, 'to tell you the truth, I think you are pretty constant to the promise of your youth; if that's any satisfaction to you.'

'Thank you, Miss Trotwood,' said Uriah, writhing in his ungainly manner,



'for your good opinion! Micawber, tell 'em to let Miss Agnes know--and mother. Mother will be quite in a state, when she sees the present company!' said Uriah, setting chairs.

'You are not busy, Mr. Heep?' said Traddles, whose eye the cunning red eye accidentally caught, as it at once scrutinized and evaded us.

'No, Mr. Traddles,' replied Uriah, resuming his official seat, and squeezing his bony hands, laid palm to palm between his bony knees. 'Not so much so as I could wish. But lawyers, sharks, and leeches, are not easily satisfied, you know! Not but what myself and Micawber have our hands pretty full, in general, on account of Mr. Wickfield's being hardly fit for any occupation, sir. But it's a pleasure as well as a duty, I am sure, to work for him. You've not been intimate with Mr. Wickfield, I think, Mr. Traddles? I believe I've only had the honour of seeing you once myself?'

'No, I have not been intimate with Mr. Wickfield,' returned Traddles; 'or I might perhaps have waited on you long ago, Mr. Heep.'

There was something in the tone of this reply, which made Uriah look at the speaker again, with a very sinister and suspicious expression. But, seeing only Traddles, with his good-natured face, simple manner, and hair on end, he dismissed it as he replied, with a jerk of his whole body, but especially his throat:

'I am sorry for that, Mr. Traddles. You would have admired him as much as we all do. His little failings would only have endeared him to you the more. But if you would like to hear my fellow-partner eloquently spoken of, I should refer you to Copperfield. The family is a subject he's very strong upon, if you never heard him.'

I was prevented from disclaiming the compliment (if I should have

done so, in any case), by the entrance of Agnes, now ushered in by Mr. Micawber. She was not quite so self-possessed as usual, I thought; and had evidently undergone anxiety and fatigue. But her earnest cordiality, and her quiet beauty, shone with the gentler lustre for it.

I saw Uriah watch her while she greeted us; and he reminded me of an ugly and rebellious genie watching a good spirit. In the meanwhile, some slight sign passed between Mr. Micawber and Traddles; and Traddles, unobserved except by me, went out.

'Don't wait, Micawber,' said Uriah.

Mr. Micawber, with his hand upon the ruler in his breast, stood erect before the door, most unmistakably contemplating one of his fellow-men, and that man his employer.

'What are you waiting for?' said Uriah. 'Micawber! did you hear me tell you not to wait?'

'Yes!' replied the immovable Mr. Micawber.

'Then why DO you wait?' said Uriah.

'Because I--in short, choose,' replied Mr. Micawber, with a burst.

Uriah's cheeks lost colour, and an unwholesome paleness, still faintly tinged by his pervading red, overspread them. He looked at Mr. Micawber attentively, with his whole face breathing short and quick in every feature.

'You are a dissipated fellow, as all the world knows,' he said, with an effort at a smile, 'and I am afraid you'll oblige me to get rid of you. Go along! I'll talk to you presently.'

'If there is a scoundrel on this earth,' said Mr. Micawber, suddenly breaking out again with the utmost vehemence, 'with whom I have already talked too much, that scoundrel's name is--HEEP!'

Uriah fell back, as if he had been struck or stung. Looking slowly round upon us with the darkest and wickedest expression that his face could wear, he said, in a lower voice:

'Oho! This is a conspiracy! You have met here by appointment! You are playing Booty with my clerk, are you, Copperfield? Now, take care. You'll make nothing of this. We understand each other, you and me. There's no love between us. You were always a puppy with a proud stomach, from your first coming here; and you envy me my rise, do you? None of your plots against me; I'll counterplot you! Micawber, you be off. I'll talk to you presently.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'there is a sudden change in this fellow, in more respects than the extraordinary one of his speaking the truth in one particular, which assures me that he is brought to bay. Deal with him as he deserves!'

'You are a precious set of people, ain't you?' said Uriah, in the same low voice, and breaking out into a clammy heat, which he wiped from his forehead, with his long lean hand, 'to buy over my clerk, who is the very scum of society,--as you yourself were, Copperfield, you know it, before anyone had charity on you,--to defame me with his lies? Miss Trotwood, you had better stop this; or I'll stop your husband shorter than will be pleasant to you. I won't know your story professionally, for nothing, old lady! Miss Wickfield, if you have any love for your father, you had better not join that gang. I'll ruin him, if you do. Now, come! I have got some of you under the harrow. Think twice, before it goes over you. Think twice, you, Micawber, if you don't want to

be crushed. I recommend you to take yourself off, and be talked to presently, you fool! while there's time to retreat. Where's mother?' he said, suddenly appearing to notice, with alarm, the absence of Traddles, and pulling down the bell-rope. 'Fine doings in a person's own house!'

'Mrs. Heep is here, sir,' said Traddles, returning with that worthy mother of a worthy son. 'I have taken the liberty of making myself known to her.'

'Who are you to make yourself known?' retorted Uriah. 'And what do you want here?'

'I am the agent and friend of Mr. Wickfield, sir,' said Traddles, in a composed and business-like way. 'And I have a power of attorney from him in my pocket, to act for him in all matters.'

'The old ass has drunk himself into a state of dotage,' said Uriah, turning uglier than before, 'and it has been got from him by fraud!'

'Something has been got from him by fraud, I know,' returned Traddles quietly; 'and so do you, Mr. Heep. We will refer that question, if you please, to Mr. Micawber.'

'Ury--!' Mrs. Heep began, with an anxious gesture.

'YOU hold your tongue, mother,' he returned; 'least said, soonest mended.'

'But, my Ury--'

'Will you hold your tongue, mother, and leave it to me?'

Though I had long known that his servility was false, and all his

pretences knavish and hollow, I had had no adequate conception of the extent of his hypocrisy, until I now saw him with his mask off. The suddenness with which he dropped it, when he perceived that it was useless to him; the malice, insolence, and hatred, he revealed; the leer with which he exulted, even at this moment, in the evil he had done--all this time being desperate too, and at his wits' end for the means of getting the better of us--though perfectly consistent with the experience I had of him, at first took even me by surprise, who had known him so long, and disliked him so heartily.

I say nothing of the look he conferred on me, as he stood eyeing us, one after another; for I had always understood that he hated me, and I remembered the marks of my hand upon his cheek. But when his eyes passed on to Agnes, and I saw the rage with which he felt his power over her slipping away, and the exhibition, in their disappointment, of the odious passions that had led him to aspire to one whose virtues he could never appreciate or care for, I was shocked by the mere thought of her having lived, an hour, within sight of such a man.

After some rubbing of the lower part of his face, and some looking at us with those bad eyes, over his grisly fingers, he made one more address to me, half whining, and half abusive.

'You think it justifiable, do you, Copperfield, you who pride yourself so much on your honour and all the rest of it, to sneak about my place, eaves-dropping with my clerk? If it had been ME, I shouldn't have wondered; for I don't make myself out a gentleman (though I never was in the streets either, as you were, according to Micawber), but being you!--And you're not afraid of doing this, either? You don't think at all of what I shall do, in return; or of getting yourself into trouble for conspiracy and so forth? Very well. We shall see! Mr. What's-your-name, you were going to refer some question to Micawber. There's your referee. Why don't you make him speak? He has learnt his

lesson, I see.'

Seeing that what he said had no effect on me or any of us, he sat on the edge of his table with his hands in his pockets, and one of his splay feet twisted round the other leg, waiting doggedly for what might follow.

Mr. Micawber, whose impetuosity I had restrained thus far with the greatest difficulty, and who had repeatedly interposed with the first syllable Of SCOUN-drel! without getting to the second, now burst forward, drew the ruler from his breast (apparently as a defensive weapon), and produced from his pocket a foolscap document, folded in the form of a large letter. Opening this packet, with his old flourish, and glancing at the contents, as if he cherished an artistic admiration of their style of composition, he began to read as follows:

'"Dear Miss Trotwood and gentlemen--"'

'Bless and save the man!' exclaimed my aunt in a low voice. 'He'd write letters by the ream, if it was a capital offence!'

Mr. Micawber, without hearing her, went on.

'"In appearing before you to denounce probably the most consummate Villain that has ever existed,"' Mr. Micawber, without looking off the letter, pointed the ruler, like a ghostly truncheon, at Uriah Heep, 'I ask no consideration for myself. The victim, from my cradle, of pecuniary liabilities to which I have been unable to respond, I have ever been the sport and toy of debasing circumstances. Ignominy, Want, Despair, and Madness, have, collectively or separately, been the attendants of my career."'

The relish with which Mr. Micawber described himself as a prey to these dismal calamities, was only to be equalled by the emphasis with which he read his letter; and the kind of homage he rendered to it with a roll of his head, when he thought he had hit a sentence very hard indeed.

"In an accumulation of Ignominy, Want, Despair, and Madness, I entered the office--or, as our lively neighbour the Gaul would term it, the Bureau--of the Firm, nominally conducted under the appellation of Wickfield and--HEEP, but in reality, wielded by--HEEP alone. HEEP, and only HEEP, is the mainspring of that machine. HEEP, and only HEEP, is the Forger and the Cheat."

Uriah, more blue than white at these words, made a dart at the letter, as if to tear it in pieces. Mr. Micawber, with a perfect miracle of dexterity or luck, caught his advancing knuckles with the ruler, and disabled his right hand. It dropped at the wrist, as if it were broken. The blow sounded as if it had fallen on wood.

'The Devil take you!' said Uriah, writhing in a new way with pain. 'I'll be even with you.'

'Approach me again, you--you--you HEEP of infamy,' gasped Mr. Micawber, 'and if your head is human, I'll break it. Come on, come on!'

I think I never saw anything more ridiculous--I was sensible of it, even at the time--than Mr. Micawber making broad-sword guards with the ruler, and crying, 'Come on!' while Traddles and I pushed him back into a corner, from which, as often as we got him into it, he persisted in emerging again.

His enemy, muttering to himself, after wringing his wounded hand for sometime, slowly drew off his neck-kerchief and bound it up; then held it in his other hand, and sat upon his table with his sullen face

looking down.

Mr. Micawber, when he was sufficiently cool, proceeded with his letter.

"The stipendiary emoluments in consideration of which I entered into the service of--HEEP," always pausing before that word and uttering it with astonishing vigour, "were not defined, beyond the pittance of twenty-two shillings and six per week. The rest was left contingent on the value of my professional exertions; in other and more expressive words, on the baseness of my nature, the cupidity of my motives, the poverty of my family, the general moral (or rather immoral) resemblance between myself and--HEEP. Need I say, that it soon became necessary for me to solicit from--HEEP--pecuniary advances towards the support of Mrs. Micawber, and our blighted but rising family? Need I say that this necessity had been foreseen by--HEEP? That those advances were secured by I.O.U.'s and other similar acknowledgements, known to the legal institutions of this country? And that I thus became immeshed in the web he had spun for my reception?"

Mr. Micawber's enjoyment of his epistolary powers, in describing this unfortunate state of things, really seemed to outweigh any pain or anxiety that the reality could have caused him. He read on:

"Then it was that--HEEP--began to favour me with just so much of his confidence, as was necessary to the discharge of his infernal business. Then it was that I began, if I may so Shakespearianly express myself, to dwindle, peak, and pine. I found that my services were constantly called into requisition for the falsification of business, and the mystification of an individual whom I will designate as Mr. W. That Mr. W. was imposed upon, kept in ignorance, and deluded, in every possible way; yet, that all this while, the ruffian--HEEP--was professing unbounded gratitude to, and unbounded friendship for, that much-abused gentleman. This was bad enough; but, as the philosophic Dane observes,



with that universal applicability which distinguishes the illustrious ornament of the Elizabethan Era, worse remains behind!"'

Mr. Micawber was so very much struck by this happy rounding off with a quotation, that he indulged himself, and us, with a second reading of the sentence, under pretence of having lost his place.

'"It is not my intention,"' he continued reading on, '"to enter on a detailed list, within the compass of the present epistle (though it is ready elsewhere), of the various malpractices of a minor nature, affecting the individual whom I have denominated Mr. W., to which I have been a tacitly consenting party. My object, when the contest within myself between stipend and no stipend, baker and no baker, existence and non-existence, ceased, was to take advantage of my opportunities to discover and expose the major malpractices committed, to that gentleman's grievous wrong and injury, by--HEEP. Stimulated by the silent monitor within, and by a no less touching and appealing monitor without--to whom I will briefly refer as Miss W.--I entered on a not unlaborious task of clandestine investigation, protracted--now, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, over a period exceeding twelve calendar months."'

He read this passage as if it were from an Act of Parliament; and appeared majestically refreshed by the sound of the words.

'"My charges against--HEEP,"' he read on, glancing at him, and drawing the ruler into a convenient position under his left arm, in case of need, '"are as follows."'

We all held our breath, I think. I am sure Uriah held his.

'"First,"' said Mr. Micawber, '"When Mr. W.'s faculties and memory for business became, through causes into which it is not necessary or

expedient for me to enter, weakened and confused,--HEEP--designedly perplexed and complicated the whole of the official transactions. When Mr. W. was least fit to enter on business,--HEEP was always at hand to force him to enter on it. He obtained Mr. W.'s signature under such circumstances to documents of importance, representing them to be other documents of no importance. He induced Mr. W. to empower him to draw out, thus, one particular sum of trust-money, amounting to twelve six fourteen, two and nine, and employed it to meet pretended business charges and deficiencies which were either already provided for, or had never really existed. He gave this proceeding, throughout, the appearance of having originated in Mr. W.'s own dishonest intention, and of having been accomplished by Mr. W.'s own dishonest act; and has used it, ever since, to torture and constrain him."

'You shall prove this, you Copperfield!' said Uriah, with a threatening shake of the head. 'All in good time!'

'Ask--HEEP--Mr. Traddles, who lived in his house after him,' said Mr. Micawber, breaking off from the letter; 'will you?'

'The fool himself--and lives there now,' said Uriah, disdainfully.

'Ask--HEEP--if he ever kept a pocket-book in that house,' said Mr. Micawber; 'will you?'

I saw Uriah's lank hand stop, involuntarily, in the scraping of his chin.

'Or ask him,' said Mr. Micawber, 'if he ever burnt one there. If he says yes, and asks you where the ashes are, refer him to Wilkins Micawber, and he will hear of something not at all to his advantage!'

The triumphant flourish with which Mr. Micawber delivered himself of

these words, had a powerful effect in alarming the mother; who cried out, in much agitation:

'Ury, Ury! Be umble, and make terms, my dear!'

'Mother!' he retorted, 'will you keep quiet? You're in a fright, and don't know what you say or mean. Uumble!' he repeated, looking at me, with a snarl; 'I've umbled some of 'em for a pretty long time back, umble as I was!'

Mr. Micawber, genteelly adjusting his chin in his cravat, presently proceeded with his composition.

'"Second. HEEP has, on several occasions, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief--"'

'But that won't do,' muttered Uriah, relieved. 'Mother, you keep quiet.'

'We will endeavour to provide something that WILL do, and do for you finally, sir, very shortly,' replied Mr. Micawber.

'"Second. HEEP has, on several occasions, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, systematically forged, to various entries, books, and documents, the signature of Mr. W.; and has distinctly done so in one instance, capable of proof by me. To wit, in manner following, that is to say:"'

Again, Mr. Micawber had a relish in this formal piling up of words, which, however ludicrously displayed in his case, was, I must say, not at all peculiar to him. I have observed it, in the course of my life, in numbers of men. It seems to me to be a general rule. In the taking of legal oaths, for instance, deponents seem to enjoy themselves mightily when they come to several good words in succession, for the expression

of one idea; as, that they utterly detest, abominate, and abjure, or so forth; and the old anathemas were made relishing on the same principle. We talk about the tyranny of words, but we like to tyrannize over them too; we are fond of having a large superfluous establishment of words to wait upon us on great occasions; we think it looks important, and sounds well. As we are not particular about the meaning of our liveries on state occasions, if they be but fine and numerous enough, so, the meaning or necessity of our words is a secondary consideration, if there be but a great parade of them. And as individuals get into trouble by making too great a show of liveries, or as slaves when they are too numerous rise against their masters, so I think I could mention a nation that has got into many great difficulties, and will get into many greater, from maintaining too large a retinue of words.

Mr. Micawber read on, almost smacking his lips:

'"To wit, in manner following, that is to say. Mr. W. being infirm, and it being within the bounds of probability that his decease might lead to some discoveries, and to the downfall of--HEEP'S--power over the W. family,--as I, Wilkins Micawber, the undersigned, assume--unless the filial affection of his daughter could be secretly influenced from allowing any investigation of the partnership affairs to be ever made, the said--HEEP--deemed it expedient to have a bond ready by him, as from Mr. W., for the before-mentioned sum of twelve six fourteen, two and nine, with interest, stated therein to have been advanced by--HEEP--to Mr. W. to save Mr. W. from dishonour; though really the sum was never advanced by him, and has long been replaced. The signatures to this instrument purporting to be executed by Mr. W. and attested by Wilkins Micawber, are forgeries by--HEEP. I have, in my possession, in his hand and pocket-book, several similar imitations of Mr. W.'s signature, here and there defaced by fire, but legible to anyone. I never attested any such document. And I have the document itself, in my possession.'" Uriah Heep, with a start, took out of his pocket a bunch of keys, and opened

a certain drawer; then, suddenly bethought himself of what he was about, and turned again towards us, without looking in it.

"And I have the document," Mr. Micawber read again, looking about as if it were the text of a sermon, "in my possession,--that is to say, I had, early this morning, when this was written, but have since relinquished it to Mr. Traddles."

'It is quite true,' assented Traddles.

'Ury, Ury!' cried the mother, 'be umble and make terms. I know my son will be umble, gentlemen, if you'll give him time to think. Mr. Copperfield, I'm sure you know that he was always very umble, sir!'

It was singular to see how the mother still held to the old trick, when the son had abandoned it as useless.

'Mother,' he said, with an impatient bite at the handkerchief in which his hand was wrapped, 'you had better take and fire a loaded gun at me.'

'But I love you, Ury,' cried Mrs. Heep. And I have no doubt she did; or that he loved her, however strange it may appear; though, to be sure, they were a congenial couple. 'And I can't bear to hear you provoking the gentlemen, and endangering of yourself more. I told the gentleman at first, when he told me upstairs it was come to light, that I would answer for your being umble, and making amends. Oh, see how umble I am, gentlemen, and don't mind him!'

'Why, there's Copperfield, mother,' he angrily retorted, pointing his lean finger at me, against whom all his animosity was levelled, as the prime mover in the discovery; and I did not undeceive him; 'there's Copperfield, would have given you a hundred pound to say less than you've blurted out!'

'I can't help it, Ury,' cried his mother. 'I can't see you running into danger, through carrying your head so high. Better be umble, as you always was.'

He remained for a little, biting the handkerchief, and then said to me with a scowl:

'What more have you got to bring forward? If anything, go on with it. What do you look at me for?'

Mr. Micawber promptly resumed his letter, glad to revert to a performance with which he was so highly satisfied.

'"Third. And last. I am now in a condition to show, by--HEEP'S--false books, and--HEEP'S--real memoranda, beginning with the partially destroyed pocket-book (which I was unable to comprehend, at the time of its accidental discovery by Mrs. Micawber, on our taking possession of our present abode, in the locker or bin devoted to the reception of the ashes calcined on our domestic hearth), that the weaknesses, the faults, the very virtues, the parental affections, and the sense of honour, of the unhappy Mr. W. have been for years acted on by, and warped to the base purposes of--HEEP. That Mr. W. has been for years deluded and plundered, in every conceivable manner, to the pecuniary aggrandisement of the avaricious, false, and grasping--HEEP. That the engrossing object of--HEEP--was, next to gain, to subdue Mr. and Miss W. (of his ulterior views in reference to the latter I say nothing) entirely to himself. That his last act, completed but a few months since, was to induce Mr. W. to execute a relinquishment of his share in the partnership, and even a bill of sale on the very furniture of his house, in consideration of a certain annuity, to be well and truly paid by--HEEP--on the four common quarter-days in each and every year. That these meshes; beginning with alarming and falsified accounts of the estate of which Mr. W. is the

receiver, at a period when Mr. W. had launched into imprudent and ill-judged speculations, and may not have had the money, for which he was morally and legally responsible, in hand; going on with pretended borrowings of money at enormous interest, really coming from--HEEP--and by--HEEP--fraudulently obtained or withheld from Mr. W. himself, on pretence of such speculations or otherwise; perpetuated by a miscellaneous catalogue of unscrupulous chicaneries--gradually thickened, until the unhappy Mr. W. could see no world beyond. Bankrupt, as he believed, alike in circumstances, in all other hope, and in honour, his sole reliance was upon the monster in the garb of man,"'--Mr. Micawber made a good deal of this, as a new turn of expression,--'"who, by making himself necessary to him, had achieved his destruction. All this I undertake to show. Probably much more!"'

I whispered a few words to Agnes, who was weeping, half joyfully, half sorrowfully, at my side; and there was a movement among us, as if Mr. Micawber had finished. He said, with exceeding gravity, 'Pardon me,' and proceeded, with a mixture of the lowest spirits and the most intense enjoyment, to the peroration of his letter.

"I have now concluded. It merely remains for me to substantiate these accusations; and then, with my ill-starred family, to disappear from the landscape on which we appear to be an encumbrance. That is soon done. It may be reasonably inferred that our baby will first expire of inanition, as being the frailest member of our circle; and that our twins will follow next in order. So be it! For myself, my Canterbury Pilgrimage has done much; imprisonment on civil process, and want, will soon do more. I trust that the labour and hazard of an investigation--of which the smallest results have been slowly pieced together, in the pressure of arduous avocations, under grinding penurious apprehensions, at rise of morn, at dewy eve, in the shadows of night, under the watchful eye of one whom it were superfluous to call Demon--combined with the struggle of parental Poverty to turn it, when completed, to the right account,

may be as the sprinkling of a few drops of sweet water on my funeral pyre. I ask no more. Let it be, in justice, merely said of me, as of a gallant and eminent naval Hero, with whom I have no pretensions to cope, that what I have done, I did, in despite of mercenary and selfish objects,

For England, home, and Beauty.

"Remaining always, &c. &c., WILKINS MICAWBER."

Much affected, but still intensely enjoying himself, Mr. Micawber folded up his letter, and handed it with a bow to my aunt, as something she might like to keep.

There was, as I had noticed on my first visit long ago, an iron safe in the room. The key was in it. A hasty suspicion seemed to strike Uriah; and, with a glance at Mr. Micawber, he went to it, and threw the doors clanking open. It was empty.

'Where are the books?' he cried, with a frightful face. 'Some thief has stolen the books!'

Mr. Micawber tapped himself with the ruler. 'I did, when I got the key from you as usual--but a little earlier--and opened it this morning.'

'Don't be uneasy,' said Traddles. 'They have come into my possession. I will take care of them, under the authority I mentioned.'

'You receive stolen goods, do you?' cried Uriah.

'Under such circumstances,' answered Traddles, 'yes.'



What was my astonishment when I beheld my aunt, who had been profoundly quiet and attentive, make a dart at Uriah Heep, and seize him by the collar with both hands!

'You know what I want?' said my aunt.

'A strait-waistcoat,' said he.

'No. My property!' returned my aunt. 'Agnes, my dear, as long as I believed it had been really made away with by your father, I wouldn't--and, my dear, I didn't, even to Trot, as he knows--breathe a syllable of its having been placed here for investment. But, now I know this fellow's answerable for it, and I'll have it! Trot, come and take it away from him!'

Whether my aunt supposed, for the moment, that he kept her property in his neck-kerchief, I am sure I don't know; but she certainly pulled at it as if she thought so. I hastened to put myself between them, and to assure her that we would all take care that he should make the utmost restitution of everything he had wrongly got. This, and a few moments' reflection, pacified her; but she was not at all disconcerted by what she had done (though I cannot say as much for her bonnet) and resumed her seat composedly.

During the last few minutes, Mrs. Heep had been clamouring to her son to be 'umble'; and had been going down on her knees to all of us in succession, and making the wildest promises. Her son sat her down in his chair; and, standing sulkily by her, holding her arm with his hand, but not rudely, said to me, with a ferocious look:

'What do you want done?'

'I will tell you what must be done,' said Traddles.

'Has that Copperfield no tongue?' muttered Uriah, 'I would do a good deal for you if you could tell me, without lying, that somebody had cut it out.'

'My Uriah means to be umble!' cried his mother. 'Don't mind what he says, good gentlemen!'

'What must be done,' said Traddles, 'is this. First, the deed of relinquishment, that we have heard of, must be given over to me now--here.'

'Suppose I haven't got it,' he interrupted.

'But you have,' said Traddles; 'therefore, you know, we won't suppose so.' And I cannot help avowing that this was the first occasion on which I really did justice to the clear head, and the plain, patient, practical good sense, of my old schoolfellow. 'Then,' said Traddles, 'you must prepare to disgorge all that your rapacity has become possessed of, and to make restoration to the last farthing. All the partnership books and papers must remain in our possession; all your books and papers; all money accounts and securities, of both kinds. In short, everything here.'

'Must it? I don't know that,' said Uriah. 'I must have time to think about that.'

'Certainly,' replied Traddles; 'but, in the meanwhile, and until everything is done to our satisfaction, we shall maintain possession of these things; and beg you--in short, compel you--to keep to your own room, and hold no communication with anyone.'

'I won't do it!' said Uriah, with an oath.

'Maidstone jail is a safer place of detention,' observed Traddles; 'and though the law may be longer in righting us, and may not be able to right us so completely as you can, there is no doubt of its punishing YOU. Dear me, you know that quite as well as I! Copperfield, will you go round to the Guildhall, and bring a couple of officers?'

Here, Mrs. Heep broke out again, crying on her knees to Agnes to interfere in their behalf, exclaiming that he was very humble, and it was all true, and if he didn't do what we wanted, she would, and much more to the same purpose; being half frantic with fears for her darling. To inquire what he might have done, if he had had any boldness, would be like inquiring what a mongrel cur might do, if it had the spirit of a tiger. He was a coward, from head to foot; and showed his dastardly nature through his sullenness and mortification, as much as at any time of his mean life.

'Stop!' he growled to me; and wiped his hot face with his hand. 'Mother, hold your noise. Well! Let 'em have that deed. Go and fetch it!'

'Do you help her, Mr. Dick,' said Traddles, 'if you please.'

Proud of his commission, and understanding it, Mr. Dick accompanied her as a shepherd's dog might accompany a sheep. But, Mrs. Heep gave him little trouble; for she not only returned with the deed, but with the box in which it was, where we found a banker's book and some other papers that were afterwards serviceable.

'Good!' said Traddles, when this was brought. 'Now, Mr. Heep, you can retire to think: particularly observing, if you please, that I declare to you, on the part of all present, that there is only one thing to be done; that it is what I have explained; and that it must be done without delay.'

Uriah, without lifting his eyes from the ground, shuffled across the room with his hand to his chin, and pausing at the door, said:

'Copperfield, I have always hated you. You've always been an upstart, and you've always been against me.'

'As I think I told you once before,' said I, 'it is you who have been, in your greed and cunning, against all the world. It may be profitable to you to reflect, in future, that there never were greed and cunning in the world yet, that did not do too much, and overreach themselves. It is as certain as death.'

'Or as certain as they used to teach at school (the same school where I picked up so much umbleness), from nine o'clock to eleven, that labour was a curse; and from eleven o'clock to one, that it was a blessing and a cheerfulness, and a dignity, and I don't know what all, eh?' said he with a sneer. 'You preach, about as consistent as they did. Won't umbleness go down? I shouldn't have got round my gentleman fellow-partner without it, I think. --Micawber, you old bully, I'll pay YOU!'

Mr. Micawber, supremely defiant of him and his extended finger, and making a great deal of his chest until he had slunk out at the door, then addressed himself to me, and proffered me the satisfaction of 'witnessing the re-establishment of mutual confidence between himself and Mrs. Micawber'. After which, he invited the company generally to the contemplation of that affecting spectacle.

'The veil that has long been interposed between Mrs. Micawber and myself, is now withdrawn,' said Mr. Micawber; 'and my children and the Author of their Being can once more come in contact on equal terms.'

As we were all very grateful to him, and all desirous to show that we were, as well as the hurry and disorder of our spirits would permit, I dare say we should all have gone, but that it was necessary for Agnes to return to her father, as yet unable to bear more than the dawn of hope; and for someone else to hold Uriah in safe keeping. So, Traddles remained for the latter purpose, to be presently relieved by Mr. Dick; and Mr. Dick, my aunt, and I, went home with Mr. Micawber. As I parted hurriedly from the dear girl to whom I owed so much, and thought from what she had been saved, perhaps, that morning--her better resolution notwithstanding--I felt devoutly thankful for the miseries of my younger days which had brought me to the knowledge of Mr. Micawber.

His house was not far off; and as the street door opened into the sitting-room, and he bolted in with a precipitation quite his own, we found ourselves at once in the bosom of the family. Mr. Micawber exclaiming, 'Emma! my life!' rushed into Mrs. Micawber's arms. Mrs. Micawber shrieked, and folded Mr. Micawber in her embrace. Miss Micawber, nursing the unconscious stranger of Mrs. Micawber's last letter to me, was sensibly affected. The stranger leaped. The twins testified their joy by several inconvenient but innocent demonstrations. Master Micawber, whose disposition appeared to have been soured by early disappointment, and whose aspect had become morose, yielded to his better feelings, and blubbered.

'Emma!' said Mr. Micawber. 'The cloud is past from my mind. Mutual confidence, so long preserved between us once, is restored, to know no further interruption. Now, welcome poverty!' cried Mr. Micawber, shedding tears. 'Welcome misery, welcome houselessness, welcome hunger, rags, tempest, and beggary! Mutual confidence will sustain us to the end!'

With these expressions, Mr. Micawber placed Mrs. Micawber in a chair, and embraced the family all round; welcoming a variety of bleak

prospects, which appeared, to the best of my judgement, to be anything but welcome to them; and calling upon them to come out into Canterbury and sing a chorus, as nothing else was left for their support.

But Mrs. Micawber having, in the strength of her emotions, fainted away, the first thing to be done, even before the chorus could be considered complete, was to recover her. This my aunt and Mr. Micawber did; and then my aunt was introduced, and Mrs. Micawber recognized me.

'Excuse me, dear Mr. Copperfield,' said the poor lady, giving me her hand, 'but I am not strong; and the removal of the late misunderstanding between Mr. Micawber and myself was at first too much for me.'

'Is this all your family, ma'am?' said my aunt.

'There are no more at present,' returned Mrs. Micawber.

'Good gracious, I didn't mean that, ma'am,' said my aunt. 'I mean, are all these yours?'

'Madam,' replied Mr. Micawber, 'it is a true bill.'

'And that eldest young gentleman, now,' said my aunt, musing, 'what has he been brought up to?'

'It was my hope when I came here,' said Mr. Micawber, 'to have got Wilkins into the Church: or perhaps I shall express my meaning more strictly, if I say the Choir. But there was no vacancy for a tenor in the venerable Pile for which this city is so justly eminent; and he has--in short, he has contracted a habit of singing in public-houses, rather than in sacred edifices.'

'But he means well,' said Mrs. Micawber, tenderly.

'I dare say, my love,' rejoined Mr. Micawber, 'that he means particularly well; but I have not yet found that he carries out his meaning, in any given direction whatsoever.'

Master Micawber's moroseness of aspect returned upon him again, and he demanded, with some temper, what he was to do? Whether he had been born a carpenter, or a coach-painter, any more than he had been born a bird? Whether he could go into the next street, and open a chemist's shop? Whether he could rush to the next assizes, and proclaim himself a lawyer? Whether he could come out by force at the opera, and succeed by violence? Whether he could do anything, without being brought up to something?

My aunt mused a little while, and then said:

'Mr. Micawber, I wonder you have never turned your thoughts to emigration.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'it was the dream of my youth, and the fallacious aspiration of my riper years.' I am thoroughly persuaded, by the by, that he had never thought of it in his life.

'Aye?' said my aunt, with a glance at me. 'Why, what a thing it would be for yourselves and your family, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, if you were to emigrate now.'

'Capital, madam, capital,' urged Mr. Micawber, gloomily.

'That is the principal, I may say the only difficulty, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' assented his wife.

'Capital?' cried my aunt. 'But you are doing us a great service--have

done us a great service, I may say, for surely much will come out of the fire--and what could we do for you, that would be half so good as to find the capital?'

'I could not receive it as a gift,' said Mr. Micawber, full of fire and animation, 'but if a sufficient sum could be advanced, say at five per cent interest, per annum, upon my personal liability--say my notes of hand, at twelve, eighteen, and twenty-four months, respectively, to allow time for something to turn up--'

'Could be? Can be and shall be, on your own terms,' returned my aunt, 'if you say the word. Think of this now, both of you. Here are some people David knows, going out to Australia shortly. If you decide to go, why shouldn't you go in the same ship? You may help each other. Think of this now, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. Take your time, and weigh it well.'

'There is but one question, my dear ma'am, I could wish to ask,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'The climate, I believe, is healthy?'

'Finest in the world!' said my aunt.

'Just so,' returned Mrs. Micawber. 'Then my question arises. Now, are the circumstances of the country such, that a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities would have a fair chance of rising in the social scale? I will not say, at present, might he aspire to be Governor, or anything of that sort; but would there be a reasonable opening for his talents to develop themselves--that would be amply sufficient--and find their own expansion?'

'No better opening anywhere,' said my aunt, 'for a man who conducts himself well, and is industrious.'

'For a man who conducts himself well,' repeated Mrs. Micawber, with her



clearest business manner, 'and is industrious. Precisely. It is evident to me that Australia is the legitimate sphere of action for Mr. Micawber!'

'I entertain the conviction, my dear madam,' said Mr. Micawber, 'that it is, under existing circumstances, the land, the only land, for myself and family; and that something of an extraordinary nature will turn up on that shore. It is no distance--comparatively speaking; and though consideration is due to the kindness of your proposal, I assure you that is a mere matter of form.'

Shall I ever forget how, in a moment, he was the most sanguine of men, looking on to fortune; or how Mrs. Micawber presently discoursed about the habits of the kangaroo! Shall I ever recall that street of Canterbury on a market-day, without recalling him, as he walked back with us; expressing, in the hardy roving manner he assumed, the unsettled habits of a temporary sojourner in the land; and looking at the bullocks, as they came by, with the eye of an Australian farmer!

#### CHAPTER 53. ANOTHER RETROSPECT

I must pause yet once again. O, my child-wife, there is a figure in the moving crowd before my memory, quiet and still, saying in its innocent love and childish beauty, Stop to think of me--turn to look upon the Little Blossom, as it flutters to the ground!

I do. All else grows dim, and fades away. I am again with Dora, in our cottage. I do not know how long she has been ill. I am so used to it in feeling, that I cannot count the time. It is not really long, in weeks or months; but, in my usage and experience, it is a weary, weary while.

They have left off telling me to 'wait a few days more'. I have begun to fear, remotely, that the day may never shine, when I shall see my child-wife running in the sunlight with her old friend Jip.

He is, as it were suddenly, grown very old. It may be that he misses in his mistress, something that enlivened him and made him younger; but he mopes, and his sight is weak, and his limbs are feeble, and my aunt is sorry that he objects to her no more, but creeps near her as he lies on Dora's bed--she sitting at the bedside--and mildly licks her hand.

Dora lies smiling on us, and is beautiful, and utters no hasty or complaining word. She says that we are very good to her; that her dear old careful boy is tiring himself out, she knows; that my aunt has no sleep, yet is always wakeful, active, and kind. Sometimes, the little bird-like ladies come to see her; and then we talk about our wedding-day, and all that happy time.

What a strange rest and pause in my life there seems to be--and in all life, within doors and without--when I sit in the quiet, shaded, orderly room, with the blue eyes of my child-wife turned towards me, and her little fingers twining round my hand! Many and many an hour I sit thus; but, of all those times, three times come the freshest on my mind.

It is morning; and Dora, made so trim by my aunt's hands, shows me how her pretty hair will curl upon the pillow yet, and how long and bright it is, and how she likes to have it loosely gathered in that net she wears.

'Not that I am vain of it, now, you mocking boy,' she says, when I smile; 'but because you used to say you thought it so beautiful; and because, when I first began to think about you, I used to peep in the glass, and wonder whether you would like very much to have a lock of it.'

Oh what a foolish fellow you were, Doady, when I gave you one!'

'That was on the day when you were painting the flowers I had given you, Dora, and when I told you how much in love I was.'

'Ah! but I didn't like to tell you,' says Dora, 'then, how I had cried over them, because I believed you really liked me! When I can run about again as I used to do, Doady, let us go and see those places where we were such a silly couple, shall we? And take some of the old walks? And not forget poor papa?'

'Yes, we will, and have some happy days. So you must make haste to get well, my dear.'

'Oh, I shall soon do that! I am so much better, you don't know!'

It is evening; and I sit in the same chair, by the same bed, with the same face turned towards me. We have been silent, and there is a smile upon her face. I have ceased to carry my light burden up and down stairs now. She lies here all the day.

'Doady!'

'My dear Dora!'

'You won't think what I am going to say, unreasonable, after what you told me, such a little while ago, of Mr. Wickfield's not being well? I want to see Agnes. Very much I want to see her.'

'I will write to her, my dear.'

'Will you?'

'Directly.'

'What a good, kind boy! Doady, take me on your arm. Indeed, my dear, it's not a whim. It's not a foolish fancy. I want, very much indeed, to see her!'

'I am certain of it. I have only to tell her so, and she is sure to come.'

'You are very lonely when you go downstairs, now?' Dora whispers, with her arm about my neck.

'How can I be otherwise, my own love, when I see your empty chair?'

'My empty chair!' She clings to me for a little while, in silence. 'And you really miss me, Doady?' looking up, and brightly smiling. 'Even poor, giddy, stupid me?'

'My heart, who is there upon earth that I could miss so much?'

'Oh, husband! I am so glad, yet so sorry!' creeping closer to me, and folding me in both her arms. She laughs and sobs, and then is quiet, and quite happy.

'Quite!' she says. 'Only give Agnes my dear love, and tell her that I want very, very, much to see her; and I have nothing left to wish for.'

'Except to get well again, Dora.'

'Ah, Doady! Sometimes I think--you know I always was a silly little thing!--that that will never be!'

'Don't say so, Dora! Dearest love, don't think so!'

'I won't, if I can help it, Doady. But I am very happy; though my dear boy is so lonely by himself, before his child-wife's empty chair!'

It is night; and I am with her still. Agnes has arrived; has been among us for a whole day and an evening. She, my aunt, and I, have sat with Dora since the morning, all together. We have not talked much, but Dora has been perfectly contented and cheerful. We are now alone.

Do I know, now, that my child-wife will soon leave me? They have told me so; they have told me nothing new to my thoughts--but I am far from sure that I have taken that truth to heart. I cannot master it. I have withdrawn by myself, many times today, to weep. I have remembered who wept for a parting between the living and the dead. I have bethought me of all that gracious and compassionate history. I have tried to resign myself, and to console myself; and that, I hope, I may have done imperfectly; but what I cannot firmly settle in my mind is, that the end will absolutely come. I hold her hand in mine, I hold her heart in mine, I see her love for me, alive in all its strength. I cannot shut out a pale lingering shadow of belief that she will be spared.

'I am going to speak to you, Doady. I am going to say something I have often thought of saying, lately. You won't mind?' with a gentle look.

'Mind, my darling?'

'Because I don't know what you will think, or what you may have thought sometimes. Perhaps you have often thought the same. Doady, dear, I am afraid I was too young.'

I lay my face upon the pillow by her, and she looks into my eyes, and

speaks very softly. Gradually, as she goes on, I feel, with a stricken heart, that she is speaking of herself as past.

'I am afraid, dear, I was too young. I don't mean in years only, but in experience, and thoughts, and everything. I was such a silly little creature! I am afraid it would have been better, if we had only loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it. I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife.'

I try to stay my tears, and to reply, 'Oh, Dora, love, as fit as I to be a husband!'

'I don't know,' with the old shake of her curls. 'Perhaps! But if I had been more fit to be married I might have made you more so, too. Besides, you are very clever, and I never was.'

'We have been very happy, my sweet Dora.'

'I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is.'

'Oh, Dora, dearest, dearest, do not speak to me so. Every word seems a reproach!'

'No, not a syllable!' she answers, kissing me. 'Oh, my dear, you never deserved it, and I loved you far too well to say a reproachful word to you, in earnest--it was all the merit I had, except being pretty--or you thought me so. Is it lonely, down-stairs, Doady?'

'Very! Very!'

'Don't cry! Is my chair there?'

'In its old place.'

'Oh, how my poor boy cries! Hush, hush! Now, make me one promise. I want to speak to Agnes. When you go downstairs, tell Agnes so, and send her up to me; and while I speak to her, let no one come--not even aunt. I want to speak to Agnes by herself. I want to speak to Agnes, quite alone.'

I promise that she shall, immediately; but I cannot leave her, for my grief.

'I said that it was better as it is!' she whispers, as she holds me in her arms. 'Oh, Doady, after more years, you never could have loved your child-wife better than you do; and, after more years, she would so have tried and disappointed you, that you might not have been able to love her half so well! I know I was too young and foolish. It is much better as it is!'

Agnes is downstairs, when I go into the parlour; and I give her the message. She disappears, leaving me alone with Jip.

His Chinese house is by the fire; and he lies within it, on his bed of flannel, querulously trying to sleep. The bright moon is high and clear. As I look out on the night, my tears fall fast, and my undisciplined heart is chastened heavily--heavily.

I sit down by the fire, thinking with a blind remorse of all those secret feelings I have nourished since my marriage. I think of every little trifle between me and Dora, and feel the truth, that trifles make the sum of life. Ever rising from the sea of my remembrance, is the image of the dear child as I knew her first, graced by my young love,

and by her own, with every fascination wherein such love is rich. Would it, indeed, have been better if we had loved each other as a boy and a girl, and forgotten it? Undisciplined heart, reply!

How the time wears, I know not; until I am recalled by my child-wife's old companion. More restless than he was, he crawls out of his house, and looks at me, and wanders to the door, and whines to go upstairs.

'Not tonight, Jip! Not tonight!'

He comes very slowly back to me, licks my hand, and lifts his dim eyes to my face.

'Oh, Jip! It may be, never again!'

He lies down at my feet, stretches himself out as if to sleep, and with a plaintive cry, is dead.

'Oh, Agnes! Look, look, here!' --That face, so full of pity, and of grief, that rain of tears, that awful mute appeal to me, that solemn hand upraised towards Heaven!

'Agnes?'

It is over. Darkness comes before my eyes; and, for a time, all things are blotted out of my remembrance.

#### CHAPTER 54. Mr. MICAWBER'S TRANSACTIONS

This is not the time at which I am to enter on the state of my mind



beneath its load of sorrow. I came to think that the Future was walled up before me, that the energy and action of my life were at an end, that I never could find any refuge but in the grave. I came to think so, I say, but not in the first shock of my grief. It slowly grew to that. If the events I go on to relate, had not thickened around me, in the beginning to confuse, and in the end to augment, my affliction, it is possible (though I think not probable), that I might have fallen at once into this condition. As it was, an interval occurred before I fully knew my own distress; an interval, in which I even supposed that its sharpest pangs were past; and when my mind could soothe itself by resting on all that was most innocent and beautiful, in the tender story that was closed for ever.

When it was first proposed that I should go abroad, or how it came to be agreed among us that I was to seek the restoration of my peace in change and travel, I do not, even now, distinctly know. The spirit of Agnes so pervaded all we thought, and said, and did, in that time of sorrow, that I assume I may refer the project to her influence. But her influence was so quiet that I know no more.

And now, indeed, I began to think that in my old association of her with the stained-glass window in the church, a prophetic foreshadowing of what she would be to me, in the calamity that was to happen in the fullness of time, had found a way into my mind. In all that sorrow, from the moment, never to be forgotten, when she stood before me with her upraised hand, she was like a sacred presence in my lonely house. When the Angel of Death alighted there, my child-wife fell asleep--they told me so when I could bear to hear it--on her bosom, with a smile. From my swoon, I first awoke to a consciousness of her compassionate tears, her words of hope and peace, her gentle face bending down as from a purer region nearer Heaven, over my undisciplined heart, and softening its pain.

Let me go on.

I was to go abroad. That seemed to have been determined among us from the first. The ground now covering all that could perish of my departed wife, I waited only for what Mr. Micawber called the 'final pulverization of Heep'; and for the departure of the emigrants.

At the request of Traddles, most affectionate and devoted of friends in my trouble, we returned to Canterbury: I mean my aunt, Agnes, and I. We proceeded by appointment straight to Mr. Micawber's house; where, and at Mr. Wickfield's, my friend had been labouring ever since our explosive meeting. When poor Mrs. Micawber saw me come in, in my black clothes, she was sensibly affected. There was a great deal of good in Mrs. Micawber's heart, which had not been dunned out of it in all those many years.

'Well, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber,' was my aunt's first salutation after we were seated. 'Pray, have you thought about that emigration proposal of mine?'

'My dear madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'perhaps I cannot better express the conclusion at which Mrs. Micawber, your humble servant, and I may add our children, have jointly and severally arrived, than by borrowing the language of an illustrious poet, to reply that our Boat is on the shore, and our Bark is on the sea.'

'That's right,' said my aunt. 'I augur all sort of good from your sensible decision.'

'Madam, you do us a great deal of honour,' he rejoined. He then referred to a memorandum. 'With respect to the pecuniary assistance enabling us to launch our frail canoe on the ocean of enterprise, I have reconsidered that important business-point; and would beg to propose

my notes of hand--drawn, it is needless to stipulate, on stamps of the amounts respectively required by the various Acts of Parliament applying to such securities--at eighteen, twenty-four, and thirty months.

The proposition I originally submitted, was twelve, eighteen, and twenty-four; but I am apprehensive that such an arrangement might not allow sufficient time for the requisite amount of--Something--to turn up. We might not,' said Mr. Micawber, looking round the room as if it represented several hundred acres of highly cultivated land, 'on the first responsibility becoming due, have been successful in our harvest, or we might not have got our harvest in. Labour, I believe, is sometimes difficult to obtain in that portion of our colonial possessions where it will be our lot to combat with the teeming soil.'

'Arrange it in any way you please, sir,' said my aunt.

'Madam,' he replied, 'Mrs. Micawber and myself are deeply sensible of the very considerate kindness of our friends and patrons. What I wish is, to be perfectly business-like, and perfectly punctual. Turning over, as we are about to turn over, an entirely new leaf; and falling back, as we are now in the act of falling back, for a Spring of no common magnitude; it is important to my sense of self-respect, besides being an example to my son, that these arrangements should be concluded as between man and man.'

I don't know that Mr. Micawber attached any meaning to this last phrase; I don't know that anybody ever does, or did; but he appeared to relish it uncommonly, and repeated, with an impressive cough, 'as between man and man'.

'I propose,' said Mr. Micawber, 'Bills--a convenience to the mercantile world, for which, I believe, we are originally indebted to the Jews, who appear to me to have had a devilish deal too much to do with them ever since--because they are negotiable. But if a Bond, or any other

description of security, would be preferred, I should be happy to execute any such instrument. As between man and man.'

MY aunt observed, that in a case where both parties were willing to agree to anything, she took it for granted there would be no difficulty in settling this point. Mr. Micawber was of her opinion.

'In reference to our domestic preparations, madam,' said Mr. Micawber, with some pride, 'for meeting the destiny to which we are now understood to be self-devoted, I beg to report them. My eldest daughter attends at five every morning in a neighbouring establishment, to acquire the process--if process it may be called--of milking cows. My younger children are instructed to observe, as closely as circumstances will permit, the habits of the pigs and poultry maintained in the poorer parts of this city: a pursuit from which they have, on two occasions, been brought home, within an inch of being run over. I have myself directed some attention, during the past week, to the art of baking; and my son Wilkins has issued forth with a walking-stick and driven cattle, when permitted, by the rugged hirelings who had them in charge, to render any voluntary service in that direction--which I regret to say, for the credit of our nature, was not often; he being generally warned, with imprecations, to desist.'

'All very right indeed,' said my aunt, encouragingly. 'Mrs. Micawber has been busy, too, I have no doubt.'

'My dear madam,' returned Mrs. Micawber, with her business-like air.

'I am free to confess that I have not been actively engaged in pursuits immediately connected with cultivation or with stock, though well aware that both will claim my attention on a foreign shore. Such opportunities as I have been enabled to alienate from my domestic duties, I have devoted to corresponding at some length with my family. For I own it seems to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, who always

fell back on me, I suppose from old habit, to whomsoever else she might address her discourse at starting, 'that the time is come when the past should be buried in oblivion; when my family should take Mr. Micawber by the hand, and Mr. Micawber should take my family by the hand; when the lion should lie down with the lamb, and my family be on terms with Mr. Micawber.'

I said I thought so too.

'This, at least, is the light, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' pursued Mrs. Micawber, 'in which I view the subject. When I lived at home with my papa and mama, my papa was accustomed to ask, when any point was under discussion in our limited circle, "In what light does my Emma view the subject?" That my papa was too partial, I know; still, on such a point as the frigid coldness which has ever subsisted between Mr. Micawber and my family, I necessarily have formed an opinion, delusive though it may be.'

'No doubt. Of course you have, ma'am,' said my aunt.

'Precisely so,' assented Mrs. Micawber. 'Now, I may be wrong in my conclusions; it is very likely that I am, but my individual impression is, that the gulf between my family and Mr. Micawber may be traced to an apprehension, on the part of my family, that Mr. Micawber would require pecuniary accommodation. I cannot help thinking,' said Mrs. Micawber, with an air of deep sagacity, 'that there are members of my family who have been apprehensive that Mr. Micawber would solicit them for their names.---I do not mean to be conferred in Baptism upon our children, but to be inscribed on Bills of Exchange, and negotiated in the Money Market.'

The look of penetration with which Mrs. Micawber announced this discovery, as if no one had ever thought of it before, seemed rather to

astonish my aunt; who abruptly replied, 'Well, ma'am, upon the whole, I shouldn't wonder if you were right!'

'Mr. Micawber being now on the eve of casting off the pecuniary shackles that have so long enthralled him,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'and of commencing a new career in a country where there is sufficient range for his abilities,--which, in my opinion, is exceedingly important; Mr. Micawber's abilities peculiarly requiring space,--it seems to me that my family should signalize the occasion by coming forward. What I could wish to see, would be a meeting between Mr. Micawber and my family at a festive entertainment, to be given at my family's expense; where Mr. Micawber's health and prosperity being proposed, by some leading member of my family, Mr. Micawber might have an opportunity of developing his views.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, with some heat, 'it may be better for me to state distinctly, at once, that if I were to develop my views to that assembled group, they would possibly be found of an offensive nature: my impression being that your family are, in the aggregate, impertinent Snobs; and, in detail, unmitigated Ruffians.'

'Micawber,' said Mrs. Micawber, shaking her head, 'no! You have never understood them, and they have never understood you.'

Mr. Micawber coughed.

'They have never understood you, Micawber,' said his wife. 'They may be incapable of it. If so, that is their misfortune. I can pity their misfortune.'

'I am extremely sorry, my dear Emma,' said Mr. Micawber, relenting, 'to have been betrayed into any expressions that might, even remotely, have the appearance of being strong expressions. All I would say is, that

I can go abroad without your family coming forward to favour me,--in short, with a parting Shove of their cold shoulders; and that, upon the whole, I would rather leave England with such impetus as I possess, than derive any acceleration of it from that quarter. At the same time, my dear, if they should condescend to reply to your communications--which our joint experience renders most improbable--far be it from me to be a barrier to your wishes.'

The matter being thus amicably settled, Mr. Micawber gave Mrs. Micawber his arm, and glancing at the heap of books and papers lying before Traddles on the table, said they would leave us to ourselves; which they ceremoniously did.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, leaning back in his chair when they were gone, and looking at me with an affection that made his eyes red, and his hair all kinds of shapes, 'I don't make any excuse for troubling you with business, because I know you are deeply interested in it, and it may divert your thoughts. My dear boy, I hope you are not worn out?'

'I am quite myself,' said I, after a pause. 'We have more cause to think of my aunt than of anyone. You know how much she has done.'

'Surely, surely,' answered Traddles. 'Who can forget it!'

'But even that is not all,' said I. 'During the last fortnight, some new trouble has vexed her; and she has been in and out of London every day. Several times she has gone out early, and been absent until evening. Last night, Traddles, with this journey before her, it was almost midnight before she came home. You know what her consideration for others is. She will not tell me what has happened to distress her.'

My aunt, very pale, and with deep lines in her face, sat immovable until

I had finished; when some stray tears found their way to her cheeks, and she put her hand on mine.

'It's nothing, Trot; it's nothing. There will be no more of it. You shall know by and by. Now Agnes, my dear, let us attend to these affairs.'

'I must do Mr. Micawber the justice to say,' Traddles began, 'that although he would appear not to have worked to any good account for himself, he is a most untiring man when he works for other people. I never saw such a fellow. If he always goes on in the same way, he must be, virtually, about two hundred years old, at present. The heat into which he has been continually putting himself; and the distracted and impetuous manner in which he has been diving, day and night, among papers and books; to say nothing of the immense number of letters he has written me between this house and Mr. Wickfield's, and often across the table when he has been sitting opposite, and might much more easily have spoken; is quite extraordinary.'

'Letters!' cried my aunt. 'I believe he dreams in letters!'

'There's Mr. Dick, too,' said Traddles, 'has been doing wonders! As soon as he was released from overlooking Uriah Heep, whom he kept in such charge as I never saw exceeded, he began to devote himself to Mr. Wickfield. And really his anxiety to be of use in the investigations we have been making, and his real usefulness in extracting, and copying, and fetching, and carrying, have been quite stimulating to us.'

'Dick is a very remarkable man,' exclaimed my aunt; 'and I always said he was. Trot, you know it.'

'I am happy to say, Miss Wickfield,' pursued Traddles, at once with great delicacy and with great earnestness, 'that in your absence Mr.



Wickfield has considerably improved. Relieved of the incubus that had fastened upon him for so long a time, and of the dreadful apprehensions under which he had lived, he is hardly the same person. At times, even his impaired power of concentrating his memory and attention on particular points of business, has recovered itself very much; and he has been able to assist us in making some things clear, that we should have found very difficult indeed, if not hopeless, without him. But what I have to do is to come to results; which are short enough; not to gossip on all the hopeful circumstances I have observed, or I shall never have done.' His natural manner and agreeable simplicity made it transparent that he said this to put us in good heart, and to enable Agnes to hear her father mentioned with greater confidence; but it was not the less pleasant for that.

'Now, let me see,' said Traddles, looking among the papers on the table. 'Having counted our funds, and reduced to order a great mass of unintentional confusion in the first place, and of wilful confusion and falsification in the second, we take it to be clear that Mr. Wickfield might now wind up his business, and his agency-trust, and exhibit no deficiency or defalcation whatever.'

'Oh, thank Heaven!' cried Agnes, fervently.

'But,' said Traddles, 'the surplus that would be left as his means of support--and I suppose the house to be sold, even in saying this--would be so small, not exceeding in all probability some hundreds of pounds, that perhaps, Miss Wickfield, it would be best to consider whether he might not retain his agency of the estate to which he has so long been receiver. His friends might advise him, you know; now he is free. You yourself, Miss Wickfield--Copperfield--I--'

'I have considered it, Trotwood,' said Agnes, looking to me, 'and I feel that it ought not to be, and must not be; even on the recommendation of

a friend to whom I am so grateful, and owe so much.'

'I will not say that I recommend it,' observed Traddles. 'I think it right to suggest it. No more.'

'I am happy to hear you say so,' answered Agnes, steadily, 'for it gives me hope, almost assurance, that we think alike. Dear Mr. Traddles and dear Trotwood, papa once free with honour, what could I wish for! I have always aspired, if I could have released him from the toils in which he was held, to render back some little portion of the love and care I owe him, and to devote my life to him. It has been, for years, the utmost height of my hopes. To take our future on myself, will be the next great happiness--the next to his release from all trust and responsibility--that I can know.'

'Have you thought how, Agnes?'

'Often! I am not afraid, dear Trotwood. I am certain of success. So many people know me here, and think kindly of me, that I am certain. Don't mistrust me. Our wants are not many. If I rent the dear old house, and keep a school, I shall be useful and happy.'

The calm fervour of her cheerful voice brought back so vividly, first the dear old house itself, and then my solitary home, that my heart was too full for speech. Traddles pretended for a little while to be busily looking among the papers.

'Next, Miss Trotwood,' said Traddles, 'that property of yours.'

'Well, sir,' sighed my aunt. 'All I have got to say about it is, that if it's gone, I can bear it; and if it's not gone, I shall be glad to get it back.'

'It was originally, I think, eight thousand pounds, Consols?' said Traddles.

'Right!' replied my aunt.

'I can't account for more than five,' said Traddles, with an air of perplexity.

'--thousand, do you mean?' inquired my aunt, with uncommon composure, 'or pounds?'

'Five thousand pounds,' said Traddles.

'It was all there was,' returned my aunt. 'I sold three, myself. One, I paid for your articles, Trot, my dear; and the other two I have by me. When I lost the rest, I thought it wise to say nothing about that sum, but to keep it secretly for a rainy day. I wanted to see how you would come out of the trial, Trot; and you came out nobly--persevering, self-reliant, self-denying! So did Dick. Don't speak to me, for I find my nerves a little shaken!'

Nobody would have thought so, to see her sitting upright, with her arms folded; but she had wonderful self-command.

'Then I am delighted to say,' cried Traddles, beaming with joy, 'that we have recovered the whole money!'

'Don't congratulate me, anybody!' exclaimed my aunt. 'How so, sir?'

'You believed it had been misappropriated by Mr. Wickfield?' said Traddles.

'Of course I did,' said my aunt, 'and was therefore easily silenced.'

Agnes, not a word!'

'And indeed,' said Traddles, 'it was sold, by virtue of the power of management he held from you; but I needn't say by whom sold, or on whose actual signature. It was afterwards pretended to Mr. Wickfield, by that rascal,--and proved, too, by figures,--that he had possessed himself of the money (on general instructions, he said) to keep other deficiencies and difficulties from the light. Mr. Wickfield, being so weak and helpless in his hands as to pay you, afterwards, several sums of interest on a pretended principal which he knew did not exist, made himself, unhappily, a party to the fraud.'

'And at last took the blame upon himself,' added my aunt; 'and wrote me a mad letter, charging himself with robbery, and wrong unheard of. Upon which I paid him a visit early one morning, called for a candle, burnt the letter, and told him if he ever could right me and himself, to do it; and if he couldn't, to keep his own counsel for his daughter's sake.---If anybody speaks to me, I'll leave the house!'

We all remained quiet; Agnes covering her face.

'Well, my dear friend,' said my aunt, after a pause, 'and you have really extorted the money back from him?'

'Why, the fact is,' returned Traddles, 'Mr. Micawber had so completely hemmed him in, and was always ready with so many new points if an old one failed, that he could not escape from us. A most remarkable circumstance is, that I really don't think he grasped this sum even so much for the gratification of his avarice, which was inordinate, as in the hatred he felt for Copperfield. He said so to me, plainly. He said he would even have spent as much, to baulk or injure Copperfield.'

'Ha!' said my aunt, knitting her brows thoughtfully, and glancing at

Agnes. 'And what's become of him?'

'I don't know. He left here,' said Traddles, 'with his mother, who had been clamouring, and beseeching, and disclosing, the whole time. They went away by one of the London night coaches, and I know no more about him; except that his malevolence to me at parting was audacious. He seemed to consider himself hardly less indebted to me, than to Mr. Micawber; which I consider (as I told him) quite a compliment.'

'Do you suppose he has any money, Traddles?' I asked.

'Oh dear, yes, I should think so,' he replied, shaking his head, seriously. 'I should say he must have pocketed a good deal, in one way or other. But, I think you would find, Copperfield, if you had an opportunity of observing his course, that money would never keep that man out of mischief. He is such an incarnate hypocrite, that whatever object he pursues, he must pursue crookedly. It's his only compensation for the outward restraints he puts upon himself. Always creeping along the ground to some small end or other, he will always magnify every object in the way; and consequently will hate and suspect everybody that comes, in the most innocent manner, between him and it. So the crooked courses will become crookeder, at any moment, for the least reason, or for none. It's only necessary to consider his history here,' said Traddles, 'to know that.'

'He's a monster of meanness!' said my aunt.

'Really I don't know about that,' observed Traddles thoughtfully. 'Many people can be very mean, when they give their minds to it.'

'And now, touching Mr. Micawber,' said my aunt.

'Well, really,' said Traddles, cheerfully, 'I must, once more, give Mr.

Micawber high praise. But for his having been so patient and persevering for so long a time, we never could have hoped to do anything worth speaking of. And I think we ought to consider that Mr. Micawber did right, for right's sake, when we reflect what terms he might have made with Uriah Heep himself, for his silence.'

'I think so too,' said I.

'Now, what would you give him?' inquired my aunt.

'Oh! Before you come to that,' said Traddles, a little disconcerted, 'I am afraid I thought it discreet to omit (not being able to carry everything before me) two points, in making this lawless adjustment--for it's perfectly lawless from beginning to end--of a difficult affair. Those I.O.U.'s, and so forth, which Mr. Micawber gave him for the advances he had--'

'Well! They must be paid,' said my aunt.

'Yes, but I don't know when they may be proceeded on, or where they are,' rejoined Traddles, opening his eyes; 'and I anticipate, that, between this time and his departure, Mr. Micawber will be constantly arrested, or taken in execution.'

'Then he must be constantly set free again, and taken out of execution,' said my aunt. 'What's the amount altogether?'

'Why, Mr. Micawber has entered the transactions--he calls them transactions--with great form, in a book,' rejoined Traddles, smiling; 'and he makes the amount a hundred and three pounds, five.'

'Now, what shall we give him, that sum included?' said my aunt. 'Agnes, my dear, you and I can talk about division of it afterwards. What should

it be? Five hundred pounds?'

Upon this, Traddles and I both struck in at once. We both recommended a small sum in money, and the payment, without stipulation to Mr. Micawber, of the Uriah claims as they came in. We proposed that the family should have their passage and their outfit, and a hundred pounds; and that Mr. Micawber's arrangement for the repayment of the advances should be gravely entered into, as it might be wholesome for him to suppose himself under that responsibility. To this, I added the suggestion, that I should give some explanation of his character and history to Mr. Peggotty, who I knew could be relied on; and that to Mr. Peggotty should be quietly entrusted the discretion of advancing another hundred. I further proposed to interest Mr. Micawber in Mr. Peggotty, by confiding so much of Mr. Peggotty's story to him as I might feel justified in relating, or might think expedient; and to endeavour to bring each of them to bear upon the other, for the common advantage. We all entered warmly into these views; and I may mention at once, that the principals themselves did so, shortly afterwards, with perfect good will and harmony.

Seeing that Traddles now glanced anxiously at my aunt again, I reminded him of the second and last point to which he had adverted.

'You and your aunt will excuse me, Copperfield, if I touch upon a painful theme, as I greatly fear I shall,' said Traddles, hesitating; 'but I think it necessary to bring it to your recollection. On the day of Mr. Micawber's memorable denunciation a threatening allusion was made by Uriah Heep to your aunt's--husband.'

My aunt, retaining her stiff position, and apparent composure, assented with a nod.

'Perhaps,' observed Traddles, 'it was mere purposeless impertinence?'

'No,' returned my aunt.

'There was--pardon me--really such a person, and at all in his power?'  
hinted Traddles.

'Yes, my good friend,' said my aunt.

Traddles, with a perceptible lengthening of his face, explained that he  
had not been able to approach this



**E.M. Forster**  
***A Passage to India***

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

PART I: MOSQUE

CHAPTER I

Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents

nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple

of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There

are no bathing-steps on the river front, as the Ganges happens not to be holy here; indeed

there is no river front, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream. The

streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden

away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest. Chandrapore was

never large or beautiful, but two hundred years ago it lay on the road between Upper India,

then imperial, and the sea, and the fine houses date from that period. The zest for decoration

stopped in the eighteenth century, nor was it ever democratic. There is no painting and scarcely

any carving in the bazaars. The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving.

So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life.

Inland, the prospect alters. There is an oval Maidan, and a long shallow hospital. Houses belonging

to Furasians stand on the high ground by the railway station. Beyond the railway— which

runs parallel to the river— the land sinks, then rises again rather steeply. On the second rise is

laid out the little civil station, and viewed hence Chandrapore appears to be a totally different

place. It is a city of gardens. It is no city, but a forest sparsely scattered with huts. It is a tropical

pleasaunce washed by a noble river. The toddy palms and neem trees and mangoes and poplars

that were hidden behind the bazaars now become visible and in their turn hide the bazaars.

They rise from the gardens where ancient tanks nourish them, they burst out of stifling purlieus

and unconsidered temples. Seeking light and air, and endowed with more strength than man or

his works, they soar above the lower deposit to greet one another with branches and beckoning

leaves, and to build a city for the birds. Especially after the rains do they screen what passes

below, but at all times, even when scorched or leafless, they glorify the city to the English people

who inhabit the rise, so that new-comers cannot believe it to be as meagre as it is described,

and have to be driven down to acquire disillusionment. As for the civil station itself, it

provokes no emotion. It charms not; neither does it repel. It is sensibly planned, with a redbrick

club on its brow, and farther back a grocer's and a cemetery, and the bungalows are disposed

along roads that intersect at right angles. It has nothing hideous in it, and only the view

is beautiful; it shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky.

The sky too has its changes, but they are less marked than those of the vegetation and the

river. Clouds map it tip at times, but it is normally a dome of blending tints, and the main tint

blue. By day the blue will pale down into white where it touches the white of the land, after

sunset it has a new circumference— orange, melting upwards into tenderest purple. But the core

of blue persists, and so it is by night. Then the stars hang like lamps from the immense vault.

The distance between the vault and them is as nothing to the distance behind them, and that

farther distance, though beyond colour, last freed itself from blue.

The sky settles everything— not only climates and seasons but when the earth shall be beautiful.

By herself she can do little— only feeble outbursts of flowers. But when the sky chooses,

glory can rain into the Chandrapore bazaars or a benediction pass from horizon to horizon. The

sky can do this because it is so strong and so enormous. Strength comes from the sun, infused

in it daily; size from the prostrate earth. No mountains infringe on the curve. League after

league the earth lies flat, heaves a little, is flat again. Only in the south, where a group of fists

and fingers are thrust up through the soil, is the endless expanse interrupted. These fists and

fingers are the Marabar Hills, containing the extraordinary caves.

## CHAPTER II

Abandoning his bicycle, which fell before a servant could catch it, the young man sprang up

on to the verandah. He was all animation. "Hamidullah, Hamidullah! am I late?" he cried.

"Do not apologize," said his host. "You are always late."

"Kindly answer my question. Am I late? Has Mahmoud Ali eaten all the food? If so I go elsewhere. Mr. Mahmoud Ali, how are you?"

"Thank you, Dr. Aziz, I am dying."

"Dying before your dinner? Oh, poor Malimoud Ali!"

"Hamidullah here is actually dead. He passed away just as you rode up on your bike."

"Yes, that is so," said the other. "Imagine us both as addressing you from another and a

happier world."

"Does there happen to be such a thing as a hookah in that happier world of yours?"

"Aziz, don't chatter. We are having a very sad talk."

The hookah had been packed too tight, as was usual in his friend's house, and bubbled

sulkily. He coaxed it. Yielding at last, the tobacco jetted up into his lungs and nostrils, driving

out the smoke of burning cow dung that had filled them as he rode through the bazaar. It was

delicious. He lay in a trance, sensuous but healthy, through which the talk of the two others did

not seem particularly sad—they were discussing as to whether or no it is possible to be friends

with an Englishman. Mahmoud Ali argued that it was not, Hamidullah disagreed, but with so

many reservations that there was no friction between them. Delicious indeed to lie on the broad

verandah with the moon rising in front and the servants preparing dinner behind, and no trouble

happening.

"Well, look at my own experience this morning."

"I only contend that it is possible in England," replied Hamidullah, who had been to that

country long ago, before the big rush, and had received a cordial welcome at Cambridge.

"It is impossible here. Aziz! The red-nosed boy has again insulted me in Court. I do not

blame him. He was told that he ought to insult me. Until lately he was quite a nice boy, but the

others have got hold of him."

"Yes, they have no chance here, that is my point. They come out intending to be gentlemen,

and are told it will not do. Look at Lesley, look at Blakiston, now it is your red-nosed boy,

and Fielding will go next. Why, I remember when Turton came out first. It was in another part

of the Province. You fellows will not believe me, but I have driven with Turton in his carriage—

Turton! Oh yes, we were once quite intimate. He has shown me his stamp collection."

"He would expect you to steal it now. Turton! But red-nosed boy will be far worse than Turton!"

"I do not think so. They all become exactly the same, not worse, not better. I give any Englishman

two years, be he Turton or Burton. It is only the difference of a letter. And I give any

Englishwoman six months. All are exactly alike. Do you not agree with me?"

"I do not," replied Mahmoud Ali, entering into the bitter fun, and feeling both pain and

amusement at each word that was uttered. "For my own part I find such profound differences

among our rulers. Red-nose mumbles, Turton talks distinctly, Mrs. Turton takes bribes, Mrs.

Red-nose does not and cannot, because so far there is no Mrs. Red-nose."

"Bribes?"

"Did you not know that when they were lent to Central India over a Canal Scheme, some

Rajah or other gave her a sewing machine in solid gold so that the water should run through his

state?"

"And does it?"

"No, that is where Mrs. Turton is so skilful. When we poor blacks take bribes, we perform

what we are bribed to perform, and the law discovers us in consequence. The English take and

do nothing. I admire them."

"We all admire them. Aziz, please pass me the hookah."

"Oh, not yet—hookah is so jolly now."

"You are a very selfish boy." He raised his voice suddenly, and shouted for dinner. Servants

shouted back that it was ready. They meant that they wished it was ready, and were so understood,

for nobody moved. Then Hamidullah continued, but with changed manner and evident

emotion.

"But take my case—the case of young Hugh Bannister. Here is the son of my dear, my dear

friends, the Reverend and Mrs. Bannister, whose goodness to me in England I shall never forget

or describe. They were father and mother to me, I talked to them as I do now. In the vacations

their Rectory became my home. They entrusted all their children to me— I often carried little

Hugh about— I took him up to the Funeral of Queen Victoria, and held him in my arms above the

crowd."

"Queen Victoria was different," murmured Mahmoud Ali.

"I learn now that this boy is in business as a leather merchant at Cawnpore. Imagine how I

long to see him and to pay his fare that this house may be his home. But it is useless. The

other Anglo-Indians will have got hold of him long ago. He will probably think that I want

something,

and I cannot face that from the son of my old friends. Oh, what in this country has gone

wrong with everything, Vakil Sahib? I ask you."

Aziz joined in. "Why talk about the English? Brrrr . . . ! Why be either friends with the fellows

or not friends? Let us shut them out and be jolly. Queen Victoria and Mrs. Bannister were

the only exceptions, and they're dead."



"No, no, I do not admit that, I have met others."

"So have I," said Mahmoud Ali, unexpectedly veering. "All ladies are far from alike."  
Their

mood was changed, and they recalled little kindnesses and courtesies. "She said 'Thank you so

much' in the most natural way." "She offered me a lozenge when the dust irritated my throat."

Hamidullah could remember more important examples of angelic ministration, but the other,

who only knew Anglo-India, had to ransack his memory for scraps, and it was not surprising

that he should return to "But of course all this is exceptional. The exception does not prove the

rule. The average woman is like Mrs. Turton, and, Aziz, you know what she is." Aziz did not

know, but said he did. He too generalized from his disappointments— it is difficult for members

of a subject race to do otherwise. Granted the exceptions, he agreed that all English women are

haughty and venal. The gleam passed from the conversation, whose wintry surface unrolled and

expanded interminably.

A servant announced dinner. They ignored him. The elder men had reached their eternal

politics, Aziz drifted into the garden. The trees smelt sweet- green-blossomed champak- and

scraps of Persian poetry came into his head. Dinner, dinner, dinner . . . but when he returned to

the house for it, Mahmoud Ali had drifted away in his turn, to speak to his sais. "Come and see

my wife a little then," said Hamidullah, and they spent twenty minutes behind the purdah.

Hamidullah

Begum was a distant aunt of Aziz, and the only female relative he had in Chandrapore,

and she had much to say to him on this occasion about a family circumcision that had been

celebrated with imperfect pomp. It was difficult to get away, because until they had had their

dinner she would not begin hers, and consequently prolonged her remarks in case they should

suppose she was impatient. Having censured the circumcision, she bethought her of kindred

topics, and asked Aziz when he was going to be married.

Respectful but irritated, he answered, "Once is enough."

"Yes, he has done his duty," said Hamidullah. "Do not tease him so. He carries on his family,

two boys and their sister."

"Aunt, they live most comfortably with my wife's mother, where she was living when she

died. I can see them whenever I like. They are such very, very small children."

"And he sends them the whole of his salary and lives like a low-grade clerk, and tells no one

the reason. What more do you require him to do?"

But this was not Hamidullah Begum's point, and having courteously changed the conversation

for a few moments she returned and made it. She said, "What is to become of all our

daughters if men refuse to marry? They will marry beneath them, or--" And she began to tell

the tale of a lady of Imperial descent who could find no husband in the narrow circle where her

pride permitted her to mate, and had lived on unwed, her age now thirty, and would die unwed,

for no one would have her now. While the tale was in progress, it convinced the two men, the

tragedy seemed a slur on the whole community; better polygamy almost, than that a woman

should die without the joys God has intended her to receive. Wedlock, motherhood, power in

the house—for what else is she born, and how can the man who has denied them to her stand

up to face her creator and his own at the last day? Aziz took his leave saying "Perhaps . . . but

later . . ."--his invariable reply to such an appeal.

"You mustn't put off what you think right," said Hamidullah. "That is why India is in such a

plight, because we put off things." But seeing that his young relative looked worried, he added

a few soothing words, and thus wiped out any impression that his wife might have made .

During their absence, Mahmoud Ali had gone off in his carriage leaving a message that he

should be back in five minutes, but they were on no account to wait. They sat down to meat

with a distant cousin of the house, Mohammed Latif, who lived on Hamidullah's bounty and who

occupied the position neither of a servant nor of an equal. He did not speak unless spoken to,

and since no one spoke kept unoffended silence. Now and then he belched, in compliment to

the richness of the food. A gentle, happy and dishonest old man; all his life he had never done

a stroke of work. So long as some one of his relatives had a house he was sure of a home, and

it was unlikely that so large a family would all go bankrupt. His wife led a similar existence some

hundreds of miles away—he did not visit her, owing to the expense of the railway ticket. Presently

Aziz chaffed him, also the servants, and then began quoting poetry, Persian, Urdu, a little

Arabic. His memory was good, and for so young a man he had read largely; the themes he preferred

were the decay of Islam and the brevity of Love. They listened delighted, for they took

the public view of poetry, not the private which obtains in England. It never bored them to hear

words, words; they breathed them with the cool night air, never stopping to analyse; the name

of the poet, Hafiz, Hali, Iqbal, was sufficient guarantee. India— a hundred Indias— whispered

outside beneath the indifferent moon, but for the time India seemed one and their own, and

they regained their departed greatness by hearing its departure lamented, they felt young again

because reminded that youth must fly. A servant in scarlet interrupted him; he was the chuprassi

of the Civil Surgeon, and he handed Aziz a note.

"Old Callendar wants to see me at his bungalow," he said, not rising. "He might have the

politeness to say why."

"Some case, I daresay."

"I daresay not, I daresay nothing. He has found out our dinner hour, that's all, and chooses

to interrupt us every time, in order to show his power."

"On the one hand he always does this, on the other it may be a serious case, and you cannot

know," said Hamidullah, considerately paving the way towards obedience. "Had you not better clean your teeth after pan?"

"If my teeth are to be cleaned, I don't go at all. I am an Indian, it is an Indian habit to take

pan. The Civil Surgeon must put up with it. Mohammed Latif, my bike, please."

The poor relation got up. Slightly immersed in the realms of matter, he laid his hand on the

bicycle's saddle, while a servant did the actual wheeling. Between them they took it over a tintack.

Aziz held his hands under the ewer, dried them, fitted on his green felt hat, and then with

unexpected energy whizzed out of Hamidullah's compound.

"Aziz, Aziz, imprudent boy. ..." But he was far down the bazaar, riding furiously. He had

neither light nor bell nor had he a brake, but what use are such adjuncts in a land where the

cyclist's only hope is to coast from face to face, and just before he collides with each it vanishes?

And the city was fairly empty at this hour. When his tyre went flat, he leapt off and

shouted for a tonga.

He did not at first find one, and he had also to dispose of his bicycle at a friend's house. He

dallied furthermore to clean his teeth. But at last he was rattling towards the civil lines, with a

vivid sense of speed. As he entered their arid tidiness, depression suddenly seized him. The

roads, named after victorious generals and intersecting at right angles, were symbolic of the net

Great Britain had thrown over India. He felt caught in their meshes. When he turned into Major

Callendar's compound he could with difficulty restrain himself from getting down from the tonga

and approaching the bungalow on foot, and this not because his soul was servile but because

his feelings—the sensitive edges of him—feared a gross snub. There had been a "case" last

year—an Indian gentleman had driven up to an official's house and been turned back by the

servants and been told to approach more suitably— only one case among thousands of visits to

hundreds of officials, but its fame spread wide. The young man shrank from a repetition of it.

He compromised, and stopped the driver just outside the flood of light that fell across the verandah.

The Civil Surgeon was out.

"But the sahib has left me some message?"

The servant returned an indifferent "No." Aziz was in despair. It was a servant whom he had

forgotten to tip, and he could do nothing now because there were people in the hall. He was

convinced that there was a message, and that the man was withholding it out of revenge. While

they argued, the people came out. Both were ladies. Aziz lifted his hat. The first, who was in

evening dress, glanced at the Indian and turned instinctively away.

"Mrs. Lesley, it is a tonga," she cried.

"Ours?" enquired the second, also seeing Aziz, and doing likewise.

"Take the gifts the gods provide, anyhow," she screeched, and both jumped in. "Ø Tonga



wallah, club, club. Why doesn't the fool go?"

"Go, I will pay you to-morrow," said Aziz to the driver, and as they went off he called courteously,

"You are most welcome, ladies." They did not reply, being full of their own affairs.

So it had come, the usual thing— just as Mahmoud Ali said. The inevitable snub— his bow ignored,

his carriage taken. It might have been worse, for it comforted him somehow that Mesdames

Callendar and Lesley should both be fat and weigh the tonga down behind. Beautiful

women would have pained him. He turned to the servant, gave him a couple of rupees, and

asked again whether there was a message. The man, now very civil, returned the same answer.

Major Callendar had driven away half an hour before.

"Saying nothing?"

He had as a matter of fact said, "Damn Aziz"— words that the servant understood, but was

too polite to repeat. One can tip too much as well as too little, indeed the coin that buys the

exact truth has not yet been minted.

"Then I will write him a letter."

He was offered the use of the house, but was too dignified to enter it. Paper and ink were

brought on to the verandah. He began: "Dear Sir,— At your express command I have hastened

as a subordinate should—" and then stopped. "Tell him I have called, that is sufficient," he said,

tearing the protest up. "Here is my card. Call me a tonga."

"Huzoor, all are at the club."

"Then telephone for one down to the railway station." And since the man hastened to do

this he said, "Enough, enough, I prefer to walk." He commandeered a match and lit a cigarette.

These attentions, though purchased, soothed him. They would last as long as he had rupees,

which is something. But to shake the dust of Anglo-India off his feet! To escape from the net

and be back among manners and gestures that he knew! He began a walk, an unwonted exercise.

He was an athletic little man, daintily put together, but really very strong. Nevertheless

walking fatigued him, as it fatigues everyone in India except the new-corner. There is something

hostile in that soil. It either yields, and the foot sinks into a depression, or else it is unexpectedly

rigid and sharp, pressing stones or crystals against the tread. A series of these little surprises

exhausts; and he was wearing pumps, a poor preparation for any country. At the edge of

the civil station he turned into a mosque to rest.

He had always liked this mosque. It was gracious, and the arrangement pleased him. The

courtyard— entered through a ruined gate— contained an ablution tank of fresh clear water,

which was always in motion, being indeed part of a conduit that supplied the city. The courtyard

was paved with broken slabs. The covered part of the mosque was deeper than is usual; its effect

was that of an English parish church whose side has been taken out. Where he sat, he

looked into three arcades whose darkness was illuminated by a small hanging lamp and by the

moon. The front—in full moonlight—had the appearance of marble, and the ninety- nine names

of God on the frieze stood out black, as the frieze stood out white against the sky. The contest

between this dualism and the contention of shadows within pleased Aziz, and he tried to symbolize

the whole into some truth of religion or love. A mosque by winning his approval let loose

his imagination. The temple of another creed, Hindu, Christian, or Greek, would have bored him

and failed to awaken his sense of beauty. Here was Islam, his own country, more than a Faith,

more than a battle-cry, more, much more . . . Islam, an attitude towards life both exquisite and

durable, where his body and his thoughts found their home.

His seat was the low wall that bounded the courtyard on the left. The ground fell away beneath

him towards the city, visible as a blur of trees, and in the stillness he heard many small

sounds. On the right, over in the club, the English community contributed an amateur orchestra.

Elsewhere some Hindus were drumming— he knew they were Hindus, because the rhythm

was uncongenial to him,— and others were bewailing a corpse— he knew whose, having certified

it in the afternoon. There were owls, the Punjab mail . . . and flowers smelt deliciously in the

station-master's garden. But the mosque— that alone signified, and he returned to it from the

complex appeal of the night, and decked it with meanings the builder had never intended.

Some day he too would build a mosque, smaller than this but in perfect taste, so that all who

passed by should experience the happiness he felt now. And near it, under a low dome, should

be his tomb, with a Persian inscription:

Alas, without me for thousands of years

The Rose will blossom and the Spring will bloom,

But those who have secretly understood my heart—

They will approach and visit the grave where I lie.

He had seen the quatrain on the tomb of a Deccan king, and regarded it as profound

philosophy— he always held pathos to be profound. The secret understanding of the heart! He

repeated the phrase with tears in his eyes, and as he did so one of the pillars of the mosque

seemed to quiver. It swayed in the gloom and detached itself. Belief in ghosts ran in his blood,

but he sat firm. Another pillar moved, a third, and then an Englishwoman stepped out into the

moonlight. Suddenly he was furiously angry and shouted: "Madam! Madam! Madam!"

"Oh! Oh!" the woman gasped.

"Madam, this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your

shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems."

"I have taken them off."

"You have?"

"I left them at the entrance."

"Then I ask your pardon."

Still startled, the woman moved out, keeping the ablution-tank between them. He called

after her, "I am truly sorry for speaking."

"Yes, I was right, was I not? If I remove my shoes, I am allowed?"

"Of course, but so few ladies take the trouble, especially if thinking no one is there to see."

"That makes no difference. God is here."

"Madam!"

"Please let me go."

"Oh, can I do you some service now or at any time?"

"No, thank you, really none— good night."

"May I know your name?"

She was now in the shadow of the gateway, so that he could not see her face, but she saw

his, and she said with a change of voice, "Mrs. Moore."

"Mrs. --" Advancing, he found that she was old. A fabric bigger than the mosque fell to

pieces, and he did not know whether he was glad or sorry. She was older than Hamidullah Begum,

with a red face and white hair. Her voice had deceived him.

"Mrs. Moore, I am afraid I startled you. I shall tell my community—our friends—about you.

That God is here—very good, very fine indeed. I think you are newly arrived in India."

"Yes— how did you know?"

"By the way you address me. No, but can I call you a carriage?"

"I have only come from the club. They are doing a play that I have seen in London, and it

was so hot."

"What was the name of the play?"

"Cousin Kate."

"I think you ought not to walk at night alone, Mrs. Moore. There are bad characters about

and leopards may come across from the Marabar Hills. Snakes also."

She exclaimed; she had forgotten the snakes.

"For example, a six-spot beetle," he continued. "You pick it up, it bites, you die."

"But you walk about yourself."

"Oh, I am used to it."

"Used to snakes?"

They both laughed. "I'm a doctor," he said. "Snakes don't dare bite me." They sat down side

by side in the entrance, and slipped on their evening shoes. "Please may I ask you a question

now? Why do you come to India at this time of year, just as the cold weather is ending?"

"I intended to start earlier, but there was an unavoidable delay."

"It will soon be so unhealthy for you! And why ever do you come to Chandrapore?"

"To visit my son. He is the City Magistrate here."

"Oh no, excuse me, that is quite impossible. Our City Magistrate's name is Mr. Heaslop. I

know him intimately."

"He's my son all the same," she said, smiling.

"But, Mrs. Moore, how can he be?"

"I was married twice."



"Yes, now I see, and your first husband died."

"He did, and so did my second husband."

"Then we are in the same box," he said cryptically. "Then is the City Magistrate the entire of

your family now?"

"No, there are the younger ones— Ralph and Stella in England."

"And the gentleman here, is he Ralph and Stella's half-brother?"

"Quite right."

"Mrs. Moore, this is all extremely strange, because like yourself I have also two sons and a

daughter. Is not this the same box with a vengeance?"

"What are their names? Not also Ronny, Ralph, and Stella, surely?"

The suggestion delighted him. "No, indeed. How funny it sounds! Their names are quite different

and will surprise you. Listen, please. I am about to tell you my children's names. The first

is called Ahmed, the second is called Karim, the third— she is the eldest— Jamila. Three children

are enough. Do not you agree with me?"

"I do."

They were both silent for a little, thinking of their respective families. She sighed and rose to

go-

"Would you care to see over the Minto Hospital one morning?" he enquired. "I have nothing

else to offer at Chandrapore."

"Thank you, I have seen it already, or I should have liked to come with you very much."

"I suppose the Civil Surgeon took you."

"Yes, and Mrs. Callendar."

His voice altered. "Ah! A very charming lady."

"Possibly, when one knows her better."

"What? What? You didn't like her?"

"She was certainly intending to be kind, but I did not find her exactly charming."

He burst out with: "She has just taken my tonga without my permission—do you call that

being charming?— and Major Callendar interrupts me night after night from where I am dining

with my friends and I go at once, breaking tip a most pleasant entertainment, and he is not

there and not even a message. Is this charming, pray? But what does it matter? I can do nothing

and he knows it. I am just a subordinate, my time is of no value, the verandah is good

enough for an Indian, yes, yes, let him stand, and Mrs. Callendar takes my carriage and cuts

me dead ..."

She listened.

He was excited partly by his wrongs, but much more by the knowledge that someone sympathized

with them. It was this that led him to repeat, exaggerate, contradict. She had proved

her sympathy by criticizing her fellowcountrywoman to him, but even earlier he had known. The

flame that not even beauty can nourish was springing up, and though his words were querulous

his heart began to glow secretly. Presently it burst into speech.

"You understand me, you know what others feel. Oh, if others resembled you!"

Rather surprised, she replied: "I don't think I understand people very well. I only know

whether I like or dislike them."

"Then you are an Oriental."

She accepted his escort back to the club, and said at the gate that she wished she was a

member, so that she could have asked him in.

"Indians are not allowed into the Chandrapore Club even as guests," he said simply. He did

not expatiate on his wrongs now, being happy. As he strolled downhill beneath the lovely moon,

and again saw the lovely mosque, he seemed to own the land as much as anyone owned it.

What did it matter if a few flabby Hindus had preceded him there, and a few chilly English

succeeded?

### CHAPTER III

The third act of Cousin Kate\_ was well advanced by the time Mrs. Moore re-entered the

club. Windows were barred, lest the servants should see their mem-sahibs acting, and the heat

was consequently immense. One electric fan revolved like a wounded bird, another was out of

order. Disinclined to return to the audience, she went into the billiard room, where she was

greeted by "I want to see the \_real\_ India," and her appropriate life came back with a rush.

This was Adela Quested, the queer, cautious girl whom Ronny had commissioned her to bring

from England, and Ronny was her son, also cautious, whom Miss Quested would probably though not certainly marry, and she herself was an elderly lady.

"I want to see it too, and I only wish we could. Apparently the Turtons will arrange something

for next Tuesday."

"It'll end in an elephant ride, it always does. Look at this evening. Cousin Kate!\_ I imagine,

Cousin Kate!\_ But where have you been off to? Did you succeed in catching the moon in the Ganges?"

The two ladies had happened, the night before, to see the moon's reflection in a distant

channel of the stream. The water had drawn it out, so that it had seemed larger than the real

moon, and brighter, which had pleased them.

"I went to the mosque, but I did not catch the moon."

"The angle would have altered— she rises later."

"Later and later," yawned Mrs. Moore, who was tired after her walk. "Let me think— we don't

see the other side of the moon out here, no."

"Come, India's not as bad as all that," said a pleasant voice. "Other side of the earth, if you

like, but we stick to the same old moon." Neither of them knew the speaker nor did they ever

see him again. He passed with his friendly word through red-brick pillars into the darkness.

"We aren't even seeing the other side of the world; that's our complaint," said Adela. Mrs.

Moore agreed; she too was disappointed at the dullness of their new life. They had made such

a romantic voyage across the Mediterranean and through the sands of Egypt to the harbour of

Bombay, to find only a gridiron of bungalows at the end of it. But she did not take the

disappointment

as seriously as Miss Quested, for the reason that she was forty years older, and had

learnt that Life never gives us what we want at the moment that we consider appropriate.

Adventures

do occur, but not punctually. She said again that she hoped that something interesting

would be arranged for next Tuesday.

"Have a drink," said another pleasant voice. "Mrs. Moore—Miss Quested—have a drink, have

two drinks." They knew who it was this time— the Collector, Mr. Turton, with whom they had

dined. Like themselves, he had found the atmosphere of Cousin Kate\_ too hot. Ronny, however, told

them, was stage-managing in place of Major Callendar, whom some native subordinate or other

had let down, and doing it very well; then he turned to Ronny's other merits, and in quiet, decisive

tones said much that was flattering. It wasn't that the young man was particularly good at

the games or the lingo, or that he had much notion of the Law, but— apparently a large but—

Ronny was dignified.

Mrs. Moore was surprised to learn this, dignity not being a quality with which any mother

credits her son. Miss Quested learnt it with anxiety, for she had not decided whether she liked

dignified men. She tried indeed to discuss this point with Mr. Turton, but he silenced her with a

good-humoured motion of his hand, and continued what he had come to say. "The long and the

short of it is Heaslop's a sahib; he's the type we want, he's one of us," and another civilian who

was leaning over the billiard table said, "Hear, hear!" The matter was thus placed beyond

doubt, and the Collector passed on, for other duties called him.

Meanwhile the performance ended, and the amateur orchestra played the National Anthem.

Conversation and billiards stopped, faces stiffened. It was the Anthem of the Army of Occupation.

it reminded every member of the club that he or she was British and in exile. It produced a

little sentiment and a useful accession of willpower. The meagre tune, the curt series of demands

on Jehovah, fused into a prayer unknown in England, and though they perceived neither

Royalty nor Deity they did perceive something, they were strengthened to resist another day.

Then they poured out, offering one another drinks.

"Adela, have a drink; mother, a drink."

They refused— they were weary of drinks— and Miss Quested, who always said exactly what

was in her mind, announced anew that she was desirous of seeing the real India.

Ronny was in high spirits. The request struck him as comic, and he called out to another

passer-by: "Fielding! how's one to see the real India?"

"Try seeing Indians," the man answered, and vanished.

"Who was that?"

"Our schoolmaster— Government College."

"As if one could avoid seeing them," sighed Mrs. Lesley.

"I've avoided," said Miss Quested. "Excepting my own servant, I've scarcely spoken to an



Indian since landing."

"Oh, lucky you."

"But I want to see them."

She became the centre of an amused group of ladies. One said, "Wanting to see Indians !

How new that sounds!" Another, "Natives! why, fancy!" A third, more serious, said, "Let me

explain.

Natives don't respect one any the more after meeting one, you see."

"That occurs after so many meetings."

But the lady, entirely stupid and friendly, continued: "What I mean is, I was a nurse before

my marriage, and came across them a great deal, so I know. I really do know the truth about

Indians. A most unsuitable position for any Englishwoman— I was a nurse in a Native State.

One's only hope was to hold sternly aloof."

"Even from one's patients?"

"Why, the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die," said Mrs. Callendar.

"How if he went to heaven?" asked Mrs. Moore, with a gentle but crooked smile.

"He can go where he likes as long as he doesn't come near me. They give me the creeps."

"As a matter of fact I have thought what you were saying about heaven, and that is why I

am against Missionaries," said the lady who had been a nurse. "I am all for Chaplains, but all

against Missionaries. Let me explain."

But before she could do so, the Collector intervened.

"Do you really want to meet the Aryan Brother, Miss Quested? That can be easily fixed up. I

didn't realize he'd amuse you." He thought a moment. "You can practically see any type you

like. Take your choice. I know the Government people and the landowners, Heaslop here can

get hold of the barrister crew, while if you want to specialize on education, we can come down

on Fielding."

"I'm tired of seeing picturesque figures pass before me as a frieze," the girl explained. "It

was wonderful when we landed, but that superficial glamour soon goes."

Her impressions were of no interest to the Collector; he was only concerned to give her a

good time. Would she like a Bridge Party? He explained to her what that was—not the game,

but a party to bridge the gulf between East and West; the expression was his own invention,

and amused all who heard it.

"I only want those Indians whom you come across socially—as your friends."

"Well, we don't come across them socially," he said, laughing. "They're full of all the virtues,

but we don't, and it's now eleven-thirty, and too late to go into the reasons."

"Miss Quested, what a name!" remarked Mrs. Turton to her husband as they drove away.

She had not taken to the new young lady, thinking her ungracious and cranky. She trusted that

she hadn't been brought out to marry nice little Heaslop, though it looked like it. Her husband

agreed with her in his heart, but he never spoke against an Englishwoman if he could avoid doing

so, and he only said that Miss Quested naturally made mistakes. He added: "India does

wonders for the judgment, especially during the hot weather; it has even done wonders for

Fielding." Mrs. Turton closed her eyes at this name and remarked that Mr. Fielding wasn't

pukka, and had better marry Miss Quested, for she wasn't pukka. Then they reached the  
 ir bungalow,

low and enormous, the oldest and most uncomfortable bungalow in the civil station, wi  
 th

a sunk soup plate of a lawn, and they had one drink more, this time of barley water,  
 and went

to bed. Their withdrawal from the club had broken up the evening, which, like all gat  
 herings,

had an official tinge. A community that bows the knee to a Viceroy and believes that  
 the divinity

that hedges a king can be transplanted, must feel some reverence for any viceregal su  
 bstitute.

At Chandrapore the Turtens were little gods; soon they would retire to some suburban  
 villa, and

die exiled from glory.

"It's decent of the Burra Sahib," chattered Ronny, much gratified at the civility tha  
 t had been

shown to his guests. "Do you know he's never given a Bridge Party before? Coming on t  
 op of

the dinner too! I wish I could have arranged something myself, but when you know the  
 natives

better you'll realize it's easier for the Burra Sahib than for me. They know him— the  
 y know be

can't be fooled— I'm still fresh comparatively. No one can even begin to think of kno  
 wing this

country until he has been in it twenty years.— Hullo, the mater! Here's your cloak.— Well: for an

example of the mistakes one makes. Soon after I came out I asked one of the Pleaders to have

a smoke with me—only a cigarette, mind. I found afterwards that he had sent touts all over the

bazaar to announce the fact—told all the litigants, 'Oh, you'd better come to my Vak il Mahmoud

Ali— he's in with the City Magistrate.' Ever since then I've dropped on him in Court as hard as I

could. It's taught me a lesson, and I hope him."

"Isn't the lesson that you should invite all the Pleaders to have a smoke with you?"

"Perhaps, but time's limited and the flesh weak. I prefer my smoke at the club amongst my

own sort, I'm afraid."

"Why not ask the Pleaders to the club?" Miss Quested persisted.

"Not allowed." He was pleasant and patient, and evidently understood why she did not understand.

He implied that he had once been as she, though not for long. Going to the verandah,

he called firmly to the moon. His sais answered, and without lowering his head, he ordered his

trap to be brought round.

Mrs. Moore, whom the club had stupefied, woke up outside. She watched the moon, whose

radiance stained with primrose the purple of the surrounding sky. In England the moon had

seemed dead and alien; here she was caught in the shawl of night together with earth and all

the other stars. A sudden sense of unity, of kinship with the heavenly bodies, passed into the

old woman and out, like water through a tank, leaving a strange freshness behind. She did not

dislike Cousin Kate\_ or the National Anthem, but their note had died into a new one, just as

cocktails and cigars had died into invisible flowers. When the mosque, long and domel  
ess,

gleamed at the turn of the road, she exclaimed, "Oh, yes—that's where I got to—that's  
where

I've been."

"Been there when?" asked her son.

"Between the acts."

"But, mother, you can't do that sort of thing."

"Can't mother?" she replied.

"No, really not in this country. It's not done. There's the danger from snakes for one thing.

They are apt to lie out in the evening."

"Ah yes, so the young man there said."

"This sounds very romantic," said Miss Quested, who was exceedingly fond of Mrs. Moore,

and was glad she should have had this little escapade. "You meet a young man in a mosque,

and then never let me know!"

"I was going to tell you, Adela, but something changed the conversation and I forgot. My

memory grows deplorable."

"Was he nice?"

She paused, then said emphatically: "Very nice."

"Who was he?" Ronny enquired.

"A doctor. I don't know his name."

"A doctor? I know of no young doctor in Chandrapore. How odd! What was he like?"

"Rather small, with a little moustache and quick eyes. He called out to me when I was in the

dark part of the mosque— about my shoes. That was how we began talking. He was afraid I had

them on, but I remembered luckily. He told me about his children, and then we walked back to

the club. He knows you well."

"I wish you had pointed him out to me. I can't make out who he is."

"He didn't come into the club. He said he wasn't allowed to."

Thereupon the truth struck him, and he cried, "Oh, good gracious! Not a Mohammedan?

Why ever didn't you tell me you'd been talking to a native? I was going all wrong."

"A Mohammedan! How perfectly magnificent!" exclaimed Miss Quested. "Ronny, isn't that

like your mother? While we talk about seeing the real India, she goes and sees it, and then forgets

she's seen it."

But Ronny was ruffled. From his mother's description he had thought the doctor might be

young Muggins from over the Ganges, and had brought out all the comradely emotions. What a

mix-up! Why hadn't she indicated by the tone of her voice that she was talking about an Indian?

Scratchy and dictatorial, he began to question her. "He called to you in the mosque, did

he? How? Impudently? What was he doing there himself at that time of night?— No, it's not their



prayer time."— This in answer to a suggestion of Miss Quested's, who showed the keenest interest.

"So he called to you over your shoes. Then it was impudence. It's an old trick. I wish you

had had them on."

"I think it was impudence, but I don't know about a trick," said Mrs. Moore. "His nerves

were all on edge— I could tell from his voice. As soon as I answered he altered."

"You oughtn't to have answered."

"Now look here," said the logical girl, "wouldn't you expect a Mohammedan to answer if you

asked him to take off his hat in church?"

"It's different, it's different; you don't understand."

"I know I don't, and I want to. What is the difference, please?"

He wished she wouldn't interfere. His mother did not signify—she was just a globe-trotter, a

temporary escort, who could retire to England with what impressions she chose. But Adela, who

meditated spending her life in the country, was a more serious matter; it would be tiresome if

she started crooked over the native question. Pulling up the mare, he said, "There's your

Ganges."

Their attention was diverted. Below them a radiance had suddenly appeared. It belonged

neither to water nor moonlight, but stood like a luminous sheaf upon the fields of darkness. He

told them that it was where the new sand-bank was forming, and that the dark ravelled bit at

the top was the sand, and that the dead bodies floated down that way from Benares, or would

if the crocodiles let them. "It's not much of a dead body that gets down to Chandrapore."

"Crocodiles down in it too, how terrible!" his mother murmured. The young people glanced

at each other and smiled; it amused them when the old lady got these gentle creeps, and harmony

was restored between them consequently. She continued: "What a terrible river! what a

wonderful river! "and sighed. The radiance was already altering, whether through shifting of the

moon or of the sand; soon the bright sheaf would be gone, and a circlet, itself to alter, be burnished

upon the streaming void. The women discussed whether they would wait for the change

or not, while the silence broke into patches of unquietness and the mare shivered. On her account

they did not wait, but drove on to the City Magistrate's bungalow, where Miss Quested

went to bed, and Mrs. Moore had a short interview with her son.

He wanted to enquire about the Mohammedan doctor in the mosque. It was his duty to report

suspicious characters and conceivably it was some disreputable hakim who had prowled up

from the bazaar. When she told him that it was someone connected with the Minto Hospital, he

was relieved, and said that the fellow's name must be Aziz, and that he was quite all right,

nothing against him at all.

"Aziz! what a charming name!"

"So you and he had a talk. Did you gather he was well disposed?"

Ignorant of the force of this question, she replied, "Yes, quite, after the first moment."

"I meant, generally. Did he seem to tolerate us— the brutal conqueror, the sundried bureaucrat,

that sort of thing?"

"Oh, yes, I think so, except the Callendars— he doesn't care for the Callendars at all."

"Oh. So he told you that, did he? The Major will be interested. I wonder what was the aim

of the remark."

"Ronny, Ronny! you're never going to pass it on to Major Callendar?"

"Yes, rather. I must, in fact!"

"But, my dear boy—"

"If the Major heard I was disliked by any native subordinate of mine, I should expect him to

pass it on to me."

"But, my dear boy— a private conversation!"

"Nothing's private in India. Aziz knew that when he spoke out, so don't you worry. He had

some motive in what he said. My personal belief is that the remark wasn't true."

"How not true?"

"He abused the Major in order to impress you."

"I don't know what you mean, dear."

"It's the educated native's latest dodge. They used to cringe, but the younger generation

believe in a show of manly independence. They think it will pay better with the itinerant M.P.

But whether the native swaggers or cringes, there's always something behind every remark he

makes, always something, and if nothing else he's trying to increase his izzat— in plain knglo-

Saxon, to score. Of course there are exceptions."

"You never used to judge people like this at home."

"India isn't home," he retorted, rather rudely, but in order to silence her he had been using

phrases and arguments that he had picked up from older officials, and he did not feel quite sure

of himself. When he said "of course there are exceptions" he was quoting Mr. Turton, while "

increasing the izzat" was Major Callendar's own. The phrases worked and were in current use at

the club, but she was rather clever at detecting the first from the second hand, and might press

him for definite examples.

She only said, "I can't deny that what you say sounds very sensible, but you really must not

hand on to Major Callendar anything I have told you about Doctor Aziz."

He felt disloyal to his caste, but he promised, adding, "In return please don't talk about Aziz

to Adela."

"Not talk about him? Why?"

"There you go again, mother— I really can't explain every thing. I don't want Adela to be

worried, that's the fact; she'll begin wondering whether we treat the natives properly, and all

that sort of nonsense."

"But she came out to be worried—that's exactly why she's here. She discussed it all on the

boat. We had a long talk when we went on shore at Aden. She knows you in play, as she put it,

but not in work, and she felt she must come and look round, before she decided— and before

you decided. She is very, very fair-minded."

"I know," he said dejectedly.

The note of anxiety in his voice made her feel that he was still a little boy, who must have

what he liked, so she promised to do as he wished, and they kissed good night. He had not

forbidden

her to think about Aziz, however, and she did this when she retired to her room. In the

light of her son's comment she reconsidered the scene at the mosque, to see whose impression

was correct. Yes, it could be worked into quite an unpleasant scene. The doctor had begun by

bullying her, had said Mrs. Callendar was nice, and then— finding the ground safe— had changed;

he had alternately whined over his grievances and patronized her, had run a dozen ways in a

single sentence, had been unreliable, inquisitive, vain. Yes, it was all true, but how false as a

summary of the man; the essential life of him had been slain.

Going to hang up her cloak, she found that the tip of the peg was occupied by a small wasp.

She had known this wasp or his relatives by day; they were not as English wasps, but had long

yellow legs which hung down behind when they flew. Perhaps he mistook the peg for a

branch— no Indian animal has any sense of an interior. Bats, rats, birds, insects will as soon nest

inside a house as out; it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately

produces houses trees, houses trees. There he clung, asleep, while jackals in the plain bayed

their desires and mingled with the percussion of drums.

"Pretty dear," said Mrs. Moore to the wasp. He did not wake, but her voice floated out, to

swell the night's uneasiness.

#### CHAPTER IV

The Collector kept his word. Next day he issued invitation cards to numerous Indian gentlemen

in the neighbourhood, stating that he would be at home in the garden of the club between

the hours of five and seven on the following Tuesday, also that Mrs. Turton would be glad

to receive any ladies of their families who were out of purdah. His action caused much excitement

and was discussed in several worlds.

"It is owing to orders from the L.G.," was Mahmoud Ali's explanation. "Turton would never

do this unless compelled. Those high officials are different— they sympathize, the Viceroy

sympathizes,

they would have us treated properly. But they come too seldom and live too far away.

Meanwhile—"

"It is easy to sympathize at a distance," said an old gentleman with a beard. "I value more



the kind word that is spoken close to my ear. Mr. Turton has spoken it, from whatever cause. He

speaks, we hear. I do not see why we need discuss it further." Quotations followed from the Koran.

"We have not all your sweet nature, Nawab Bahadur, nor your learning."

"The Lieutenant-Governor may be my very good friend, but I give him no trouble. —How do

you do, Nawab Bahadur?~Quite well, thank you, Sir Gilbert; how are you? —And all is over. But I

can be a thorn in Mr. Turton's flesh, and if he asks me I accept the invitation. I shall come in

from Dilkusha specially, though I have to postpone other business."

"You will make yourself chip," suddenly said a little black man.

There was a stir of disapproval. Who was this ill-bred upstart, that he should criticize the

leading Mohammedan landowner of the district? Mahmoud Ali, though sharing his opinion, felt

bound to oppose it. "Mr. Ram Chand!" he said, swaying forward stiffly with his hands on his

hips.

"Mr. Mahmoud Ali!"

"Mr. Ram Chand, the Nawab Bahadur can decide what is cheap without our valuation, I

think."

"I do not expect I shall make myself cheap," said the Nawab Bahadur to Mr. Ram Chand,

speaking very pleasantly, for he was aware that the man had been impolite and he desired to

shield him from the consequences. It had passed through his mind to reply, "I expect I shall

make myself cheap," but he rejected this as the less courteous alternative. "I do not see why

we should make ourselves cheap. I do not see why we should. The invitation is worded very

graciously." Feeling that he could not further decrease the social gulf between himself and his

auditors, he sent his elegant grandson, who was in attendance on him, to fetch his car. When it

came, he repeated all that he had said before, though at greater length, ending up with "Till

Tuesday, then, gentlemen all, when I hope we may meet in the flower gardens of the club."

This opinion carried great weight. The Nawab Bahadur was a big proprietor and a philanthropist,

a man of benevolence and decision. His character among all the communities in the

province stood high. He was a straightforward enemy and a staunch friend, and his hospitality

was proverbial. "Give, do not lend; after death who will thank you?" was his favourite remark.

He held it a disgrace to die rich. When such a man was prepared to motor twenty-five miles to

shake the Collector's hand, the entertainment took another aspect. For he was not like some

eminent men, who give out that they will come, and then fail at the last moment, leaving the

small fry floundering. If he said he would come, he would come, he would never deceive his

supporters. The gentlemen whom he had lectured now urged one another to attend the party,

although convinced at heart that his advice was unsound.

He had spoken in the little room near the Courts where the pleaders waited for clients; clients,

waiting for pleaders, sat in the dust outside. These had not received a card from Mr. Turton.

And there were circles even beyond these—people who wore nothing but a loincloth, people

who wore not even that, and spent their lives in knocking two sticks together before a scarlet

doll—humanity grading and drifting beyond the educated vision, until no earthly invitation

can embrace it.

All invitations must proceed from heaven perhaps; perhaps it is futile for men to initiate

their own unity, they do but widen the gulfs between them by the attempt. So at all events

thought old Mr. Graysford and young Mr. Sorley, the devoted missionaries who lived out beyond

the slaughterhouses, always travelled third on the railways, and never came up to the club. In

our Father's house are many mansions, they taught, and there alone will the incompatible multitudes

of mankind be welcomed and soothed. Not one shall be turned away by the servants on

that verandah, be he black or white, not one shall be kept standing who approaches with a loving

heart. And why should the divine hospitality cease here? Consider, with all reverence, the

monkeys. May there not be a mansion for the monkeys also? Old Mr. Graysford said No, but

young Mr. Sorley, who was advanced, said Yes; he saw no reason why monkeys should not have

their collateral share of bliss, and he had sympathetic discussions about them with his Hindu

friends. And the jackals? Jackals were indeed less to Mr. Sorley's mind, but he admitted that the

mercy of God, being infinite, may well embrace all mammals. And the wasps? He became uneasy

during the descent to wasps, and was apt to change the conversation. And oranges, cactuses,

crystals and mud? and the bacteria inside Mr. Sorley? No, no, this is going too far. We

must exclude someone from our gathering, or we shall be left with nothing.

## CHAPTER V

The Bridge Party was not a success—at least it was not what Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested

were accustomed to consider a successful party. They arrived early, since it was given in their

honour, but most of the Indian guests had arrived even earlier, and stood massed at the farther

side of the tennis lawns, doing nothing.

"It is only just five," said Mrs. Turton. "My husband will be up from his office in a moment

and start the thing. I have no idea what we have to do. It's the first time we've ever given a

party like this at the club. Mr. Heaslop, when I'm dead and gone will you give parties like this?

It's enough to make the old type of Burra Sahib turn in his grave."

Ronny laughed deferentially. "You wanted something not picturesque and we've provided it,"

he remarked to Miss Quested. "What do you think of the Aryan Brother in a topi and spats?"

Neither she nor his mother answered. They were gazing rather sadly over the tennis lawn.

No, it was not picturesque; the East, abandoning its secular magnificence, was descending into

a valley whose farther side no man can see.

"The great point to remember is that no one who's here matters; those who matter don't

come. Isn't that so, Mrs. Turton?"

"Absolutely true," said the great lady, leaning back. She was "saving herself up," as she

called it—not for anything that would happen that afternoon or even that week, but for some

vague future occasion when a high official might come along and tax her social strength. Most

of her public appearances were marked by this air of reserve.

Assured of her approbation, Ronny continued: "The educated Indians will be no good to us

if there's a row, it's simply not worth while conciliating them, that's why they don't matter. Most

of the people you see are seditious at heart, and the rest 'Id run squealing. The cultivator— he's

another story. The Pathan— he's a man if you like. But these people— don't imagine they're India."

He pointed to the dusky line beyond the court, and here and there it flashed a pince-nez

or shuffled a shoe, as if aware that he was despising it. European costume had lighted like a

leprosy. Few had yielded entirely, but none were untouched. There was a silence when he had

finished speaking, on both sides of the court; at least, more ladies joined the English group, but

their words seemed to die as soon as uttered. Some kites hovered overhead, impartial, over the

kites passed the mass of a vulture, and with an impartiality exceeding all, the sky, not deeply

coloured but translucent, poured light from its whole circumference. It seemed unlikely that the

series stopped here. Beyond the sky must not there be something that overarches all the skies,

more impartial even than they? Beyond which again . . .

They spoke of Cousin Kate\_.

They had tried to reproduce their own attitude to life upon the stage, and to dress up as the

middle-class English people they actually were. Next year they would do \_Quality Street\_ or

The Yeomen of the Guard\_. Save for this annual incursion, they left literature alone. The men

had no time for it, the women did nothing that they could not share with the men. Their ignorance

of the Arts was notable, and they lost no opportunity of proclaiming it to one another; it

was the Public School attitude; flourishing more vigorously than it can yet hope to do in England.

If Indians were shop, the Arts were bad form, and Ronny had repressed his mother when

she enquired after his viola; a viola was almost a demerit, and certainly not the sort of instrument

one mentioned in public. She noticed now how tolerant and conventional his judgments had become; when they had seen Cousin Kate\_ in London together in the past, he had scorned it; now he pretended that it was a good play, in order to hurt nobody's feelings. And

"unkind notice" had appeared in the local paper, "the sort of thing no white man could have

written," as Mrs. Lesley said. The play was praised, to be sure, and so were the stage management

and the performance as a whole, but the notice contained the following sentence: "Miss

Derek, though she charmingly looked her part, lacked the necessary experience, and occasionally

forgot her words." This tiny breath of genuine criticism had given deep offence, not indeed

to Miss Derek, who was as hard as nails, but to her friends. Miss Derek did not belong to

Chandrapore. She was stopping for a fortnight with the McBrydes, the police people, and she

had been so good as to fill up a gap in the cast at the last moment. A nice impression of local



hospitality she would carry away with here

"To work, Mary, to work," cried the Collector, touching his wife on the shoulder with a

switch.

Mrs. Turton got up awkwardly. "What do you want me to do? Oh, those purdah women! I never thought any would come. Oh dear!"

A little group of Indian ladies had been gathering in a third quarter of the grounds, near a

rustic summer-house in which the more timid of them had already taken refuge. The rest stood

with their backs to the company and their faces pressed into a bank of shrubs. At a little distance

stood their male relatives, watching the venture. The sight was significant: an island

bared by the turning tide, and bound to grow.

"I consider they ought to come over to me."

"Come along, Mary, get it over."

"I refuse to shake hands with any of the men, unless it has to be the Nawab Bahadur."

"Whom have we so far?" He glanced along the line. "H'm! h'm! much as one expected. We

know why he's here, I think—over that contract, and he wants to get the right side of me for

Mohurram, and he's the astrologer who wants to dodge the municipal building regulations, and

he's that Parsi, and he's—Hullo! there he goes— smash into our hollyhocks. Pulled the left rein

when he meant the right. All as usual."

"They ought never to have been allowed to drive in; it's so bad for them," said Mrs. Turton,

who had at last begun her progress to the summer-house, accompanied by Mrs. Moore, Miss

Quested, and a terrier. "Why they come at all I don't know. They hate it as much as we do. Talk

to Mrs. McBryde. Her husband made her give purdah parties until she struck."

"This isn't a purdah party," corrected Miss Quested.

"Oh, really," was the haughty rejoinder.

"Do kindly tell us who these ladies are," asked Mrs. Moore.

"You're superior to them, anyway. Don't forget that. You're superior to everyone in India except

one or two of the Ranis, and they're on an equality."

Advancing, she shook hands with the group and said a few words of welcome in Urdu. She

had learnt the lingo, but only to speak to her servants, so she knew none of the politeness forms

and of the verbs only the imperative mood. As soon as her speech was over, she enquired of

her companions, "Is that what you wanted?"

"Please tell these ladies that I wish we could speak their language, but we have only just

come to their country."

"Perhaps we speak yours a little," one of the ladies said.

"Why, fancy, she understands!" said Mrs. Turton.

"Eastbourne, Piccadilly, High Park Corner," said another of the ladies.

"Oh yes, they're English-speaking."

"But now we can talk: how delightful!" cried Adela, her face lighting up.

"She knows Paris also," called one of the onlookers.

"They pass Paris on the way, no doubt," said Mrs. Turton, as if she was describing the

movements of migratory birds. Her manner had grown more distant since she had discovered

that some of the group was Westernized, and might apply her own standards to her.

"The shorter lady, she is my wife, she is Mrs. Bhattacharya," the onlooker explained.  
"The

taller lady, she is my sister, she is Mrs. Das."

The shorter and the taller ladies both adjusted their saris, and smiled. There was a curious

uncertainty about their gestures, as if they sought for a new formula which neither East nor

West could provide. When Mrs. Bhattacharya's husband spoke, she turned away from him, but

she did not mind seeing the other men. Indeed all the ladies were uncertain, cowering, recovering,

giggling, making tiny gestures of atonement or despair at all that was said, and alternately

fondling the terrier or shrinking from him. Miss Quested now had her desired opportunity;

friendly Indians were before her, and she tried to make them talk, but she failed, she strove in

vain against the echoing walls of their civility. Whatever she said produced a murmur of

deprecation,

varying into a murmur of concern when she dropped her pocket-handkerchief. She tried

doing nothing, to see what that produced, and they too did nothing. Mrs. Moore was equally

unsuccessful. Mrs. Turton waited for them with a detached expression; she had known what

nonsense it all was from the first.

When they took their leave, Mrs. Moore had an impulse, and said to Mrs. Bhattacharya, whose face she liked, "I wonder whether you would allow us to call on you some day."

"When?" she replied, inclining charmingly.

"Whenever is convenient."

"All days are convenient."

"Thursday ..."

"Most certainly."

"We shall enjoy it greatly, it would be a real pleasure. What about the time?"

"All hours."

"Tell us which you would prefer. We're quite strangers to your country; we don't know when

you have visitors," said Miss Quested.

Mrs. Bhattacharya seemed not to know either. Her gesture implied that she had known, since Thursdays began, that English ladies would come to see her on one of them, and so always

stayed in. Everything pleased her, nothing surprised. She added, "We leave for Calcutta

to-day."

"Oh, do you?" said Adela, not at first seeing the implication. Then she cried, "Oh, but if you

do we shall find you gone."

Mrs. Bhattacharya did not dispute it. But her husband called from the distance, "Yes, yes,

you come to us Thursday."

"But you'll be in Calcutta."

"No, no, we shall not." He said something swiftly to his wife in Bengali. "We expect you

Thursday."

"Thursday ..." the woman echoed.

"You can't have done such a dreadful thing as to put off going for our sake?" exclaimed Mrs.

Moore.

"No, of course not, we are not such people." He was laughing.

"I believe that you have. Oh, please—it distresses me beyond words."

Everyone was laughing now, but with no suggestion that they had blundered. A shapeless

discussion occurred, during which Mrs. Turton retired, smiling to herself. The upshot was that

they were to come Thursday, but early in the morning, so as to wreck the Bhattacharya plans as

little as possible, and Mr. Bhattacharya would send his carriage to fetch them, with servants to

point out the way. Did he know where they lived? Yes, of course he knew, he knew everything;

and he laughed again. They left among a flutter of compliments and smiles, and three ladies,

who had hitherto taken no part in the reception, suddenly shot out of the summer-house like

exquisitely coloured swallows, and salaamed them.

Meanwhile the Collector had been going his rounds. He made pleasant remarks and a few

jokes, which were applauded lustily, but he knew something to the discredit of nearly every one

of his guests, and was consequently perfunctory. When they had not cheated, it was bh ang,

women, or worse, and even the desirables wanted to get something out of him. He believed

that a "Bridge Party" did good rather than harm, or he would not have given one, but he was

under no illusions, and at the proper moment he retired to the English side of the lawn. The

impressions he left behind him were various. Many of the guests, especially the humbler and

less Anglicized, were genuinely grateful. To be addressed by so high an official was a permanent

asset. They did not mind how long they stood, or how little happened, and when seven o'clock

struck, they had to be turned out. Others were grateful with more intelligence. The Nawab Bahadur,

indifferent for himself and for the distinction with which he was greeted, was moved by

the mere kindness that must have prompted the invitation. He knew the difficulties. He

also thought that the Collector had played up well. But others, such as Mahmoud Ali, were cynical;

they were firmly convinced that Turton had been made to give the party by his official superiors

and was all the time consumed with impotent rage, and they infected some who were

inclined to a healthier view. Yet even Mahmoud Ali was glad he had come. Shrines are fascinating,

especially when rarely opened, and it amused him to note the ritual of the English club, and

to caricature it afterwards to his friends.

After Mr. Turton, the official who did his duty best was Mr. Fielding, the Principal of the little

Government College. He knew little of the district and less against the inhabitants, so he was in



a less cynical state of mind. Athletic and cheerful, he romped about, making numerous mistakes

which the parents of his pupils tried to cover up, for he was popular among them. When the

moment for refreshments came, he did not move back to the English side, but burnt his mouth

with gram. He talked to anyone and he ate anything. Amid much that was alien, he learnt that

the two new ladies from England had been a great success, and that their politeness in wishing

to be Mrs. Bhattacharya's guests had pleased not only her but all Indians who heard of it. It

pleased Mr. Fielding also. He scarcely knew the two new ladies, still he decided to tell them

what pleasure they had given by their friendliness.

He found the younger of them alone. She was looking through a nick in the cactus hedge at

the distant Marabar Hills, which had crept near, as was their custom at sunset; if the sunset had

lasted long enough, they would have reached the town, but it was swift, being tropical. He gave

her his information, and she was so much pleased and thanked him so heartily that he asked

her and the other lady to tea.

"I'd like to come very much indeed, and so would Mrs. Moore, I know."

"I'm rather a hermit, you know."

"Much the best thing to be in this place."

"Owing to my work and so on, I don't get up much to the club."

"I know, I know, and we never get down from it. I envy you being with Indians."

"Do you care to meet one or two?"

"Very, very much indeed; it's what I long for. This party to-day makes me so angry and miserable.

I think my countrymen out here must be mad. Fancy inviting guests and not treating

them properly! You and Mr. Turton and perhaps Mr. McBryde are the only people who showed

any common politeness. The rest make me perfectly ashamed, and it's got worse and worse."

It had. The Englishmen had intended to play up better, but had been prevented from doing

so by their women folk, whom they had to attend, provide with tea, advise about dogs, etc.

When tennis began, the barrier grew impenetrable. It had been hoped to have some sets between

East and West, but this was forgotten, and the courts were monopolized by the usual

club couples. Fielding resented it too, but did not say so to the girl, for he found something

theoretical in her outburst. Did she care about Indian music? he enquired; there was an old professor

down at the College, who sang.

"Oh, just what we wanted to hear. And do you know Doctor Aziz?"

"I know all about him. I don't know him. Would you like him asked too?"

"Mrs. Moore says he is so nice."

"Very well, Miss Quested. Will Thursday suit you?"

"Indeed it will, and that morning we go to this Indian lady's. All the nice things are coming

Thursday."

"I won't ask the City Magistrate to bring you. I know he'll be busy at that time."

"Yes, Ronny is always hard-worked," she replied, contemplating the hills. How lovely they

suddenly were! But she couldn't touch them. In front, like a shutter, fell a vision of her married

life. She and Ronny would look into the club like this every evening, then drive home to dress;

they would see the Lesleys and the Callendars and the Turtons and the Burtons, and invite

them and be invited by them, while the true India slid by unnoticed. Colour would remain—the

pageant of birds in the early morning, brown bodies, white turbans, idols whose flesh was scarlet

or blue—and movement would remain as long as there were crowds in the bazaar and bathers

in the tanks. Perched up on the seat of a dogcart, she would see them. But the force that

lies behind colour and movement would escape her even more effectually than it did now. She

would see India always as a frieze, never as a spirit, and she assumed that it was a spirit o'f

which Mrs. Moore had had a glimpse.

And sure enough they did drive away from the club in a few minutes, and they did dress,

and to dinner came Miss Derek and the McBrydes, and the menu was: Julienne soup full of bullety

bottled peas, pseudo-cottage bread, fish full of branching bones, pretending to be plain,

more bottled peas with the cutlets, trifle, sardines on toast: the menu of Anglo-India. A dish

might be added or subtracted as one rose or fell in the official scale, the peas might rattle less

or more, the sardines and the vermouth be imported by a different firm, but the tradition remained;

the food of exiles, cooked by servants who did not understand it. Adela thought of the

young men and women who had come out before her, P. & O. full after P. & O. full, and had

been set down to the same food and the same ideas, and been snubbed in the same goodhumoured

way until they kept to the accredited themes and began to snub others. "I should

never get like that," she thought, for she was young herself; all the same she knew that she

had come up against something that was both insidious and tough, and against which she

needed allies. She must gather around her at Chandrapore a few people who felt as she did,

and she was glad to have met Mr. Fielding and the Indian lady with the unpronounceable name.

Here at all events was a nucleus; she should know much better where she stood in the course

of the next two days.

Miss Derek— she companioned a Maharani in a remote Native State. She was genial and gay

and made them all laugh about her leave, which she had taken because she felt she deserved

it, not because the Maharani said she might go. Now she wanted to take the Maharajah's

motor-car as well; it had gone to a Chiefs' Conference at Delhi, and she had a great scheme for

burgling it at the junction as it came back in the train. She was also very funny about the Bridge

Party— indeed she regarded the entire peninsula as a comic opera. "If one couldn't see the

laughable side of these people one 'Id be done for," said Miss Derek. Mrs. McBryde— it was she

who had been the nurse— ceased not to exclaim, "Oh, Nancy, how topping! Oh, Nancy, how killing!

I wish I could look at things like that." Mr. McBryde did not speak much; he seemed nice.

When the guests had gone, and Adela gone to bed, there was another interview between

mother and son. He wanted her advice and support— while resenting interference. "Does Adela

talk to you much?" he began. "I'm so driven with work, I don't see her as much as I hoped, but

I hope she finds things comfortable."

"Adela and I talk mostly about India. Dear, since you mention it, you're quite right—you

ought to be more alone with her than you are."

Yes, perhaps, but then people'd gossip."

"Well, they must gossip sometime! Let them gossip."

"People are so odd out here, and it's not like home— one's always facing the footlights, as

the Burra Sahib said. Take a silly little example: when Adela went out to the boundary of the

club compound, and Fielding followed her. I saw Mrs. Callendar notice it. They notice everything,

until they're perfectly sure you're their sort."

"I don't think Adela'll ever be quite their sort— she's much too individual."

"I know, that's so remarkable about her," he said thoughtfully. Mrs. Moore thought him

rather absurd. Accustomed to the privacy of London, she could not realize that India, seemingly

so mysterious, contains none, and that consequently the conventions have greater force. "I

suppose nothing's on her mind," he continued.

"Ask her, ask her yourself, my dear boy."

"Probably she's heard tales of the heat, but of course I should pack her off to the Hills every

April—I'm not one to keep a wife grilling in the Plains."

"Oh, it wouldn't be the weather."

"There's nothing in India but the weather, my dear mother; it's the Alpha and Omega of the

whole affair."

"Yes, as Mrs. McBryde was saying, but it's much more the Anglo-Indians themselves who

are likely to get on Adela's nerves. She doesn't think they behave pleasantly to Indians, you

see."

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed, losing his gentle manner. "I knew it last week. Oh, how

like a woman to worry over a side-issue!"

She forgot about Adela in her surprise. "A side-issue, a side-issue?" she repeated. "How can

it be that?"

"We're not out here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. We're out here to do justice and keep the peace. That's my sentiments. India

isn't a drawingroom."

"Your sentiments are those of a god," she said quietly, but it was his manner rather than his

sentiments that annoyed her.



Trying to recover his temper, he said, "India likes gods."

"And Englishmen like posing as gods."

"There's no point in all this. Here we are, and we're going to stop, and the country's got to

put up with us, gods or no gods. Oh, look here," he broke out, rather pathetically, "what do you

and Adela want me to do? Go against my class, against all the people I respect and admire out

here? Lose such power as I have for doing good in this country because my behaviour isn't

pleasant? You neither of you understand what work is, or you 'Id never talk such eyewash. I

hate talking like this, but one must occasionally. It's morbidly sensitive to go on as Adela and

you do. I noticed you both at the club to-day—after the Burra Sahib had been at all that trouble

to amuse you. I am out here to work, mind, to hold this wretched country by force. I'm not a

missionary or a Labour Member or a vague sentimental sympathetic literary man. I'm just a

servant of the Government; it's the profession you wanted me to choose myself, and that's that.

We're not pleasant in India, and we don't intend to be pleasant. We've something more important

to do."

He spoke sincerely. Every day he worked hard in the court trying to decide which of the two untrue

accounts was the less untrue, trying to dispense justice fearlessly, to protect the weak

against the less weak, the incoherent against the plausible, surrounded by lies and flattery. That

morning he had convicted a railway clerk of overcharging pilgrims for their tickets, and a Pathan

of attempted rape. He expected no gratitude, no recognition for this, and both clerk and Pathan

might appeal, bribe their witnesses more effectually in the interval, and get their sentences reversed.

It was his duty. But he did expect sympathy from his own people, and except from newcomers

he obtained it. He did think he ought not to be worried about "Bridge Parties" when the

day's work was over and he wanted to play tennis with his equals or rest his legs upon a long

chair.

He spoke sincerely, but she could have wished with less gusto. How Ronny revelled in the

drawbacks of his situation! How he did rub it in that he was not in India to behave pleasantly,

and derived positive satisfaction therefrom! He reminded her of his public-school days. The

traces of young-man humanitarianism had sloughed off, and he talked like an intelligent and

embittered boy. His words without his voice might have impressed her, but when she heard the

self-satisfied lilt of them, when she saw the mouth moving so complacently and competently

beneath the little red nose, she felt, quite illogically, that this was not the last word on India.

One touch of regret— not the canny substitute but the true regret from the heart— would have

made him a different man, and the British Empire a different institution.

"I'm going to argue, and indeed dictate," she said, clinking her rings. "The English are out

here to be pleasant."

"How do you make that out, mother?" he asked, speaking gently again, for he was ashamed

of his irritability.

"Because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant

to each other. God . . . is . . . love." She hesitated, seeing how much he disliked the argument,

but something made her go on. "God has put us on earth to love our neighbours and to show

it, and He is omnipresent, even in India, to see how we are succeeding."

He looked gloomy, and a little anxious. He knew this religious strain in her, and that it was a

symptom of bad health; there had been much of it when his stepfather died. He thought, "She

is certainly ageing, and I ought not to be vexed with anything she says."

"The desire to behave pleasantly satisfies God . . . The sincere if impotent desire wishes His

blessing. I think everyone fails, but there are so many kinds of failure. Good will and more good

will and more good will. Though I speak with the tongues of . . ."

He waited until she had done, and then said gently, "I quite see that. I suppose I ought to

get off to my files now, and you'll be going to bed."

"I suppose so, I suppose so." They did not part for a few minutes, but the conversation had

become unreal since Christianity had entered it. Ronny approved of religion as long as it endorsed

the National Anthem, but he objected when it attempted to influence his life. Then he

would say in respectful yet decided tones, "I don't think it does to talk about these things, every

fellow has to work out his own religion," and any fellow who heard him muttered, "Hear!"

Mrs. Moore felt that she had made a mistake in mentioning God, but she found him increasingly

difficult to avoid as she grew older, and he had been constantly in her thoughts since she

entered India, though oddly enough he satisfied her less. She must needs pronounce his name

frequently, as the greatest she knew, yet she had never found it less efficacious. Outside the

arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence. And she regretted afterwards

that she had not kept to the real serious subject that had caused her to visit India—

namely, the relationship between Ronny and Adela. Would they, or would they not, succeed in

becoming engaged to be married?

## CHAPTER VI

! Aziz had not gone to the Bridge Party. Immediately after his meeting with Mrs. Moore he

was diverted to other matters. Several surgical cases came in, and kept him busy. He ceased to

be either outcaste or poet, and became the medical student, very gay, and full of details of

operations

which he poured into the shrinking ears of his friends. His profession fascinated him at

times, but he required it to be exciting, and it was his hand, not his mind, that was scientific.

The knife he loved and used skilfully, and he also liked pumping in the latest serums. But the

boredom of regime and hygiene repelled him, and after inoculating a man for enteric, he would

go away and drink unfiltered water himself. "What can you expect from the fellow?" said our

Major Callendar. "No grits, no guts." But in his heart he knew that if Aziz and not he had operated

last year on Mrs. Graysford's appendix, the old lady would probably have lived. And this

did not dispose him any better towards his subordinate.

There was a row the morning after the mosque—they were always having rows. The Major,

who had been up half the night, wanted damn well to know why Aziz had not come promptly

when summoned.

"Sir, excuse me, I did. I mounted my bike, and it bust in front of the Cow Hospital. So I had

to find a tonga."

"Bust in front of the Cow Hospital, did it? And how did you come to be there?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh Lord, oh Lord! When I live here "--he kicked the gravel--" and you live there—not ten

minutes from me— and the Cow Hospital is right ever so far away the other side of you —

there— then how did you come to be passing the Cow Hospital on the way to me? Now do some work for a change."

He strode away in a temper, without waiting for the excuse, which as far as it went was as a

sound one: the Cow Hospital was in a straight line between Hamidullah's house and his own, so

Aziz had naturally passed it. He never realized that the educated Indians visited one another

constantly, and were weaving, however painfully, a new social fabric. Caste "or something of

the sort" would prevent them. He only knew that no one ever told him the truth, although he

had been in the country for twenty years.

Aziz watched him go with amusement. When his spirits were up he felt that the English are

a comic institution, and he enjoyed being misunderstood by them. But it was an amusement of

the emotions and nerves, which an accident or the passage of time might destroy; it was apart

from the fundamental gaiety that he reached when he was with those whom he trusted. A

disobliging

simile involving Mrs. Callendar occurred to his fancy. "I must tell that to Mahmoud Ali,

it'll make him laugh," he thought. Then he got to work. He was competent and indispensable,

and he knew it. The simile passed from his mind while he exercised his professional skill.

During these pleasant and busy days, he heard vaguely that the Collector was giving a

party, and that the Nawab Bahadur said everyone ought to go to it. His fellowassistant, Doctor

Panna Lai, was in ecstasies at the prospect, and was urgent that they should attend it together

in his new tum-tum. The arrangement suited them both. Aziz was spared the indignity of a bicycle

or the expense of hiring, while Dr. Panna Lai, who was timid and elderly, secured someone

who could manage his horse. He could manage it himself, but only just, and he was afraid of

the motors and of the unknown turn into the club grounds. "Disaster may come," he said politely,

"but we shall at all events get there safe, even if we do not get back." And with more

logic: "It will, I think, create a good impression should two doctors arrive at the same time."

But when the time came, Aziz was seized with a revulsion, and determined not to go. For

one thing his spell of work, lately concluded, left him independent and healthy. For another, the

day chanced to fall on the anniversary of his wife's death. She had died soon after he had fallen

in love with her; he had not loved her at first. Touched by Western feeling, he disliked union

with a woman whom he had never seen; moreover, when he did see her, she disappointed him,

and he begat his first child in mere animality. The change began after its birth. He was won by

her love for him, by a loyalty that implied something more than submission, and by her efforts



to educate herself against that lifting of the purdah that would come in the next generation if

not in theirs. She was intelligent, yet had old-fashioned grace. Gradually he lost the feeling that

his relatives had chosen wrongly for him. Sensuous enjoyment –well, even if he had had it, it

would have dulled in a year, and he had gained something instead, which seemed to increase

the longer they lived together. She became the mother of a son . . . and in giving him a second

son she died. Then he realized what he had lost, and that no woman could ever take her place;

a friend would come nearer to her than another woman. She had gone, there was no one like

her, and what is that uniqueness but love? He amused himself, he forgot her at times: but at

other times he felt that she had sent all the beauty and joy of the world into Paradise, and he

meditated suicide. Would he meet her beyond the tomb? Is there such a meetingplace? Though

orthodox, he did not know. God's unity was indubitable and indubitably announced, but on all

other points he wavered like the average Christian; his belief in the life to come would pale to a

hope, vanish, reappear, all in a single sentence or a dozen heart-beats, so that the corpuscles of

his blood rather than he seemed to decide which opinion he should hold, and for how long. It

was so with all his opinions. Nothing stayed, nothing passed that did not return; the circulation

was ceaseless and kept him young, and he mourned his wife the more sincerely because he

mourned her seldom.

It would have been simpler to tell Dr. Lai that he had changed his mind about the party, but

until the last minute he did not know that he had changed it; indeed, he didn't change it, it

changed itself. Unconquerable aversion welled. Mrs. Callendar, Mrs. Lesley–no, he couldn't

stand them in his sorrow: they would guess it— for he dowered the British matron with strange

insight— and would delight in torturing him, they would mock him to their husbands. When he

should have been ready, he stood at the Post Office, writing a telegram to his children, and

found on his return that Dr. Lai had called for him, and gone on. Well, let him go on, as befitted

the coarseness of his nature. For his own part, he would commune with the dead.

And unlocking a drawer, he took out his wife's photograph. He gazed at it, and tears

spouted from his eyes. He thought, "How unhappy I am!" But because he really was unhappy,

another emotion soon mingled with his self-pity: he desired to remember his wife and could

not. Why could he remember people whom he did not love? They were always so vivid to him,

whereas the more he looked at this photograph, the less he saw. She had eluded him thus, ever

since they had carried her to her tomb. He had known that she would pass from his hands and

eyes, but had thought she could live in his mind, not realizing that the very fact that we have

loved the dead increases their unreality, and that the more passionately we invoke them the

further they recede. A piece of brown cardboard and three children— that was all that was left of

his wife. It was unbearable, and he thought again, "How unhappy I am!" and became happier.

He had breathed for an instant the mortal air that surrounds Orientals and all men, and he drew

back from it with a gasp, for he was young. "Never, never shall I get over this," he told himself.

"Most certainly my career is a failure, and my sons will be badly brought up." Since it was certain,

he strove to avert it, and looked at some notes he had made on a case at the hospital.

Perhaps some day a rich person might require this particular operation, and he gain a large

sum. The notes interesting him on their own account, he locked the photograph up again. Its

moment was over, and he did not think about his wife any more.

After tea his spirits improved, and he went round to see Hamidullah. Hamidullah had gone

to the party, but his pony had not, so Aziz borrowed it, also his friend's riding breeches and polo

mallet. He repaired to the Maidan. It was deserted except at its rim, where some bazaar youths

were training. Training for what? They would have found it hard to say, but the word had got

into the air. Round they ran, weedy and knock-kneed—the local physique was wretched—with an

expression on their faces not so much of determination as of a determination to be determined.

"Maharajah, salaam," he called for a joke. The youths stopped and laughed. He advised them

not to exert themselves. They promised they would not, and ran on.

Riding into the middle, he began to knock the ball about. He could not play, but his pony

could, and he set himself to learn, free from all human tension. He forgot the whole damned

business of living as he scurried over the brown platter of the Maidan, with the evening wind on

his forehead, and the encircling trees soothing his eyes. The ball shot away towards a stray

subaltern who was also practising; he hit it back to Aziz and called, "Send it along again."

"All right."

The new-corner had some notion of what to do, but his horse had none, and forces were

equal. Concentrated on the ball, they somehow became fond of one another, and smiled when

they drew rein to rest. Aziz liked soldiers— they either accepted you or swore at you, which was

preferable to the civilian's hauteur— and the subaltern liked anyone who could ride.

"Often play?" he asked.

"Never."

"Let's have another chukker."

As he hit, his horse bucked and off he went, cried, "Oh God! "and jumped on again. "Don't

you ever fall off?"

"Plenty."

"Not you."

They reined up again, the fire of good fellowship in their eyes. But it cooled with their bodies,

for athletics can only raise a temporary glow. Nationality was returning, but before it could

exert its poison they parted, saluting each other. "If only they were all like that," each thought.

Now it was sunset. A few of his co-religionists had come to the Maidan, and were praying

with their faces towards Mecca. A Brahminy Bull walked towards them, and Aziz, though

disinclined

to pray himself, did not see why they should be bothered with the clumsy and idolatrous

animal. He gave it a tap with his polo mallet. As he did so, a voice from the road hailed him: it

was Dr. Panna Lai, returning in high distress from the Collector's party.

"Dr. Aziz, Dr. Aziz, where you been? I waited ten full minutes' time at your house, then I

went."

"I am so awfully sorry~I was compelled to go to the Post Office."

One of his own circle would have accepted this as meaning that he had changed his mind,

an event too common to merit censure. But Dr. Lai, being of low extraction, was not sure

whether an insult had not been intended, and he was further annoyed because Aziz had buffeted

the Brahminy Bull. "Post Office? Do you not send your servants?" he said.

"I have so few~my scale is very small."

"Your servant spoke to me. I saw your servant."

"But, Dr. Lai, consider. How could I send my servant when you were coming: you come, we

go, my house is left alone, my servant comes back perhaps, and all my portable property has

been carried away by bad characters in the meantime. Would you have that? The cook is deaf—

I can never count on my cook—and the boy is only a little boy. Never, never do I and Hassan

leave the house at the same time together. It is my fixed rule." He said all this and much more

out of civility, to save Dr. Lai's face. It was not offered as truth and should not have been criticized

as such. But the other demolished it—an easy and ignoble task. "Even if this so, what prevents

leaving a chit saying where you go?" and so on. Aziz detested ill breeding, and made his

pony caper. "Farther away, or mine will start out of sympathy," he wailed, revealing the true

source of his irritation. "It has been so rough and wild this afternoon. It spoiled some most

valuable blossoms in the club garden, and had to be dragged back by four men. English ladies

and gentlemen looking on, and the Collector Sahib himself taking a note. But, Dr. Aziz, I'll not

take up your valuable time. This will not interest you, who have so many engagements and

telegrams. I am just a poor old doctor who thought right to pay my respects when I was asked

and where I was asked. Your absence, I may remark, drew commentaries."

"They can damn well comment."

"It is fine to be young. Damn well! Oh, very fine. Damn whom?"

"I go or not as I please."

"Yet you promise me, and then fabricate this tale of a telegram. Go forward, Dapple."

They went, and Aziz had a wild desire to make an enemy for life. He could do it so easily by

galloping near them. He did it. Dapple bolted. He thundered back on to the Maidan. The glory

of his play with the subaltern remained for a little, he galloped and swooped till he poured with

sweat, and until he returned the pony to Hamidullah's stable he felt the equal of any man. Once

on his feet, he had creeping fears. Was he in bad odour with the powers that be? Had he offended

the Collector by absenting himself? Dr. Panna La! was a person of no importance, yet

was it wise to have quarrelled even with him? The complexion of his mind turned from human

to political. He thought no longer, "Can I get on with people?" but "Are they stronger than I?"

breathing the prevalent miasma.

At his home a chit was awaiting him, bearing the Government stamp. It lay on his table like



a high explosive, which at a touch might blow his flimsy bungalow to bits. He was going to be

cashiered because he had not turned up at the party. When he opened the note, it proved to be

quite different; an invitation from Mr. Fielding, the Principal of Government College, asking him

to come to tea the day after to-morrow. His spirits revived with violence. They would have revived

in any case, for he possessed a soul that could suffer but not stifle, and led a steady life

beneath his mutability. But this invitation gave him particular joy, because Fielding had asked

him to tea a month ago, and he had forgotten about it-never answered, never gone, just forgotten.

And here came a second invitation, without a rebuke or even an allusion to his slip. Here

was true courtesy- the civil deed that shows the good heart- and snatching up his pen he wrote

an affectionate reply, and hurried back for news to Hamidullah's. For he had never met the

Principal, and believed that the one serious gap in his life was going to be filled. He longed to

know everything about the splendid fellow- his salary, preferences, antecedents, how best one

might please him. But Hamidullah was still out, and Mahmoud AH, who was in, would only make

silly rude jokes about the party.

## CHAPTER VII

This Mr. Fielding had been caught by India late. He was over forty when he entered the

oddest portal, the Victoria Terminus at Bombay, and—having bribed a European ticket

inspector—took his luggage into the compartment of his first tropical train. The journey remained

in his mind as significant. Of his two carriage companions one was a youth, fresh to the

East like himself, the other a seasoned Anglo-Indian of his own age. A gulf divided him from

either; he had seen too many cities and men to be the first or to become the second. New

impressions

crowded on him, but they were not the orthodox new impressions; the past conditioned

them, and so it was with his mistakes. To regard an Indian as if he were an Italian is not,

for instance, a common error, nor perhaps a fatal one, and Fielding often attempted analogies

between this peninsula and that other, smaller and more exquisitely shaped, that stretches into

the classic waters of the Mediterranean.

His career, though scholastic, was varied, and had included going to the bad and repenting

thereafter. By now he was a hard-bitten, good-tempered, intelligent fellow on the verge of middle

age, with a belief in education. He did not mind whom he taught; public schoolboys, mental

defectives and policemen, had all come his way, and he had no objection to adding Indians.

Through the influence of friends, he was nominated Principal of the little college at Chandrapore,

liked it, and assumed he was a success. He did succeed with his pupils, but the gulf between

himself and his countrymen, which he had noticed in the train, widened distressingly. He

could not at first see what was wrong. He was not unpatriotic, he always got on with Englishmen

in England, all his best friends were English, so why was it not the same out here? Outwardly

of the large shaggy type, with sprawling limbs and blue eyes, he appeared to inspire

confidence until he spoke. Then something in his manner puzzled people and failed to allay the

distrust which his profession naturally inspired. There needs must be this evil of brains in India,

but woe to him through whom they are increased! The feeling grew that Mr. Fielding was a

disruptive

force, and rightly, for ideas are fatal to caste, and he used ideas by that most potent

method— interchange. Neither a missionary nor a student, he was happiest in the give-and-take

of a private conversation. The world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one

another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence— a creed ill

suited to Chandrapore, but he had come out too late to lose it. He had no racial feeling— not

because he was superior to his brother civilians, but because he had matured in a different

atmosphere,

where the herd instinct does not flourish. The remark that did him most harm at the

club was a silly aside to the effect that the so-called white races are really pinko-grey. He only

said this to be cheery, he did not realize that "white" has no more to do with a colour than "God

save the King" with a god, and that it is the height of impropriety to consider what it does connote.

The pinko-grey male whom he addressed was subtly scandalized; his sense of insecurity

was awoken, and he communicated it to the rest of the herd.

Still, the men tolerated him for the sake of his good heart and strong body; it was their

wives who decided that he was not a sahib really. They disliked him. He took no notice of them,

and this, which would have passed without comment in feminist England, did him harm in a

community where the male is expected to be lively and helpful. Mr. Fielding never advised one

about dogs or horses, or dined, or paid his midday calls, or decorated trees for one's children at

Christmas, and though he came to the club, it was only to get his tennis or billiards, and to go.

This was true. He had discovered that it is possible to keep in with Indians and Englishmen, but

that he who would also keep in with Englishwomen must drop the Indians. The two wouldn't

combine. Useless to blame either party, useless to blame them for blaming one another. It just

was so, and one had to choose. Most Englishmen preferred their own kinswomen, who, coming

out in increasing numbers, made life on the home pattern yearly more possible. He had found it

convenient and pleasant to associate with Indians and he must pay the price. As a rule no

Englishwoman

entered the College except for official functions, and if he invited Mrs. Moore and

Miss Quested to tea, it was because they were new-comers who would view everything with an

equal if superficial eye, and would not turn on a special voice when speaking to his other

guests.

The College itself had been slapped down by the Public Works Department, but its grounds

included an ancient garden and a garden-house, and here he lived for much of the year. He was

dressing after a bath when Dr. Aziz was announced. Lifting up his voice, he shouted from the

bedroom, "Please make yourself at home." The remark was unpremeditated, like most of his

actions; it was what he felt inclined to say.

To Aziz it had a very definite meaning. "May I really, Mr. Fielding? It's very good of you," he

called back; "I like unconventional behaviour so extremely." His spirits flared up, he glanced

round the living-room. Some luxury in it, but no order –nothing to intimidate poor Indians. It

was also a very beautiful room, opening into the garden through three high arches of wood.

"The fact is I have long wanted to meet you," he continued. "I have heard so much about your

warm heart from the Nawab Bahadur. But where is one to meet in a wretched hole like

Chandrapore?" He came close up to the door. "When I was greener here, I'll tell you what. I

used to wish you to fall ill so that we could meet that way." They laughed, and encouraged by

his success he began to improvise. "I said to myself, How does Mr. Fielding look this morning?

Perhaps pale. And the Civil Surgeon is pale too, he will not be able to attend upon him when

the shivering commences. I should have been sent for instead. Then we would have had jolly

talks, for you are a celebrated student of Persian poetry."

'You know me by sight, then.'

'Of course, of course. You know me?'

'I know you very well by name.'

'I have been here such a short time, and always in the bazaar. No wonder you have never

seen me, and I wonder you know my name. I say, Mr. Fielding?'

'Yes?'"

'Guess what I look like before you come out. That will be a kind of game."

'You're five feet nine inches high," said Fielding, surmising this much through the glass of the bedroom door.

round

glass of the bedroom door.

'Jolly good. What next? Have I not a venerable white beard?"

' Blast!

Anything wrong?"

'I've stamped on my last collar stud."

'Take mine, take mine."

'Have you a spare one?"

'Yes, yes, one minute."

'Not if you're wearing it yourself."

No, no, one in my pocket." Stepping aside, so that his outline might vanish, he wrenched

off his collar, and pulled out of his shirt the back stud, a gold stud, which was part of a set that

his brother-in-law had brought him from Europe. " Here it is," he cried.



"Come in with it if you don't mind the unconventionality."

"One minute again." Replacing his collar, he prayed that it would not spring up at the back

during tea. Fielding's bearer, who was helping him to dress, opened the door for him.

"Many thanks." They shook hands smiling. He began to look round, as he would have with

any old friend. Fielding was not surprised at the rapidity of their intimacy. With so emotional a

people it was apt to come at once or never, and he and Aziz, having heard only good of each

other, could afford to dispense with preliminaries.

"But I always thought that Englishmen kept their rooms so tidy. It seems that this is not so.

I need not be so ashamed." He sat down gaily on the bed; then, forgetting himself entirely,

drew up his legs and folded them under him. "Everything ranged coldly on shelves was what

\_I\_ thought— I say, Mr. Fielding, is the stud going to go in?"

"I have ma doots."

"What's that last sentence, please? Will you teach me some new words and so improve my

English?"

Fielding doubted whether "everything ranged coldly on shelves" could be improved. He was

often struck with the liveliness with which the younger generation handled a foreign tongue.

They altered the idiom, but they could say whatever they wanted to say quickly; there were

none of the babuisms ascribed to them up at the club. But then the club moved slowly; it still

declared that few Mohammedans and no Hindus would eat at an Englishman's table, and that

all Indian ladies were in impenetrable purdah. Individually it knew better; as a club it declined

to change.

"Let me put in your stud. I see . . . the shirt back's hole is rather small and to rip it wider a

pity."

"Why in hell does one wear collars at all?" grumbled Fielding as he bent his neck.

"We wear them to pass the Police."

"What's that?"

"If I'm biking in English dress—starch collar, hat with ditch— they take no notice. When I

wear a fez, they cry, 'Your lamp's out!' Lord Curzon did not consider this when he urged natives

of India to retain their picturesque costumes.— Hooray! Stud's gone in.— Sometimes I shut my

eyes and dream I have splendid clothes again and am riding into battle behind Alamgir . Mr.

Fielding, must not India have been beautiful then, with the Mogul Empire at its height and

Alamgir reigning at Delhi upon the Peacock Throne?"

"Two ladies are coming to tea to meet you— I think you know them."

"Meet me? I know no ladies."

"Not Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested?"

"Oh yes— I remember." The romance at the mosque had sunk out of his consciousness as

soon as it was over. "An excessively aged lady; but will you please repeat the name of her

companion?"

"Miss Quested."

"Just as you wish." He was disappointed that other guests were coming, for he preferred to

be alone with his new friend.

"You can talk to Miss Quested about the Peacock Throne if you like— she's artistic, they say."

"Is she a Post Impressionist?"

"Post Impressionism, indeed! Come along to tea. This world is getting too much for me altogether."

Aziz was offended. The remark suggested that he, an obscure Indian, had no right to have

heard of Post Impressionism— a privilege reserved for the Ruling Race, that. He said stiffly, "I do

not consider Mrs. Moore my friend, I only met her accidentally in my mosque," and was adding

"a single meeting is too short to make a friend," but before he could finish the sentence the

stiffness vanished from it, because he felt Fielding's fundamental good will. His own went out to

it, and grappled beneath the shifting tides of emotion which can alone bear the voyager to an

anchorage but may also carry him across it on to the rocks. He was safe really— as safe as the

shore-dweller who can only understand stability and supposes that every ship must be wrecked,

and he had sensations the shore-dweller cannot know. Indeed, he was sensitive rather than

responsive.

In every remark he found a meaning, but not always the true meaning, and his life

though vivid was largely a dream. Fielding, for instance, had not meant that Indians are obscure,

but that Post Impressionism is; a gulf divided his remark from Mrs. Turton's "Why, they

speak English," but to Aziz the two sounded alike. Fielding saw that something had gone wrong,

and equally that it had come right, but he didn't fidget, being an optimist where personal relations

were concerned, and their talk rattled on as before.

"Besides the ladies I am expecting one of my assistants— Narayan Godbole."

"Oho, the Deccani Brahman!"

"He wants the past back too, but not precisely Alamgir."

"I should think not. Do you know what Deccani Brahmins say? That England conquered India

from them—from them, mind, and not from the Moguls. Is not that like their cheek? They

have even bribed it to appear in text-books, for they are so subtle and immensely rich. Professor

Godbole must be quite unlike all other Deccani Brahmins from all I can hear say. A most

sincere chap."

"Why don't you fellows run a club in Chandrapore, Aziz?"

"Perhaps— some day . . . just now I see Mrs. Moore and— what's her name— coming."

How fortunate that it was an "unconventional" party, where formalities are ruled out!  
On

this basis Aziz found the English ladies easy to talk to, he treated them like men. Beauty would

have troubled him, for it entails rules of its own, but Mrs. Moore was so old and Miss Quested

so plain that he was spared this anxiety. Adela's angular body and the freckles on her face were

terrible defects in his eyes, and he wondered how God could have been so unkind to any female

form. His attitude towards her remained entirely straightforward in consequence.

"I want to ask you something, Dr. Aziz," she began. "I heard from Mrs. Moore how helpful

you were to her in the mosque, and how interesting. She learnt more about India in those few

minutes' talk with you than in the three weeks since we landed."

"Oh, please do not mention a little thing like that. Is there anything else I may tell you

about my country?"

"I want you to explain a disappointment we had this morning; it must be some point of Indian

etiquette."

"There honestly is none," he replied. "We are by nature a most informal people."

"I am afraid we must have made some blunder and given offence," said Mrs. Moore.

"That is even more impossible. But may I know the facts?"

"An Indian lady and gentleman were to send their carriage for us this morning at nine . It

has never come. We waited and waited and waited; we can't think what happened."

"Some misunderstanding," said Fielding, seeing at once that it was the type of incident that

had better not be cleared up.

"Oh no, it wasn't that," Miss Quested persisted. "They even gave up going to Calcutta to

entertain us. We must have made some stupid blunder, we both feel sure."

"I wouldn't worry about that."

"Exactly what Mr. Heaslop tells me," she retorted, reddening a little. "If one doesn't worry,

how's one to understand?"

The host was inclined to change the subject, but Aziz took it up warmly, and on learning

fragments of the delinquents' name pronounced that they were Hindus.

"Slack Hindus— they have no idea of society; I know them very well because of a doctor at

the hospital. Such a slack, unpunctual fellow! It is as well you did not go to their house, for it

would give you a wrong idea of India. Nothing sanitary. I think for my own part they grew

ashamed of their house and that is why they did not send."

"That's a notion," said the other man.

"I do so hate mysteries," Adela announced.

"We English do."

"I dislike them not because I'm English, but from my own personal point of view," she corrected.

"I like mysteries but I rather dislike muddles," said Mrs. Moore.

"A mystery is a muddle."

"Oh, do you think so, Mr. Fielding?"

"A mystery is only a high-sounding term for a muddle. No advantage in stirring it up, in either

case. Aziz and I know well that India's a muddle."

"India's— Oh, what an alarming idea!"

"There'll be no muddle when you come to see me," said Aziz, rather out of his depth.  
"Mrs.



Moore and everyone –I invite you all– oh, please."

The old lady accepted: she still thought the young doctor excessively nice; moreover, a new

feeling, half languor, half excitement, bade her turn down any fresh path. Miss Quested accepted

out of adventure. She also liked Aziz, and believed that when she knew him better he

would unlock his country for her. His invitation gratified her, and she asked him for his address.

Aziz thought of his bungalow with horror. It was a detestable shanty near a low bazaar.

There was practically only one room in it, and that infested with small black flies. "Oh, but we

will talk of something else now," he exclaimed. "I wish I lived here. See this beautiful room! Let

us admire it together for a little. See those curves at the bottom of the arches. What delicacy! It

is the architecture of Question and Answer. Mrs. Moore, you are in India; I am not joking." The

room inspired him. It was an audience hall built in the eighteenth century for some high official,

and though of wood had reminded Fielding of the Loggia de' Lanzi at Florence. Little rooms,

now Europeanized, clung to it on either side, but the central hall was unpapered and unglazed,

and the air of the garden poured in freely. One sat in public—on exhibition, as it were— in full

view of the gardeners who were screaming at the birds and of the man who rented the tank for

the cultivation of water chestnut. Fielding let the mango trees too— there was no knowing who

might not come in— and his servants sat on his steps night and day to discourage thieves. Beautiful

certainly, and the Englishman had not spoilt it, whereas Aziz in an occidental moment

would have hung Maude Goodmans on the walls. Yet there was no doubt to whom the room

really belonged. . . .

"I am doing justice here. A poor widow who has been robbed comes along and I give her

fifty rupees, to another a hundred, and so on and so on. I should like that."

Mrs. Moore smiled, thinking of the modern method as exemplified in her son. "Rupees don't

last for ever, I'm afraid," she said.

"Mine would. God would give me more when he saw I gave. Always be giving, like the Nawab

Bahadur. My father was the same, that is why he died poor." And pointing about the room

he peopled it with clerks and officials, all benevolent because they lived long ago.  
"So we would

sit giving for ever— on a carpet instead of chairs, that is the chief change between  
now and

then, but I think we would never punish anyone."

The ladies agreed.

"Poor criminal, give him another chance. It only makes a man worse to go to prison and  
be

corrupted." His face grew very tender— the tenderness of one incapable of administration, and

unable to grasp that if the poor criminal is let off he will again rob the poor widow  
. He was tender

to everyone except a few family enemies whom he did not consider human: on these he

desired revenge. He was even tender to the English; he knew at the bottom of his heart that

they could not help being so cold and odd and circulating like an ice stream through  
his land.

"We punish no one, no one," he repeated, "and in the evening we will give a great banquet with

a nautch and lovely girls shall shine on every side of the tank with fireworks in their hands, and

all shall be feasting and happiness until the next day, when there shall be justice as before— fifty

rupees, a hundred, a thousand— till peace comes. Ah, why didn't we live in that time?  
— But are

you admiring Mr. Fielding's house? Do look how the pillars are painted blue, and the verandah's

pavilions— what do you call them?— that are above us inside are blue also. Look at the carving

on the pavilions. Think of the hours it took. Their little roofs are curved to imitate bamboo. So

pretty— and the bamboos waving by the tank outside. Mrs. Moore! Mrs. Moore!"

"Well?" she said, laughing.

"You remember the water by our mosque? It comes down and fills this tank— a skilful arrangement

of the Emperors. They stopped here going down into Bengal. They loved water.

Wherever they went they created fountains, gardens, hammams. I was telling Mr. Fielding I

would give anything to serve them."

He was wrong about the water, which no Emperor, however skilful, can cause to gravitate

uphill; a depression of some depth together with the whole of Chandrapore lay between the

mosque and Fielding's house. Ronny would have pulled him up, Turton would have wanted to

pull him up, but restrained himself. Fielding did not even want to pull him up; he had dulled his

craving for verbal truth and cared chiefly for truth of mood. As for Miss Quested, she accepted

everything Aziz said as true verbally. In her ignorance, she regarded him as "India," and never

surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India.

He was now much excited, chattering away hard, and even saying damn when he got mixed

up in his sentences. He told them of his profession, and of the operations he had witnessed and

performed, and he went into details that scared Mrs. Moore, though Miss Quested mistook them

for proofs of his broad-mindedness; she had heard such talk at home in advanced academic

circles, deliberately free. She supposed him to be emancipated as well as reliable, and placed

him on a pinnacle which he could not retain. He was high enough for the moment, to be sure,

but not on any pinnacle. Wings bore him up, and flagging would deposit him.

The arrival of Professor Godbole quieted him somewhat, but it remained his afternoon. The

Brahman, polite and enigmatic, did not impede his eloquence, and even applauded it. He took

his tea at a little distance from the outcasts, from a low table placed slightly behind him, to

which he stretched back, and as it were encountered food by accident; all feigned indifference

to Professor Godbole's tea. He was elderly and wizened with a grey moustache and grey-blue

eyes, and his complexion was as fair as a European's. He wore a turban that looked like pale

purple macaroni, coat, waistcoat, dhoti, socks with clocks. The clocks matched the turban, and

his whole appearance suggested harmony—as if he had reconciled the products of East and

West, mental as well as physical, and could never be discomposed. The ladies were interested

in him, and hoped that he would supplement Dr. Aziz by saying something about religion. But

he only ate—ate and ate, smiling, never letting his eyes catch sight of his hand.

Leaving the Mogul Emperors, Aziz turned to topics that could distress no one. He described

the ripening of the mangoes, and how in his boyhood he used to run out in the rains to a big

mango grove belonging to an uncle and gorge there. "Then back with water streaming over you

and perhaps rather a pain inside. But I did not mind. All my friends were paining with me. We

have a proverb in Urdu: 'What does unhappiness matter when we are all unhappy together?'

which comes in conveniently after mangoes. Miss Quested, do wait for mangoes. Why not settle

altogether in India?"

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said Adela. She made the remark without thinking what it

meant. To her, as to the three men, it seemed in key with the rest of the conversation, and not

for several minutes— indeed, not for half an hour— did she realize that it was an important remark,

and ought to have been made in the first place to Ronny.

"Visitors like you are too rare."

"They are indeed," said Professor Godbole. "Such affability is seldom seen. But what can we

offer to detain them? "

"Mangoes, mangoes."

They laughed. "Even mangoes can be got in England now," put in Fielding. "They ship them

in ice-cold rooms. You can make India in England apparently, just as you can make England in

India."

"Frightfully expensive in both cases," said the girl.

"I suppose so."

"And nasty."

But the host wouldn't allow the conversation to take this heavy turn. He turned to the old

lady, who looked flustered and put out— he could not imagine why— and asked about her own

plans. She replied that she should like to see over the College. Everyone immediately rose, with

the exception of Professor Godbole, who was finishing a banana.

"Don't you come too, Adela; you dislike institutions."

"Yes, that is so," said Miss Quested, and sat down again.

Aziz hesitated. His audience was splitting up. The more familiar half was going, but the

more attentive remained. Reflecting that it was an "unconventional" afternoon, he stopped.

Talk went on as before. Could one offer the visitors unripe mangoes in a fool? "I speak now

as a doctor: no." Then the old man said, "But I will send you up a few healthy sweets. I will

give myself that pleasure."



"Miss Quested, Professor Godbole's sweets are delicious," said Aziz sadly, for he wanted to

send sweets too and had no wife to cook them. "They will give you a real Indian treat. Ah, in

my poor position I can give you nothing."

"I don't know why you say that, when you have so kindly asked us to your house."

He thought again of his bungalow with horror. Good heavens, the stupid girl had taken him

at his word! What was he to do? "Yes, all that is settled," he cried. "I invite you all to see me in

the Marabar Caves."

"I shall be delighted."

"Oh, that is a most magnificent entertainment compared to my poor sweets. But has not

Miss Quested visited our caves already?"

"No. I've not even heard of them."

"Not heard of them?" both cried. "The Marabar Caves in the Marabar Hills?"

"We hear nothing interesting up at the club. Only tennis and ridiculous gossip."

The old man was silent, perhaps feeling that it was unseemly of her to criticize her race,

perhaps fearing that if he agreed she would report him for disloyalty. But the young man uttered

a rapid "I know."

"Then tell me everything you will, or I shall never understand India. Are they the hills I

sometimes see in the evening? What are these caves?"

Aziz undertook to explain, but it presently appeared that he had never visited the caves

himself—had always been "meaning" to go, but work or private business had prevented him,

and they were so far. Professor Godbole chaffed him pleasantly. "My dear young sir, the pot and

the kettle! Have you ever heard of that useful proverb?"

"Are they large caves?" she asked.

"No, not large."

"Do describe them, Professor Godbole."

"It will be a great honour." He drew up his chair and an expression of tension came over his

face. Taking the cigarette box, she offered to him and to Aziz, and lit up herself. After an

impressive

pause he said: "There is an entrance in the rock which you enter, and through the entrance

is the cave."

"Something like the caves at Elephanta?"

"Oh no, not at all; at Elephanta there are sculptures of Siva and Parvati. There are no sculptures

at Marabar."

"They are immensely holy, no doubt," said Aziz, to help on the narrative.

"Oh no, oh no."

"Still, they are ornamented in some way."

"Oh no."

"Well, why are they so famous? We all talk of the famous Marabar Caves. Perhaps that is

our empty brag."

"No, I should not quite say that."

"Describe them to this lady, then."

"It will be a great pleasure." He forewent the pleasure, and Aziz realized that he was keeping

back something about the caves. He realized because he often suffered from similar inhibitions

himself. Sometimes, to the exasperation of Major Callendar, he would pass over the one

relevant fact in a position, to dwell on the hundred irrelevant. The Major accused him of

disingenuousness,

and was roughly right, but only roughly. It was rather that a power he couldn't

control capriciously silenced his mind. Godbole had been silenced now; no doubt not willingly,

he was concealing something. Handled subtly, he might regain control and announce that the

Marabar Caves were—full of stalactites, perhaps; Aziz led up to this, but they weren't.

The dialogue remained light and friendly, and Adela had no conception of its undercurrent. She

did not know that the comparatively simple mind of the Mohammedan was encountering ancient

Night. Aziz played a thrilling game. He was handling a human toy that refused to work—he

knew that much. If it worked, neither he nor Professor Godbole would be the least advantaged,

but the attempt enthralled him and was akin to abstract thought. On he chattered, defeated at

every move by an opponent who would not even admit that a move had been made, and further

than ever from discovering what, if anything, was extraordinary about the Marabar Caves.

Into this Ronny dropped.

With an annoyance he took no trouble to conceal, he called from the garden: "What's happened

to Fielding? Where's my mother?"

"Good evening!" she replied coolly.

"I want you and mother at once. There's to be polo."

"I thought there was to be no polo."

"Everything's altered. Some soldier men have come in. Come along and I'll tell you about it."

"Your mother will return shortly, sir," said Professor Godbole, who had risen with deference.

"There is but little to see at our poor college."

Ronny took no notice, but continued to address his remarks to Adela; he had hurried away

from his work to take her to see the polo, because he thought it would give her pleasure. He

did not mean to be rude to the two men, but the only link he could be conscious of with an Indian

was the official, and neither happened to be his subordinate. As private individuals he forgot

them.

Unfortunately Aziz was in no mood to be forgotten. He would not give up the secure and

intimate note of the last hour. He had not risen with Godbole, and now, offensively friendly,

called from his seat, "Come along up and join us, Mr. Heaslop; sit down till your mother turns

up."

Ronny replied by ordering one of Fielding's servants to fetch his master at once.

"He may not understand that. Allow me--" Aziz repeated the order idiomatically.

Ronny was tempted to retort; he knew the type; he knew all the types, and this was the

spoilt Westernized. But he was a servant of the Government, it was his job to avoid "incidents,"

so he said nothing, and ignored the provocation that Aziz continued to offer. Aziz was provocative.

Everything he said had an impertinent flavour or jarred. His wings were failing, but he refused

to fall without a struggle. He did not mean to be impertinent to Mr. Heaslop, who had

never done him harm, but here was an Anglo-Indian who must become a man before comfort

could be regained. He did not mean to be greasily confidential to Miss Quested, only to enlist

her support; nor to be loud and jolly towards Professor Godbole. A strange quartette—he fluttering

to the ground, she puzzled by the sudden ugliness, Ronny fuming, the Brahman observing

all three, but with downcast eyes and hands folded, as if nothing was noticeable. A scene from

a play, thought Fielding, who now saw them from the distance across the garden grouped

among the blue pillars of his beautiful hall.

"Don't trouble to come, mother," Ronny called; "we're just starting." Then he hurried to

Fielding, drew him aside and said with pseudo-heartiness, "I say, old man, do excuse me, but I

think perhaps you oughtn't to have left Miss Quested alone."

"I'm sorry, what's up?" replied Fielding, also trying to be genial.

"Well . . . I'm the sun-dried bureaucrat, no doubt; still, I don't like to see an English girl left

smoking with two Indians."

"She stopped, as she smokes, by her own wish, old man."

"Yes, that's all right in England."

"I really can't see the harm."

"If you can't see, you can't see. . . . Can't you see that fellow's a bounder?"

Aziz flamboyant, was patronizing Mrs. Moore.

"He isn't a bounder," protested Fielding. "His nerves are on edge, that's all."

"What should have upset his precious nerves?"

"I don't know. He was all right when I left."

"Well, it's nothing I've said," said Ronny reassuringly. "I never even spoke to him."

"Oh well, come along now, and take your ladies away; the catastrophe over."

"Fielding . . . don't think I'm taking it badly, or anything of that sort. . . . I suppose you

won't come on to the polo with us? We should all be delighted."

"I'm afraid I can't, thanks all the same. I'm awfully sorry you feel I've been remiss . I didn't

mean to be."

So the leave-taking began. Every one was cross or wretched. It was as if irritation exuded

from the very soil. Could one have been so petty on a Scotch moor or an Italian alp? Fielding

wondered afterwards. There seemed no reserve of tranquillity to draw upon in India. Either

none, or else tranquillity swallowed up everything, as it appeared to do for Professor Godbole.



Here was Aziz all shoddy and odious, Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested both silly, and he himself

and Heaslop both decorous on the surface, but detestable really, and detesting each other.

"Good-bye, Mr. Fielding, and thank you so much. What lovely College buildings!"

"Good-bye, Mrs. Moore."

"Good-bye, Mr. Fielding. Such an interesting afternoon . . ."

"Good-bye, Miss Quested."

"Good-bye, Dr. Aziz."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Moore."

"Good-bye, Dr. Aziz."

"Good-bye, Miss Quested." He pumped her hand up and down to show that he felt at ease .

"You'll jolly jolly well not forget those caves, won't you? I'll fix the whole show up in a jiffy."

"Thank you ..."

Inspired by the devil to a final effort, he added, "What a shame you leave India so soon!

Oh, do reconsider your decision, do stay."

"Good-bye, Professor Godbole," she continued, suddenly agitated. "It's a shame we never

heard you sing."

"I may sing now," he replied, and did.

His thin voice rose, and gave out one sound after another. At times there seemed rhythm, at

times there was the illusion of a Western melody. But the ear, baffled repeatedly, soon lost any

clue, and wandered in a maze of noises, none harsh or unpleasant, none intelligible. It was the

song of an unknown bird. Only the servants understood it. They began to whisper to one another.

The man who was gathering water chestnut came naked out of the tank, his lips parted

with delight, disclosing his scarlet tongue. The sounds continued and ceased after a few moments

as casually as they had begun— apparently half through a bar, and upon the subdominant.

"Thanks so much: what was that?" asked Fielding.

"I will explain in detail. It was a religious song. I placed myself in the position of a milkmaid.

I say to Shri Krishna, 'Come! come to me only.' The god refuses to come. I grow humble

and say: 'Do not come to me only. Multiply yourself into a hundred Krishnas, and let one go

to each of my hundred companions, but one, O Lord of the Universe, come to me.' He refuses

to come. This is repeated several times. The song is composed in a raga appropriate to the present

hour, which is the evening."

"But He comes in some other song, I hope?" said Mrs. Moore gently.

"Oh no, he refuses to come," repeated Godbole, perhaps not understanding her question. "I

say to Him, Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come."

Ronny's steps had died away, and there was a moment of absolute silence. No ripple disturbed

the water, no leaf stirred.

## CHAPTER VIII

Although Miss Quested had known Ronny well in England, she felt well advised to visit him

before deciding to be his wife. India had developed sides of his character that she had never

admired. His self-complacency, his censoriousness, his lack of subtlety, all grew vivid beneath a

tropic sky; he seemed more indifferent than of old to what was passing in the minds of his fellows,

more certain that he was right about them or that if he was wrong it didn't matter. When

proved wrong, he was particularly exasperating; he always managed to suggest that she

needn't have bothered to prove it. The point she made was never the relevant point, her arguments

conclusive but barren, she was reminded that he had expert knowledge and she none,

and that experience would not help her because she could not interpret it. A Public School,

London University, a year at a crammer's, a particular sequence of posts in a particular province,

a fall from a horse and a touch of fever were presented to her as the only training by

which Indians and all who reside in their country can be understood; the only training she could

comprehend, that is to say, for of course above Ronny there stretched the higher realms of

knowledge, inhabited by Callendars and Turtons, who had been not one year in the country but

twenty and whose instincts were superhuman. For himself he made no extravagant claims; she

wished he would. It was the qualified bray of the callow official, the "I am not perfect, but--"

that got on her nerves.

How gross he had been at Mr. Fielding's--spoiling the talk and walking off in the middle of

the haunting song! As he drove them away in the turn- turn, her irritation became unbearable,

and she did not realize that much of it was directed against herself. She longed for an opportunity

to fly out at him, and since he felt cross too, and they were both in India, an opportunity

soon occurred. They had scarcely left the College grounds before she heard him say to his

mother, who was with him on the front seat, "What was that about caves?" and she promptly

opened fire.

"Mrs. Moore, your delightful doctor has decided on a picnic, instead of a party in his house;

we are to meet him out there—you, myself, Mr. Fielding, Professor Godbole— exactly the same

party."

"Out where?" asked Ronny.

"The Marabar Caves."

"Well, I'm blessed," he murmured after a pause. "Did he descend to any details?"

"He did not. If you had spoken to him, we could have arranged them."

He shook his head, laughing.

"Have I said anything funny?"

"I was only thinking how the worthy doctor's collar climbed up his neck."

"I thought you were discussing the caves."

"So I am. Aziz was exquisitely dressed, from tie-pin to spats, but he had forgotten his back

collar-stud, and there you have the Indian all over: inattention to detail; the fundamental slackness

that reveals the race. Similarly, to 'meet' in the caves as if they were the clock at Charing

Cross, when they're miles from a station and each other."

"Have you been to them?"

"No, but I know all about them, naturally."

"Oh, naturally!"

"Are you too pledged to this expedition, mother?"

"Mother is pledged to nothing," said Mrs. Moore, rather unexpectedly. "Certainly not to this

polo. Will you drive up to the bungalow first, and drop me there, please? I prefer to rest."

"Drop me too," said Adela. "I don't want to watch polo either, I'm sure."

"Simpler to drop the polo," said Ronny. Tired and disappointed, he quite lost self-control,

and added in a loud lecturing voice, "I won't have you messing about with Indians any more! If

you want to go to the Marabar Caves, you'll go under British auspices."

"I've never heard of these caves, I don't know what or where they are," said Mrs. Moore,

"but I really can't have"—she tapped the cushion beside her—"so much quarrelling and

tiresomeness!"

The young people were ashamed. They dropped her at the bungalow and drove on together

to the polo, feeling it was the least they could do. Their crackling bad humour left them, but the

heaviness of their spirit remained; thunderstorms seldom clear the air. Miss Quested was thinking

over her own behaviour, and didn't like it at all. Instead of weighing Ronny and herself, and

coming to a reasoned conclusion about marriage, she had incidentally, in the course of a talk

about mangoes, remarked to mixed company that she didn't mean to stop in India. Which

meant that she wouldn't marry Ronny: but what a way to announce it, what a way for a civilized

girl to behave! She owed him an explanation, but unfortunately there was nothing to explain.

The "thorough talk" so dear to her principles and temperament had been postponed until

too late. There seemed no point in being disagreeable to him and formulating her complaints

against his character at this hour of the day, which was the evening. . . . The polo took place on

the Maidan near the entrance of Chandrapore city. The sun was already declining and each of

the trees held a premonition of night. They walked away from the governing group to a distant

seat, and there, feeling that it was his due and her own, she forced out of herself the undigested

remark: "We must have a thorough talk, Ronny, I'm afraid."

"My temper's rotten, I must apologize," was his reply. "I didn't mean to order you and

mother about, but of course the way those Bengalis let you down this morning annoyed me,

and I don't want that sort of thing to keep happening."

"It's nothing to do with them that I . . ."

"No, but Aziz would make some similar muddle over the caves. He meant nothing by the invitation, I could tell by his voice; it's just their way of being pleasant."

"It's something very different, nothing to do with caves, that I wanted to talk, over with



you." She gazed at the colourless grass. "I've finally decided we are not going to be married,

my dear boy."

The news hurt Ronny very much. He had heard Aziz announce that she would not return to

the country, but had paid no attention to the remark, for he never dreamt that an Indian could

be a channel of communication between two English people. He controlled himself and said

gently, "You never said we should marry, my dear girl; you never bound either yourself or me—

don't let this upset you."

She felt ashamed. How decent he was! He might force his opinions down her throat, but did

not press her to an "engagement," because he believed, like herself, in the sanctity of personal

relationships: it was this that had drawn them together at their first meeting, which had occurred

among the grand scenery of the English Lakes. Her ordeal was over, but she felt it

should have been more painful and longer. Adela will not marry Ronny. It seemed slipping away

like a dream. She said, "But let us discuss things; it's all so frightfully important, we mustn't

make false steps. I want next to hear your point of view about me— it might help us both."

His manner was unhappy and reserved. "I don't much believe in this discussing— besides,

I'm so dead with all this extra work Mohurram's bringing, if you'll excuse me."

"I only want everything to be absolutely clear between us, and to answer any questions you

care to put to me on my conduct."

"But I haven't got any questions. You've acted within your rights, you were quite right to

come out and have a look at me doing my work, it was an excellent plan, and anyhow it's no

use talking further— we should only get up steam." He felt angry and bruised; he was too proud

to tempt her back, but he did not consider that she had behaved badly, because where his

compatriots were concerned he had a generous mind.

"I suppose that there is nothing else; it's unpardonable of me to have given you and your

mother all this bother," said Miss Quested heavily, and frowned up at the tree beneath which

they were sitting. A little green bird was observing her, so brilliant and neat that it might have

hopped straight out of a shop. On catching her eye it closed its own, gave a small skip and prepared

to go to bed. Some Indian wild bird. "Yes, nothing else," she repeated, feeling that a profound

and passionate speech ought to have been delivered by one or both of them. "We've been awfully British over it, but I suppose that's all right."

"As we are British, I suppose it is."

"Anyhow we've not quarrelled, Ronny."

"Oh, that would have been too absurd. Why should we quarrel?"

"I think we shall keep friends."

"I know we shall."

"Quite so."

As soon as they had exchanged this admission, a wave of relief passed through them both,

and then transformed itself into a wave of tenderness, and passed back. They were softened by

their own honesty, and began to feel lonely and unwise. Experiences, not character, divided

them; they were not dissimilar, as humans go; indeed, when compared with the people who

stood nearest to them in point of space they became practically identical. The Bhil who was

holding an officer's polo pony, the Eurasian who drove the Nawab Bahadur's car, the Nawab

Bahadur

himself, the Nawab Bahadur's debauched grandson—none would have examined a difficulty

so frankly and coolly. The mere fact of examination caused it to diminish. Of course they

were friends, and for ever. "Do you know what the name of that green bird up above us is?" she

asked, putting her shoulder rather nearer to his.

"Bee-eater."

"Oh no, Ronny, it has red bars on its wings."

"Parrot," he hazarded.

"Good gracious no."

The bird in question dived into the dome of the tree. It was of no importance, yet they

would have liked to identify it, it would somehow have solaced their hearts. But nothing in India

is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something

else.

"McBryde has an illustrated bird book," he said dejectedly. "I'm no good at all at birds, in

fact I'm useless at any information outside my own job. It's a great pity."

"So am I. I'm useless at everything."

"What do I hear?" shouted the Nawab Bahadur at the top of his voice, causing both of them

to start. "What most improbable statement have I heard? An English lady useless? No, no, no,

no, no." He laughed genially, sure, within limits, of his welcome.

"Hallo, Nawab Bahadur! Been watching the polo again?" said Ronny tepidly.

"I have, sahib, I have."

"How do you do?" said Adela, likewise pulling herself together. She held out her hand. The

old gentleman judged from so wanton a gesture that she was new to his country, but he paid

little heed. Women who exposed their face became by that one act so mysterious to him that

he took them at the valuation of their men folk rather than at his own. Perhaps they were not

immoral, and anyhow they were not his affair. On seeing the City Magistrate alone with a

maiden at twilight, he had borne down on them with hospitable intent. He had a new little car,

and wished to place it at their disposal; the City Magistrate would decide whether the offer was

acceptable.

Ronny was by this time rather ashamed of his curtness to Aziz and Godbole, and here was

an opportunity of showing that he could treat Indians with consideration when they deserved it.

So he said to Adela, with the same sad friendliness that he had employed when discussing the

bird, "Would half an hour's spin entertain you at all?"

"Oughtn't we to get back to the bungalow?"

"Why?" He gazed at her.

"I think perhaps I ought to see your mother and discuss future plans."

"That's as you like, but there's no hurry, is there?"

"Let me take you to the bungalow, and first the little spin," cried the old man, and hastened

to the car.

"He may show you some aspect of the country I can't, and he's a real loyalist. I thought you

might care for a bit of a change."

Determined to give him no more trouble, she agreed, but her desire to see India had suddenly

decreased. There had been a factitious element in it.

How should they seat themselves in the car? The elegant grandson had to be left behind.

The Nawab Bahadur got up in front, for he had no intention of neighbouring an English girl.

"Despite my advanced years, I am learning to drive," he said. "Man can learn everything if he

will but try." And foreseeing a further difficulty, he added, "I do not do the actual steering. I sit

and ask my chauffeur questions, and thus learn the reason for everything that is done before I

do it myself. By this method serious and I may say ludicrous accidents, such as befall one of my

compatriots during that delightful reception at the English Club, are avoided. Our good Panna

Lai! I hope, sahib, that great damage was not done to your flowers. Let us have our little spin

down the Gangavati road. Half one league onwards!" He fell asleep.

! Ronny instructed the chauffeur to take the Marabar road rather than the Gangavati, since

the latter was under repair, and settled himself down beside the lady he had lost. The car made

a burring noise and rushed along a chaussée that ran upon an embankment above melancholy

fields. Trees of a poor quality bordered, the road, indeed the whole scene was inferior, and

suggested

that the countryside was too vast to admit of excellence. In vain did each item in it call

out, "Come, come." There was not enough god to go round. The two young people conversed

feebly and felt unimportant. When the darkness began, it seemed to well out of the meagre

vegetation, entirely covering the fields each side of them before it brimmed over the road.

Ronny's face grew dim—an event that always increased her esteem for his character. Her hand

touched his, owing to a jolt, and one of the thrills so frequent in the animal kingdom passed

between them, and announced that all their difficulties were only a lovers' quarrel. Each was

too proud to increase the pressure, but neither withdrew it, and a spurious unity descended on

them, as local and temporary as the gleam that inhabits a firefly. It would vanish in a moment,

perhaps to reappear, but the darkness is alone durable. And the night that encircled them, absolute



as it seemed, was itself only a spurious unity, being modified by the gleams of day that  
 hat

leaked up round the edges of the earth, and by the stars.

They gripped . . . bump, jump, a swerve, two wheels lifted in the air, brakes on, bump with

tree at edge of embankment, standstill. An accident. A slight one. Nobody hurt. The Nawab

Bahadur

awoke. He cried out in Arabic, and violently tugged his beard.

"What's the damage?" enquired Ronny, after the moment's pause that he permitted himself

before taking charge of a situation. The Eurasian, inclined to be flustered, rallied to the sound

of his voice, and, every inch an Englishman, replied, "You give me five minutes' time, I'll take

you any damage anywhere."

"Frightened, Adela?" He released her hand.

"Not a bit."

"I consider not to be frightened the height of folly," cried the Nawab Bahadur quite rudely.

"Well, it's all over now, tears are useless," said Ronny, dismounting. "We had some luck

butting that tree."

"All over ... oh yes, the danger is past, let us smoke cigarettes, let us do anything we

please. Oh yes . . enjoy ourselves—oh my merciful God . . ." His words died into Arabic again.

"Wasn't the bridge. We skidded."

"We didn't skid," said Adela, who had seen the cause of the accident, and thought everyone

must have seen it too. "We ran into an animal."

A loud cry broke from the old man: his terror was disproportionate and ridiculous.

"An animal?"

"A large animal rushed up out of the dark on the right and hit us."

"By Jove, she's right," Ronny exclaimed. "The paint's gone."

"By Jove, sir, your lady is right," echoed the Eurasian. Just by the hinges of the door was a

dent, and the door opened with difficulty.

"Of course I'm right. I saw its hairy back quite plainly."

"I say, Adela, what was it?"

"I don't know the animals any better than the birds here— too big for a goat."

"Exactly, too big for a goat ..." said the old man.

Ronny said, "Let's go into this; let's look for its tracks."

"Exactly; you wish to borrow this electric torch."

The English people walked a few steps back into the darkness, united and happy. Thanks to

their youth and upbringing, they were not upset by the accident. They traced back the writhing

of the tyres to the source of their disturbance. It was just after the exit from a bridge; the animal

had probably come up out of the nullah. Steady and smooth ran the marks of the car, ribbons

neatly nicked with lozenges, then all went mad. Certainly some external force had impinged,

but the road had been used by too many objects for any one track to be legible, and

the torch created such high lights and black shadows that they could not interpret what it revealed.

Moreover, Adela in her excitement knelt and swept her skirts about, until it was she if

anyone who appeared to have attacked the car. The incident was a great relief to them both.

They forgot their abortive personal relationship, and felt adventurous as they muddled about in

the dust.

"I believe it was a buffalo," she called to their host, who had not accompanied them.

"Exactly."

"Unless it was a hyena."

Ronny approved this last conjecture. Hyenas prowl in nullahs and headlights dazzle them.

"Excellent, a hyena," said the Indian with an angry irony and a gesture at the night.  
"Mr.

Harris!"

"Haifa mo-ment. Give me ten minutes' time."

"Sahib says hyena."

"Don't worry Mr. Harris. He saved us from a nasty smash. Harris, well done!"

"A smash, sahib, that would not have taken place had he obeyed and taken us Gangavati side, instead of Marabar."

"My fault that. I told him to come this way because the road's better. Mr. Lesley has made it

pukka right up to the hills."

"Ah, now I begin to understand." Seeming to pull himself together, he apologized slowly and

elaborately for the accident. Ronny murmured, "Not at all," but apologies were his due, and

should have started sooner: because English people are so calm at a crisis, it is not to be assumed

that they are unimportant. The Nawab Bahadur had not come out very well.

At that moment a large car approached from the opposite direction. Ronny advanced a few

steps down the road, and with authority in his voice and gesture stopped it. It bore the inscription

"Mudkul State" across its bonnet. All friskiness and friendliness, Miss Derek sat inside.

"Mr. Heaslop, Miss Quested, what are you holding up an innocent female for?"

"We've had a breakdown."

"But how putrid!"

"We ran into a hyena!"

"How absolutely rotten!"

"Can you give us a lift?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Take me too," said the Nawab Bahadur.

"Heh, what about me?" cried Mr. Harris.

"Now what's all this? I'm not an omnibus," said Miss Derek with decision. "I've a harmonium

and two dogs in here with me as it is. I'll take three of you if one'! ! sit in front and nurse a pug.

No more."

"I will sit in front," said the Nawab Bahadur.

"Then hop in: I've no notion who you are."

"Heh no, what about my dinner? I can't be left alone all the night." Trying to look a nd feel

like a European, the chauffeur interposed aggressively. He still wore a topi, despite the darkness,

and his face, to which the Ruling Race had contributed little beyond bad teeth, peered out

of it pathetically, and seemed to say, "What's it all about? Don't worry me so, you blacks and

whites. Here I am, stuck in dam India same as you, and you got to fit me in better than this."

"Nussu will bring you out some suitable dinner upon a bicycle," said the Nawab Bahadur,

who had regained his usual dignity. "I shall despatch him with all possible speed. Meanwhile,

repair my car."

They sped off, and Mr. Harris, after a reproachful glance, squatted down upon his ham  
s.

When English and Indians were both present, he grew self-conscious, because he did not know

to whom he belonged. For a little he was vexed by opposite currents in his blood, then they

blended, and he belonged to no one but himself.

But Miss Derek was in tearing spirits. She had succeeded in stealing the Mudkul car. Her

Maharajah would be awfully sick, but she didn't mind, he could sack her if he liked. "I don't believe

in these people letting you down," she said. "If I didn't snatch like the devil, I should be

nowhere. He doesn't want the car, silly fool! Surely it's to the credit of his State I should be

seen about in it at Chandrapore during my leave. He ought to look at it that way. Anyhow he's

got to look at it that way. My Maharani's different—my Maharani's a dear. That's her fox terrier,

poor little devil. I fished them out both with the driver. Imagine taking dogs to a Chiefs'

Conference!

As sensible as taking Chiefs, perhaps." She shrieked with laughter. "The harmonium—the

harmonium's my little mistake, I own. They rather had me over the harmonium. I meant it to

stop on the train. Oh lor' ! "

Ronny laughed with restraint. He did not approve of English people taking service under the

Native States, where they obtain a certain amount of influence, but at the expense of the general

prestige. The humorous triumphs of a free lance are of no assistance to an administrator,

and he told the young lady that she would outdo Indians at their own game if she went on

much longer.

"They always sack me before that happens, and then I get another job. The whole of India

seethes with Maharanis and Ranis and Begums who clamour for such as me."

"Really. I had no idea."

"How could you have any idea, Mr. Heaslop? What should he know about Maharanis, Miss

Quested? Nothing. At least I should hope not."

"I understand those big people are not particularly interesting," said Adela, quietly, disliking

the young woman's tone. Her hand touched Ronny's again in the darkness, and to the animal



thrill there was now added a coincidence of opinion.

"Ah, there you're wrong. They're priceless."

"I would scarcely call her wrong," broke out the Nawab Bahadur, from his isolation on the

front seat, whither they had relegated him. "A Native State, a Hindu State, the wife of a ruler of

a Hindu State, may beyond doubt be a most excellent lady, and let it not be for a moment supposed

that I suggest anything against the character of Her Highness the Maharani of Mudkul.

But I fear she will be uneducated, I fear she will be superstitious. Indeed, how could she be

otherwise? What opportunity of education has such a lady had? Oh, superstition is terrible, terrible!

oh, it is the great defect in our Indian character! "—and as if to point his criticism, the

lights of the civil station appeared on a rise to the right. He grew more and more voluble. "Oh,

it is the duty of each and every citizen to shake superstition off, and though I have little experience

of Hindu States, and none of this particular one, namely Mudkul (the Ruler, I fancy, has a

salute of but eleven guns)— yet I cannot imagine that they have been as successful as British

India, where we see reason and orderliness spreading in every direction, like a most healthgiving

flood!"

Miss Derek said "Golly!"

Undeterred by the expletive, the old man swept on. His tongue had been loosed and his

mind had several points to make. He wanted to endorse Miss Quested's remark that big people

are not interesting, because he was bigger himself than many an independent chief; at the

same time, he must neither remind nor inform her that he was big, lest she felt she had committed

a discourtesy. This was the groundwork of his oration; worked in with it was his gratitude

to Miss Derek for the lift, his willingness to hold a repulsive dog in his arms, and his general

regret for the trouble he had caused the human race during the evening. Also he wanted to

be dropped near the city to get hold of his cleaner, and to see what mischief his grandson was

up to. As he wove all these anxieties into a single rope, he suspected that his audience felt no

interest, and that the City Magistrate fondled either maiden behind the cover of the harnionium,

but good breeding compelled him to continue; it was nothing to him if they were bored , because

he did not know what boredom is, and it was nothing to him if they were licentious, because

God has created all races to be different. The accident was over, and his life, equally

useful, distinguished, happy, ran on as before and expressed itself in streams of well-chosen

words.

When this old geyser left them, Ronny made no comment, but talked lightly about polo;

Turton had taught him that it is sounder not to discuss a man at once, and he reserved what he

had to say on the Nawab's character until later in the evening. His hand, which he had removed

to say good-bye, touched Adela's again; she caressed it definitely, he responded, and their firm

and mutual pressure surely meant something. They looked at each other when they reached

the bungalow, for Mrs. Moore was inside it. It was for Miss Quested to speak, and she said

nervously, "Ronny, I should like to take back what I said on the Maidan." He assented , and they

became engaged to be married in consequence.

Neither had foreseen such a consequence. She had meant to revert to her former condition

of important and cultivated uncertainty, but it had passed out of her reach at its appropriate

hour. Unlike the green bird or the hairy animal, she was labelled now. She felt humiliated again,

for she deprecated labels, and she felt too that there should have been another scene between

her lover and herself at this point, something dramatic and lengthy. He was pleased instead of

distressed, he was surprised, but he had really nothing to say. What indeed is there to say? To

be or not to be married, that was the question, and they had decided it in the affirmative.

"Come along and let's tell the mater all this "--opening the perforated zinc door that protected

the bungalow from the swarms of winged creatures. The noise woke the mater up. She

had been dreaming of the absent children who were so seldom mentioned, Ralph and Stella,

and did not at first grasp what was required of her. She too had become used to thoughtful

procrastination,

and felt alarmed when it came to an end.

When the announcement was over, he made a gracious and honest remark. "Look here,

both of you, see India if you like and as you like— I know I made myself rather ridiculous at

Fielding's, but . . . it's different now. I wasn't quite sure of myself."

"My duties here are evidently finished, I don't want to see India now; now for my passage

back," was Mrs. Moore's thought. She reminded herself of all that a happy marriage means, and

of her own happy marriages, one of which had produced Ronny. Adela's parents had also been

happily married, and excellent it was to see the incident repeated by the younger generation.

On and on! the number of such unions would certainly increase as education spread and ideals

grew loftier, and characters firmer. But she was tired by her visit to Government College, her

feet ached, Mr. Fielding had walked too fast and far, the young people had annoyed her in the

turn-turn, and given her to suppose they were breaking with each other, and though it was all

right now she could not speak as enthusiastically of wedlock or of anything as she should have

done. Ronny was suited, now she must go home and help the others, if they wished. She was

past marrying herself, even unhappily; her function was to help others, her reward to be informed

that she was sympathetic. Elderly ladies must not expect more than this.

They dined alone. There was much pleasant and affectionate talk about the future. Later on

they spoke of passing events, and Ronny reviewed and recounted the day from his own point of

view. It was a different day from the women's because while they had enjoyed themselves or

thought, he had worked. Mohurram was approaching, and as usual the Chandrapore Mohammedans

were building paper towers of a size too large to pass under the branches of a certain

pepul tree. One knew what happened next; the tower stuck, a Mohammedan climbed up the

pepul and cut the branch off, the Hindus protested, there was a religious riot, and Heaven knew

what, with perhaps the troops sent for. There had been deputations and conciliation committees

under the auspices of Turton, and all the normal work of Chandrapore had been hung up.

Should the procession take another route, or should the towers be shorter? The Mohammedans

offered the former, the Hindus insisted on the latter. The Collector had favoured the Hindus, until

he suspected that they had artificially bent the tree nearer the ground. They said it sagged

naturally. Measurements, plans, an official visit to the spot. But Ronny had not disliked his day,

for it proved that the British were necessary to India; there would certainly have been bloodshed

without them. His voice grew complacent again; he was here not to be pleasant but to

keep the peace, and now that Adela had promised to be his wife, she was sure to understand.

"What does our old gentleman of the car think?" she asked, and her negligent tone was exactly

what he desired.

"Our old gentleman is helpful and sound, as he always is over public affairs. You've seen in

him our show Indian."

"Have I really?"

"I'm afraid so. Incredible, aren't they, even the best of them? They're all—they all forget

their back collar studs sooner or later. You've had to do with three sets of Indians to-day, the

Bhattacharyas, Aziz, and this chap, and it really isn't a coincidence that they've all let you

down."

"I like Aziz, Aziz is my real friend," Mrs. Moore interposed.

"When the animal runs into us the Nawab loses his head, deserts his unfortunate chauffeur,

intrudes upon Miss Derek ... no great crimes, no great crimes, but no white man would have

done it."

"What animal?"

"Oh, we had a small accident on the Marabar Road. Adela thinks it was a hyena."

"An accident?" she cried.

"Nothing; no one hurt. Our excellent host awoke much rattled from his dreams, appeared to

think it was our fault, and chanted exactly, exactly."

Mrs. Moore shivered, "A ghost!" But the idea of a ghost scarcely passed her lips. The young

people did not take it up, being occupied with their own outlooks, and deprived of support it

perished, or was reabsorbed into the part of the mind that seldom speaks.

"Yes, nothing criminal," Ronny summed up, "but there's the native, and there's one of the

reasons why we don't admit him to our clubs, and how a decent girl like Miss Derek can take



service under natives puzzles me. . . . But I must get on with my work. Krishna!" Krishna was

the peon who should have brought the files from his office. He had not turned up, and a terrific

row ensued. Ronny stormed, shouted, howled, and only the experienced observer could tell that

he was not angry, did not much want the files, and only made a row because it was the custom.

Servants, quite understanding, ran slowly in circles, carrying hurricane lamps. Krishna the earth,

Krishna the stars replied, until the Englishman was appeased by their echoes, fined the absent

peon eight annas, and sat down to his arrears in the next room.

"Will you play Patience with your future mother-inlaw, dear Adela, or does it seem to you

tame?"

"I should like to— I don't feel a bit excited— I'm just glad it's settled up at last, but I'm not

conscious of vast changes. We are all three the same people still."

"That's much the best feeling to have." She dealt out the first row of "demon."

"I suppose so," said the girl thoughtfully.

"I feared at Mr. Fielding's that it might be settled the other way . . . black knave on a red

queen. . . ." They chatted gently about the game.

Presently Adela said: "You heard me tell Aziz and Godbole I wasn't stopping in their country.

I didn't mean it, so why did I say it? I feel I haven't been— frank enough, attentive enough, or

something. It's as if I got everything out of proportion. You have been so very good to me, and

I meant to be good when I sailed, but somehow I haven't been. . . . Mrs. Moore, if one isn't

absolutely

honest, what is the use of existing?"

She continued to lay out her cards. The words were obscure, but she understood the uneasiness

that produced them. She had experienced it twice herself, during her own

engagements—this vague contrition and doubt. All had come right enough afterwards and

doubtless would this time—marriage makes most things right enough. "I wouldn't worry," she

said. "It's partly the odd surroundings; you and I keep on attending to trifles instead of what's

important; we are what the people here call 'new.'"

"You mean that my bothers are mixed up with India?"

"India's—" She stopped.

"What made you call it a ghost?"

"Call what a ghost?"

"The animal thing that hit us. Didn't you say 'Oh, a ghost,' in passing."

"I couldn't have been thinking of what I was saying."

"It was probably a hyena, as a matter of fact."

"Ah, very likely."

And they went on with their Patience. Down in Chandrapore the Nawab Bahadur waited for

his car. He sat behind his town house (a small unfurnished building which he rarely entered) in

the midst of the little court that always improvises itself round Indians of position. As if turbans

were the natural product of darkness a fresh one would occasionally froth to the front, incline

itself towards him, and retire. He was preoccupied, his diction was appropriate to a religious

subject. Nine years previously, when first he had had a car, he had driven it over a drunken man

and killed him, and the man had been waiting for him ever since. The Nawab Bahadur was innocent

before God and the Law, he had paid double the compensation necessary; but it was no

use, the man continued to wait in an unspeakable form, close to the scene of his death. None

of the English people knew of this, nor did the chauffeur; it was a racial secret communicable

more by blood than speech. He spoke now in horror of the particular circumstances; he had led

others into danger, he had risked the lives of two innocent and honoured guests. He repeated,

"If I had been killed, what matter? it must happen sometime; but they who trusted me—" The

company shuddered and invoked the mercy of God. Only Aziz held aloof, because a personal

experience restrained him: was it not by despising ghosts that he had come to know Mrs.

Moore? "You know, Nureddin," he whispered to the grandson— an effeminate youth whom he

seldom met, always liked, and invariably forgot—" you know, my dear fellow, we Moslems simply

must get rid of these superstitions, or India will never advance. How long must I hear of the

savage pig upon the Marabar Road?" Nureddin looked down. Aziz continued: "Your grandfather

belongs to another generation, and I respect and love the old gentleman, as you know. I say

nothing against him, only that it is wrong for us, because we are young. I want you to promise

me— Nureddin, are you listening?— not to believe in Evil Spirits, and if I die (for my health grows

very weak) to bring up my three children to disbelieve in them too." Nureddin smiled, and a

suitable answer rose to his pretty lips, but before he could make it the car arrived, and his

grandfather took him away.

The game of Patience up in the civil lines went on longer than this. Mrs. Moore continued to

murmur "Red ten on a black knave," Miss Quested to assist her, and to intersperse among the

intricacies of the play details about the hyena, the engagement, the Maharani of Mudkul, the

Bhattacharyas, and the day generally, whose rough desiccated surface acquired as it receded a

definite outline, as India itself might, could it be viewed from the moon. Presently the players

went to bed, but not before other people had woken up elsewhere, people whose emotions

they could not share, and whose existence they ignored. Never tranquil, never perfectly dark,

the night wore itself away, distinguished from other nights by two or three blasts of wind, which

seemed to fall perpendicularly out of the sky and to bounce back into it, hard and compact,

leaving no freshness behind them: the hot weather was approaching.

## CHAPTER IX

Aziz fell ill as he foretold—slightly ill. Three days later he lay abed in his bungalow, pretending

to be very ill. It was a touch of fever, which he would have neglected if there was anything

important at the hospital. Now and then he groaned and thought he should die, but did not

think so for long, and a very little diverted him. It was Sunday, always an equivocal day in the

East, and an excuse for slacking. He could hear church bells as he drowsed, both from the civil

station and from the missionaries out beyond the slaughter house—different bells and rung with

different intent, for one set was calling firmly to Anglo-India, and the other feebly to mankind.

He did not object to the first set; the other he ignored, knowing their inefficiency. Old Mr.

Graysford

and young Mr. Sorley made converts during a famine, because they distributed food; but

when times improved they were naturally left alone again, and though surprised and aggrieved

each time this happened, they never learnt wisdom. "No Englishman understands us except Mr.

Fielding," he thought; "but how shall I see him again? If he entered this room the disgrace of it

would kill me." He called to Hassan to clear up, but Hassan, who was testing his wages by ringing

them on the step of the verandah, found it possible not to hear him; heard and didn't hear,

just as Aziz had called and hadn't called. "That's India all over . . . how like us . . . there we are

..." He dozed again, and his thoughts wandered over the varied surface of life.

Gradually they steadied upon a certain spot— the Bottomless Pit according to missionaries,

but he had never regarded it as more than a dimple. Yes, he did want to spend an evening with

some girls, singing and all that, the vague jollity that would culminate in voluptuousness. Yes,

that was what he did want. How could it be managed? If Major Callendar had been an Indian,

he would have remembered what young men are, and granted two or three days' leave to Calcutta

without asking questions. But the Major assumed either that his subordinates were made

of ice, or that they repaired to the Chandrapore bazaars— disgusting ideas both. It was only Mr.

Fielding who

"Hassan!

The servant came running.

"Look at those flies, brother;" and he pointed to the horrible mass that hung from the ceiling.

The nucleus was a wire which had been inserted as a homage to electricity. Electricity had

paid no attention, and a colony of eye-flies had come instead and blackened the coils with their

bodies.

"Huzoor, those are flies."

"Good, good, they are, excellent, but why have I called you?"

"To drive them elsewhere," said Hassan, after painful thought.

"Driven elsewhere, they always return."

"Huzoor."

"You must make some arrangement against flies; that is why you are my servant," said Aziz



gently.

Hassan would call the little boy to borrow the stepladder from Mahmoud Ali's house; he

would order the cook to light the Primus stove and heat water; he would personally ascend the

steps with a bucket in his arms, and dip the end of the coil into it.

"Good, very good. Now what have you to do?"

"Kill flies."

"Good. Do it."

Hassan withdrew, the plan almost lodged in his head, and began to look for the little boy.

Not finding him, his steps grew slower, and he stole back to his post on the verandah, but did

not go on testing his rupees, in case his master heard them clink. On twittered the Sunday

bells; the East had returned to the East via the suburbs of England, and had become ridiculous

during the detour.

Aziz continued to think about beautiful women.

His mind here was hard and direct, though not brutal. He had learnt all he needed concerning

his own constitution many years ago, thanks to the social order into which he had been

born, and when he came to study medicine he was repelled by the pedantry and fuss with

which Europe tabulates the facts of sex. Science seemed to discuss everything from the wrong

end. It didn't interpret his experiences when he found them in a German manual, because by

being there they ceased to be his experiences. What he had been told by his father or mother

or had picked up from servants—it was information of that sort that he found useful, and

handed on as occasion offered to others.

But he must not bring any disgrace on his children by some silly escapade. Imagine if it got

about that he was not respectable! His professional position too must be considered, whatever

Major Callendar thought. Aziz upheld the proprieties, though he did not invest them with any

moral halo, and it was here that he chiefly differed from an Englishman. His conventions were

social. There is no harm in deceiving society as long as she does not find you out, because it is

only when she finds you out that you have harmed her; she is not like a friend or God, who are

injured by the mere existence of unfaithfulness. Quite clear about this, he meditated what type

of lie he should tell to get away to Calcutta, and had thought of a man there who could be

trusted to send him a wire and a letter that he could show to Major Callendar, when the noise of

wheels was heard in his compound. Someone had called to enquire. The thought of sympathy

increased his fever, and with a sincere groan he wrapped himself in his quilt.

"Aziz, my dear fellow, we are greatly concerned," said Hamidullah's voice. One, two, three,

four bumps, as people sat down upon his bed.

"When a doctor falls ill it is a serious matter," said the voice of Mr. Syed Mohammed, the assistant

engineer.

"When an engineer falls ill, it is equally important," said the voice of Mr. Haq, a police inspector.

"Oh yes, we are all jolly important, our salaries prove it."

"Dr. Aziz took tea with our Principal last Thursday afternoon," piped Rafi, the engineer's

nephew. "Professor Godbole, who also attended, has sickened too, which seems rather a curious

thing, sir, does it not?"

Flames of suspicion leapt up in the breast of each man. "Humbug!" exclaimed Hamidullah,

in authoritative tones, quenching them.

"Humbug, most certainly," echoed the others, ashamed of themselves. The wicked school boy,

having failed to start a scandal, lost confidence and stood up with his back to the wall.

"Is Professor Godbole ill?" enquired Aziz, penetrated by the news. "I am sincerely sorry."

Intelligent and compassionate, his face peeped out of the bright crimson folds of the quilt.

"How do you do, Mr. Syed Mohammed, Mr. Haq? How very kind of you to enquire after my health! How do you do, Hamidullah? But you bring me bad news. What is wrong with him, the

excellent fellow?"

"Why don't you answer, Rafi? You're the great authority," said his uncle.

"Yes, Rafi's the great man," said Hamidullah, rubbing it in. "Rafi is the Sherlock Holmes of

Chandrapore. Speak up, Rafi."

Less than the dust, the schoolboy murmured the word "Diarrhoea," but took courage as

soon as it had been uttered, for it improved his position. Flames of suspicion shot up again in

the breasts of his elders, though in a different direction. Could what was called diarrhoea really

be an early case of cholera?

"If this is so, this is a very serious thing: this is scarcely the end of March. Why have I not

been informed?" cried Aziz.

"Dr. Panna Lai attends him, sir."

"Oh yes, both Hindus; there we have it; they hang together like flies and keep everything

dark. Rafi, come here. Sit down. Tell me all the details. Is there vomiting also?"

"Oh yes indeed, sir, and the serious pains."

"That settles it. In twenty-four hours he will be dead."

Everybody looked and felt shocked, but Professor Godbole had diminished his appeal by

linking himself with a co-religionist. He moved them less than when he had appeared as a suffering

individual. Before long they began to condemn him as a source of infection. "All illness

proceeds from Hindus," Mr. Haq said. Mr. Syed Mohammed had visited religious fairs, at

Allahabad

and at Ujjain, and described them with biting scorn. At Allahabad there was flowing water,

which carried impurities away, but at Ujjain the little river Sipra was banked up, and thousands

of bathers deposited their germs in the pool. He spoke with disgust of the hot sun, the crowding

and marigold flowers, and the encampment of sadhus, some of whom strode stark naked

through the streets. Asked what was the name of the chief idol at Ujjain, he replied that he

did not know, he had disdained to enquire, he really could not waste his time over such trivialities.

His outburst took some time, and in his excitement he fell into Punjabi (he came from that

side) and was unintelligible.

Aziz liked to hear his religion praised. It soothed the surface of his mind, and allowed beautiful

images to form beneath. When the engineer's noisy tirade was finished, he said, "That is

exactly my own view." He held up his hand, palm outward, his eyes began to glow, his heart to

fill with tenderness. Issuing still farther from his quilt, he recited a poem by Ghalib. It had no

connection with anything that had gone before, but it came from his heart and spoke to theirs.

They were overwhelmed by its pathos; pathos, they agreed, is the highest quality in a poet; a

poem should touch the hearer with a sense of his own weakness, and should institute some

comparison between mankind and flowers. The squalid bedroom grew quiet; the silly intrigues,

the gossip, the shallow discontent were stilled, while words accepted as immortal filled the

indifferent

air. Not as a call to battle, but as a calm assurance came the feeling that India was

one; Moslem; always had been; an assurance that lasted until they looked out of the door.

Whatever Ghalib had felt, he had anyhow lived in India, and this consolidated it for them: he

had gone with his own tulips and roses, but tulips and roses do not go. And the sister kingdoms

of the north— Arabia, Persia, Ferghana, Turkestan— stretched out their hands as he sang, sadly,

because all beauty is sad, and greeted ridiculous Chandrapore, where every street and house

was divided against itself, and told her that she was a continent and a unity.

Of the company, only Hamidullah had any comprehension of poetry. The minds of the others

were inferior and rough. Yet they listened with pleasure, because literature had not been divorced

from their civilization. The police inspector, for instance, did not feel that Aziz had degraded

himself by reciting, nor break into the cheery guffaw with which an Englishman averts

the infection of beauty. He just sat with his mind empty, and when his thoughts, which were

mainly ignoble, flowed back into it they had a pleasant freshness. The poem had done no

"good" to anyone, but it was a passing reminder, a breath from the divine lips of beauty, a

nightingale between two worlds of dust. Less explicit than the call to Krishna, it voiced our

loneliness

nevertheless, our isolation, our need for the Friend who never comes yet is not entirely

disproved. Aziz it left thinking about women again, but in a different way: less definite, more

intense. Sometimes poetry had this effect on him, sometimes it only increased his local desires,

and he never knew beforehand which effect would ensue: he could discover no rule for this or



for anything else in life.

Hamidullah had called in on his way to a worrying committee of notables, nationalist in tendency,

where Hindus, Moslems, two Sikhs, two Parsis, a Jam, and a Native Christian tried to like

one another more than came natural to them. As long as someone abused the English, all went

well, but nothing constructive had been achieved, and if the English were to leave India, the

committee would vanish also. He was glad that Aziz, whom he loved and whose family was

connected with his own, took no interest in politics, which ruin the character and career, yet

nothing can be achieved without them. He thought of Cambridge— sadly, as of another poem

that had ended. How happy he had been there, twenty years ago! Politics had not mattered in

Mr. and Mrs. Bannister's rectory. There, games, work, and pleasant society had intervened, and

appeared to be sufficient substructure for a national life. Here all was wire-pulling and fear.

Messrs. Syed Mohammed and Haq— he couldn't even trust them, although they had come in his

carriage, and the schoolboy was a scorpion. Bending down, he said, "Aziz, Aziz, my dear boy,

we must be going, we are already late. Get well quickly, for I do not know what our little circle

would do without you."

"I shall not forget those affectionate words," replied Aziz.

"Add mine to them," said the engineer.

"Thank you, Mr. Syed Mohammed, I will."

"And mine," "And, sir, accept mine," cried the others, stirred each according to his capacity

towards goodwill. Little ineffectual unquenchable flames! The company continued to sit on the

bed and to chew sugarcane, which Hassan had run for into the bazaar, and Aziz drank a cup of

spiced milk. Presently there was the sound of another carriage. Dr. Panna Lai had arrived,

driven by horrid Mr. Ram Chand. The atmosphere of a sick-room was at once re-established,

and the invalid retired under his quilt.

"Gentlemen, you will excuse, I have come to enquire by Major Callendar's orders," said the

Hindu, nervous of the den of fanatics into which his curiosity had called him.

"Here he lies," said Hamidullah, indicating the prostrate form.

"Dr. Aziz, Dr. Aziz, I come to enquire."

Aziz presented an expressionless face to the thermometer.

"Your hand also, please." He took it, gazed at the flies on the ceiling, and finally announced,

"Some temperature."

"I think not much," said Ram Chand, desirous of fomenting trouble.

"Some; he should remain in bed," repeated Dr. Panna Lai, and shook the thermometer

down, so that its altitude remained for ever unknown. He loathed his young colleague since the

disasters with Dapple, and he would have liked to do him a bad turn and report to Maj or Callendar

that he was shamming. But he might want a day in bed himself soon,-- besides, though

Major Callendar always believed the worst of natives, he never believed them when the y carried

tales about one another. Sympathy seemed the safer course. "How is stomach?" he enquired,

"how head?" And catching sight of the empty cup, he recommended a milk diet.

"This is a great relief to us, it is very good of you to call, Doctor Sahib," said Hamidullah,

buttering him up a bit.

"It is only my duty."

"We know how busy you are."

"Yes, that is true."

"And how much illness there is in the city."

The doctor suspected a trap in this remark; if he admitted that there was or was not illness,

either statement might be used against him. "There is always illness," he replied, "and I am always

busy— it is a doctor's nature."

"He has not a minute, he is due double sharp at Government College now," said Ram Chand.

"You attend Professor Godbole there perhaps?"

The doctor looked professional and was silent.

"We hope his diarrhoea is ceasing."

"He progresses, but not from diarrhoea."

"We are in some anxiety over him—he and Dr. Aziz are great friends. If you could tell us the

name of his complaint we should be grateful to you."

After a cautious pause he said, "Haemorrhoids."

"And so much, my dear Rati, for your cholera," hooted Aziz, unable to restrain himself.

"Cholera, cholera, what next, what now?" cried the doctor, greatly fussed. "Who spreads

such untrue reports about my patients?"

Hamidullah pointed to the culprit.

"I hear cholera, I hear bubonic plague, I hear every species of lie. Where will it end, I ask

myself sometimes. This city is full of misstatements, and the originators of them ought to be

discovered and punished authoritatively."

"Rafi, do you hear that? Now why do you stuff us up with all this humbug?"

The schoolboy murmured that another boy had told him, also that the bad English grammar

the Government obliged them to use often gave the wrong meaning for words, and so led

scholars into mistakes.

"That is no reason you should bring a charge against a doctor," said Ram Chand.

"Exactly, exactly," agreed Hamidullah, anxious to avoid an unpleasantness. Quarrels spread

so quickly and so far, and Messrs. Syed Mohammed and Haq looked cross, and ready to fly out.

"You must apologize properly, Rafi, I can see your uncle wishes it," he said. "You have not yet

said that you are sorry for the trouble you have caused this gentleman by your carelessness."

"It is only a boy," said Dr. Panna Lai, appeased.

"Even boys must learn," said Ram Chand.

"Your own son failing to pass the lowest standard, I think," said Syed Mohammed suddenly.

"Oh, indeed? Oh yes, perhaps. He has not the advantage of a relative in the Prosperity

Printing Press."

"Nor you the advantage of conducting their cases in the Courts any longer."

Their voices rose. They attacked one another with obscure allusions and had a silly quarrel.

Hamidullali and the doctor tried to make peace between them. In the midst of the din someone

said, "I say! Is he ill or isn't he ill?" Mr. Fielding had entered unobserved. All rose to their feet,

and Hassan, to do an Englishman honour, struck up with a sugar-cane at the coil of flies.

Aziz said, "Sit down," coldly. What a room! What a meeting! Squalor and ugly talk, the floor

strewn with fragments of cane and nuts, and spotted with ink, the pictures crooked up on the

dirty walls, no punkah! He hadn't meant to live like this or among these third-rate people. And

in his confusion he thought only of the insignificant Rafi, whom he had laughed at, and allowed

to be teased. The boy must be sent away happy, or hospitality would have failed, along the

whole line.

"It is good of Mr. Fielding to condescend to visit our friend," said the police inspector. "We

are touched by this great kindness."

"Don't talk to him like that, he doesn't want it, and he doesn't want three chairs; he's not

three Englishmen," he flashed. "Rafi, come here. Sit down again. I'm delighted you could come

with Mr. Hamidullah, my dear boy; it will help me to recover, seeing you."

"Forgive my mistakes," said Rafi, to consolidate himself.

"Well, are you ill, Aziz, or aren't you?" Fielding repeated.

"No doubt Major Callendar has told you that I am shamming."

"Well, are you?" The company laughed, friendly and pleased. "An Englishman at his best,"

they thought; "so genial."

"Enquire from Dr. Panna Lai."

"You're sure I don't tire you by stopping?"

"Why, no! There are six people present in my small room already. Please remain seated, if

you will excuse the informality." He turned away and continued to address Rafi, who was terrified

at the arrival of his Principal, remembered that he had tried to spread slander about him,

and yearned to get away.

"He is ill and he is not ill," said Hamidullah, offering a cigarette. "And I suppose that most of

us are in that same case."

Fielding agreed; he and the pleasant sensitive barrister got on well. They were fairly intimate

and beginning to trust each other.

"The whole world looks to be dying, still it doesn't die, so we must assume the existence of

a beneficent Providence."

"Oh, that is true, how true!" said the policeman, thinking religion had been praised.



"Does Mr. Fielding think it's true?"

"Think which true? The world isn't dying. I'm certain of that!"

"No, no—the existence of Providence."

"Well, I don't believe in Providence."

"But how then can you believe in God?" asked Syed Mohammed.

"I don't believe in God."

A tiny movement as of "I told you so!" passed round the company, and Aziz looked up for

an instant, scandalized. "Is it correct that most are atheists in England now?" Hamid ullah enquired.

"The educated thoughtful people? I should say so, though they don't like the name. The

truth is that the West doesn't bother much over belief and disbelief in these days. Fifty years

ago, or even when you and I were young, much more fuss was made."

"And does not morality also decline?"

"It depends what you call—yes, yes, I suppose morality does decline."

"Excuse the question, but if this is the case, how is England justified in holding India?"

There they were! Politics again. "It's a question I can't get my mind on to," he replied. "I'm

out here personally because I needed a job. I cannot tell you why England is here or whether

she ought to be here. It's beyond me."

"Well-qualified Indians also need jobs in the educational."

"I guess they do; I got in first," said Fielding, smiling.

"Then excuse me again—is it fair an Englishman should occupy one when Indians are available?

Of course I mean nothing personally. Personally we are delighted you should be here, and

we benefit greatly by this frank talk."

There is only one answer to a conversation of this type: "England holds India for her good."

Yet Fielding was disinclined to give it. The zeal for honesty had eaten him up. He said, "I'm

delighted

to be here too— that's my answer, there's my only excuse. I can't tell you anything about

fairness. It mayn't have been fair I should have been born. I take up some other fellow's air,

don't I, whenever I breathe? Still, I'm glad it's happened, and I'm glad I'm out here. However

big a badmash one is— if one's happy in consequence, that is some justification."

The Indians were bewildered. The line of thought was not alien to them, but the words

were too definite and bleak. Unless a sentence paid a few compliments to Justice and Morality

in passing, its grammar wounded their ears and paralysed their minds. What they said and what

they felt were (except in the case of affection) seldom the same. They had numerous mental

conventions and when these were flouted they found it very difficult to function. Hamidullah

bore up best. "And those Englishmen who are not delighted to be in India— have they no excuse?"

he asked.

"None. Chuck 'em out."

"It may be difficult to separate them from the rest," he laughed.

"Worse than difficult, wrong," said Mr. Ram Chaid. "No Indian gentleman approves chucking

out as a proper thing. Here we differ from those other nations. We are so spiritual."

"Oh, that is true, how true!" said the police inspector.

"Is it true, Mr. Haq? I don't consider us spiritual. We can't co-ordinate, we can't co-ordinate,

it only comes to that. We can't keep engagements, we can't catch trains. What more than this is

the so-called spirituality of India? You and I ought to be at the Committee of Notables, we're

not; our friend Dr. Lai ought to be with his patients, he isn't. So we go on, and so we shall continue

to go, I think, until the end of time."

"It is not the end of time, it is scarcely ten-thirty, ha, ha!" cried Dr. Panna Lai, who was

again in confident mood. "Gentlemen, if I may be allowed to say a few words, what an interesting

talk, also thankfulness and gratitude to Mr. Fielding in the first place teaches our sons and

gives them all the great benefits of his experience and judgment— "

"Dr. Lai!"

"Dr. Aziz?"

"You sit on my leg."

"I beg pardon, but some might say your leg kicks."

"Come along, we tire the invalid in either case," said Fielding, and they filed out—four

Mohammedans,

two Hindus and the Englishman. They stood on the verandah while their conveyances were summoned out of various patches of shade.

"Aziz has a high opinion of you, he only did not speak because of his illness."

"I quite understand," said Fielding, who was rather disappointed with his call. The Club

comment, "making himself cheap as usual," passed through his mind. He couldn't even get his

horse brought up. He had liked Aziz so much at their first meeting, and had hoped for developments.

## CHAPTER X

The heat had leapt forward in the last hour, the street was deserted as if a catastrophe had

cleaned off humanity during the inconclusive talk. Opposite Aziz' bungalow stood a large

unfinished

house belonging to two brothers, astrologers, and a squirrel hung head-downwards on it,

pressing its belly against burning scaffolding and twitching a mangy tail. It seemed the only

occupant

of the house, and the squeals it gave were in tune with the infinite, no doubt, but not

attractive except to other squirrels. More noises came from a dusty tree, where brown birds

creaked and floundered about looking for insects; another bird, the invisible coppersmith, had

started his "ponk ponk." It matters so little to the majority of living beings what the minority,

that calls itself human, desires or decides. Most of the inhabitants of India do not mind how India

is governed. Nor are the lower animals of England concerned about England, but in the

tropics the indifference is more prominent, the inarticulate world is closer at hand and readier to

resume control as soon as men are tired. When the seven gentlemen who had held such various

opinions inside the bungalow came out of it, they were aware of a common burden, a

vague threat which they called "the bad weather coming." They felt that they could not do their

work, or would not be paid enough for doing it. The space between them and their carriages,

instead of being empty, was clogged with a medium that pressed against their flesh, the carriage

cushions scalded their trousers, their eyes pricked, domes of hot water accumulated under

their head-gear and poured down their cheeks. Salaaming feebly, they dispersed for the interior

of other bungalows, to recover their self-esteem and the qualities that distinguished them from

each other.

All over the city and over much of India the same retreat on the part of humanity was beginning,

into cellars, up hills, under trees. April, herald of horrors, is at hand. The sun was returning

to his kingdom with power but without beauty—that was the sinister feature. If only

there had been beauty! His cruelty would have been tolerable then. Through excess of light, he

failed to triumph, he also; in his yellowy-white overflow not only matter, but brightness itself lay

drowned. He was not the unattainable friend, either of men or birds or other suns, he was not

the eternal promise, the never-withdrawn suggestion that haunts our consciousness; he was

merely a creature, like the rest, and so debarred from glory.

## CHAPTER XI

Although the Indians had driven off, and Fielding could see his horse standing in a small

shed in the corner of the compound, no one troubled to bring it to him. He started to get it

himself, but was stopped by a call from the house. Aziz was sitting up in bed, looking dishevelled

and sad. "Here's your home," he said sardonically. "Here's the celebrated hospitality of the

East. Look at the flies. Look at the chunam coming off the walls. Isn't it jolly? Now I suppose

you want to be off, having seen an Oriental interior."

"Anyhow, you want to rest."

"I can rest the whole day, thanks to worthy Dr. Lai. Major Callendar's spy, I suppose you

know, but this time it didn't work. I am allowed to have a slight temperature."

"Callendar doesn't trust anyone, English or Indian: that's his character, and I wish you

weren't under him; but you are, and that's that."

"Before you go, for you are evidently in a great hurry, will you please unlock that drawer?

Do you see a piece of brown paper at the top?"

"Yes."

"Open it."

"Who is this?"



"She was my wife. You are the first Englishman she has ever come before. Now put her photograph away."

He was astonished, as a traveller who suddenly sees, between the stones of the desert ,

flowers. The flowers have been there all the time, but suddenly he sees them. He tried to look

at the photograph, but in itself it was just a woman in a sari, facing the world. He muttered,

"Really, I don't know why you pay me this great compliment, Aziz, but I do appreciate it."

"Oh, it's nothing, she was not a highly educated woman or even beautiful, but put it away.

You would have seen her, so why should you not see her photograph?"

"You would have allowed me to see her?"

"Why not? I believe in the purdah, but I should have told her you were my brother, and she

would have seen you. Hamidullah saw her, and several others."

"Did she think they were your brothers?"

"Of course not, but the word exists and is convenient. All men are my brothers, and as soon

as one behaves as such he may see my wife."

"And when the whole world behaves as such, there will be no more purdah?"

"It is because you can say and feel such a remark as that, that I show you the photograph,"

said Aziz gravely. "It is beyond the power of most men. It is because you behave well while I

behave badly that I show it you. I never expected you to come back just now when I called

you. I thought, 'He has certainly done with me; I have insulted him.' Mr. Fielding, no one can

ever realize how much kindness we Indians need, we do not even realize it ourselves. But we

know when it has been given. We do not forget, though we may seem to. Kindness, more kindness,

and even after that more kindness. I assure you it is the only hope." His voice seemed to

arise from a dream. Altering it, yet still deep below his normal surface, he said, "We can't build

up India except on what we feel. What is the use of all these reforms, and Conciliation Committees

for Mohurram, and shall we cut the tazia short or shall we carry it another route, and

Councils of Notables and official parties where the English sneer at our skins?"

"It's beginning at the wrong end, isn't it? I know, but institutions and the governments

don't." He looked again at the photograph. The lady faced the world at her husband's wish and

her own, but how bewildering she found it, the echoing contradictory world!

"Put her away, she is of no importance, she is dead," said Aziz gently. "I showed her to you

because I have nothing else to show. You may look round the whole of my bungalow now, and

empty everything. I have no other secrets, my three children live away with their grandmother,

and that is all."

Fielding sat down by the bed, flattered at the trust reposed in him, yet rather sad. He felt

old. He wished that he too could be carried away on waves of emotion. The next time they met,

Aziz might be cautious and standoffish. He realized this, and it made him sad that he should

realize it. Kindness, kindness, and more kindness—yes, that he might supply, but was that really

all that the queer nation needed? Did it not also demand an occasional intoxication of the

blood? What had he done to deserve this outburst of confidence, and what hostage could he

give in exchange? He looked back at his own life. What a poor crop of secrets it had produced!

There were things in it that he had shown to no one, but they were so uninteresting, it wasn't

worth while lifting a purdah on their account. He'd been in love, engaged to be married, lady

broke it off, memories of her and thoughts about her had kept him from other women for a

time; then indulgence, followed by repentance and equilibrium. Meagre really except that he

equilibrium,

and Aziz didn't want to have that confided to him— he would have called it "everything

ranged coldly on shelves."

"I shall not really be intimate with this fellow," Fielding thought, and then "nor with anyone."

That was the corollary. And he had to confess that he really didn't mind, that he was content

to help people, and like them as long as they didn't object, and if they objected pass on

serenely. Experience can do much, and all that he had learnt in England and Europe was an

assistance

to him, and helped him towards clarity, but clarity prevented him from experiencing

something else.

"How did you like the two ladies you met last Thursday?" he asked.

Aziz shook his head distastefully. The question reminded him of his rash remark about the

Marabar Caves.

"How do you like Englishwomen generally?"

"Hamidullah liked them in England. Here we never look at them. Oh no, much too careful.

Let's talk of something else."

"Hamidullah's right: they are much nicer in England. There's something that doesn't suit

them out here."

Aziz after another silence said, "Why are you not married?"

Fielding was pleased that he had asked. "Because I have more or less come through without

it," he replied. "I was thinking of telling you a little about myself some day if I can make it

interesting

enough. The lady I liked wouldn't marry me~that is the main point, but that's fifteen

years ago and now means nothing."

"But you haven't children."

"None."

"Excuse the following question: have you any illegitimate children?"

"No. I'd willingly tell you if I had."

"Then your name will entirely die out."

"It must."

"Well." He shook his head. "This indifference is what the Oriental will never understand."

"I don't care for children."

"Caring has nothing to do with it," he said impatiently.

"I don't feel their absence, I don't want them weeping around my death-bed and being polite

about me afterwards, which I believe is the general notion. I'd far rather leave a thought

behind me than a child. Other people can have children. No obligation, with England getting so

chock-a-block and overrunning India for jobs."

"Why don't you marry Miss Quested?"

"Good God! why, the girl's a prig."

"Prig, prig? Kindly explain. Isn't that a bad word?"

"Oh, I don't know her, but she struck me as one of the more pathetic products of Western

education. She depresses me."

"But prig, Mr. Fielding? How's that?"

"She goes on and on as if she's at a lecture—trying ever so hard to understand India and

life, and occasionally taking a note."

"I thought her so nice and sincere."

"So she probably is," said Fielding, ashamed of his roughness: any suggestion that he

should marry always does produce overstatements on the part of the bachelor, and a mental

breeze. "But I can't marry her if I wanted to, for she has just become engaged to the City

Magistrate."

"Has she indeed? I am so glad!" he exclaimed with relief, for this exempted him from the

Marabar expedition: he would scarcely be expected to entertain regular Anglo-Indians.

"It's the old mother's doing. She was afraid her dear boy would choose for himself, so she

brought out the girl on purpose, and flung them together until it happened."

"Mrs. Moore did not mention that to me among her plans."

"I may have got it wrong—I'm out of club gossip. But anyhow they're engaged to be married."

"Yes, you're out of it, my poor chap," he smiled. "No Miss Quested for Mr. Fielding. However,

she was not beautiful. She has practically no breasts, if you come to think of it."

He smiled too, but found a touch of bad taste in the reference to a lady's breasts.

"For the City Magistrate they shall be sufficient perhaps, and he for her. For you I shall arrange

a lady with breasts like mangoes. ..."

"No, you won't."

"I will not really, and besides your position makes it dangerous for you." His mind had

slipped from matrimony to Calcutta. His face grew grave. Fancy if he had persuaded the Principal

to accompany him there, and then got him into trouble! And abruptly he took up a new attitude

towards his friend, the attitude of the protector who knows the dangers of India and is

admonitory. "You can't be too careful in every way, Mr. Fielding; whatever you say or do in this



damned country there is always some envious fellow on the lookout. You may be surprised to

know that there were at least three spies sitting here when you came to enquire. I was really a

good deal upset that you talked in that fashion about God. They will certainly report it."

"To whom?"

"That's all very well, but you spoke against morality also, and you said you had come to

take other people's jobs. All that was very unwise. This is an awful place for scandal. Why, actually

one of your own pupils was listening."

"Thanks for telling me that; yes, I must try and be more careful. If I'm interested, I'm apt to

forget myself. Still, it doesn't do real harm."

"But speaking out may get you into trouble."

"It's often done so in the past."

"There, listen to that! But the end of it might be that you lost your job."

"If I do, I do. I shall survive it. I travel light."

"Travel light! You are a most extraordinary race," said Aziz, turning away as if he were going

to sleep, and immediately turning back again. "Is it your climate, or what?"

"Plenty of Indians travel light too~saddhus and such. It's one of the things I admire about

your country. Any man can travel light until he has a wife or children. That's part of my case

against marriage. I'm a holy man minus the holiness. Hand that on to your three spies, and tell

them to put it in their pipes."

Aziz was charmed and interested, and turned the new idea over in his mind. So this was

why Mr. Fielding and a few others were so fearless! They had nothing to lose. But he himself

was rooted in society and Islam. He belonged to a tradition which bound him, and he had

brought children into the world, the society of the future. Though he lived so vaguely in this

flimsy bungalow, nevertheless he was placed, placed.

"I can't be sacked from my job, because my job's Education. I believe in teaching people to

be individuals, and to understand other individuals. It's the only thing I do believe in. At

Government

College, I mix it up with trigonometry, and so on. When I'm a saddhu, I shall mix it up

with something else."

He concluded his manifesto, and both were silent. The eye-flies became worse than ever

and danced close up to their pupils, or crawled into their ears. Fielding hit about wildly. The

exercise

made him hot, and he got up to go.

"You might tell your servant to bring my horse. He doesn't seem to appreciate my Urdu."

"I know. I gave him orders not to. Such are the tricks we play on unfortunate English men.

Poor Mr. Fielding! But I will release you now. Oh dear! With the exception of yourself and

Hamidullah,

I have no one to talk to in this place. You like Hamidullah, don't you?"

"Very much."

"Do you promise to come at once to us when you are in trouble?"

"I never can be in trouble."

"There goes a queer chap, I trust he won't come to grief," thought Aziz, left alone. His period

of admiration was over, and he reacted towards patronage. It was difficult for him to remain

in awe of anyone who played with all his cards on the table. Fielding, he discovered on

closer acquaintance, was truly warm-hearted and unconventional, but not what can be called

wise. That frankness of speech in the presence of Ram Chand Rati and Co. was dangerous and

inelegant. It served no useful end.

But they were friends, brothers. That part was settled, their compact had been subscribed

by the photograph, they trusted one another, affection had triumphed for once in a way. He

dropped off to sleep amid the happier memories of the last two hours—poetry of Ghalib, female

grace, good old Hamidullah, good Fielding, his honoured wife and dear boys. He passed into a

region where these joys had no enemies but bloomed harmoniously in an eternal garden, or ran

down watershoots of ribbed marble, or rose into domes whereunder were inscribed, black

against white, the ninety-nine attributes of God.

PART II: CAVES

## CHAPTER XII

The Ganges, though flowing from the foot of Vishnu and through Siva's hair, is not an ancient

stream. Geology, looking further than religion, knows of a time when neither the river nor

the Himalayas that nourished it existed, and an ocean flowed over the holy places of Hindustan.

The mountains rose, their debris silted up the ocean, the gods took their seats on them and

contrived the river, and the India we call immemorial came into being. But India is really far

older. In the days of the prehistoric ocean the southern part of the peninsula already existed,

and the high places of Dravidia have been land since land began, and have seen on the one

side the sinking of a continent that joined them to Africa, and on the other the upheaval of the

Himalayas from a sea. They are older than anything in the world. No water has ever covered

them, and the sun who has watched them for countless aeons may still discern in their outlines

forms that were his before our globe was torn from his bosom. If flesh of the sun's flesh is to

be touched anywhere, it is here, among the incredible antiquity of these hills.

Yet even they are altering. As Himalayan India rose, this India, the primal, has been depressed,

and is slowly re-entering the curve of the earth. It may be that in aeons to come an

ocean will flow here too, and cover the sun-born rocks with slime. Meanwhile the plain of the

Ganges encroaches on them with something of the sea's action. They are sinking beneath the

newer lands. Their main mass is untouched, but at the edge their outposts have been cut off

and stand knee-deep, throat-deep, in the advancing soil. There is something unspeakable in

these outposts. They are like nothing else in the world, and a glimpse of them makes the

breath catch. They rise abruptly, insanely, without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills

elsewhere, they bear no relation to anything dreamt or seen. To call them "uncanny" suggests

ghosts, and they are older than all spirit. Hinduism has scratched and plastered a few rocks, but

the shrines are unfrequented, as if pilgrims, who generally seek the extraordinary, had here

found too much of it. Some siddhus did once settle in a cave, but they were smoked out, and

even Buddha, who must have passed this way down to the Bo Tree of Gaya, shunned a renunciation

more complete than his own, and has left no legend of struggle or victory in the Marabar.

The caves are readily described. A tunnel eight feet long, five feet high, three feet wide,

leads to a circular chamber about twenty feet in diameter. This arrangement occurs again and

again throughout the group of hills, and this is all, this is a Marabar Cave. Having seen one such

cave, having seen two, having seen three, four, fourteen, twenty-four, the visitor returns to

Chandrapore uncertain whether he has had an interesting experience or a dull one or any experience

at all. He finds it difficult to discuss the caves, or to keep them apart in his mind, for the

pattern never varies, and no carving, not even a bees'-nest or a bat distinguishes one from another.

Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation—for they have one—does not depend

upon human speech. It is as if the surrounding plain or the passing birds have taken upon

themselves to exclaim "extraordinary," and the word has taken root in the air, and been inhaled

by mankind.

They are dark caves. Even when they open towards the sun, very little light penetrates

down the entrance tunnel into the circular chamber. There is little to see, and no eye to see it,

until the visitor arrives for his five minutes, and strikes a match. Immediately another flame

rises in the depths of the rock and moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit: the

walls of the circular chamber have been most marvellously polished. The two flames approach

and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. A mirror inlaid

with lovely colours divides the lovers, delicate stars of pink and grey interpose, exquisite

nebulae, shadings fainter than the tail of a comet or the midday moon, all the evanescent life of

the granite, only here visible. Fists and fingers thrust above the advancing soil—here at last is

their skin, finer than any covering acquired by the animals, smoother than windless water, more

voluptuous than love. The radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss, expire. The

cave is dark again, like all the caves.

Only the wall of the circular chamber has been polished thus. The sides of the tunnel are

left rough, they impinge as an afterthought upon the internal perfection. An entrance was necessary,

so mankind made one. But elsewhere, deeper in the granite, are there certain chambers

that have no entrances? Chambers never unsealed since the arrival of the gods. Local report

declares that these exceed in number those that can be visited, as the dead exceed the living—

four hundred of them, four thousand or million. Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up

before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing,

nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil. One of them is rumoured within the boulder



that swings on the summit of the highest of the hills; a bubble-shaped cave that has neither

ceiling nor floor, and mirrors its own darkness in every direction infinitely. If the boulder falls

and smashes, the cave will smash too— empty as an Easter egg. The boulder because of its

hollowness

sways in the wind, and even moves when a crow perches upon it: hence its name and the name of its stupendous pedestal: the Kawa Dol.

#### CHAPTER XIII

These hills look romantic in certain lights and at suitable distances, and seen of an evening

from the upper verandah of the club they caused Miss Quested to say conversationally to Miss

Derek that she should like to have gone, that Dr. Aziz at Mr. Fielding's had said he would arrange

something, and that Indians seem rather forgetful. She was overheard by the servant who offered them vermoutheads. This servant understood English. And he was not exactly a spy,

but he kept his ears open, and Mahmoud Ali did not exactly bribe him, but did encourage him to

come and squat with his own servants, and would happen to stroll their way when he was

there. As the story travelled, it accreted emotion and Aziz learnt with horror that the ladies were

deeply offended with him, and had expected an invitation daily. He thought his facile remark

had been forgotten. Endowed with two memories, a temporary and a permanent, he had hitherto

relegated the caves to the former. Now he transferred them once for all, and pushed the

matter through. They were to be a stupendous replica of the tea party. He began by securing

Fielding and old Godbole, and then commissioned Fielding to approach Mrs. Moore and Miss

Quested when they were alone— by this device Ronny, their official protector, could be circum-

vented. Fielding didn't like the job much; he was busy, caves bored him, he foresaw friction and

expense, but he would not refuse the first favour his friend had asked from him, and did as required.

The ladies accepted. It was a little inconvenient in the present press of their engagements,

still, they hoped to manage it after consulting Mr. Heaslop. Consulted, Ronny raised no

objection, provided Fielding undertook full responsibility for their comfort. He was not enthusiastic

about the picnic, but, then, no more were the ladies— no one was enthusiastic, yet it took

place.

Aziz was terribly worried. It was not a long expedition— a train left Chandrapore just before

dawn, another would bring them back for tiffin— but he was only a little official still, and feared

to acquit himself dishonourably. He had to ask Major Callendar for half a day's leave, and be

refused because of his recent malingering; despair; renewed approach of Major Callendar

through Fielding, and contemptuous snarling permission. He had to borrow cutlery from Mahmoud

Ali without inviting him. Then there was the question of alcohol; Mr. Fielding, and perhaps

the ladies, were drinkers, so must he provide whisky-sodas and ports? There was the problem

of transport from the wayside station of Marabar to the caves. There was the problem of Professor

Godbole and his food, and of Professor Godbole and other people's food—two problems,

not one problem. The Professor was not a very strict Hindu—he would take tea, fruit, sodawater

and sweets, whoever cooked them, and vegetables and rice if cooked by a Brahman; but

not meat, not cakes lest they contained eggs, and he would not allow anyone else to eat beef:

a slice of beef upon a distant plate would wreck his happiness. Other people might eat mutton,

they might eat ham. But over ham Aziz' own religion raised its voice: he did not fancy other

people eating ham. Trouble after trouble encountered him, because he had challenged the spirit

of the Indian earth, which tries to keep men in compartments.

At last the moment arrived.

His friends thought him most unwise to mix himself up with English ladies, and warned him

to take every precaution against unpunctuality. Consequently he spent the previous night at the

station. The servants were huddled on the platform, enjoined not to stray. He himself walked up

and down with old Mohammed Latif, who was to act as major-domo. He felt insecure and also

unreal. A car drove up, and he hoped Fielding would get out of it, to lend him solidity. But it

contained Mrs. Moore, Miss Quested, and their Goanese servant. He rushed to meet them, suddenly

happy. "But you've come, after all. Oh, how very very kind of you!" he cried. "This is the

happiest moment in all my life."

The ladies were civil. It was not the happiest moment in their lives, still, they looked forward

to enjoying themselves as soon as the bother of the early start was over. They had not seen

him since the expedition was arranged, and they thanked him adequately.

"You don't require tickets— please stop your servant. There are no tickets on the Marabar

branch line; it is its peculiarity. You come to the carriage and rest till Mr. Fielding joins us. Did

you know you are to travel purdah? Will you like that?"

They replied that they should like it. The train had come in, and a crowd of dependents

were swarming over the seats of the carriage like monkeys. Aziz had borrowed servants from

his friends, as well as bringing his own three, and quarrels over precedence were resulting. The

ladies' servant stood apart, with a sneering expression on his face. They had hired him while

they were still globe-trotters, at Bombay. In a hotel or among smart people he was excellent,

but as soon as they consorted with anyone whom he thought second-rate he left them to their

disgrace.

The night was still dark, but had acquired the temporary look that indicates its end. Perched

on the roof of a shed, the station-master's hens began to dream of kites instead of owls. Lamps

were put out, in order to save the trouble of putting them out later; the smell of tobacco and

the sound of spitting arose from third-class passengers in dark corners; heads were unshrouded,

teeth cleaned on the twigs of a tree. So convinced was a junior official that another

sun would rise, that he rang a bell with enthusiasm. This upset the servants. They shrieked that

the train was starting, and ran to both ends of it to intercede. Much had still to enter the purdah

carriage— a box bound with brass, a melon wearing a fez, a towel containing guavas, a stepladder

and a gun. The guests played up all right. They had no race-consciousness— Mrs. Moore

was too old, Miss Quested too new— and they behaved to Aziz as to any young man who had

been kind to them in the country. This moved him deeply. He had expected them to arrive with

Mr. Fielding, instead of which they trusted themselves to be with him a few moments alone.

"Send back your servant," he suggested. "He is unnecessary. Then we shall all be Moslems

together."

"And he is such a horrible servant. Antony, you can go; we don't want you," said the girl

impatiently.

"Master told me to come."

"Mistress tells you to go."

"Master says, keep near the ladies all the morning."

"Well, your ladies won't have you." She turned to the host. "Do get rid of him, Dr. Aziz!"

"Mohammed Latif!" he called.

The poor relative exchanged fezzes with the melon, and peeped out of the window of the

railway carriage, whose confusion he was superintending.

"Here is my cousin, Mr. Mohammed Latif. Oh no, don't shake hands. He is an Indian of the

old-fashioned sort, he prefers to salaam. There, I told you so. Mohammed Latif, how beautifully

you salaam. See, he hasn't understood; he knows no English."

"You spick lie," said the old man gently.

"I spick a lie! Oh, jolly good. Isn't he a funny old man? We will have great jokes with him

later. He does all sorts of little things. He is not nearly as stupid as you think, and awfully poor.

It's lucky ours is a large family." He flung an arm round the grubby neck. "But you get inside,

make yourselves at home; yes, you lie down." The celebrated Oriental confusion appeared at

last to be at an end. "Excuse me, now I must meet our other two guests!"

He was getting nervous again, for it was ten minutes to the time. Still, Fielding was an Englishman,

and they never do miss trains, and Godbole was a Hindu and did not count, and,

soothed by this logic, he grew calmer as the hour of departure approached. Mohammed Latif

had bribed Antony not to come. They walked up and down the platform, talking usefully. They

agreed that they had overdone the servants, and must leave two or three behind at Marabar

station. And Aziz explained that he might be playing one or two practical jokes at the caves—

not out of unkindness, but to make the guests laugh. The old man assented with slight sideways

motions of the head: he was always willing to be ridiculed, and he bade Aziz not spare him.

Elated by his importance, he began an indecent anecdote.

"Tell me another time, brother, when I have more leisure, for now, as I have already explained,

we have to give pleasure to non-Moslems. Three will be Europeans, one a Hindu, which

must not be forgotten. Every attention must be paid to Professor Godbole, lest he feel that he is

inferior to my other guests."

"I will discuss philosophy with him."

"That will be kind of you; but the servants are even more important. We must not convey

an impression of disorganization. It can be done, and I expect you to do it . . ."

A shriek from the purdah carriage. The train had started.

"Merciful God!" cried Mohammed Latif. He flung himself at the train, and leapt on to the

footboard of a carriage. Aziz did likewise. It was an easy feat, for a branch-line train is slow to

assume special airs. "We're monkeys, don't worry," he called, hanging on to a bar and laughing.



Then he howled, "Mr. Fielding! Mr. Fielding!"

There were Fielding and old Godbole, held up at the level-crossing. Appalling catastrophe!

The gates had been closed earlier than usual. They leapt from their tonga; they gesticulated,

but what was the good. So near and yet so far! As the train joggled past over the points, there

was time for agonized words.

"Bad, bad, you have destroyed me."

"Godbole's pujah did it," cried the Englishman.

The Brahman lowered his eyes, ashamed of religion. For it was so: he had miscalculated the

length of a prayer.

"Jump on, I must have you," screamed Aziz, beside himself.

"Right, give a hand."

"He's not to, he'll kill himself," Mrs. Moore protested. He jumped, he failed, missed his

friend's hand, and fell back on to the line. The train rumbled past. He scrambled on to his feet,

and bawled after them, "I'm all right, you're all right, don't worry," and then they passed beyond

range of his voice.

"Mrs. Moore, Miss Quested, our expedition is a ruin." He swung himself along the foot board,

almost in tears.

"Get in, get in; you'll kill yourself as well as Mr. Fielding. I see no ruin."

"How is that? Oh, explain to me!" he said piteously, like a child.

"We shall be all Moslems together now, as you promised."

She was perfect as always, his dear Mrs. Moore. All the love for her he had felt at t  
he

mosque welled up again, the fresher for forgetfulness. There was nothing he would not  
do for

her. He would die to make her happy.

"Get in, Dr. Aziz, you make us giddy," the other lady called. "If they're so foolish  
as to miss

the train, that's their loss, not ours."

"I am to blame. I am the host."

"Nonsense, go to your carriage. We're going to have a delightful time without them."

Not perfect like Mrs. Moore, but very sincere and kind. Wonderful ladies, both of the  
m, and

for one precious morning his guests. He felt important and competent. Fielding was a  
loss

personally,

being a friend, increasingly dear, yet if Fielding had come, he himself would have remained

in leading-strings. "Indians are incapable of responsibility," said the officials, and Hamidullah

sometimes said so too. He would show those pessimists that they were wrong. Smiling

proudly, he glanced outward at the country, which was still invisible except as a dark movement

in the darkness; then upwards at the sky, where the stars of the sprawling Scorpion had begun

to pale. Then he dived through a window into a Secondclass carriage.

"Mohammed Latif, by the way, what is in these caves, brother? Why are we all going to see

them?"

Such a question was beyond the poor relative's scope. He could only reply that God and the

local villagers knew, and that the latter would gladly act as guides.

#### CHAPTER XIV

Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talk that

would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own

existence. Inside its cocoon of work or social obligation, the human spirit slumbers for the most

part, registering the distinction between pleasure and pain, but not nearly as alert as we pretend.

There are periods in the most thrilling day during which nothing happens, and though we

continue to exclaim, "I do enjoy myself," or, " I am horrified," we are insincere. " As far as I feel

anything, it is enjoyment, horror "--it's no more than that really, and a perfectly adjusted organism

would be silent.

It so happened that Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested had felt nothing acutely for a fortnight.

Ever since Professor Godbole had sung his queer little song, they had lived more or less inside

cocoons, and the difference between them was that the elder lady accepted her own apathy,

while the younger resented hers. It was Adela's faith that the whole stream of events is important

and interesting, and if she grew bored she blamed herself severely and compelled her lips

to utter enthusiasms. This was the only insincerity in a character otherwise sincere, and it was

indeed the intellectual protest of her youth. She was particularly vexed now because she was

both in India and engaged to be married, which double event should have made every instant

sublime.

India was certainly dim this morning, though seen under the auspices of Indians. Her wish

had been granted, but too late. She could not get excited over Aziz and his arrangements. She

was not the least unhappy or depressed, and the various odd objects that surrounded her—the

comic "purdah" carriage, the piles of rugs and bolsters, the rolling melons, the scent of sweet

oils, the ladder, the brass-bound box, the sudden irruption of Mahmoud Ali's butler from the

lavatory with tea and poached eggs upon a tray—they were all new and amusing, and led her to

comment appropriately, but they wouldn't bite into her mind. So she tried to find comfort by

reflecting that her main interest would hence forward be Ronny.

"What a nice cheerful servant! What a relief after Antony!"

"They startle one rather. A strange place to make tea in," said Mrs. Moore, who had hoped

for a nap.

"I want to sack Antony. His behaviour on the platform has decided me."

Mrs. Moore thought that Antony's better self would come to the front at Simla. Miss Q  
uested

was to be married at Simla; some cousins, with a house looking straight on to Thibet,  
had invited

her.

"Anyhow, we must get a second servant, because at Simla you will be at the hotel, and  
I

don't think Ronny's Baldeo ..." She loved plans.

"Very well, you get another servant, and I'll keep Antony with me. I am used to his u  
nappetizing

ways. He will see me through the Hot Weather."

"I don't believe in the Hot Weather. People like Major Callendar who always talk abou  
t it-it's

in the hope of making one feel inexperienced and small, like their everlasting, 'I've  
been twenty

years in this country.'

"I believe in the Hot Weather, but never did I suppose it would bottle me up as it wi  
ll." For

owing to the sage leisureliness of Ronny and Adela, they could not be married till Ma  
y, and

consequently

Mrs. Moore could not return to England immediately after the wedding, which was

what she had hoped to do. By May a barrier of fire would have fallen across India and the adjoining

sea, and she would have to remain perched up in the Himalayas waiting for the world to

get cooler.

"I won't be bottled up," announced the girl. "I've no patience with these women here who

leave their husbands grilling in the plains. Mrs. McBryde hasn't stopped down once since she

married; she leaves her quite intelligent husband alone half the year, and then's surprised she's

out of touch with him."

"She has children, you see."

"Oh yes, that's true," said Miss Quested, disconcerted.

"It is the children who are the first consideration. Until they are grown up, and married off.

When that happens one has again the right to live for oneself—in the plains or the hills, as

suits."

"Oh yes, you're perfectly right. I never thought it out."

"If one has not become too stupid and old." She handed her empty cup to the servant.

"My idea now is that my cousins shall find me a servant in Simla, at all events to see me

through the wedding, after which Ronny means to reorganize his staff entirely. He does it very

well for a bachelor; still, when he is married no doubt various changes will have to be made— his

old servants won't want to take their orders from me, and I don't blame them."

Mrs. Moore pushed up the shutters and looked out. She had brought Ronny and Adela together

by their mutual wish, but really she could not advise them further. She felt increasingly

(vision or nightmare?) that, though people are important, the relations between them are not,

and that in particular too much fuss has been made over marriage; centuries of carnal embracement,

yet man is no nearer to understanding man. And to-day she felt this with such force

that it seemed itself a relationship, itself a person who was trying to take hold of her hand.

"Anything to be seen of the hills?"

"Only various shades of the dark."

"We can't be far from the place where my hyena was." She peered into the timeless twilight.



The train crossed a nullah. "Pomper, pomper, pomper," was the sound that the wheels made as

they trundled over the bridge, moving very slowly. A hundred yards on came a second nullah,

then a third, suggesting the neighbourhood of higher ground. "Perhaps this is mine; anyhow,

the road runs parallel with the railway." Her accident was a pleasant memory; she felt in her

dry, honest way that it had given her a good shake up, and taught her Ronny's true worth.

Then she went back to her plans; plans had been a passion with her from girlhood. Now and

then she paid tribute to the present, said how friendly and intelligent Aziz was, ate a guava,

couldn't eat a fried sweet, practised her Urdu on the servant; but her thoughts ever veered to

the manageable future, and to the Anglo-Indian life she had decided to endure. And as she appraised

it with its adjuncts of Turtons and Burtons, the train accompanied her sentences, "pomper,

pomper," the train half asleep, going nowhere in particular and with no passenger of importance

in any of its carriages, the branch-line train, lost on a low embankment between dull

fields. Its message—for it had one—avoided her wellequipped mind. Far away behind her, with a

shriek that meant business, rushed the Mail, connecting up important towns such as Calcutta

and Lahore, where interesting events occur and personalities are developed. She understood

that. Unfortunately, India has few important towns. India is the country, fields, fields, then hills,

jungle, hills, and more fields. The branch line stops, the road is only practicable for cars to a

point, the bullockcarts lumber down the side tracks, paths fray out into the cultivation, and

disappear

near a splash of red paint. How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations

of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile. The important towns they build are only retreats,

their quarrels the malaise of men who cannot find their way home. India knows of their

trouble. She knows of the whole world's trouble, to its uttermost depth. She calls "Come"

through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and august. But come to what? She

has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal.

"I will fetch you from Simla when it's cool enough. I will unbottle you in fact," continued the

reliable girl. "We then see some of the Mogul stuff— how appalling if we let you miss the Taj

!— and then I will see you off at Bombay. Your last glimpse of this country really shall be

interesting."

But Mrs. Moore had fallen asleep, exhausted by the early start. She was in rather low

health, and ought not to have attempted the expedition, but had pulled herself together in case

the pleasure of the others should suffer. Her dreams were of the same texture, but there it was

her other children who were wanting something, Stella and Ralph, and she was explaining to

them that she could not be in two families at once. When she awoke, Adela had ceased to plan,

and leant out of a window, saying, "They're rather wonderful."

Astonishing even from the rise of the civil station, here the Marabar were gods to whom

earth is a ghost. Kawa Do! was nearest. It shot up in a single slab, on whose summit one rock

was poised— if a mass so great can be called one rock. Behind it, recumbent, were the hills that

contained the other caves, isolated each from his neighbour by broad channels of the plain. The

assemblage, ten in all, shifted a little as the train crept past them, as if observing its arrival.

"I'd not have missed this for anything," said the girl, exaggerating her enthusiasm. "Look,

the sun's rising— this'll be absolutely magnificent— come quickly— look. I wouldn't have missed

this for anything. We should never have seen it if we'd stuck to the Turtons and their eternal

elephants."

As she spoke, the sky to the left turned angry orange. Colour throbbed and mounted behind

a pattern of trees, grew in intensity, was yet brighter, incredibly brighter, strained from without

against the globe of the air. They awaited the miracle. But at the supreme moment, when night

should have died and day lived, nothing occurred. It was as if virtue had failed in the celestial

fount. The hues in the east decayed, the hills seemed dimmer though in fact better lit, and a

profound disappointment entered with the morning breeze. Why, when the chamber was prepared,

did the bridegroom not enter with trumpets and shawms, as humanity expects? The sun

rose without splendour. He was presently observed trailing yellowish behind the trees, or

against insipid sky, and touching the bodies already at work in the fields.

"Ah, that must be the false dawn— isn't it caused by dust in the upper layers of the atmosphere

that couldn't fall down during the night? I think Mr. McBryde said so. Well, I must admit

that England has it as regards sunrises. Do you remember Grasmere?"

"Ah, dearest Grasmere!" Its little lakes and mountains were beloved by them all. Romantic

yet manageable, it sprang from a kindlier planet. Here an untidy plain stretched to the knees of

the Marabar.

"Good morning, good morning, put on your topis," shouted Aziz from farther down the train.

"Put on your topis at once, the early sun is highly dangerous for heads. I speak as a doctor."

"Good morning, good morning, put on your own."

"Not for my thick head," he laughed, banging it and holding up pads of his hair.

"Nice creature he is," murmured Adela.

"Listen—Mohammed Latif says 'Good morning' next." Various pointless jests.

"Dr. Aziz, what's happened to your hills? The train has forgotten to stop."

"Perhaps it is a circular train and goes back to Chandrapore without a break. Who knows!"

Having wandered off into the plain for a mile, the train slowed up against an elephant.

There was a platform too, but it shrivelled into insignificance. An elephant, waving her painted

forehead at the morn! "Oh, what a surprise!" called the ladies politely. Aziz said nothing, but he

nearly burst with pride and relief. The elephant was the one grand feature of the picnic, and

God alone knew what he had gone through to obtain her. Semi-official, she was best approached

through the Nawab Bahadur, who was best approached through Nureddin, but he

never answered letters, but his mother had great influence with him and was a friend of Hamidulhah

Begum's, who had been excessively kind and had promised to call on her provided the

broken shutter of the purdah carriage came back soon enough from Calcutta. That an elephant

should depend from so long and so slender a string filled Aziz with content, and with humorous

appreciation of the East, where the friends of friends are a reality, where everything gets done

sometime, and sooner or later every one gets his share of happiness. And Mohammed Latif was

likewise content, because two of the guests had missed the train, and consequently he could

ride on the howdah instead of following in a cart, and the servants were content because an

elephant increased their self-esteem, and they tumbled out the luggage into the dust with

shouts and bangs, issuing orders to one another, and convulsed with goodwill.

"It takes an hour to get there, an hour to get back, and two hours for the caves, which we

will call three," said Aziz, smiling charmingly. There was suddenly something regal about him.

"The train back is at eleventhirty, and you will be sitting down to your tiffin in Chandrapore with

Mr. Heaslop at exactly your usual hour, namely, one-fifteen. I know everything about you. Four

hours—quite a small expedition— and an hour extra for misfortunes, which occur somewhat

frequently

among my people. My idea is to plan everything without consulting you; but you, Mrs.

Moore, or Miss Quested, you are at any moment to make alterations if you wish, even if it

means giving up the caves. Do you agree? Then mount this wild animal."

The elephant had knelt, grey and isolated, like another hill. They climbed up the ladder, and

he mounted shikar fashion, treading first on the sharp edge of the heel and then into the

looped-up tail. When Mohammed Latif followed him, the servant who held the end of the tail let

go of it according to previous instructions, so that the poor relative slipped and had to cling to

the netting over the buttocks. It was a little piece of Court buffoonery, and distressed only the

ladies, whom it was intended to divert. Both of them disliked practical jokes. Then the beast

rose in two shattering movements, and poised them ten feet above the plain. Immediately below

was the scurf of life that an elephant always collects round its feet—villagers, naked babies.

The servants flung crockery into tongas. Hassan annexed the stallion intended for Aziz, and defied

Mahmoud Ali's man from its altitude. The Brahman who had been hired to cook for Professor

Godbole was planted under an acacia tree, to await their return. The train, also hoping to

return, wobbled away through the fields, turning its head this way and that like a centipede.



And the only other movement to be seen was a movement as of antennae, really the counterpoises

of the wells which rose and fell on their pivots of mud all over the plain and dispersed a

feeble flow of water. The scene was agreeable rather than not in the mild morning air, but there

was little colour in it, and no vitality.

As the elephant moved towards the hills (the pale sun had by this time saluted them to the

base, and pencilled shadows down their creases) a new quality occurred, a spiritual silence

which invaded more senses than the ear. Life went on as usual, but had no consequences, that

is to say, sounds did not echo or thoughts develop. Everything seemed cut off at its root, and

therefore infected with illusion. For instance, there were some mounds by the edge of the track,

low, serrated, and touched with whitewash. What were these mounds— graves, breasts of the

goddess Parvati? The villagers beneath gave both replies. Again, there was a confusion about a

snake which was never cleared up. Miss Quested saw a thin, dark object reared on end at the

farther side of a watercourse, and said, "A snake!" The villagers agreed, and Aziz explained:

yes, a black cobra, very venomous, who had reared himself up to watch the passing of the elephant.

But when she looked through Ronny's fieldglasses, she found it wasn't a snake, but the

withered and twisted stump of a toddy-palm. So she said, "It isn't a snake." The villagers

contradicted

her. She had put the word into their minds, and they refused to abandon it. Aziz admitted

that it looked like a tree through the glasses, but insisted that it was a black cobra really,

and improvised some rubbish about protective mimicry. Nothing was explained, and yet there

was no romance. Films of heat, radiated from the Kawa Dol precipices, increased the confusion.

They came at irregular intervals and moved capriciously. A patch of field would jump as if it was

being fried, and then lie quiet. As they drew closer the radiation stopped.

The elephant walked straight at the Kawa Dol as if she would knock for admission with her

forehead, then swerved, and followed a path round its base. The stones plunged straight into

the earth, like cliffs into the sea, and while Miss Quested was remarking on this, and saying that

it was striking, the plain quietly disappeared, peeled off, so to speak, and nothing was to be

seen on either side but the granite, very dead and quiet. The sky dominated as usual, but

seemed unhealthily near, adhering like a ceiling to the summits of the precipices. It was as if

the contents of the corridor had never been changed. Occupied by his own munificence, Aziz

noticed nothing. His guests noticed a little. They did not feel that it was an attractive place or

quite worth visiting, and wished it could have turned into some Mohammedan object, such as a

mosque, which their host would have appreciated and explained. His ignorance became evident,

and was really rather a drawback. In spite of his gay, confident talk, he had no notion

how to treat this particular aspect of India; he was lost in it without Professor Godbole, like

themselves.

The corridor narrowed, then widened into a sort of tray. Here, more or less, was their goal.

A ruined tank held a little water which would do for the animals, and close above the mud was

punched a black hole—the first of the caves. Three hills encircled the tray. Two of them pumped

out heat busily, but the third was in shadow, and here they camped.

"A horrid, stuffy place really," murmured Mrs. Moore to herself.

"How quick your servants are!" Miss Quested exclaimed. For a cloth had already been laid,

with a vase of artificial flowers in its centre, and Mahmoud Ali's butler offered them poached

eggs and tea for the second time.

"I thought we would eat this before our caves, and breakfast after."

Isn't this breakfast?"

"This breakfast? Did you think I should treat you so strangely?" He had been warned that

English people never stop eating, and that he had better nourish them every two hours until a

solid meal was ready.

"How very well it is all arranged."

"That you shall tell me when I return to Chandrapore. Whatever disgraces I bring upon myself,

you remain my guests." He spoke gravely now. They were dependent on him for a few

hours, and he felt grateful to them for placing themselves in such a position. All was well so far;

the elephant held a fresh cut bough to her lips, the tonga shafts stuck up into the air, the

kitchen-boy peeled potatoes, Hassan shouted, and Mohammed Latif stood as he ought, with a

peeled switch in his hand. The expedition was a success, and it was Indian; an obscure young

man had been allowed to show courtesy to visitors from another country, which is what all Indians

long to do— even cynics like Mahmoud Ali— but they never have the chance. Hospitality had

been achieved, they were "his" guests; his honour was involved in their happiness, and any

discomfort

they endured would tear his own soul.

Like most Orientals, Aziz overrated hospitality, mistaking it for intimacy, and not seeing that

it is tainted with the sense of possession. It was only when Mrs. Moore or Fielding was near him

that he saw further, and knew that it is more blessed to receive than to give. These two had

strange and beautiful effects on him—they were his friends, his for ever, and he theirs for ever;

he loved them so much that giving and receiving became one. He loved them even better than

the Hamidullah's because he had surmounted obstacles to meet them, and this stimulates a

generous mind. Their images remained somewhere in his soul up to his dying day, permanent

additions. He looked at her now as she sat on a deckchair, sipping his tea, and had for a moment

a joy that held the seeds of its own decay, for it would lead him to think, "Oh, what more

can I do for her?" and so back to the dull round of hospitality. The black bullets of his eyes filled

with soft expressive light, and he said, "Do you ever remember our mosque, Mrs. Moore?"

"I do. I do," she said, suddenly vital and young.

"And how rough and rude I was, and how good you were."

"And how happy we both were."

"Friendships last longest that begin like that, I think. Shall I ever entertain your other children?"

"Do you know about the others? She will never talk about them to me," said Miss Quested,

unintentionally breaking a spell.

"Ralph and Stella, yes, I know everything about them. But we must not forget to visit our

caves. One of the dreams of my life is accomplished in having you both here as my guests. You

cannot imagine how you have honoured me. I feel like the Emperor Babur."

"Why like him?" she enquired, rising.

"Because my ancestors came down with him from Afghanistan. They joined him at Herat.

He also had often no more elephants than one, none sometimes, but he never ceased showing

hospitality. When he fought or hunted or ran away, he would always stop for a time among hills,

just like us; he would never let go of hospitality and pleasure, and if there was only a little food,

he would have it arranged nicely, and if only one musical instrument, he would compel it to play

a beautiful tune. I take him as my ideal. He is the poor gentleman, and he became a great

king."

"I thought another Emperor is your favourite—I forget the name—you mentioned him at Mr.

Fielding's: what my book calls Aurangzebe."

"Alamgir? Oh yes, he was of course the more pious. But Babur— never in his whole life did

he betray a friend, so I can only think of him this morning. And you know how he died? He laid

down his life for his son. A death far more difficult than battle. They were caught in the heat.

They should have gone back to Kabul for the bad weather, but could not for reasons of state,

and at Agra Humayun fell sick. Babur walked round the bed three times, and said, 'I have borne

it away,' and he did bear it away; the fever left his son and came to him instead, and he died.

That is why I prefer Babur to Alamgir. I ought not to do so, but I do. However, I mustn't delay

you. I see you are ready to start."

"Not at all," she said, sitting down by Mrs. Moore again. "We enjoy talk like this very much."

For at last he was talking about what he knew and felt, talking as he had in Fielding's gardenhouse;

he was again the Oriental guide whom they appreciated.

"I always enjoy conversing about the Moguls. It is the chief pleasure I know. You see, those

first six emperors were all most wonderful men, and as soon as one of them is mentioned, no

matter which, I forget everything else in the world except the other five. You could not find six

such kings in all the countries of the earth, not, I mean, coming one after the other – father,



son."

"Tell us something about Akbar."

"Ah, you have heard the name of Akbar. Good. Hamidullah— whom you shall meet— will tell

you that Akbar is the greatest of all. I say, Yes, Akbar is very wonderful, but half a Hindu; he

was not a true Moslem,' which makes Hamidullah cry, 'No more was Babur, he drank wine . ' But

Babur always repented afterwards, which makes the entire difference, and Akbar never repented

of the new religion he invented instead of the Holy Koran."

"But wasn't Akbar's new religion very fine? It was to embrace the whole of India."

"Miss Quested, fine but foolish. You keep your religion, I mine. That is the best. Nothing

embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing, and that was Akbar's mistake."

"Oh, do you feel that, Dr. Aziz?" she said thoughtfully. "I hope you're not right. There will

have to be something universal in this country—I don't say religion, for I'm not religious, but

something, or how else are barriers to be broken down?"

She was only recommending the universal brotherhood he sometimes dreamed of, but as soon as it was put into prose it became untrue.

"Take my own case," she continued—it was indeed her own case that had animated her. "I

don't know whether you happen to have heard, but I'm going to marry Mr. Heaslop."

"On which my heartiest congratulations."

"Mrs. Moore, may I put our difficulty to Dr. Aziz— I mean our Anglo-Indian one?"

"It is your difficulty, not mine, my dear."

"Ab, that's true. Well, by marrying Mr. Heaslop, I shall become what is known as an Anglo-

Indian."

He held up his hand in protest. "Impossible. Take back such a terrible remark."

"But I shall! it's inevitable. I can't avoid the label. What I do hope to avoid is the mentality.

Women like—" She stopped, not quite liking to mention names; she would boldly have said

"Mrs. Turton and Mrs. Callendar" a fortnight ago. "Some women are so— well, ungenerous and

snobby about Indians, and I should feel too ashamed for words if I turned like them, but— and

here's my difficulty— there's nothing special about me, nothing specially good or strong, which

will help me to resist my environment and avoid becoming like them. I've most lamentable defects.

That's why I want Akbar's 'universal religion' or the equivalent to keep me decent and

sensible. Do you see what I mean?"

Her remarks pleased him, but his mind shut up tight because she had alluded to her marriage.

He was not going to be mixed up in that side of things. "You are certain to be happy with

any relative of Mrs. Moore's," he said with a formal bow.

"Oh, my happiness— that's quite another problem. I want to consult you about this Anglo-

Indian difficulty. Can you give me any advice?"

"You are absolutely unlike the others, I assure you. You will never be rude to my people."

"I am told we all get rude after a year."

"Then you are told a lie," he flashed, for she had spoken the truth and it touched him on

the raw; it was itself an insult in these particular circumstances. He recovered himself at once

and laughed, but her error broke up their conversation— their civilization it had almost been—

which scattered like the petals of a desert flower, and left them in the middle of the hills. "Come

along," he said, holding out a hand to each. They got up a little reluctantly, and addressed

themselves to sightseeing.

The first cave was tolerably convenient. They skirted the puddle of water, and then climbed

up over some unattractive stones, the sun crashing on their backs. Bending their heads, they

disappeared one by one into the interior of the hills. The small black hole gaped where their

varied forms and colours had momentarily functioned. They were sucked in like water down a

drain. Bland and bald rose the precipices; bland and glutinous the sky that connected the precipices;

solid and white, a Brahminy kite flapped between the rocks with a clumsiness that

seemed intentional. Before man, with his itch for the seemly, had been born, the planet must

have looked thus. The kite flapped away. . . . Before birds, perhaps. . . . And then the hole

belched and humanity returned.

A Marabar cave had been horrid as far as Mrs Moore was concerned, for she had nearly fainted in it, and had some difficulty in preventing herself from saying so as soon as she got

into the air again. It was natural enough: she had always suffered from faintness, and the cave

had become too full, because all their retinue followed them. Crammed with villagers and servants, the circular chamber began to smell. She lost Aziz and Adela in the dark, didn't know who touched her, couldn't breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad. She tried to regain the entrance tunnel, but an influx of villagers swept her back. She hit her head. For an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo.

Professor Godbole had never mentioned an echo; it never impressed him, perhaps. There

are some exquisite echoes in India; there is the whisper round the dome at Bijapur; there are

the long, solid sentences that voyage through the air at Mandu, and return unbroken to their

creator. The echo in a Marabar cave is not like these, it is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever

is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is

absorbed into the roof. "Bourn" is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or

"bou-ourn," or "ou-boum,"-- utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of

a boot, all produce "bourn." Even the striking of a match starts a little worm coiling, which is

too small to complete a circle but is eternally watchful. And if several people talk at once, an

overlapping howling noise begins, echoes generate echoes, and the cave is stuffed with a snake

composed of small snakes, which writhe independently.

After Mrs. Moore all the others poured out. She had given the signal for the reflux. Aziz and

Adela both emerged smiling and she did not want him to think his treat was a failure, so smiled

too. As each person emerged she looked for a villain, but none was there, and she realized that

she had been among the mildest individuals, whose only desire was to honour her, and that the

naked pad was a poor little baby, astride its mother's hip. Nothing evil had been in the cave, but

she had not enjoyed herself; no, she had not enjoyed herself, and she decided not to visit a

second one.

"Did you see the reflection of his match—rather pretty?" asked Adela.

"I forget ..."

"But he says this isn't a good cave, the best are on the Kawa Dol."

"I don't think I shall go on to there. I dislike climbing."

"Very well, let's sit down again in the shade until breakfast's ready."

"Ah, but that'll disappoint him so; he has taken such trouble. You should go on; you don't

mind."

"Perhaps I ought to," said the girl, indifferent to what she did, but desirous of being amiable.

The servants, etc., were scrambling back to the camp, pursued by grave censures from Mohammed

Latif Aziz came to help the guests over the rocks. He was at the summit of his powers ,

vigorous and humble, too sure of himself to resent criticism, and he was sincerely pleased

when he heard they were altering his plans. "Certainly, Miss Quested, so you and I will go together,

and leave Mrs. Moore here, and we will not be long, yet we will not hurry, because we

know that will be her wish."

"Quite right. I'm sorry not to come too, but I'm a poor walker."

"Dear Mrs. Moore, what does anything matter so long as you are my guests? I am very glad

you are not coming, which sounds strange, but you are treating me with true frankness , as a

friend."

"Yes, I am your friend," she said, laying her hand on his sleeve, and thinking, despite her

fatigue, how very charming, how very good, he was, and how deeply she desired his happiness.

"So may I make another suggestion? Don't let so many people come with you this time. I think

you may find it more convenient."

"Exactly, exactly," he cried, and, rushing to the other extreme, forbade all except one guide

to accompany Miss Quested and him to the Kawa Dol. "Is that all right?" he enquired.

"Quite right, now enjoy yourselves, and when you come back tell me all about it." And she

sank into the deck-chair.

If they reached the big pocket of caves, they would be away nearly an hour. She took out

her writing-pad, and began, "Dear Stella, Dear Ralph," then stopped, and looked at the queer

valley and their feeble invasion of it. Even the elephant had become a nobody. Her eye rose

from it to the entrance tunnel. No, she did not wish to repeat that experience. The more she

thought over it, the more disagreeable and frightening it became. She minded it much more

now than at the time. The crush and the smells she could forget, but the echo began in some

indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a moment when she chanced to be

fatigued, it had managed to murmur, "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and

so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value." If one had spoken vileness in that place, or

quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same—"ou-bourn." If one had spoken

with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the

world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion

and position, and however much they dodge or bluff—it would amount to the same, the serpent

would descend and return to the ceiling. Devils are of the North, and poems can be written

about them, but no one could romanticize the Marabar because it robbed infinity and eternity of

their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind.

She tried to go on with her letter, reminding herself that she was only an elderly woman

who had got up too early in the morning and journeyed too far, that the despair creeping over



her was merely her despair, her personal weakness, and that even if she got a sunstroke and

went mad the rest of the world would go on. But suddenly, at the edge of her mind, Religion

appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from "Let there

be Light" to "It is finished" only amounted to "bourn." Then she was terrified over a new area

larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her

soul, the mood of the last two months took definite form at last, and she realized that at she didn't

want to write to her children, didn't want to communicate with anyone, not even with God. She

sat motionless with horror, and, when old Mohammed Latif came up to her, thought he would

notice a difference. For a time she thought, "I am going to be ill," to comfort herself, then she

surrendered to the vision. She lost all interest, even in Aziz, and the affectionate and sincere

words that she had spoken to him seemed no longer hers but the air's.

## CHAPTER XV

Miss Quested and Aziz and a guide continued the slightly tedious expedition. They did not

talk much, for the sun was getting high. The air felt like a warm bath into which hot water is

trickling constantly, the temperature rose and rose, the boulders said, "I am alive," the small

stones answered, "I am almost alive." Between the chinks lay the ashes of little plants. They

meant to climb to the rocking-stone on the summit, but it was too far, and they contented

themselves with the big group of caves. En route\_ for these, they encountered several isolated

caves, which the guide persuaded them to visit, but really there was nothing to see; they lit a

match, admired its reflection in the polish, tested the echo and came out again. Aziz was "pretty

sure they should come on some interesting old carvings soon," but only meant he wished there

were some carvings. His deeper thoughts were about the breakfast. Symptoms of disorganization

had appeared as he left the camp. He ran over the menu: an English breakfast, porridge

and mutton chops, but some Indian dishes to cause conversation, and pan afterwards. He had

never liked Miss Quested as much as Mrs. Moore, and had little to say to her, less than ever

now that she would marry a British official.

Nor had Adela much to say to him. If his mind was with the breakfast, hers was mainly with

her marriage. Simla next week, get rid of Antony, a view of Thibet, tiresome wedding bells,

Agra in October, see Mrs. Moore comfortably off from Bombay—the procession passed before

her again, blurred by the heat, and then she turned to the more serious business of her life at

Chandrapore. There were real difficulties here— Ronny's limitations and her own— but she enjoyed

facing difficulties, and decided that if she could control her peevishness (always her weak

point), and neither rail against Anglo-India nor succumb to it, their married life ought to be

happy and profitable. She mustn't be too theoretical; she would deal with each problem as it

came up, and trust to Ronny's common sense and her own. Luckily, each had abundance of

common sense and good will.

But as she toiled over a rock that resembled an inverted saucer, she thought, "What about

love?" The rock was nicked by a double row of footholds, and somehow the question was suggested

by them. Where had she seen footholds before? Oh yes, they were the pattern traced in

the dust by the wheels of the Nawab Bahadur's car. She and Ronny— no, they did not love each

other.

"Do I take you too fast?" enquired Aziz, for she had paused, a doubtful expression on her

face. The discovery had come so suddenly that she felt like a mountaineer whose rope had broken.

Not to love the man one's going to marry! Not to find it out till this moment! Not even to

have asked oneself the question until now! Something else to think out. Vexed rather than appalled,

she stood still, her eyes on the sparkling rock. There was esteem and animal contact at

dusk, but the emotion that links them was absent. Ought she to break her engagement off?

She was inclined to think not—it would cause so much trouble to others; besides, she wasn't

convinced that love is necessary to a successful union. If love is everything, few marriages

would survive the honeymoon. "No, I'm all right, thanks," she said, and, her emotions well under

control, resumed the climb, though she felt a bit dashed. Aziz held her hand, the guide adhered

to the surface like a lizard and scampered about as if governed by a personal centre of

gravity.

"Are you married, Dr. Aziz?" she asked, stopping again, and frowning.

"Yes, indeed, do come and see my wife "--for he felt it more artistic to have his wife alive for

a moment.

"Thank you," she said absently.

"She is not in Chandrapore just now."

"And have you children?"

"Yes, indeed, three," he replied in firmer tones.

"Are they a great pleasure to you?"

"Why, naturally, I adore them," he laughed.

"I suppose so." What a handsome little Oriental he was, and no doubt his wife and children

were beautiful too, for people usually get what they already possess. She did not admire him

with any personal warmth, for there was nothing of the vagrant in her blood, but she guessed

he might attract women of his own race and rank, and she regretted that neither she nor Ronny

had physical charm. It does make a difference in a relationship—beauty, thick hair, a fine skin.

Probably this man had several wives— Mohammedans always insist on their full four, according

to Mrs. Turton. And having no one else to speak to on that eternal rock, she gave rein to the

subject of marriage and said in her honest, decent, inquisitive way: "Have you one wife or more

than one?"

The question shocked the young man very much. It challenged a new conviction of his

community, and new convictions are more sensitive than old. If she had said, "Do you worship

one god or several?" he would not have objected. But to ask an educated Indian Moslem how

many wives he has— appalling, hideous! He was in trouble how to conceal his confusion . "One,

one in my own particular case," he sputtered, and let go of her hand. Quite a number of caves

were at the top of the track, and thinking, "Damn the English even at their best," he plunged

into one of them to recover his balance. She followed at her leisure, quite unconscious that she

had said the wrong thing, and not seeing him, she also went into a cave, thinking with half her

mind "sight-seeing bores me," and wondering with the other half about marriage.

## CHAPTER XVI

He waited in his cave a minute, and lit a cigarette, so that he could remark on rejoining her,

"I bolted in to get out of the draught," or something of the sort. When he returned, he found

the guide, alone, with his head on one side. He had heard a noise, he said, and then Aziz heard

it too: the noise of a motor-car. They were now on the outer shoulder of the Kawa Dol, and by

scrambling twenty yards they got a glimpse of the plain. A car was coming towards the hills

down the Chandrapore road. But they could not get a good view of it, because the precipitous

bastion curved at the top, so that the base was not easily seen and the car disappeared as it

came nearer. No doubt it would stop almost exactly beneath them, at the place where the

pukka road degenerated into a path, and the elephant had turned to sidle into the hills.

He ran back to tell the strange news to his guest.

The guide explained that she had gone into a cave.

"Which cave?"

He indicated the group vaguely.

"You should have kept her in sight, it was your duty," said Aziz severely. "Here are twelve

caves at least. How am I to know which contains my guest? Which is the cave I was in myself?

The same vague gesture. And Aziz, looking again, could not even be sure he had returned

to the same group. Caves appeared in every direction— it seemed their original spawning place—

and the orifices were always the same size. He thought, "Merciful Heavens, Miss Quested is

lost," then pulled himself together, and began to look for her calmly.

"Shout!" he commanded.

When they had done this for awhile, the guide explained that to shout is useless, because a

Marabar cave can hear no sound but its own. Aziz wiped his head, and sweat began to stream

inside his clothes. The place was so confusing; it was partly a terrace, partly a zig zag, and full

of grooves that led this way and that like snaket tracks. He tried to go into every one, but he

never knew where he had started. Caves got behind caves or confabulated in pairs, and some

were at the entrance of a gully.

"Come here!" he called gently, and when the guide was in reach, he struck him in the face

for a punishment. The man fled, and he was left alone. He thought, "This is the end of my career,

my guest is lost." And then he discovered the simple and sufficient explanation of the mystery.

Miss Quested wasn't lost. She had joined the people in the car— friends of hers, no doubt,

Mr. Heaslop perhaps. He had a sudden glimpse of her, far down the gully— only a glimpse, but



there she was quite plain, framed between rocks, and speaking to another lady. He was so relieved

that he did not think her conduct odd. Accustomed to sudden changes of plan, he supposed

that she had run down the Kawa Do! impulsively, in the hope of a little drive. He started

back alone towards his camp, and almost at once caught sight of something which would have

disquieted him very much a moment before: Miss Quested's field glasses. They were lying at

the verge of a cave, half-way down an entrance tunnel. He tried to hang them over his shoulder,

but the leather strap had broken, so he put them into his pocket instead. When he had

gone a few steps, he thought she might have dropped something else, so he went back to look.

But the previous difficulty recurred: he couldn't identify the cave. Down in the plain he heard

the car starting; however, he couldn't catch a second glimpse of that. So he scrambled down

the valley-face of the hill towards Mrs. Moore, and here he was more successful: the colour and

confusion of his little camp soon appeared, and in the midst of it he saw an Englishman's topi,

and beneath it— oh, joy !— smiled not Mr. Heaslop, but Fielding.

"Fielding! Oh, I have so wanted you!" he cried, dropping the "Mr." for the first time.

And his friend ran to meet him, all so pleasant and jolly, no dignity, shouting explanations

and apologies about the train. Fielding had come in the newly arrived car— Miss Derek's car—

that other lady was Miss Derek. Chatter, chatter, all the servants leaving their cooking to listen.

Excellent Miss Derek! She had met Fielding by chance at the post office, said, "Why haven't you

gone to the Marabar?" heard how he missed the train, offered to run him there and then. Another

nice English lady. Where was she? Left with car and chauffeur while Fielding found camp.

Car couldn't get up— no, of course not— hundreds of people must go down to escort Miss Derek

and show her the way. The elephant in person. . . .

"Aziz, can I have a drink?"

"Certainly not." He flew to get one.

"Mr. Fielding! " called Mrs. Moore, from her patch of shade; they had not spoken yet, because

his arrival had coincided with the torrent from the hill.

"Good morning again!" he cried, relieved to find all well.

"Mr. Fielding, have you seen Miss Quested?"

"But I've only just arrived. Where is she?"

"I do not know."

"Aziz! Where have you put Miss Quested to?"

Aziz, who was returning with a drink in his hand, had to think for a moment. His heart was

full of new happiness. The picnic, after a nasty shock or two, had developed into something beyond

his dreams, for Fielding had not only come, but brought an uninvited guest. "Oh, she's all

right," he said; "she went down to see Miss Derek. Well, here's luck! Chin-chin!"

"Here's luck, but chin-chin I do refuse," laughed Fielding, who detested the phrase. " Here's

to India!"

"Here's luck, and here's to England!"

Miss Derek's chauffeur stopped the cavalcade which was starting to escort his mistress up,

and informed it that she had gone back with the other young lady to Chandrapore; she had

sent him to say so. She was driving herself.

"Oh yes, that's quite likely," said Aziz. "I knew they'd gone for a spin."

"Chandrapore? The man's made a mistake," Fielding exclaimed.

"Oh no, why?" He was disappointed, but made light of it; no doubt the two young ladies

were great friends. He would prefer to give breakfast to all four; still, guests must do as they

wish, or they become prisoners. He went away cheerfully to inspect the porridge and the ice.

"What's happened?" asked Fielding, who felt at once that something had gone queer. All the

way out Miss Derek had chattered about the picnic, called it an unexpected treat, and said that

she preferred Indians who didn't invite her to their entertainments to those who did it. Mrs.

Moore sat swinging her foot, and appeared sulky and stupid. She said: "Miss Derek is most

unsatisfactory

and restless, always in a hurry, always wanting something new; she will do anything

in the world except go back to the Indian lady who pays her."

Fielding, who didn't dislike Miss Derek, replied: "She wasn't in a hurry when I left her. There

was no question of returning to Chandrapore. It looks to me as if Miss Quested's in the hurry."

"Adela ?— she's never been in a hurry in her life," said the old lady sharply.

"I say it'll prove to be Miss Quested's wish, in fact I know it is," persisted the schoolmaster.

He was annoyed—chiefly with himself. He had begun by missing a train—a sin he was never

guilty of— and now that he did arrive it was to upset Aziz' arrangements for the second time. He

wanted someone to share the blame, and frowned at Mrs. Moore rather magisterially. "Aziz is a

charming fellow," he announced.

"I know," she answered, with a yawn.

"He has taken endless trouble to make a success of our picnic."

They knew one another very little, and felt rather awkward at being drawn together by an

Indian. The racial problem can take subtle forms. In their case it had induced a sort of jealousy,

a mutual suspicion. He tried to goad her enthusiasm; she scarcely spoke. Aziz fetched them to

breakfast.

"It is quite natural about Miss Quested," he remarked, for he had been working the incident

a little in his mind, to get rid of its roughnesses. "We were having an interesting talk with our

guide, then the car was seen, so she decided to go down to her friend." Incurably inaccurate,

he already thought that this was what had occurred. He was inaccurate because he was sensitive.

He did not like to remember Miss Quested's remark about polygamy, because it was unworthy

of a guest, so he put it from his mind, and with it the knowledge that he had bolted into

a cave to get away from her. He was inaccurate because he desired to honour her, and—facts

being entangled— he had to arrange them in her vicinity, as one tidies the ground after extracting

a weed. Before breakfast was over, he had told a good many lies. "She ran to her friend, I

to mine," he went on, smiling. "And now I am with my friends and they are with me and each

other, which is happiness."

Loving them both, he expected them to love each other. They didn't want to. Fielding

thought with hostility, "I knew these women would make trouble," and Mrs. Moore thought,

"This man, having missed the train, tries to blame us"; but her thoughts were feeble; since her

faintness in the cave she was sunk in apathy and cynicism. The wonderful India of her opening

weeks, with its cool nights and acceptable hints of infinity, had vanished.

Fielding ran up to see one cave. He wasn't impressed. Then they got on the elephant and

the picnic began to unwind out of the corridor and escaped under the precipice towards the

railway station, pursued by stabs of hot air. They came to the place where he had quit the

car. A disagreeable thought now struck him, and he said: "Aziz, exactly where and how did you

leave Miss Quested?"

"Up there." He indicated the Kawa Dol cheerfully.

"But how--" A gully, or rather a crease, showed among the rocks at this place; it was scurfy

with cactuses. "I suppose the guide helped her."

"Oh, rather, most helpful."

"Is there a path off the top?"

"Millions of paths, my dear fellow."

Fielding could see nothing but the crease. Everywhere else the glaring granite plunged into

the earth.

"But you saw them get down safe?"

"Yes, yes, she and Miss Derek, and go off in the car."

"Then the guide came back to you?"

"Exactly. Got a cigarette?"

"I hope she wasn't ill," pursued the Englishman. The crease continued as a nullah across the

plain, the water draining off this way towards the Ganges.

"She would have wanted me, if she was ill, to attend her."

"Yes, that sounds sense."

"I see you're worrying, let's talk of other things," he said kindly. "Miss Quested was always

to do what she wished, it was our arrangement. I see you are worrying on my account, but

really I don't mind, I never notice trifles."

"I do worry on your account. I consider they have been impolite!" said Fielding, lowering his

voice. "She had no right to dash away from your party, and Miss Derek had no right to abet

her."

So touchy as a rule, Aziz was unassailable. The wings that uplifted him did not falter, because

he was a Mogul emperor who had done his duty. Perched on his elephant, he watched

the Marabar Hills recede, and saw again, as provinces of his kingdom, the grim untidy plain, the

frantic and feeble movements of the buckets, the white shrines, the shallow graves, the suave

sky, the snake that looked like a tree. He had given his guests as good a time as he could, and

if they came late or left early that was not his affair. Mrs. Moore slept, swaying against the rods

of the howdah, Mohammed Latif embraced her with efficiency and respect, and by his own side

sat Fielding, whom he began to think of as "Cyril."

"Aziz, have you figured out what this picnic will cost you?"

"Sh! my dear chap, don't mention that part. Hundreds and hundreds of rupees. The completed

account will be too awful; my friends' servants have robbed me right and left, and as for

an elephant, she apparently eats gold. I can trust you not to repeat this. And M.L.—please employ

initials, he listens—is far the worst of all."



"I told you he's no good."

"He is plenty of good for himself; his dishonesty will ruin me."

"Aziz, how monstrous!"

"I am delighted with him really, he has made my guests comfortable; besides, it is my duty

to employ him, he is my cousin. If money goes, money comes. If money stays, death comes.

Did you ever hear that useful Urdu proverb? Probably not, for I have just invented it ."

"My proverbs are: A penny saved is a penny earned; A stitch in time saves nine; Look before

you leap; and the British Empire rests on them. You will never kick us out, you know, until you

cease employing M.L.'s and such."

"Oh, kick you out? Why should I trouble over that dirty job? Leave it to the politicians. . . .

No, when I was a student I got excited over your damned countrymen, certainly; but if they'll

let me get on with my profession and not be too rude to me officially, I really don't ask for

more."

"But you do; you take them to a picnic."

"This picnic is nothing to do with English or Indian; it is an expedition of friends."  
"

So the cavalcade ended, partly pleasant, partly not; the Brahman cook was picked up, the

train arrived, pushing its burning throat over the plain, and the twentieth century took over

from the sixteenth. Mrs. Moore entered her carriage, the three men went to theirs, adjusted the

shutters, turned on the electric fan and tried to get some sleep. In the twilight, all resembled

corpses, and the train itself seemed dead though it moved—a coffin from the scientific north

which troubled the scenery four times a day. As it left the Marabars, their nasty little cosmos

disappeared, and gave place to the Marabars seen from a distance, finite and rather romantic.

The train halted once under a pump, to drench the stock of coal in its tender. Then it caught

sight of the main line in the distance, took courage, and bumped forward, rounded the civil station,

surmounted the level-crossing (the rails were scorching now), and clanked to a standstill.

Chandrapore, Chandrapore! The expedition was over.

And as it ended, as they sat up in the gloom and prepared to enter ordinary life, suddenly

the long drawn strangeness of the morning snapped. Mr. Haq, the Inspector of Police, flung

open the door of their carriage and said in shrill tones: "Dr. Aziz, it is my highly painful duty to

arrest you."

"Hullo, some mistake," said Fielding, at once taking charge of the situation.

"Sir, they are my instructions. I know nothing."

"On what charge do you arrest him?"

"I am under instructions not to say."

"Don't answer me like that. Produce your warrant."

"Sir, excuse me, no warrant is required under these particular circumstances. Refer to Mr.

McBryde."

"Very well, so we will. Come along, Aziz, old man; nothing to fuss about, some blunder."

"Dr. Aziz, will you kindly come ?— a closed conveyance stands in readiness."

The young man sobbed—his first sound— and tried to escape out of the opposite door onto

the line.

"That will compel me to use force," Mr. Haq wailed.

"Oh, for God's sake—" cried Fielding, his own nerves breaking under the contagion, and

pulled him back before a scandal started, and shook him like a baby. A second later, and he

would have been out, whistles blowing, a man-hunt. . . . "Dear fellow, we're coming to  
McBryde

together, and enquire what's gone wrong— he's a decent fellow, it's all unintentional  
. . . he'll

apologize. Never, never act the criminal."

"My children and my name!" he gasped, his wings broken.

"Nothing of the sort. Put your hat straight and take my arm. I'll see you through."

"Ah, thank God, he comes," the Inspector exclaimed.

They emerged into the midday heat, arm in arm. The station was seething. Passengers and

porters rushed out of every recess, many Government servants, more police. Ronny escorted

Mrs. Moore. Mohammed Latif began wailing. And before they could make their way through the

chaos, Fielding was called off by the authoritative tones of Mr. Turton, and Aziz went on to

prison alone.

## CHAPTER XVII

The Collector had watched the arrest from the interior of the waiting-room, and throwing

open its perforated doors of zinc, he was now revealed like a god in a shrine. When Fielding

entered the doors clapped to, and were guarded by a servant, while a punkah, to mark the

importance

of the moment, flapped dirty petticoats over their heads. The Collector could not

speak at first. His face was white, fanatical, and rather beautiful—the expression that all English

faces were to wear at Chandrapore for many days. Always brave and unselfish, he was now

fused by some white and generous heat; he would have killed himself, obviously, if he had

thought it right to do so. He spoke at last. "The worst thing in my whole career has happened,"

he said. "Miss Quested has been insulted in one of the Marabar caves."

"Oh no, oh no, no," gasped the other, feeling sickish.

"She escaped—by God's grace."

"Oh no, no, but not Aziz . . . not Aziz . . ."

He nodded.

"Absolutely impossible, grotesque."

"I called you to preserve you from the odium that would attach to you if you were seen

accompanying

him to the Police Station," said Turton, paying no attention to his protest, indeed scarcely hearing it.

He repeated "Oh no," like a fool. He couldn't frame other words. He felt that a mass of

madness had arisen and tried to overwhelm them all; it had to be shoved back into its pit

somehow, and he didn't know how to do it, because he did not understand madness: he had

always gone about sensibly and quietly until a difficulty came right. "Who lodges this infamous

charge?" he asked, pulling himself together.

"Miss Derek and—the victim herself. . . ." He nearly broke down, unable to repeat the girl's

name.

"Miss Quested herself definitely accuses him of—"

He nodded and turned his face away.

"Then she's mad."

"I cannot pass that last remark," said the Collector, waking up to the knowledge that they

differed, and trembling with fury. "You will withdraw it instantly. It is the type of remark you

have permitted yourself to make ever since you came to Chandrapore."

"I'm excessively sorry, sir; I certainly withdraw it unconditionally." For the man was half mad

himself.

"Pray, Mr. Fielding, what induced you to speak to me in such a tone?"

"The news gave me a very great shock, so I must ask you to forgive me. I cannot believe

that Dr. Aziz is guilty."

He slammed his hand on the table. "That— that is a repetition of your insult in an aggravated

form."

"If I may venture to say so, no," said Fielding, also going white, but sticking to his point. "I

make no reflection on the good faith of the two ladies, but the charge they are bringing against

Aziz rests upon some mistake, and five minutes will clear it up. The man's manner is perfectly

natural; besides, I know him to be incapable of infamy."

"It does indeed rest upon a mistake," came the thin, biting voice of the other. "It does indeed.

I have had twenty-five years' experience of this country"—he paused, and "twenty-five

years" seemed to fill the waiting-room with their staleness and ungenerosity—"and during those

twenty-five years I have never known anything but disaster result when English people and Indians

attempt to be intimate socially. Intercourse, yes. Courtesy, by all means. Intimacy—never,

never. The whole weight of my authority is against it. I have been in charge at Chandrapore for

six years, and if everything has gone smoothly, if there has been mutual respect and esteem, it

is because both peoples kept to this simple rule. New-comers set our traditions aside, and in an

instant what you see happens, the work of years is undone and the good name of my District

ruined for a generation. I—I—can't see the end of this day's work, Mr. Fielding. You, who are

imbued with modern ideas—no doubt you can. I wish I had never lived to see its beginning, I

know that. It is the end of me. That a lady, that a young lady engaged to my most valued



subordinate— that she— an English girl fresh from England— that I should have lived—"

Involved in his own emotions, he broke down. What he had said was both dignified and pathetic,

but had it anything to do with Aziz? Nothing at all, if Fielding was right. It is impossible

to regard a tragedy from two points of view, and whereas Turton had decided to avenge the

girl, he hoped to save the man. He wanted to get away and talk to McBryde, who had always

been friendly to him, was on the whole sensible, and could, anyhow, be trusted to keep cool.

"I came down particularly on your account— while poor Heaslop got his mother away. I regarded

it as the most friendly thing I could do. I meant to tell you that there will be an informal

meeting at the club this evening to discuss the situation, but I am doubtful whether you will

care to come. Your visits there are always infrequent."

"I shall certainly come, sir, and I am most grateful to you for all the trouble you have taken

over me. May I venture to ask—where Miss Quested is."

He replied with a gesture; she was ill.

"Worse and worse, appalling," he said feelingly.

But the Collector looked at him sternly, because he was keeping his head. He had not gone

mad at the phrase "an English girl fresh from England," he had not rallied to the banner of race.

He was still after facts, though the herd had decided on emotion. Nothing enrages Anglo-India

more than the lantern of reason if it is exhibited for one moment after its extinction is decreed.

All over Chandrapore that day the Europeans were putting aside their normal personalities and

sinking themselves in their community. Pity, wrath, heroism, filled them, but the power of putting

two and two together was annihilated.

Terminating the interview, the Collector walked on to the platform. The confusion there was

revolting. A chuprassi of Ronny's had been told to bring up some trifles belonging to the ladies,

and was appropriating for himself various articles to which he had no right; he was a camp follower

of the angry English. Mohammed Latif made no attempt to resist him. Hassan flung off

his turban, and wept. All the comforts that had been provided so liberally were rolled about and

wasted in the sun. The Collector took in the situation at a glance, and his sense of justice functioned

though he was insane with rage. He spoke the necessary word, and the looting stopped.

Then he drove off to his bungalow and gave rein to his passions again. When he saw the coolies

asleep in the ditches or the shopkeepers rising to salute him on their little platforms, he said

to himself: "I know what you're like at last; you shall pay for this, you shall squeal."

#### CHAPTER XVIII

Mr. McBryde, the District Superintendent of Police, was the most reflective and best educated

of the Chandrapore officials. He had read and thought a good deal, and, owing to a

somewhat unhappy marriage, had evolved a complete philosophy of life. There was much of

the cynic about him, but nothing of the bully; he never lost his temper or grew rough, and he

received Aziz with courtesy, was almost reassuring. "I have to detain you until you get bail," he

said, "but no doubt your friends will be applying for it, and of course they will be allowed to visit

you, under regulations. I am given certain information, and have to act on it—I'm not your

judge." Aziz was led off weeping. Mr. McBryde was shocked at his downfall, but no Indian ever

surprised him, because he had a theory about climatic zones. The theory ran: "All unfortunate

natives are criminals at heart, for the simple reason that they live south of latitude 30. They are

not to blame, they have not a dog's chance— we should be like them if we settled here."

Born at Karachi, he seemed to contradict his theory, and would sometimes admit as much with a sad,

quiet smile.

"Another of them found out," he thought, as he set to work to draft his statement to the

Magistrate.

He was interrupted by the arrival of Fielding.

He imparted all he knew without reservations. Miss Derek had herself driven in the Mukul

car about an hour ago, she and Miss Quested both in a terrible state. They had gone straight to

his bungalow where he happened to be, and there and then he had taken down the charge and

arranged for the arrest at the railway station.

"What is the charge, precisely?"

"That he followed her into the cave and made insulting advances. She hit at him with her

field-glasses; he pulled at them and the strap broke, and that is how she got away. When we

searched him just now, they were in his pocket."

"Oh no, oh no, no; it'll be cleared up in five minutes," he cried again.

"Have a look at them."

The strap had been newly broken, the eye-piece was jammed. The logic of evidence said

"Guilty."

"Did she say any more?"

"There was an echo that appears to have frightened her. Did you go into those caves?"

"I saw one of them. There was an echo. Did it get on her nerves?"

"I couldn't worry her overmuch with questions. She'll have plenty to go through in the

witness-box. They don't bear thinking about, these next weeks. I wish the Marabar Hills and all

they contain were at the bottom of the sea. Evening after evening one saw them from the club,

and they were just a harmless name. . . - Yes, we start already." For a visiting card was

brought; Vakil Mahmoud Ali, legal adviser to the prisoner, asked to be allowed to see him.

McBryde signed, gave permission, and continued: "I heard some more from Miss Derek— she is

an old friend of us both and talks freely; well— her account is that you went off to locate the

camp, and almost at once she heard stones falling on the Kawa Dol and saw Miss Quested running

straight down the face of a precipice. Well. She climbed up a sort of gully to her, and found

her practically done for—her helmet off—"

"Was a guide not with her?" interrupted Fielding.

"No. She had got among some cactuses. Miss Derek saved her life coming just then— she

was beginning to fling herself about. She helped her down to the car. Miss Quested couldn't

stand the Indian driver, cried, 'Keep him away '—and it was that that put our friend on the track

of what had happened. They made straight for our bungalow, and are there now. That's the

story as far as I know it yet. She sent the driver to join you. I think she behaved with great

sense."

"I suppose there's no possibility of my seeing Miss Quested?" he asked suddenly.

"I hardly think that would do. Surely."

"I was afraid you'd say that. I should very much like to."

"She is in no state to see anyone. Besides, you don't know her well."

"Hardly at all. . . . But you see I believe she's under some hideous delusion, and that at that

wretched boy is innocent."

The policeman started in surprise, and a shadow passed over his face, for he could not bear

his dispositions to be upset. "I had no idea that was in your mind," he said, and looked for support

at the signed deposition, which lay before him.

"Those field-glasses upset me for a minute, but I've thought since: it's impossible that, having

attempted to assault her, he would put her glasses into his pocket."

"Quite possible, I'm afraid; when an Indian goes bad, he goes not only very bad, but very

queer."

"I don't follow."

"How should you? When you think of crime you think of English crime. The psychology here

is different. I dare say you'll tell me next that he was quite normal when he came down from

the hill to greet you. No reason he should not be. Read any of the Mutiny records; which, rather

than the Bhagavad Gita, should be your Bible in this country. Though I'm not sure that the one

and the other are not closely connected. Am I not being beastly? But, you see, Fielding, as I've

said to you once before, you're a schoolmaster, and consequently you come across these people

at their best. That's what puts you wrong. They can be charming as boys. But I know them as

they really are, after they have developed into men. Look at this, for instance." He held up Aziz'

pocket-case. "I am going through the contents. They are not edifying. Here is a letter from a

friend who apparently keeps a brothel."

"I don't want to hear his private letters."

"It'll have to be quoted in Court, as bearing on his morals. He was fixing up to see women

at Calcutta."

" Oh, that'll do, that'll do."



! McBryde stopped, na0vely puzzled. It was obvious to him that any two sahibs ought to pool

all they knew about any Indian, and he could not think where the objection came in.

"I dare say you have the right to throw stones at a young man for doing that, but I haven't.

I did the same at his age."

So had the Superintendent of Police, but he considered that the conversation had taken a

turn that was undesirable. He did not like Fielding's next remark either.

"Miss Quested really cannot be seen? You do know that for a certainty?"

"You have never explained to me what's in your mind here. Why on earth do you want to see her?"

"On the off chance of her recanting before you send in that report and he's committed for

trial, and the whole thing goes to blazes. Old man, don't argue about this, but do of Your goodness

just ring up your wife or Miss Derek and enquire. It'll cost you nothing."

"It's no use ringing up them," he replied, stretching out for the telephone. "Callendar settles

a question like that, of course. You haven't grasped that she's seriously ill."

"He's sure to refuse, it's all he exists for," said the other desperately.

The expected answer came back: the Major would not hear of the patient being troubled .

"I only wanted to ask her whether she is certain, dead certain, that it was Aziz who followed

her into the cave."

"Possibly my wife might ask her that much."

"But I wanted to ask her. I want someone who believes in him to ask her."

"What difference does that make?"

"She is among people who disbelieve in Indians."

"Well, she tells her own story, doesn't she?"

"I know but she tells it to you."

McBryde raised his eyebrows, murmuring: "A bit too finespun. Anyhow, Callendar won't hear

of you seeing her. I'm sorry to say he gave a bad account just now. He says that she is by no

means out of danger."

They were silent. Another card was brought into the office—Hamidullah's The opposite army

was gathering.

"I must put this report through now, Fielding."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"How can I not?"

"I feel that things are rather unsatisfactory as well as most disastrous. We are heading for a

most awful smash. I can see your prisoner, I suppose."

He hesitated. "His own people seem in touch with him all right."

"Well, when he's done with them."

"I wouldn't keep you waiting; good heavens, you take precedence of any Indian visitor, of

course. I meant what's the good. Why mix yourself up with pitch?"

"I say he's innocent--"

"Innocence or guilt, why mix yourself up? What's the good?"

"Oh, good, good," he cried, feeling that every earth was being stopped. "One's got to

breathe occasionally, at least I have. I mayn't see her, and now I mayn't see him. I promised

him to come up here with him to you, but Turton called me off before I could get two steps."

"Sort of all-white thing the Burra Sahib would do," he muttered sentimentally. And trying not

to sound patronizing, he stretched his hand over the table, and said: "We shall all have to hang

together, old man, I'm afraid. I'm your junior in years, I know, but very much your senior in

service; you don't happen to know this poisonous country as well as I do, and you must take it

from me that the general situation is going to be nasty at Chandrapore during the next few

weeks, very nasty indeed."

"So I have just told you."

"But at a time like this there's no room for—well—personal views. The man who doesn't toe

the line is lost."

"I see what you mean."

"No, you don't see entirely. He not only loses himself, he weakens his friends. If you leave

the line, you leave a gap in the line. These jackals"—he pointed at the lawyers' cards—"are

looking with all their eyes for a gap."

"Can I visit Aziz?" was his answer.

"No." Now that he knew of Turton's attitude, the policeman had no doubts. "You may see

him on a magistrate's order, but on my own responsibility I don't feel justified. It might lead to

more complications."

Fielding paused, reflecting that if he had been either ten years younger or ten years longer

in India, he would have responded to McBryde's appeal. The bit between his teeth, he then

said, "To whom do I apply for an order?"

"City Magistrate."

"That sounds comfortable!"

"Yes, one can't very well worry poor Heaslop."

More "evidence" appeared at this moment—the tabledrawer from Aziz' bungalow, borne with

triumph in a corporal's arms.

"Photographs of women. Ah!"

"That's his wife," said Fielding, wincing.

"How do you know that?"

"He told me."

McBryde gave a faint, incredulous smile, and started rummaging in the drawer. His face became

inquisitive and slightly bestial. "Wife indeed, I know those wives!" he was thinking. Aloud

he said: "Well, you must trot off now, old man, and the Lord help us, the Lord help us all. . . ."

As if his prayer had been heard, there was a sudden rackety-dacket on a temple bell.

#### CHAPTER XIX

Hamidullah was the next stage. He was waiting outside the Superintendent's office, and

sprang up respectfully when he saw Fielding. To the Englishman's passionate "It's all a mistake,"

he answered, "Ah, ah, has some evidence come?"

"It will come," said Fielding, holding his hand.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Fielding; but when once an Indian has been arrested, we do not know where it

will stop." His manner was deferential. "You are very good to greet me in this public fashion, I

appreciate it; but, Mr. Fielding, nothing convinces a magistrate except evidence. Did Mr.

McBryde make any remark when my card came in? Do you think my application annoyed him,

will prejudice him against my friend at all? If so, I will gladly retire."

"He's not annoyed, and if he was, what does it matter?"

"Ah, it's all very well for you to speak like that, but we have to live in this country."

The leading barrister of Chandrapore, with the dignified manner and Cambridge degree, had

been rattled. He too loved Aziz, and knew he was calumniated; but faith did not rule his heart,

and he prated of "policy" and "evidence" in a way that saddened the Englishman. Fielding, too,

had his anxieties—he didn't like the fieldglasses or the discrepancy over the guide—but he relegated

them to the edge of his mind, and forbade them to infect its core. Aziz was innocent, and

all action must be based on that, and the people who said he was guilty were wrong, and it was

hopeless to try to propitiate them. At the moment when he was throwing in his lot with Indians,

he realized the profundity of the gulf that divided him from them. They always do something

disappointing. Aziz had tried to run away from the police, Mohammed Latif had not checked the

pilfering. And now Hamidullah [—instead of raging and denouncing, he temporized. Are Indians

cowards? No, but they are bad starters and occasionally jib. Fear is everywhere; the British Raj

rests on it; the respect and courtesy Fielding himself enjoyed were unconscious acts of propitiation.

He told Hamidullah to cheer up, all would end well; and Ham idullah did cheer up, and became

pugnacious and sensible. McBryde's remark, "If you leave the line, you leave a gap in the

line," was being illustrated.

"First and foremost, the question of bail ..."

Application must be made this afternoon. Fielding wanted to stand surety. Hamidullah thought the Nawab Bahadur should be approached.

"Why drag in him, though?"

To drag in everyone was precisely the barrster's aim. He then suggested that the lawyer in

charge of the case would be a Hindu; the defence would then make a wider appeal. He mentioned

one or two names—men from a distance who would not be intimidated by local

conditions—and said he should prefer Amritrao, a Calcutta barrister, who had a high reputation

professionally and personally, but who was notoriously anti-British.

Fielding demurred; this seemed to him going to the other extreme. Aziz must be cleared,



but with a minimum of racial hatred. Amritrao was loathed at the club. His retention would be

regarded as a political challenge.

"Oh no, we must hit with all our strength. When I saw my friend's private papers carried in

just now in the arms of a dirty policeman, I said to myself, Amritrao is the man to clear up

this."

There was a lugubrious pause. The temple bell continued to jangle harshly. The interminable

and disastrous day had scarcely reached its afternoon. Continuing their work, the wheels of

Dominion now propelled a messenger on a horse from the Superintendent to the Magistrate

with an official report of arrest. "Don't complicate, let the cards play themselves," entreated

Fielding, as he watched the man disappear into dust. "We're bound to win, there's nothing else

we can do. She will never be able to substantiate the charge."

This comforted Hamidullah, who remarked with complete sincerity, "At a crisis, the English

are really unequalled."

"Good-bye, then, my dear Hamidullah (we must drop the 'Mr.' now). Give Aziz my love when

you see him, and tell him to keep calm, calm, calm. I shall go back to the College now. If you

want me, ring me up; if you don't, don't, for I shall be very busy."

"Good-bye, my dear Fielding, and you actually are on our side against your own people?"

"Yes. Definitely."

He regretted taking sides. To slink through India unlabelled was his aim. Henceforward he

would be called "anti-British," "seditious"—terms that bored him, and diminished his utility. He

foresaw that besides being a tragedy, there would be a muddle; already he saw several tiresome

little knots, and each time his eye returned to them, they were larger. Born in freedom, he

was not afraid of the muddle, but he recognized its existence.

This section of the day concluded in a queer vague talk with Professor Godbole. The interminable

affair of the Russell's Viper was again in question. Some weeks before, one of the masters

at the College, an unpopular Parsi, had found a Russell's Viper nosing round his classroom.

Perhaps it had crawled in of itself, but perhaps it had not, and the staff still continued to interview

their Principal about it, and to take up his time with their theories. The reptile is so poisonous

that he did not like to cut them short, and this they knew. Thus when his mind was

bursting with other troubles and he was debating whether he should compose a letter of appeal

to Miss Quested, he was obliged to listen to a speech which lacked both basis and conclusion,

and floated through air. At the end of it Godbole said, "May I now take my leave?"—always an

indication that he had not come to his point yet. "Now I take my leave, I must tell you how glad

I am to hear that after all you succeeded in reaching the Marabar. I feared my unpunctuality

had prevented you, but you went (a far pleasanter method) in Miss Derek's car. I hope the

expedition

was a successful one."

"The news has not reached you yet, I can see."

"Oh yes."

"No; there has been a terrible catastrophe about Aziz."

"Oh yes. That is all round the College."

"Well, the expedition where that occurs can scarcely be called a successful one," said Fielding,

with an amazed stare.

"I cannot say. I was not present."

He stared again— a most useless operation, for no eye could see what lay at the bottom of

the Brahman's mind, and yet he had a mind and a heart too, and all his friends trusted him,

without knowing why. "I am most frightfully cut up," he said.

"So I saw at once on entering your office. I must not detain you, but I have a small private

difficulty on which I want your help; I am leaving your service shortly, as you know."

"Yes, alas!

"And am returning to my birthplace in Central India to take charge of education there. I

want to start a High School there on sound English lines, that shall be as like Government College

as possible."

"Well?" he sighed, trying to take an interest.

"At present there is only vernacular education at Mau. I shall feel it my duty to change all

that. I shall advise His Highness to sanction at least a High School in the Capital, and if possible

another in each pargana."

Fielding sunk his head on his arms; really, Indians were sometimes unbearable.

"The point—the point on which I desire your help is this: what name should be given to the

school?"

"A name? A name for a school?" he said, feeling sickish suddenly, as he had done in the

waiting-room.

"Yes, a name, a suitable title, by which it can be called, by which it may be generally

known."

"Really— I have no names for schools in my head. I can think of nothing but our poor Aziz.

Have you grasped that at the present moment he is in prison?"

"Oh yes. Oh no, I do not expect an answer to my question now. I only meant that when you

are at leisure, you might think the matter over, and suggest two or three alternative titles for

schools. I had thought of the 'Mr. Fielding High School,' but failing that, the 'King-Emperor

George the Fifth.'

"Godbole!"

The old fellow put his hands together, and looked sly and charming.

"Is Aziz innocent or guilty?"

"That is for the Court to decide. The verdict will be in strict accordance with the evidence, I

make no doubt."

"Yes, yes, but your personal opinion. Here's a man we both like, generally esteemed; he

lives here quietly doing his work. Well, what's one to make of it? Would he or would he not do

such a thing?"

"Ah, that is rather a different question from your previous one, and also more difficult: I

mean difficult in our philosophy. Dr. Aziz is a most worthy young man, I have a great regard for

him; but I think you are asking me whether the individual can commit good actions or evil actions,

and that is rather difficult for us." He spoke without emotion and in short tripping syllables.

"I ask you: did he do it or not? Is that plain? I know he didn't, and from that I start. I mean

to get at the true explanation in a couple of days. My last notion is that it's the guide who went

round with them. Malice on Miss Quested's part— it couldn't be that, though Hamidullah thinks

so. She has certainly had some appalling experience. But you tell me, oh no— because good and

evil are the same."

"No, not exactly, please, according to our philosophy. Because nothing can be performed in

isolation. All perform a good action, when one is performed, and when an evil action is performed,

all perform it. To illustrate my meaning, let me take the case in point as an example .

"I am informed that an evil action was performed in the Marabar Hills, and that a highly esteemed

English lady is now seriously ill in consequence. My answer to that is this: that action

was performed by Dr. Aziz." He stopped and sucked in his thin cheeks. "It was performed by the

guide." He stopped again. "It was performed by you." Now he had an air of daring and of coyness.

"It was performed by me." He looked shyly down the sleeve of his own coat. "And by my

students. It was even performed by the lady herself. When evil occurs, it expresses the whole of

the universe. Similarly when good occurs."

"And similarly when suffering occurs, and so on and so forth, and everything is anything and

nothing something," he muttered in his irritation, for he needed the solid ground.

"Excuse me, you are now again changing the basis of our discussion. We were discussing

good and evil. Suffering is merely a matter for the individual. If a young lady has a stroke,

that is a matter of no significance to the universe. Oh no, not at all. Oh no, not the least. It is

an isolated matter, it only concerns herself. If she thought her head did not ache, she would not

be ill, and that would end it. But it is far otherwise in the case of good and evil. They are not

what we think them, they are what they are, and each of us has contributed to both."

"You're preaching that evil and good are the same."

"Oh no, excuse me once again. Good and evil are different, as their names imply. But, in my

own humble opinion, they are both of them aspects of my Lord. He is present in the one, absent



in the other, and the difference between presence and absence is great, as great as my

feeble mind can grasp. Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence, and we are

therefore entitled to repeat, 'Come, come, come, come.'" And in the same breath, as if to cancel

any beauty his words might have contained, he added, "But did you have time to visit any of

the interesting Marabar antiquities?"

Fielding was silent, trying to meditate and rest his brain.

"Did you not even see the tank by the usual camping ground?" he nagged.

"Yes, yes," he answered distractedly, wandering over half a dozen things at once.

"That is good, then you saw the Tank of the Dagger." And he related a legend which might

have been acceptable if he had told it at the tea-party a fortnight ago. It concerned a Hindu

Rajah who had slain his own sister's son, and the dagger with which he performed the deed

remained clamped to his hand until in the course of years he came to the Marabar Hills, where

he was thirsty and wanted to drink but saw a thirsty cow and ordered the water to be offered to

her first, which, when done, "dagger fell from his hand, and to commemorate miracle he built

Tank." Professor Godbole's conversations frequently culminated in a row. Fielding received this

one in gloomy silence.

In the afternoon he obtained a permit and saw Aziz, but found him unapproachable through

misery. "You deserted me," was the only coherent remark. He went away to write his letter to

Miss Quested. Even if it reached her, it would do no good, and probably the McBrydes would

withhold it. Miss Quested did pull him up short. She was such a dry, sensible girl, and quite

without malice: the last person in Chandrapore wrongfully to accuse an Indian.

## CHAPTER XX

Although Miss Quested had not made herself popular with the English, she brought out all

that was fine in their character. For a few hours an exalted emotion gushed forth, which the

women felt even more keenly than the men, if not for so long. "What can we do for our sister?"

was the only thought of Mesdames Callendar and Lesley, as they drove through the pelting heat

to enquire. Mrs. Turton was the only visitor admitted to the sick-room. She came out ennobled

by an unselfish sorrow. "She is my own darling girl," were the words she spoke, and then,

remembering

that she had called her "not pukka" and resented her engagement to young

Heaslop, she began to cry. No one had ever seen the Collector's wife cry. Capable of tears—yes,

but always reserving them for some adequate occasion, and now it had come. Ah, why had

they not all been kinder to the stranger, more patient, given her not only hospitality but their

hearts? The tender core of the heart that is so seldom used—they employed it for a little, under

the stimulus of remorse. If all is over (as Major Callendar implied), well, all is over, and nothing

can be done, but they retained some responsibility in her grievous wrong that they couldn't define.

If she wasn't one of them, they ought to have made her one, and they could never do that

now, she had passed beyond their invitation. "Why don't one think more of other people?"

sighed pleasure-loving Miss Derek. These regrets only lasted in their pure form for a few hours.

Before sunset, other considerations adulterated them, and the sense of guilt (so strangely connected

with our first sight of any suffering) had begun to wear away.

People drove into the club with studious calm— the jog-trot of country gentlefolk between

green hedgerows, for the natives must not suspect that they were agitated. They exchanged

the usual drinks, but everything tasted different, and then they looked out at the palisade of

cactuses stabbing the purple throat of the sky; they realized that they were thousands of miles

from any scenery that they understood. The club was fuller than usual, and several parents had

brought their children into the rooms reserved for adults, which gave the air of the Residency at

Lucknow. One young mother—a brainless but most beautiful girl—sat on a low ottoman in the

smokingroom with her baby in her arms; her husband was away in the district, and she dared

not return to her bungalow in case the "niggers attacked." The wife of a small railway official,

she was generally snubbed; but this evening, with her abundant figure and masses of corn-gold

hair, she symbolized all that is worth fighting and dying for; more permanent a symbol, perhaps,

than poor Adela. "Don't worry, Mrs. Blakiston, those drums are only Mohurram," the men

would tell her. "Then they've started," she moaned, clasping the infant and rather wishing he

would not blow bubbles down his chin at such a moment as this. "No, of course not, and anyhow,

they're not coming to the club." "And they're not coming to the Burra Sahib's bungalow

either, my dear, and that's where you and your baby'll sleep to-night," answered Mrs. Turton,

towering by her side like Pallas Athene, and determining in the future not to be such a snob.

! The Collector clapped his hands for silence. He was much calmer than when he had flown

out at Fielding. He was indeed always calmer when he addressed several people than in a tête-à-

tête. "I want to talk specially to the ladies," he said. "Not the least cause for alarm. Keep

cool, keep cool. Don't go out more than you can help, don't go into the city, don't talk before

your servants. That's all."

"Harry, is there any news from the city?" asked his wife, standing at some distance from

him, and also assuming her public safety voice. The rest were silent during the august colloquy.

"Everything absolutely normal."

"I had gathered as much. Those drums are merely Mohurram, of course."

Merely the preparation for it— the Procession is not till next week."

"Quite so, not till Monday."

"Mr. McBryde's down there disguised as a Holy Man," said Mrs. Callendar.

"That's exactly the sort of thing that must not be said," he remarked, pointing at her. "Mrs.

Callendar, be more careful than that, please, in these times."

"I . . . well, I . . ." She was not offended, his severity made her feel safe.

"Any more questions? Necessary questions."

"Is the— where is he—" Mrs. Lesley quavered.

"Jail. Bail has been refused."

Fielding spoke next. He wanted to know whether there was an official bulletin about Miss

Quested's health, or whether the grave reports were due to gossip. His question produced a

bad effect, partly because he had pronounced her name; she, like Aziz, was always referred to

by a periphrasis.

"I hope Callendar may be able to let us know how things are going before long."

"I fail to see how that last question can be termed a necessary question," said Mrs. Turton.

"Will all ladies leave the smoking-room now, please?" he cried, clapping his hands again.

"And remember what I have said. We look to you to help us through a difficult time, and you

can help us by behaving as if everything is normal. It is all I ask. Can I rely on you?"

"Yes, indeed, Burra Sahib," they chorused out of peaked, anxious faces. They moved out,

subdued yet elated, Mrs. Blakiston in their midst like a sacred flame. His simple words had

reminded

them that they were an outpost of Empire. By the side of their compassionate love for

Adela another sentiment sprang up which was to strangle it in the long run. Its first signs were

prosaic and small. Mrs. Turton made her loud, hard jokes at bridge, Mrs. Lesley began to knit a

comforter.

When the smoking-room was clear, the Collector sat on the edge of a table, so that he could

dominate without formality. His mind whirled with contradictory impulses. He wanted to avenge

Miss Quested and punish Fielding, while remaining scrupulously fair. He wanted to flog every

native that he saw, but to do nothing that would lead to a riot or to the necessity for military

intervention. The dread of having to call in the troops was vivid to him; soldiers put one thing

straight, but leave a dozen others crooked, and they love to humiliate the civilian administration.

One soldier was in the room this evening—a stray subaltern from a Gurkha regiment; he

was a little drunk, and regarded his presence as providential. The Collector sighed. There

seemed nothing for it but the old weary business of compromise and moderation. He longed for

the good old days when an Englishman could satisfy his own honour and no questions asked

afterwards. Poor young Heaslop had taken a step in this direction, by refusing bail, but the Collector

couldn't feel this was wise of poor young Heaslop. Not only would the Nawab Bahadur

and others be angry, but the Government of India itself also watches—and behind it is that caucus

of cranks and cravens, the British Parliament. He had constantly to remind himself that, in

the eyes of the law, Aziz was not yet guilty, and the effort fatigued him.



The others, less responsible, could behave naturally. They had started speaking of "women

and children"—that phrase that exempts the male from sanity when it has been repeated a few

times. Each felt that all he loved best in this world was at stake, demanded revenge, and was

filled with a not unpleasing glow, in which the chilly and half-known features of Miss Quested

vanished, and were replaced by all that is sweetest and warmest in the private life. "But it's the

women and children," they repeated, and the Collector knew he ought to stop them intoxicating

themselves, but he hadn't the heart. "They ought to be compelled to give hostages," etc. Many

of the said women and children were leaving for the Hill Station in a few days, and the suggestion

was made that they should be packed off at once in a special train.

"And—a jolly suggestion," the subaltern cried. "The army's got to come in sooner or later.

(A special train was in his mind inseparable from troops.) This would never have happened if

Barabas Hill was under military control. Station a bunch of Gurkhas at the entrance of the cave

was all that was wanted."

"Mrs. Blakiston was saying if only there were a few Tommies," remarked someone.

"English no good," he cried, getting his loyalties mixed. "Native troops for this country. Give

me the sporting type of native, give me Gurkhas, give me Rajputs, give me Jats, give me the

Punjabi, give me Sikhs, give me Marathas, Bhils, Afridis and Pathans, and really if it comes to

that, I don't mind if you give me the scums of the bazaars. Properly led, mind. I'd lead them

anywhere—"

The Collector nodded at him pleasantly, and said to his own people: "Don't start carrying

arms about. I want everything to go on precisely as usual, until there's cause for the contrary.

Get the womenfolk off to the hills, but do it quietly, and for Heaven's sake no more talk of special

trains. Never mind what you think or feel. Possibly I have feelings too. One isolated Indian

has attempted— is charged with an attempted crime." He flipped his forehead hard with his

finger-nail, and they all realized that he felt as deeply as they did, and they loved him, and

determined

not to increase his difficulties. "Act upon that fact until there are more facts," he concluded.

"Assume every Indian is an angel."

They murmured, "Right you are, Burra Sahib. . . Angels. . . . Exactly. . . ." From the subaltern:

"Exactly what I said. The native's all right if you get him alone. Lesley! Lesley! You remember

the one I had a knock with on your Maidan last month. Well, he was all right. Any native

who plays polo is all right. What you've got to stamp on is these educated classes, and,

mind, I do know what I'm talking about this time."

The smoking-room door opened, and let in a feminine buzz. Mrs. Turton called out, "She's

better," and from both sections of the community a sigh of joy and relief rose. The Civil Surgeon,

who had brought the good news, came in. His cumbrous, pasty face looked illtempered.

He surveyed the company, saw Fielding crouched below him on an ottoman, and said, "H'm!"

Everyone began pressing him for details. "No one's out of danger in this country as long as they

have a temperature," was his answer. He appeared to resent his patient's recovery, and no one

who knew the old Major and his ways was surprised at this.

"Squat down, Callendar; tell us all about it."

"Take me some time to do that."

"How's the old lady?"

"Temperature."

"My wife heard she was sinking."

"So she may be. I guarantee nothing. I really can't be plagued with questions, Lesley."

"Sorry, old man."

"Heaslop's just behind me."

At the name of Heaslop a fine and beautiful expression was renewed on every face. Miss

Quested was only a victim, but young Heaslop was a martyr; he was the recipient of all the evil

intended against them by the country they had tried to serve; he was bearing the sahib's cross.

And they fretted because they could do nothing for him in return; they felt so craven sitting on

softness and attending the course of the law.

"I wish to God I hadn't given my jewel of an assistant leave. I'd cut my tongue out first. To

feel I'm responsible, that's what hits me. To refuse, and then give in under pressure. That is

what I did, my sons, that is what I did."

Fielding took his pipe from his mouth and looked at it thoughtfully. Thinking him afraid, the

other went on: "I understood an Englishman was to accompany the expedition. That is why I

gave in."

"No one blames you, my dear Callendar," said the Collector, looking down. "We are all to

blame in the sense that we ought to have seen the expedition was insufficiently guaranteed,

and stopped it. I knew about it myself; we lent our car this morning to take the ladies to the

station. We are all implicated in that sense, but not an atom of blame attaches to you personally."

"I don't feel that. I wish I could. Responsibility is a very awful thing, and I've no use for the

man who shirks it." His eyes were directed on Fielding. Those who knew that Fielding had

undertaken

to accompany and missed the early train were sorry for him; it was what is to be expected

when a man mixes himself up with natives; always ends in some indignity. The Collector,

who knew more, kept silent, for the official in him still hoped that Fielding would toe the line.

The conversation turned to women and children again, and under its cover Major Callendar got

hold of the subaltern, and set him on to bait the schoolmaster. Pretending to be more drunk

than he really was, he began to make semioffensive remarks.

"Heard about Miss Quested's servant?" reinforced the Major.

"No, what about him?"

"Heaslop warned Miss Quested's servant last night never to lose sight of her. Prisoner got

hold of this and managed to leave him behind. Bribed him. Heaslop has just found out the

whole story, with names and sums—a well-known pimp to those people gave the money,

Mohammed

Latif by name. So much for the servant. What about the Englishman—our friend here?

How did they get rid of him? Money again."

Fielding rose to his feet, supported by murmurs and exclamations, for no one yet suspected

his integrity.

"Oh, I'm being misunderstood, apologies," said the Major offensively. "I didn't mean they

bribed Mr. Fielding."

"Then what do you mean?"

"They paid the other Indian to make you late— Godbole. He was saying his prayers. I know now

those prayers!"

"That's ridiculous . . ." He sat down again, trembling with rage; person after person was being

dragged into the mud.

Having shot this bolt, the Major prepared the next. "Heaslop also found out something from

his mother. Aziz paid a herd of natives to suffocate her in a cave. That was the end of her, or

would have been only she got out. Nicely planned, wasn't it? Neat. Then he could go on with

the girl. He and she and a guide, provided by the same Mohammed Latif. Guide now can't be

found. Pretty." His voice broke into a roar. "It's not the time for sitting down. It's the time for

action. Call in the troops and clear the bazaars."

The Major's outbursts were always discounted, but he made everyone uneasy on this occasion.

The crime was even worse than they had supposed—the unspeakable limit of cynicism,

untouched since 1857. Fielding forgot his anger on poor old Godbole's behalf, and became

thoughtful; the evil was propagating in every direction, it seemed to have an existence of its

own, apart from anything that was done or said by individuals, and he understood better why

both Aziz and Hamidullah had been inclined to lie down and die. His adversary saw that he was

in trouble, and now ventured to say, "I suppose nothing that's said inside the club will go outside

the club?" winking the while at Lesley.

"Why should it?" responded Lesley.

"Oh, nothing. I only heard a rumour that a certain member here present has been seeing

the prisoner this afternoon. You can't run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, at least not

in this country."

"Does anyone here present want to?"

Fielding was determined not to be drawn again. He had something to say, but it should be

at his own moment. The attack failed to mature, because the Collector did not support it. Attention



shifted from him for a time. Then the buzz of women broke out again. The door had been

opened by Ronny.

The young man looked exhausted and tragic, also gentler than usual. He always showed

deference to his superiors, but now it came straight from his heart. He seemed to appeal for

their protection in the insult that had befallen him, and they, in instinctive homage, rose to their

feet. But every human act in the East is tainted with officialism, and while honouring him they

condemned Aziz and India. Fielding realized this, and he remained seated. It was an ungracious,

a caddish thing to do, perhaps an unsound thing to do, but he felt he had been passive

long enough, and that he might be drawn into the wrong current if he did not make a stand.

Ronny, who had not seen him, said in husky tones, "Oh, please— please all sit down, I only

want to listen what has been decided."

"Heaslop, I'm telling them I'm against any show of force," said the Collector apologetically.

"I don't know whether you will feel as I do, but that is how I am situated. When the verdict is

obtained, it will be another nrttter."

"You are sure to know best; I have no experience, Burra Sahib."

"How is your mother, old boy?"

"Better, thank you. I wish everyone would sit down."

"Some have never got up," the young soldier said.

"And the Major brings us an excellent report of Miss Quested," Turton went on.

"I do, I do, I'm satisfied."

"You thought badly of her earlier, did you not, Major? That's why I refused bail."

Callendar laughed with friendly inwardness, and said, "Heaslop, Heaslop, next time bail's

wanted, ring up the old doctor before giving it; his shoulders are broad, and, speaking in the

strictest confidence, don't take the old doctor's opinion too seriously. He's a blithering idiot, we

can always leave it at that, but he'll do the little he can towards keeping in quod t he—" He

broke off with affected politeness. "Oh, but he has one of his friends here."

The subaltern called, "Stand up, you swine."

"Mr. Fielding, what has prevented you from standing up?" said the Collector, entering the

fray at last. It was the attack for which Fielding had waited, and to which he must reply.

"May I make a statement, sir?"

"Certainly."

Seasoned and self-contained, devoid of the fervours of nationality or youth, the schoolmaster

did what was for him a comparatively easy thing. He stood up and said, "I believe Dr. Aziz to

be innocent."

"You have a right to hold that opinion if you choose, but pray is that any reason why you

should insult Mr. Heaslop?"

"May I conclude my statement?"

Certainly."

"I am waiting for the verdict of the courts. If he is guilty I resign from my service, and leave

India. I resign from the club now."

Hear, hear! " said voices, not entirely hostile, for they liked the fellow for speaking out.

"You have not answered my question. Why did you not stand when Mr. Heaslop entered?"

"With all deference, sir, I am not here to answer questions, but to make a personal statement,

and I have concluded it."

"May I ask whether you have taken over charge of this District?"

Fielding moved towards the door.

"One moment, Mr. Fielding. You are not to go yet, please. Before you leave the club, from

which you do very well to resign, you will express some detestation of the crime, and you will

apologize to Mr. Heaslop."

"Are you speaking to me officially, sir?"

The Collector, who never spoke otherwise, was so infuriated that he lost his head. He cried,

"Leave this room at once, and I deeply regret that I demeaned myself to meet you at the station.

You have sunk to the level of your associates; you are weak, weak, that is what is wrong

with you--"

"I want to leave the room, but cannot while this gentleman prevents me," said Fielding

lightly; the subaltern had got across his path.

"Let him go," said Ronny, almost in tears.

It was the only appeal that could have saved the situation. Whatever Heaslop wished must

be done. There was a slight scuffle at the door, from which Fielding was propelled, a little more

quickly than is natural, into the room where the ladies were playing cards. "Fancy if I'd fallen or

got angry," he thought. Of course he was a little angry. His peers had never offered him violence

or called him weak before, besides Heaslop had heaped coals of fire on his head. He

wished he had not picked the quarrel over poor suffering Heaslop, when there were clearer issues

at hand.

However, there it was, done, muddled through, and to cool himself and regain mental balance

he went on to the upper verandah for a moment, where the first object he saw was the

Marabar Hills. At this distance and hour they leapt into beauty; they were Monsalvat, Walhalla,

the towers of a cathedral, peopled with saints and heroes, and covered with flowers. What miscreant

lurked in them, presently to be detected by the activities of the law? Who was the guide,

and had he been found yet? What was the "echo" of which the girl complained? He did not

know, but presently he would know. Great is information, and she shall prevail. It was the last

moment of the light, and as he gazed at the Marabar Hills they seemed to move gracefully towards

him like a queen, and their charm became the sky's. At the moment they vanished they were everywhere, the cool benediction of the night descended, the stars sparkled, and the

whole universe was a hill. Lovely, exquisite moment—but passing the Englishman with averted

face and on swift wings. He experienced nothing himself; it was as if someone had told him

there was such a moment, and he was obliged to believe. And he felt dubious and discontented

suddenly, and wondered whether he was really and truly successful as a human being. After

forty years' experience, he had learnt to manage his life and make the best of it on advanced

European lines, had developed his personality, explored his limitations, controlled his passions—

and he had done it all without becoming either pedantic or worldly. A creditable achievement,

but as the moment passed, he felt he ought to have been working at something else the whole

time,— he didn't know at what, never would know, never could know, and that was why he felt

sad.

## CHAPTER XXI

Dismissing his regrets, as inappropriate to the matter in hand, he accomplished the last section

of the day by riding off to his new allies. He was glad that he had broken with the club, for

he would have picked up scraps of gossip there, and reported them down in the city, and he

was glad to be denied this opportunity. He would miss his billiards, and occasional tennis, and

cracks with McBryde, but really that was all, so light did he travel. At the entrance of the bazaars,

a tiger made his horse shy~a youth dressed up as a tiger, the body striped brown and

yellow, a mask over the face. Mohurram was working up. The city beat a good many drums, but

seemed good-tempered. He was invited to inspect a small tazia~a flimsy and frivolous erection,

more like a crinoline than the tomb of the grandson of the Prophet, done to death at Kerbela.

Excited children were pasting coloured paper over its ribs. The rest of the evening he spent with

the Nawab Bahadur, Hamidullah, Mahmoud Ali, and others of the confederacy. The campaign

was also working up. A telegram had been sent to the famous Amritrao, and his acceptance

received.

Application for bail was to be renewed—it could not well be withheld now that Miss

Quested was out of danger. The conference was serious and sensible, but marred by a group of

itinerant musicians, who were allowed to play in the compound. Each held a large earthenware

jar, containing pebbles, and jerked it up and down in time to a doleful chant. Distracted by the

noise, he suggested their dismissal, but the Nawab Bahadur vetoed it; he said that musicians,

who had walked many miles, might bring good luck.

Late at night, he had an inclination to tell Professor Godbole of the tactical and moral error

he had made in being rude to Heaslop, and to hear what he would say. But the old fellow had

gone to bed and slipped off unmolested to his new job in a day or two: he always did possess

the knack of slipping off.

## CHAPTER XXII

Adela lay for several days in the McBrydes' bungalow. She had been touched by the sun,



also hundreds of cactus spines had to be picked out of her flesh. Hour after hour Miss Derek

and Mrs. McBryde examined her through magnifying glasses, always coming on fresh colonies,

tiny hairs that might snap off and be drawn into the blood if they were neglected. She lay passive

beneath their fingers, which developed the shock that had begun in the cave. Hitherto she

had not much minded whether she was touched or not: her senses were abnormally inert and

the only contact she anticipated was that of mind. Everything now was transferred to the surface

of her body, which began to avenge itself, and feed unhealthily. People seemed very much

alike, except that some would come close while others kept away. "In space things touch, in

time things part," she repeated to herself while the thorns were being extracted—her brain so

weak that she could not decide whether the phrase was a p

**Salman Ruhdie**  
*Haroun and the Sea of stories*