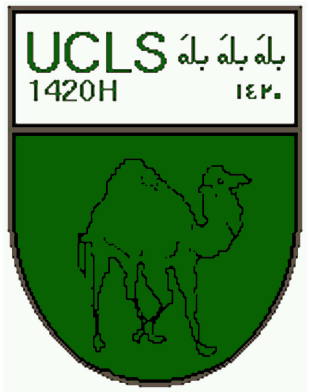
Jenny Wren
Our Mutual Friend

by

Dickens McCartney



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`https://jennywren.vlsm.org/`

Rev. 01 - 23-Jul-2021

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Mends its foolish ways

Now we, spend our days
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All because of you
Jenny Wren

--- Dickens McCartney

Jenny Wren — whose real name is Fanny Cleaver, is "the dolls' dressmaker" with whom Lizzie lives after her father dies. She is crippled with a bad back, although not ugly. She is very motherly towards her drunken father, whom she calls her "bad child". Jenny later cares for Eugene while he recovers from Headstone's attack on his life. She may have a romance with Sloppy at the end of the book, which the reader may surmise will end in marriage. Although her mannerisms give her a certain "strangeness", Jenny is very perceptive, identifying Eugene Wrayburn's intentions towards Lizzie in his small actions. Her role is a creator and a caretaker, and her "pleasant fancies" of "flowers, bird song, numbers of blessed, white-clad children" reflect the mind's ability to rise above adverse circumstances — `https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jenny_Wren`

Jenny Wren aka Fanny Cleaver — Sharp and sassy maker of doll's clothes, pincushions, and pen-wipers. Crippled (my back's bad, and my legs are queer), she lives with her drunken father whom she refers to as her bad child. Lizzie Hexam, after the death of her father, takes lodging with Jenny who helps Lizzie escape London when pursued by Bradley Headstone and Eugene Wrayburn. It was difficult to guess the age of this strange creature, for her poor figure furnished no clue to it, and her face was at once so young and so old. Twelve, or at the most thirteen, might be near the mark — `https://www.charlesdickenspage.com/dickens-characters-t-z.html`

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Part I

Book the First:
THE CUP AND THE LIP

Chapter 1

ON THE LOOK OUT

In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in.

THE BIRD OF PREY.

The figures in this boat were those of a strong man with ragged grizzled hair and a sun-browned face, and a dark girl of nineteen or twenty, sufficiently like him to be recognizable as his daughter. The girl rowed, pulling a pair of sculls very easily; the man, with the rudder-lines slack in his hands, and his hands loose in his waistband, kept an eager look out. He had no net, hook, or line, and he could not be a fisherman; his boat had no cushion for a sitter, no paint, no inscription, no appliance beyond a rusty boathook and a coil of rope, and he could not be a waterman; his boat was too crazy and too small to take in cargo for delivery, and he could not be a lighterman or river-carrier; there was no clue to what he looked for, but he looked for something, with a most intent and searching gaze. The tide, which had turned an hour before, was running down, and his eyes watched every little race and eddy in its broad sweep, as the boat made slight head-way against it, or drove stern foremost before it, according as he directed his daughter by a movement of his head. She watched his face as earnestly as he watched the river. But, in the intensity of her look there was a touch of dread or horror.

Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered, and its sodden state, this boat and the two figures in it obviously were doing something that they often did, and were seeking what they often sought. Half savage as the man showed, with no covering on his matted head, with his brown arms bare to between the elbow and the shoulder, with the loose knot of a looser kerchief lying low on his bare breast in a wilderness of beard and whisker, with such dress as he wore seeming to be made out of the mud that begrimed his boat, still there was a business-like usage in his steady gaze. So with every litle action of the girl, with every turn of her wrist, perhaps most of all with her look of dread or horror; they were things of usage.

'Keep her out, Lizzie. Tide runs strong here. Keep her well afore the sweep of it.'

Trusting to the girl's skill and making no use of the rudder, he eyed the coming tide with an absorbed attention. So the girl eyed him. But, it happened now, that a slant of light from the setting sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, coloured it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl's eye, and she shivered.

'What ails you?' said the man, immediately aware of it, though so intent on the advancing waters; 'I see nothing afloat.'

The red light was gone, the shudder was gone, and his gaze, which had come back to the boat for a moment, travelled away again. Wheresoever the strong tide met with an impediment, his gaze paused for an instant. At every mooring-chain and rope, at every stationery boat or barge that split the current into a broad-arrowhead, at the offsets from the piers of Southwark Bridge, at the paddles of the river steamboats as they beat the filthy water, at the floating logs of timber lashed together lying off certain wharves, his shining eyes darted a hungry look. After a darkening hour or so, suddenly the rudder-lines tightened in his hold, and he steered hard towards the Surrey shore.

Always watching his face, the girl instantly answered to the action in her sculling; presently the boat swung round, quivered as from a sudden jerk, and the upper half of the man was stretched

out over the stern.

The girl pulled the hood of a cloak she wore, over her head and over her face, and, looking backward so that the front folds of this hood were turned down the river, kept the boat in that direction going before the tide. Until now, the boat had barely held her own, and had hovered about one spot; but now, the banks changed swiftly, and the deepening shadows and the kindling lights of London Bridge were passed, and the tiers of shipping lay on either hand.

It was not until now that the upper half of the man came back into the boat. His arms were wet and dirty, and he washed them over the side. In his right hand he held something, and he washed that in the river too. It was money. He chinked it once, and he blew upon it once, and he spat upon it once,–'for luck,' he hoarsely said –before he put it in his pocket.

'Lizzie!'

The girl turned her face towards him with a start, and rowed in silence. Her face was very pale. He was a hook-nosed man, and with that and his bright eyes and his ruffled head, bore a certain likeness to a roused bird of prey.

'Take that thing off your face.'

She put it back.

'Here! and give me hold of the sculls. I'll take the rest of the spell.'

'No, no, father! Father!–I cannot sit so near it!' No! I can't indeed.

He was moving towards her to change places, but her terrified expostulation stopped him and he resumed his seat.

'What hurt can it do you?'

'None, none. But I cannot bear it.'

'It's my belief you hate the sight of the very river.'

'I–I do not like it, father.'

'As if it wasn't your living! As if it wasn't meat and drink to you!'

At these latter words the girl shivered again, and for a moment paused in her rowing, seeming to turn deadly faint. It escaped his attention, for he was glancing over the stern at something the boat had in tow.

'How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another.'

Lizzie took her right hand from the scull it held, and touched her lips with it, and for a moment held it out lovingly towards him: then, without speaking, she resumed her rowing, as another boat of similar appearance, though in rather better trim, came out from a dark place and dropped softly alongside.

'In luck again, Gaffer?' said a man with a squinting leer, who sculled her and who was alone, 'I know'd you was in luck again, by your wake as you come down.'

'Ah!' replied the other, drily. 'So you're out, are you?'

'Yes, pardner.'

There was now a tender yellow moonlight on the river, and the new comer, keeping half his boat's length astern of the other boat looked hard at its track.

'I says to myself,' he went on, 'directly you hove in view, yonder's Gaffer, and in luck again, by George if he ain't! Scull it is, pardner–don't fret yourself–I didn't touch him.' This was in answer to a quick impatient movement on the part of Gaffer: the speaker at the same time unshipping his scull on that side, and laying his hand on the gunwale of Gaffer's boat and holding to it.

'He's had touches enough not to want no more, as well as I make him out, Gaffer! Been a knocking about with a pretty many tides, ain't he pardner? Such is my out-of-luck ways, you see! He must have passed me when he went up last time, for I was on the lookout below bridge here. I a'most think you're like the wulturs, pardner, and scent 'em out.'

He spoke in a dropped voice, and with more than one glance at Lizzie who had pulled on her hood again. Both men then looked with a weird unholy interest in the wake of Gaffer's boat.

'Easy does it, betwixt us. Shall I take him aboard, pardner?'

'No,' said the other. In so surly a tone that the man, after a blank stare, acknowledged it with the retort:

'–Arn't been eating nothing as has disagreed with you, have you, pardner?'

'Why, yes, I have,' said Gaffer. 'I have been swallowing too much of that word, Pardner. I am no pardner of yours.'

'Since when was you no pardner of mine, Gaffer Hexam Esquire?'

'Since you was accused of robbing a man. Accused of robbing a live man!' said Gaffer, with great indignation.

'And what if I had been accused of robbing a dead man, Gaffer?'

'You COULDN'T do it.'

'Couldn't you, Gaffer?'

'No. Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? 'Tother world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it? Don't try to go confounding the rights and wrongs of things in that way. But it's worthy of the sneaking spirit that robs a live man.'

'I'll tell you what it is–.'

'No you won't. I'll tell you what it is. You got off with a short time of it for putting your hand in the pocket of a sailor, a live sailor. Make the most of it and think yourself lucky, but don't think after that to come over ME with your pardners. We have worked together in time past, but we work together no more in time present nor yet future. Let go. Cast off!'

'Gaffer! If you think to get rid of me this way–.'

'If I don't get rid of you this way, I'll try another, and chop you over the fingers with the stretcher, or take a pick at your head with the boat-hook. Cast off! Pull you, Lizzie. Pull home, since you won't let your father pull.'

Lizzie shot ahead, and the other boat fell astern. Lizzie's father, composing himself into the easy attitude of one who had asserted the high moralities and taken an unassailable position, slowly lighted a pipe, and smoked, and took a survey of what he had in tow. What he had in tow, lunged itself at him sometimes in an awful manner when the boat was checked, and sometimes seemed to try to wrench itself away, though for the most part it followed submissively. A neophyte might have fancied that the ripples passing over it were dreadfully like faint changes of expression on a sightless face; but Gaffer was no neophyte and had no fancies.

Part II

Book The Second:
BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Chapter 1

OF AN EDUCATIONAL CHARACTER

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

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

and became inflamed with a sacred zeal to administer it, matters not. It was the function of the chief executioner to hold forth, and it was the function of the acolyte to dart at sleeping infants, yawning infants, restless infants, whimpering infants, and smooth their wretched faces; sometimes with one hand, as if he were anointing them for a whisker; sometimes with both hands, applied after the fashion of blinkers. And so the jumble would be in action in this department for a mortal hour; the exponent drawling on to My Dearert Childerrenerr, let us say, for example, about the beautiful coming to the Sepulchre; and repeating the word Sepulchre (commonly used among infants) five hundred times, and never once hinting what it meant; the conventional boy smoothing away right and left, as an infallible commentary; the whole hot-bed of flushed and exhausted infants exchanging measles, rashes, whooping-cough, fever, and stomach disorders, as if they were assembled in High Market for the purpose.

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

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

'If you please, Mr Headstone.'

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

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

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

'Why do you doubt it, Mr Headstone?'

'I did not say I doubted it.'

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

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

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

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

'The question is, sir–?'

'Whether you had not better leave well alone.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent hair-guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left–natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places–this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself.

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

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

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

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

like the covers of school-books.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Good-night, Miss Peecher,' said the Master.

'Good-night, Mr Headstone,' said the Mistress.

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

'Well, Mary Anne?' said Miss Peecher.

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

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

Mary Anne again hailed.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

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

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

Mary Anne again hailed.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'They say she's very handsome.'

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

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

'Personal pronoun.'

'Person, They?'

'Third person.'

'Number, They?'

'Plural number.'

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

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' said Mary Anne, disconcerted now she came to think of it; 'but I don't know that I mean more than her brother himself.' As she said it, she unhooked her arm.

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

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

'Why verb active, Mary Anne?'

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

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

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

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

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

'How often have you seen her since?'

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

'How does she support herself?'

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

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

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

The boy knocked at a door, and the door promptly opened with a spring and a click. A parlour door within a small entry stood open, and disclosed a child–a dwarf–a girl–a something–sitting on a little low old-fashioned arm-chair, which had a kind of little working bench before it.

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

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

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

'I wanted to see my sister.'

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

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

'Hexam is my name.'

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

'Mr Headstone, my schoolmaster.'

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

They complied in silence, and the little figure went on with its work of gumming or gluing together with a camel's-hair brush certain pieces of cardboard and thin wood, previously cut into various shapes. The scissors and knives upon the bench showed that the child herself had cut them; and the bright scraps of velvet and silk and ribbon also strewn upon the bench showed that when duly stuffed (and stuffing too was there), she was to cover them smartly. The dexterity of her nimble fingers was remarkable, and, as she brought two thin edges accurately together by giving them a little bite, she would glance at the visitors out of the corners of her grey eyes with a look that out-sharpened all her other sharpness.

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

'You make pincushions,' said Charley.

'What else do I make?'

'Pen-wipers,' said Bradley Headstone.

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

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

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

'Dinner-mats?'

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

'Ladies' bonnets?'

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

'I hope it's a good business?'

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

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

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

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

'Busier. I'm slack just now. I finished a large mourning order the day before yesterday. Doll I work for, lost a canary-bird.' The person of the house gave another little laugh, and then nodded

her head several times, as who should moralize, 'Oh this world, this world!'

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

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

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

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

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

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

An uncommonly emphatic shake of her little fist close before her eyes, seemed to ease the mind of the person of the house; for she added with recovered composure, 'No, no, no. No children for me. Give me grown-ups.'

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

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

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

'Charley! You!'

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

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

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

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

Bradley seemed to think so.

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

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You one two three,
My com-pa-nie,
And don't mind me.'
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–pointing this impromptu rhyme with three points of her thin fore-finger.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'You have your own room here?'

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

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

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

It might have fallen out so, any way; but Bradley Headstone also noticed that immediately after this, Lizzie, who had not taken off her bonnet, rather hurriedly proposed that as the room was getting dark they should go out into the air. They went out; the visitors saying good-night to the doll's dressmaker, whom they left, leaning back in her chair with her arms crossed, singing to herself in a sweet thoughtful little voice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'What old man?'

'The terrible drunken old man, in the list slippers and the night-cap.'

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

'The child's father is employed by the house that employs me; that's how I came to know it, Charley. The father is like his own father, a weak wretched trembling creature, falling to pieces, never sober. But a good workman too, at the work he does. The mother is dead. This poor ailing

little creature has come to be what she is, surrounded by drunken people from her cradle–if she ever had one, Charley.'

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

'Don't you, Charley?'

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

'Any compensation–restitution–never mind the word, you know my meaning. Father's grave.'

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

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

'I, Charley?'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She had been practical enough with him, in suffering and striving for him; but she only laid her hand upon his shoulder–not reproachfully–and tapped it twice or thrice. She had been used to do so, to soothe him when she carried him about, a child as heavy as herself. Tears started to his eyes.

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

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

'And say I haven't hurt you.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Why not?'

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

'Again, why?'

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

'Then he knows your sister?'

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

'Does now?'

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

'Going to see her, I dare say.'

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

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

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

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

'And the other times?'

'There was only one other time that I know of. When my father was killed by accident, he chanced to be one of the finders. He was mooning about, I suppose, taking liberties with people's chins; but there he was, somehow. He brought the news home to my sister early in the morning,

and brought Miss Abbey Potterson, a neighbour, to help break it to her. He was mooning about the house when I was fetched home in the afternoon–they didn't know where to find me till my sister could be brought round sufficiently to tell them–and then he mooned away.'

'And is that all?'

'That's all, sir.'

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

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

'Hardly any, sir.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'Mr Headstone coming home, ma'am.'

In about a minute, Mary Anne again hailed.

'Yes, Mary Anne?'

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

Miss Peecher repressed a sigh as she gathered her work together for bed, and transfixed that part of her dress where her heart would have been if she had had the dress on, with a sharp, sharp needle.

Part III

Book The Third:
A LONG LANE

Chapter 1

LODGERS IN QUEER STREET

It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark. Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing, and choking; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither. Gaslights flared in the shops with a haggard and unblest air, as knowing themselves to be night-creatures that had no business abroad under the sun; while the sun itself when it was for a few moments dimly indicated through circling eddies of fog, showed as if it had gone out and were collapsing flat and cold. Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City–which call Saint Mary Axe–it was rusty-black. From any point of the high ridge of land northward, it might have been discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard; but this was not perceivable in the streets at their feet, where the whole metropolis was a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh.

At nine o'clock on such a morning, the place of business of Pubsey and Co. was not the liveliest object even in Saint Mary Axe–which is not a very lively spot–with a sobbing gaslight in the counting-house window, and a burglarious stream of fog creeping in to strangle it through the keyhole of the main door. But the light went out, and the main door opened, and Riah came forth with a bag under his arm.

Almost in the act of coming out at the door, Riah went into the fog, and was lost to the eyes of Saint Mary Axe. But the eyes of this history can follow him westward, by Cornhill, Cheapside, Fleet Street, and the Strand, to Piccadilly and the Albany. Thither he went at his grave and measured pace, staff in hand, skirt at heel; and more than one head, turning to look back at his venerable figure already lost in the mist, supposed it to be some ordinary figure indistinctly seen, which fancy and the fog had worked into that passing likeness.

Arrived at the house in which his master's chambers were on the second floor, Riah proceeded up the stairs, and paused at Fascination Fledgeby's door. Making free with neither bell nor knocker, he struck upon the door with the top of his staff, and, having listened, sat down on the threshold. It was characteristic of his habitual submission, that he sat down on the raw dark staircase, as many of his ancestors had probably sat down in dungeons, taking what befell him as it might befall.

After a time, when he had grown so cold as to be fain to blow upon his fingers, he arose and knocked with his staff again, and listened again, and again sat down to wait. Thrice he repeated these actions before his listening ears were greeted by the voice of Fledgeby, calling from his bed, 'Hold your row!–I'll come and open the door directly!' But, in lieu of coming directly, he fell into a sweet sleep for some quarter of an hour more, during which added interval Riah sat upon the stairs and waited with perfect patience.

At length the door stood open, and Mr Fledgeby's retreating drapery plunged into bed again.

Following it at a respectful distance, Riah passed into the bed-chamber, where a fire had been sometime lighted, and was burning briskly.

'Why, what time of night do you mean to call it?' inquired Fledgeby, turning away beneath the clothes, and presenting a comfortable rampart of shoulder to the chilled figure of the old man.

'Sir, it is full half-past ten in the morning.'

'The deuce it is! Then it must be precious foggy?'

'Very foggy, sir.'

'And raw, then?'

'Chill and bitter,' said Riah, drawing out a handkerchief, and wiping the moisture from his beard and long grey hair as he stood on the verge of the rug, with his eyes on the acceptable fire.

With a plunge of enjoyment, Fledgeby settled himself afresh.

'Any snow, or sleet, or slush, or anything of that sort?' he asked.

'No, sir, no. Not quite so bad as that. The streets are pretty clean.'

'You needn't brag about it,' returned Fledgeby, disappointed in his desire to heighten the contrast between his bed and the streets. 'But you're always bragging about something. Got the books there?'

'They are here, sir.'

'All right. I'll turn the general subject over in my mind for a minute or two, and while I'm about it you can empty your bag and get ready for me.'

With another comfortable plunge, Mr Fledgeby fell asleep again. The old man, having obeyed his directions, sat down on the edge of a chair, and, folding his hands before him, gradually yielded to the influence of the warmth, and dozed. He was roused by Mr Fledgeby's appearing erect at the foot of the bed, in Turkish slippers, rose-coloured Turkish trousers (got cheap from somebody who had cheated some other somebody out of them), and a gown and cap to correspond. In that costume he would have left nothing to be desired, if he had been further fitted out with a bottomless chair, a lantern, and a bunch of matches.

'Now, old 'un!' cried Fascination, in his light raillery, 'what dodgery are you up to next, sitting there with your eyes shut? You ain't asleep. Catch a weasel at it, and catch a Jew!'

'Truly, sir, I fear I nodded,' said the old man.

'Not you!' returned Fledgeby, with a cunning look. 'A telling move with a good many, I dare say, but it won't put ME off my guard. Not a bad notion though, if you want to look indifferent in driving a bargain. Oh, you are a dodger!'

The old man shook his head, gently repudiating the imputation, and suppressed a sigh, and moved to the table at which Mr Fledgeby was now pouring out for himself a cup of steaming and fragrant coffee from a pot that had stood ready on the hob. It was an edifying spectacle, the young man in his easy chair taking his coffee, and the old man with his grey head bent, standing awaiting his pleasure.

'Now!' said Fledgeby. 'Fork out your balance in hand, and prove by figures how you make it out that it ain't more. First of all, light that candle.'

Riah obeyed, and then taking a bag from his breast, and referring to the sum in the accounts for which they made him responsible, told it out upon the table. Fledgeby told it again with great care, and rang every sovereign.

'I suppose,' he said, taking one up to eye it closely, 'you haven't been lightening any of these; but it's a trade of your people's, you know. YOU understand what sweating a pound means, don't you?'

'Much as you do, sir,' returned the old man, with his hands under opposite cuffs of his loose sleeves, as he stood at the table, deferentially observant of the master's face. 'May I take the liberty to say something?'

'You may,' Fledgeby graciously conceded.

'Do you not, sir–without intending it–of a surety without intending it–sometimes mingle the character I fairly earn in your employment, with the character which it is your policy that I should

bear?'

'I don't find it worth my while to cut things so fine as to go into the inquiry,' Fascination coolly answered.

'Not in justice?'

'Bother justice!' said Fledgeby.

'Not in generosity?'

'Jews and generosity!' said Fledgeby. 'That's a good connexion! Bring out your vouchers, and don't talk Jerusalem palaver.'

The vouchers were produced, and for the next half-hour Mr Fledgeby concentrated his sublime attention on them. They and the accounts were all found correct, and the books and the papers resumed their places in the bag.

'Next,' said Fledgeby, 'concerning that bill-broking branch of the business; the branch I like best. What queer bills are to be bought, and at what prices? You have got your list of what's in the market?'

'Sir, a long list,' replied Riah, taking out a pocket-book, and selecting from its contents a folded paper, which, being unfolded, became a sheet of foolscap covered with close writing.

'Whew!' whistled Fledgeby, as he took it in his hand. 'Queer Street is full of lodgers just at present! These are to be disposed of in parcels; are they?'

'In parcels as set forth,' returned the old man, looking over his master's shoulder; 'or the lump.'

'Half the lump will be waste-paper, one knows beforehand,' said Fledgeby. 'Can you get it at waste-paper price? That's the question.'

Riah shook his head, and Fledgeby cast his small eyes down the list. They presently began to twinkle, and he no sooner became conscious of their twinkling, than he looked up over his shoulder at the grave face above him, and moved to the chimney-piece. Making a desk of it, he stood there with his back to the old man, warming his knees, perusing the list at his leisure, and often returning to some lines of it, as though they were particularly interesting. At those times he glanced in the chimney-glass to see what note the old man took of him. He took none that could be detected, but, aware of his employer's suspicions, stood with his eyes on the ground.

Mr Fledgeby was thus amiably engaged when a step was heard at the outer door, and the door was heard to open hastily. 'Hark! That's your doing, you Pump of Israel,' said Fledgeby; 'you can't have shut it.' Then the step was heard within, and the voice of Mr Alfred Lammle called aloud, 'Are you anywhere here, Fledgeby?' To which Fledgeby, after cautioning Riah in a low voice to take his cue as it should be given him, replied, 'Here I am!' and opened his bedroom door.

'Come in!' said Fledgeby. 'This gentleman is only Pubsey and Co. of Saint Mary Axe, that I am trying to make terms for an unfortunate friend with in a matter of some dishonoured bills. But really Pubsey and Co. are so strict with their debtors, and so hard to move, that I seem to be wasting my time. Can't I make ANY terms with you on my friend's part, Mr Riah?'

'I am but the representative of another, sir,' returned the Jew in a low voice. 'I do as I am bidden by my principal. It is not my capital that is invested in the business. It is not my profit that arises therefrom.'

'Ha ha!' laughed Fledgeby. 'Lammle?'

'Ha ha!' laughed Lammle. 'Yes. Of course. We know.'

'Devilish good, ain't it, Lammle?' said Fledgeby, unspeakably amused by his hidden joke.

'Always the same, always the same!' said Lammle. 'Mr–'

'Riah, Pubsey and Co. Saint Mary Axe,' Fledgeby put in, as he wiped away the tears that trickled from his eyes, so rare was his enjoyment of his secret joke.

'Mr Riah is bound to observe the invariable forms for such cases made and provided,' said Lammle.

'He is only the representative of another!' cried Fledgeby. 'Does as he is told by his principal! Not his capital that's invested in the business. Oh, that's good! Ha ha ha ha!' Mr Lammle joined in the laugh and looked knowing; and the more he did both, the more exquisite the secret joke became for Mr Fledgeby.

'However,' said that fascinating gentleman, wiping his eyes again, 'if we go on in this way, we shall seem to be almost making game of Mr Riah, or of Pubsey and Co. Saint Mary Axe, or of somebody: which is far from our intention. Mr Riah, if you would have the kindness to step into the next room for a few moments while I speak with Mr Lammle here, I should like to try to make terms with you once again before you go.'

The old man, who had never raised his eyes during the whole transaction of Mr Fledgeby's joke, silently bowed and passed out by the door which Fledgeby opened for him. Having closed it on him, Fledgeby returned to Lammle, standing with his back to the bedroom fire, with one hand under his coat-skirts, and all his whiskers in the other.

'Halloa!' said Fledgeby. 'There's something wrong!'

'How do you know it?' demanded Lammle.

'Because you show it,' replied Fledgeby in unintentional rhyme.

'Well then; there is,' said Lammle; 'there IS something wrong; the whole thing's wrong.'

'I say!' remonstrated Fascination very slowly, and sitting down with his hands on his knees to stare at his glowering friend with his back to the fire.

'I tell you, Fledgeby,' repeated Lammle, with a sweep of his right arm, 'the whole thing's wrong. The game's up.'

'What game's up?' demanded Fledgeby, as slowly as before, and more sternly.

'THE game. OUR game. Read that.'

Fledgeby took a note from his extended hand and read it aloud. 'Alfred Lammle, Esquire. Sir: Allow Mrs Podsnap and myself to express our united sense of the polite attentions of Mrs Alfred Lammle and yourself towards our daughter, Georgiana. Allow us also, wholly to reject them for the future, and to communicate our final desire that the two families may become entire strangers. I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient and very humble servant, JOHN PODSNAP.' Fledgeby looked at the three blank sides of this note, quite as long and earnestly as at the first expressive side, and then looked at Lammle, who responded with another extensive sweep of his right arm.

'Whose doing is this?' said Fledgeby.

'Impossible to imagine,' said Lammle.

'Perhaps,' suggested Fledgeby, after reflecting with a very discontented brow, 'somebody has been giving you a bad character.'

'Or you,' said Lammle, with a deeper frown.

Mr Fledgeby appeared to be on the verge of some mutinous expressions, when his hand happened to touch his nose. A certain remembrance connected with that feature operating as a timely warning, he took it thoughtfully between his thumb and forefinger, and pondered; Lammle meanwhile eyeing him with furtive eyes.

'Well!' said Fledgeby. 'This won't improve with talking about. If we ever find out who did it, we'll mark that person. There's nothing more to be said, except that you undertook to do what circumstances prevent your doing.'

'And that you undertook to do what you might have done by this time, if you had made a prompter use of circumstances,' snarled Lammle.

'Hah! That,' remarked Fledgeby, with his hands in the Turkish trousers, 'is matter of opinion.'

'Mr Fledgeby,' said Lammle, in a bullying tone, 'am I to understand that you in any way reflect upon me, or hint dissatisfaction with me, in this affair?'

'No,' said Fledgeby; 'provided you have brought my promissory note in your pocket, and now hand it over.'

Lammle produced it, not without reluctance. Fledgeby looked at it, identified it, twisted it up, and threw it into the fire. They both looked at it as it blazed, went out, and flew in feathery ash up the chimney.

'NOW, Mr Fledgeby,' said Lammle, as before; 'am I to understand that you in any way reflect upon me, or hint dissatisfaction with me, in this affair?'

'No,' said Fledgeby.

'Finally and unreservedly no?'

'Yes.'

'Fledgeby, my hand.'

Mr Fledgeby took it, saying, 'And if we ever find out who did this, we'll mark that person. And in the most friendly manner, let me mention one thing more. I don't know what your circumstances are, and I don't ask. You have sustained a loss here. Many men are liable to be involved at times, and you may be, or you may not be. But whatever you do, Lammle, don't–don't–don't, I beg of you–ever fall into the hands of Pubsey and Co. in the next room, for they are grinders. Regular flayers and grinders, my dear Lammle,' repeated Fledgeby with a peculiar relish, 'and they'll skin you by the inch, from the nape of your neck to the sole of your foot, and grind every inch of your skin to tooth-powder. You have seen what Mr Riah is. Never fall into his hands, Lammle, I beg of you as a friend!'

Mr Lammle, disclosing some alarm at the solemnity of this affectionate adjuration, demanded why the devil he ever should fall into the hands of Pubsey and Co.?

'To confess the fact, I was made a little uneasy,' said the candid Fledgeby, 'by the manner in which that Jew looked at you when he heard your name. I didn't like his eye. But it may have been the heated fancy of a friend. Of course if you are sure that you have no personal security out, which you may not be quite equal to meeting, and which can have got into his hands, it must have been fancy. Still, I didn't like his eye.'

The brooding Lammle, with certain white dints coming and going in his palpitating nose, looked as if some tormenting imp were pinching it. Fledgeby, watching him with a twitch in his mean face which did duty there for a smile, looked very like the tormentor who was pinching.

'But I mustn't keep him waiting too long,' said Fledgeby, 'or he'll revenge it on my unfortunate friend. How's your very clever and agreeable wife? She knows we have broken down?'

'I showed her the letter.'

'Very much surprised?' asked Fledgeby.

'I think she would have been more so,' answered Lammle, 'if there had been more go in YOU?'

'Oh!–She lays it upon me, then?'

'Mr Fledgeby, I will not have my words misconstrued.'

'Don't break out, Lammle,' urged Fledgeby, in a submissive tone, 'because there's no occasion. I only asked a question. Then she don't lay it upon me? To ask another question.'

'No, sir.'

'Very good,' said Fledgeby, plainly seeing that she did. 'My compliments to her. Good-bye!'

They shook hands, and Lammle strode out pondering. Fledgeby saw him into the fog, and, returning to the fire and musing with his face to it, stretched the legs of the rose-coloured Turkish trousers wide apart, and meditatively bent his knees, as if he were going down upon them.

'You have a pair of whiskers, Lammle, which I never liked,' murmured Fledgeby, 'and which money can't produce; you are boastful of your manners and your conversation; you wanted to pull my nose, and you have let me in for a failure, and your wife says I am the cause of it. I'll bowl you down. I will, though I have no whiskers,' here he rubbed the places where they were due, 'and no manners, and no conversation!'

Having thus relieved his noble mind, he collected the legs of the Turkish trousers, straightened himself on his knees, and called out to Riah in the next room, 'Halloa, you sir!' At sight of the old man re-entering with a gentleness monstrously in contrast with the character he had given him,

Mr Fledgeby was so tickled again, that he exclaimed, laughing, 'Good! Good! Upon my soul it is uncommon good!'

'Now, old 'un,' proceeded Fledgeby, when he had had his laugh out, 'you'll buy up these lots that I mark with my pencil–there's a tick there, and a tick there, and a tick there–and I wager two-pence you'll afterwards go on squeezing those Christians like the Jew you are. Now, next you'll want a cheque–or you'll say you want it, though you've capital enough somewhere, if one only knew where, but you'd be peppered and salted and grilled on a gridiron before you'd own to it–and that cheque I'll write.'

When he had unlocked a drawer and taken a key from it to open another drawer, in which was another key that opened another drawer, in which was another key that opened another drawer, in which was the cheque book; and when he had written the cheque; and when, reversing the key and drawer process, he had placed his cheque book in safety again; he beckoned the old man, with the folded cheque, to come and take it.

'Old 'un,' said Fledgeby, when the Jew had put it in his pocketbook, and was putting that in the breast of his outer garment; 'so much at present for my affairs. Now a word about affairs that are not exactly mine. Where is she?'

With his hand not yet withdrawn from the breast of his garment, Riah started and paused.

'Oho!' said Fledgeby. 'Didn't expect it! Where have you hidden her?'

Showing that he was taken by surprise, the old man looked at his master with some passing confusion, which the master highly enjoyed.

'Is she in the house I pay rent and taxes for in Saint Mary Axe?' demanded Fledgeby.

'No, sir.'

'Is she in your garden up atop of that house–gone up to be dead, or whatever the game is?' asked Fledgeby.

'No, sir.'

'Where is she then?'

Riah bent his eyes upon the ground, as if considering whether he could answer the question without breach of faith, and then silently raised them to Fledgeby's face, as if he could not.

'Come!' said Fledgeby. 'I won't press that just now. But I want to know this, and I will know this, mind you. What are you up to?'

The old man, with an apologetic action of his head and hands, as not comprehending the master's meaning, addressed to him a look of mute inquiry.

'You can't be a gallivanting dodger,' said Fledgeby. 'For you're a "regular pity the sorrows", you know–if you DO know any Christian rhyme–"whose trembling limbs have borne him to"–et cetrer. You're one of the Patriarchs; you're a shaky old card; and you can't be in love with this Lizzie?'

'O, sir!' expostulated Riah. 'O, sir, sir, sir!'

'Then why,' retorted Fledgeby, with some slight tinge of a blush, 'don't you out with your reason for having your spoon in the soup at all?'

'Sir, I will tell you the truth. But (your pardon for the stipulation) it is in sacred confidence; it is strictly upon honour.'

'Honour too!' cried Fledgeby, with a mocking lip. 'Honour among Jews. Well. Cut away.'

'It is upon honour, sir?' the other still stipulated, with respectful firmness.

'Oh, certainly. Honour bright,' said Fledgeby.

The old man, never bidden to sit down, stood with an earnest hand laid on the back of the young man's easy chair. The young man sat looking at the fire with a face of listening curiosity, ready to check him off and catch him tripping.

'Cut away,' said Fledgeby. 'Start with your motive.'

'Sir, I have no motive but to help the helpless.'

Mr Fledgeby could only express the feelings to which this incredible statement gave rise in his breast, by a prodigiously long derisive sniff.

'How I came to know, and much to esteem and to respect, this damsel, I mentioned when you saw her in my poor garden on the house-top,' said the Jew.

'Did you?' said Fledgeby, distrustfully. 'Well. Perhaps you did, though.'

'The better I knew her, the more interest I felt in her fortunes. They gathered to a crisis. I found her beset by a selfish and ungrateful brother, beset by an unacceptable wooer, beset by the snares of a more powerful lover, beset by the wiles of her own heart.'

'She took to one of the chaps then?'

'Sir, it was only natural that she should incline towards him, for he had many and great advantages. But he was not of her station, and to marry her was not in his mind. Perils were closing round her, and the circle was fast darkening, when I–being as you have said, sir, too old and broken to be suspected of any feeling for her but a father's–stepped in, and counselled flight. I said, "My daughter, there are times of moral danger when the hardest virtuous resolution to form is flight, and when the most heroic bravery is flight." She answered, she had had this in her thoughts; but whither to fly without help she knew not, and there were none to help her. I showed her there was one to help her, and it was I. And she is gone.'

'What did you do with her?' asked Fledgeby, feeling his cheek.

'I placed her,' said the old man, 'at a distance;' with a grave smooth outward sweep from one another of his two open hands at arm's length; 'at a distance–among certain of our people, where her industry would serve her, and where she could hope to exercise it, unassailed from any quarter.'

Fledgeby's eyes had come from the fire to notice the action of his hands when he said 'at a distance.' Fledgeby now tried (very unsuccessfully) to imitate that action, as he shook his head and said, 'Placed her in that direction, did you? Oh you circular old dodger!'

With one hand across his breast and the other on the easy chair, Riah, without justifying himself, waited for further questioning. But, that it was hopeless to question him on that one reserved point, Fledgeby, with his small eyes too near together, saw full well.

'Lizzie,' said Fledgeby, looking at the fire again, and then looking up. 'Humph, Lizzie. You didn't tell me the other name in your garden atop of the house. I'll be more communicative with you. The other name's Hexam.'

Riah bent his head in assent.

'Look here, you sir,' said Fledgeby. 'I have a notion I know something of the inveigling chap, the powerful one. Has he anything to do with the law?'

'Nominally, I believe it his calling.'

'I thought so. Name anything like Lightwood?'

'Sir, not at all like.'

'Come, old 'un,' said Fledgeby, meeting his eyes with a wink, 'say the name.'

'Wrayburn.'

'By Jupiter!' cried Fledgeby. 'That one, is it? I thought it might be the other, but I never dreamt of that one! I shouldn't object to your baulking either of the pair, dodger, for they are both conceited enough; but that one is as cool a customer as ever I met with. Got a beard besides, and presumes upon it. Well done, old 'un! Go on and prosper!'

Brightened by this unexpected commendation, Riah asked were there more instructions for him?

'No,' said Fledgeby, 'you may toddle now, Judah, and grope about on the orders you have got.' Dismissed with those pleasing words, the old man took his broad hat and staff, and left the great presence: more as if he were some superior creature benignantly blessing Mr Fledgeby, than the poor dependent on whom he set his foot. Left alone, Mr Fledgeby locked his outer door, and came back to his fire.

'Well done you!' said Fascination to himself. 'Slow, you may be; sure, you are!' This he twice or thrice repeated with much complacency, as he again dispersed the legs of the Turkish trousers and bent the knees.

'A tidy shot that, I flatter myself,' he then soliloquised. 'And a Jew brought down with it! Now, when I heard the story told at Lammle's, I didn't make a jump at Riah. Not a hit of it; I got at him by degrees.' Herein he was quite accurate; it being his habit, not to jump, or leap, or make an upward spring, at anything in life, but to crawl at everything.

'I got at him,' pursued Fledgeby, feeling for his whisker, 'by degrees. If your Lammles or your Lightwoods had got at him anyhow, they would have asked him the question whether he hadn't something to do with that gal's disappearance. I knew a better way of going to work. Having got behind the hedge, and put him in the light, I took a shot at him and brought him down plump. Oh! It don't count for much, being a Jew, in a match against ME!'

Another dry twist in place of a smile, made his face crooked here.

'As to Christians,' proceeded Fledgeby, 'look out, fellow-Christians, particularly you that lodge in Queer Street! I have got the run of Queer Street now, and you shall see some games there. To work a lot of power over you and you not know it, knowing as you think yourselves, would be almost worth laying out money upon. But when it comes to squeezing a profit out of you into the bargain, it's something like!'

With this apostrophe Mr Fledgeby appropriately proceeded to divest himself of his Turkish garments, and invest himself with Christian attire. Pending which operation, and his morning ablutions, and his anointing of himself with the last infallible preparation for the production of luxuriant and glossy hair upon the human countenance (quacks being the only sages he believed in besides usurers), the murky fog closed about him and shut him up in its sooty embrace. If it had never let him out any more, the world would have had no irreparable loss, but could have easily replaced him from its stock on hand.

Part IV

Book The Fourth:
A TURNING

Chapter 1

SETTING TRAPS

Plashwater Weir Mill Lock looked tranquil and pretty on an evening in the summer time. A soft air stirred the leaves of the fresh green trees, and passed like a smooth shadow over the river, and like a smoother shadow over the yielding grass. The voice of the falling water, like the voices of the sea and the wind, were as an outer memory to a contemplative listener; but not particularly so to Mr Riderhood, who sat on one of the blunt wooden levers of his lock-gates, dozing. Wine must be got into a butt by some agency before it can be drawn out; and the wine of sentiment never having been got into Mr Riderhood by any agency, nothing in nature tapped him.

As the Rogue sat, ever and again nodding himself off his balance, his recovery was always attended by an angry stare and growl, as if, in the absence of any one else, he had aggressive inclinations towards himself. In one of these starts the cry of 'Lock, ho! Lock!' prevented his relapse into a doze. Shaking himself as he got up like the surly brute he was, he gave his growl a responsive twist at the end, and turned his face down-stream to see who hailed.

It was an amateur-sculler, well up to his work though taking it easily, in so light a boat that the Rogue remarked: 'A little less on you, and you'd a'most ha' been a Wagerbut'; then went to work at his windlass handles and sluices, to let the sculler in. As the latter stood in his boat, holding on by the boat-hook to the woodwork at the lock side, waiting for the gates to open, Rogue Riderhood recognized his 'T'other governor,' Mr Eugene Wrayburn; who was, however, too indifferent or too much engaged to recognize him.

The creaking lock-gates opened slowly, and the light boat passed in as soon as there was room enough, and the creaking lock-gates closed upon it, and it floated low down in the dock between the two sets of gates, until the water should rise and the second gates should open and let it out. When Riderhood had run to his second windlass and turned it, and while he leaned against the lever of that gate to help it to swing open presently, he noticed, lying to rest under the green hedge by the towing-path astern of the Lock, a Bargeman.

The water rose and rose as the sluice poured in, dispersing the scum which had formed behind the lumbering gates, and sending the boat up, so that the sculler gradually rose like an apparition against the light from the bargeman's point of view. Riderhood observed that the bargeman rose too, leaning on his arm, and seemed to have his eyes fastened on the rising figure.

But, there was the toll to be taken, as the gates were now complaining and opening. The T'other governor tossed it ashore, twisted in a piece of paper, and as he did so, knew his man.

'Ay, ay? It's you, is it, honest friend?' said Eugene, seating himself preparatory to resuming his sculls. 'You got the place, then?'

'I got the place, and no thanks to you for it, nor yet none to Lawyer Lightwood,' gruffly answered Riderhood.

'We saved our recommendation, honest fellow,' said Eugene, 'for the next candidate–the one who will offer himself when you are transported or hanged. Don't be long about it; will you be so good?'

So imperturbable was the air with which he gravely bent to his work that Riderhood remained

staring at him, without having found a retort, until he had rowed past a line of wooden objects by the weir, which showed like huge teetotums standing at rest in the water, and was almost hidden by the drooping boughs on the left bank, as he rowed away, keeping out of the opposing current. It being then too late to retort with any effect–if that could ever have been done–the honest man confined himself to cursing and growling in a grim under-tone. Having then got his gates shut, he crossed back by his plank lock-bridge to the towing-path side of the river.

If, in so doing, he took another glance at the bargeman, he did it by stealth. He cast himself on the grass by the Lock side, in an indolent way, with his back in that direction, and, having gathered a few blades, fell to chewing them. The dip of Eugene Wrayburn's sculls had become hardly audible in his ears when the bargeman passed him, putting the utmost width that he could between them, and keeping under the hedge. Then, Riderhood sat up and took a long look at his figure, and then cried: 'Hi–I–i! Lock, ho! Lock! Plashwater Weir Mill Lock!'

The bargeman stopped, and looked back.

'Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, T'otherest gov–er–nor–or–or–or!' cried Mr Riderhood, with his hands to his mouth.

The bargeman turned back. Approaching nearer and nearer, the bargeman became Bradley Headstone, in rough water-side second-hand clothing.

'Wish I may die,' said Riderhood, smiting his right leg, and laughing, as he sat on the grass, 'if you ain't ha' been a imitating me, T'otherest governor! Never thought myself so good-looking afore!'

Truly, Bradley Headstone had taken careful note of the honest man's dress in the course of that night-walk they had had together. He must have committed it to memory, and slowly got it by heart. It was exactly reproduced in the dress he now wore. And whereas, in his own schoolmaster clothes, he usually looked as if they were the clothes of some other man, he now looked, in the clothes of some other man or men, as if they were his own.

'THIS your Lock?' said Bradley, whose surprise had a genuine air; 'they told me, where I last inquired, it was the third I should come to. This is only the second.'

'It's my belief, governor,' returned Riderhood, with a wink and shake of his head, 'that you've dropped one in your counting. It ain't Locks as YOU'VE been giving your mind to. No, no!'

As he expressively jerked his pointing finger in the direction the boat had taken, a flush of impatience mounted into Bradley's face, and he looked anxiously up the river.

'It ain't Locks as YOU'VE been a reckoning up,' said Riderhood, when the schoolmaster's eyes came back again. 'No, no!'

'What other calculations do you suppose I have been occupied with? Mathematics?'

'I never heerd it called that. It's a long word for it. Hows'ever, p'raps you call it so,' said Riderhood, stubbornly chewing his grass.

'It. What?'

'I'll say them, instead of it, if you like,' was the coolly growled reply. 'It's safer talk too.'

'What do you mean that I should understand by them?'

'Spites, affronts, offences giv' and took, deadly aggrawations, such like,' answered Riderhood.

Do what Bradley Headstone would, he could not keep that former flush of impatience out of his face, or so master his eyes as to prevent their again looking anxiously up the river.

'Ha ha! Don't be afeerd, T'otherest,' said Riderhood. 'The T'other's got to make way agin the stream, and he takes it easy. You can soon come up with him. But wot's the good of saying that to you! YOU know how fur you could have outwalked him betwixt anywheres about where he lost the tide–say Richmond–and this, if you had a mind to it.'

'You think I have been following him?' said Bradley.

'I KNOW you have,' said Riderhood.

'Well! I have, I have,' Bradley admitted. 'But,' with another anxious look up the river, 'he may land.'

'Easy you! He won't be lost if he does land,' said Riderhood. 'He must leave his boat behind him. He can't make a bundle or a parcel on it, and carry it ashore with him under his arm.'

'He was speaking to you just now,' said Bradley, kneeling on one knee on the grass beside the Lock-keeper. 'What did he say?'

'Cheek,' said Riderhood.

'What?'

'Cheek,' repeated Riderhood, with an angry oath; 'cheek is what he said. He can't say nothing but cheek. I'd ha' liked to plump down aboard of him, neck and crop, with a heavy jump, and sunk him.'

Bradley turned away his haggard face for a few moments, and then said, tearing up a tuft of grass:

'Damn him!'

'Hooroar!' cried Riderhood. 'Does you credit! Hooroar! I cry chorus to the T'otherest.'

'What turn,' said Bradley, with an effort at self-repression that forced him to wipe his face, 'did his insolence take to-day?'

'It took the turn,' answered Riderhood, with sullen ferocity, 'of hoping as I was getting ready to be hanged.'

'Let him look to that,' cried Bradley. 'Let him look to that! It will be bad for him when men he has injured, and at whom he has jeered, are thinking of getting hanged. Let HIM get ready for HIS fate, when that comes about. There was more meaning in what he said than he knew of, or he wouldn't have had brains enough to say it. Let him look to it; let him look to it! When men he has wronged, and on whom he has bestowed his insolence, are getting ready to be hanged, there is a death-bell ringing. And not for them.'

Riderhood, looking fixedly at him, gradually arose from his recumbent posture while the schoolmaster said these words with the utmost concentration of rage and hatred. So, when the words were all spoken, he too kneeled on one knee on the grass, and the two men looked at one another.

'Oh!' said Riderhood, very deliberately spitting out the grass he had been chewing. 'Then, I make out, T'otherest, as he is a-going to her?'

'He left London,' answered Bradley, 'yesterday. I have hardly a doubt, this time, that at last he is going to her.'

'You ain't sure, then?'

'I am as sure here,' said Bradley, with a clutch at the breast of his coarse shirt, 'as if it was written there;' with a blow or a stab at the sky.

'Ah! But judging from the looks on you,' retorted Riderhood, completely ridding himself of his grass, and drawing his sleeve across his mouth, 'you've made ekally sure afore, and have got disapinted. It has told upon you.'

'Listen,' said Bradley, in a low voice, bending forward to lay his hand upon the Lock-keeper's shoulder. 'These are my holidays.'

'Are they, by George!' muttered Riderhood, with his eyes on the passion-wasted face. 'Your working days must be stiff 'uns, if these is your holidays.'

'And I have never left him,' pursued Bradley, waving the interruption aside with an impatient hand, 'since they began. And I never will leave him now, till I have seen him with her.'

'And when you have seen him with her?' said Riderhood.

'–I'll come back to you.'

Riderhood stiffened the knee on which he had been resting, got up, and looked gloomily at his new friend. After a few moments they walked side by side in the direction the boat had taken, as if by tacit consent; Bradley pressing forward, and Riderhood holding back; Bradley getting out his neat prim purse into his hand (a present made him by penny subscription among his pupils); and Riderhood, unfolding his arms to smear his coat-cuff across his mouth with a thoughtful air.

'I have a pound for you,' said Bradley.

'You've two,' said Riderhood.

Bradley held a sovereign between his fingers. Slouching at his side with his eyes upon the towing-path, Riderhood held his left hand open, with a certain slight drawing action towards himself. Bradley dipped in his purse for another sovereign, and two chinked in Riderhood's hand, the drawing action of which, promptly strengthening, drew them home to his pocket.

'Now, I must follow him,' said Bradley Headstone. 'He takes this river-road–the fool!–to confuse observation, or divert attention, if not solely to baffle me. But he must have the power of making himself invisible before he can shake Me off.'

Riderhood stopped. 'If you don't get disapinted agin, T'otherest, maybe you'll put up at the Lock-house when you come back?'

'I will.'

Riderhood nodded, and the figure of the bargeman went its way along the soft turf by the side of the towing-path, keeping near the hedge and moving quickly. They had turned a point from which a long stretch of river was visible. A stranger to the scene might have been certain that here and there along the line of hedge a figure stood, watching the bargeman, and waiting for him to come up. So he himself had often believed at first, until his eyes became used to the posts, bearing the dagger that slew Wat Tyler, in the City of London shield.

Within Mr Riderhood's knowledge all daggers were as one. Even to Bradley Headstone, who could have told to the letter without book all about Wat Tyler, Lord Mayor Walworth, and the King, that it is dutiful for youth to know, there was but one subject living in the world for every sharp destructive instrument that summer evening. So, Riderhood looking after him as he went, and he with his furtive hand laid upon the dagger as he passed it, and his eyes upon the boat, were much upon a par.

The boat went on, under the arching trees, and over their tranquil shadows in the water. The bargeman skulking on the opposite bank of the stream, went on after it. Sparkles of light showed Riderhood when and where the rower dipped his blades, until, even as he stood idly watching, the sun went down and the landscape was dyed red. And then the red had the appearance of fading out of it and mounting up to Heaven, as we say that blood, guiltily shed, does.

Turning back towards his Lock (he had not gone out of view of it), the Rogue pondered as deeply as it was within the contracted power of such a fellow to do. 'Why did he copy my clothes? He could have looked like what he wanted to look like, without that.' This was the subject-matter in his thoughts; in which, too, there came lumbering up, by times, like any half floating and half sinking rubbish in the river, the question, Was it done by accident? The setting of a trap for finding out whether it was accidentally done, soon superseded, as a practical piece of cunning, the abstruser inquiry why otherwise it was done. And he devised a means.

Rogue Riderhood went into his Lock-house, and brought forth, into the now sober grey light, his chest of clothes. Sitting on the grass beside it, he turned out, one by one, the articles it contained, until he came to a conspicuous bright red neckerchief stained black here and there by wear. It arrested his attention, and he sat pausing over it, until he took off the rusty colourless wisp that he wore round his throat, and substituted the red neckerchief, leaving the long ends flowing. 'Now,' said the Rogue, 'if arter he sees me in this neckhankecher, I see him in a sim'lar neckhankecher, it won't be accident!' Elated by his device, he carried his chest in again and went to supper.

'Lock ho! Lock!' It was a light night, and a barge coming down summoned him out of a long doze. In due course he had let the barge through and was alone again, looking to the closing of his gates, when Bradley Headstone appeared before him, standing on the brink of the Lock.

'Halloa!' said Riderhood. 'Back a' ready, T'otherest?'

'He has put up for the night, at an Angler's Inn,' was the fatigued and hoarse reply. 'He goes on, up the river, at six in the morning. I have come back for a couple of hours' rest.'

'You want 'em,' said Riderhood, making towards the schoolmaster by his plank bridge.

'I don't want them,' returned Bradley, irritably, 'because I would rather not have them, but

would much prefer to follow him all night. However, if he won't lead, I can't follow. I have been waiting about, until I could discover, for a certainty, at what time he starts; if I couldn't have made sure of it, I should have stayed there.–This would be a bad pit for a man to be flung into with his hands tied. These slippery smooth walls would give him no chance. And I suppose those gates would suck him down?'

'Suck him down, or swaller him up, he wouldn't get out,' said Riderhood. 'Not even, if his hands warn't tied, he wouldn't. Shut him in at both ends, and I'd give him a pint o' old ale ever to come up to me standing here.'

Bradley looked down with a ghastly relish. 'You run about the brink, and run across it, in this uncertain light, on a few inches width of rotten wood,' said he. 'I wonder you have no thought of being drowned.'

'I can't be!' said Riderhood.

'You can't be drowned?'

'No!' said Riderhood, shaking his head with an air of thorough conviction, 'it's well known. I've been brought out o' drowning, and I can't be drowned. I wouldn't have that there busted B'lowbridger aware on it, or her people might make it tell agin' the damages I mean to get. But it's well known to water-side characters like myself, that him as has been brought out o drowning, can never be drowned.'

Bradley smiled sourly at the ignorance he would have corrected in one of his pupils, and continued to look down into the water, as if the place had a gloomy fascination for him.

'You seem to like it,' said Riderhood.

He took no notice, but stood looking down, as if he had not heard the words. There was a very dark expression on his face; an expression that the Rogue found it hard to understand. It was fierce, and full of purpose; but the purpose might have been as much against himself as against another. If he had stepped back for a spring, taken a leap, and thrown himself in, it would have been no surprising sequel to the look. Perhaps his troubled soul, set upon some violence, did hover for the moment between that violence and another.

'Didn't you say,' asked Riderhood, after watching him for a while with a sidelong glance, 'as you had come back for a couple o' hours' rest?' But, even then he had to jog him with his elbow before he answered.

'Eh? Yes.'

'Hadn't you better come in and take your couple o' hours' rest?'

'Thank you. Yes.'

With the look of one just awakened, he followed Riderhood into the Lock-house, where the latter produced from a cupboard some cold salt beef and half a loaf, some gin in a bottle, and some water in a jug. The last he brought in, cool and dripping, from the river.

'There, T'otherest,' said Riderhood, stooping over him to put it on the table. 'You'd better take a bite and a sup, afore you takes your snooze.' The draggling ends of the red neckerchief caught the schoolmaster's eyes. Riderhood saw him look at it.

'Oh!' thought that worthy. 'You're a-taking notice, are you? Come! You shall have a good squint at it then.' With which reflection he sat down on the other side of the table, threw open his vest, and made a pretence of re-tying the neckerchief with much deliberation.

Bradley ate and drank. As he sat at his platter and mug, Riderhood saw him, again and yet again, steal a look at the neckerchief, as if he were correcting his slow observation and prompting his sluggish memory. 'When you're ready for your snooze,' said that honest creature, 'chuck yourself on my bed in the corner, T'otherest. It'll be broad day afore three. I'll call you early.'

'I shall require no calling,' answered Bradley. And soon afterwards, divesting himself only of his shoes and coat, laid himself down.

Riderhood, leaning back in his wooden arm-chair with his arms folded on his breast, looked at him lying with his right hand clenched in his sleep and his teeth set, until a film came over his own sight, and he slept too. He awoke to find that it was daylight, and that his visitor was already

astir, and going out to the river-side to cool his head:–'Though I'm blest,' muttered Riderhood at the Lock-house door, looking after him, 'if I think there's water enough in all the Thames to do THAT for you!' Within five minutes he had taken his departure, and was passing on into the calm distance as he had passed yesterday. Riderhood knew when a fish leaped, by his starting and glancing round.

'Lock ho! Lock!' at intervals all day, and 'Lock ho! Lock!' thrice in the ensuing night, but no return of Bradley. The second day was sultry and oppressive. In the afternoon, a thunderstorm came up, and had but newly broken into a furious sweep of rain when he rushed in at the door, like the storm itself.

'You've seen him with her!' exclaimed Riderhood, starting up.

'I have.'

'Where?'

'At his journey's end. His boat's hauled up for three days. I heard him give the order. Then, I saw him wait for her and meet her. I saw them'–he stopped as though he were suffocating, and began again–'I saw them walking side by side, last night.'

'What did you do?'

'Nothing.'

'What are you going to do?'

He dropped into a chair, and laughed. Immediately afterwards, a great spirt of blood burst from his nose.

'How does that happen?' asked Riderhood.

'I don't know. I can't keep it back. It has happened twice–three times–four times–I don't know how many times–since last night. I taste it, smell it, see it, it chokes me, and then it breaks out like this.'

He went into the pelting rain again with his head bare, and, bending low over the river, and scooping up the water with his two hands, washed the blood away. All beyond his figure, as Riderhood looked from the door, was a vast dark curtain in solemn movement towards one quarter of the heavens. He raised his head and came back, wet from head to foot, but with the lower parts of his sleeves, where he had dipped into the river, streaming water.

'Your face is like a ghost's,' said Riderhood.

'Did you ever see a ghost?' was the sullen retort.

'I mean to say, you're quite wore out.'

'That may well be. I have had no rest since I left here. I don't remember that I have so much as sat down since I left here.'

'Lie down now, then,' said Riderhood.

'I will, if you'll give me something to quench my thirst first.'

The bottle and jug were again produced, and he mixed a weak draught, and another, and drank both in quick succession. 'You asked me something,' he said then.

'No, I didn't,' replied Riderhood.

'I tell you,' retorted Bradley, turning upon him in a wild and desperate manner, 'you asked me something, before I went out to wash my face in the river.

'Oh! Then?' said Riderhood, backing a little. 'I asked you wot you wos a-going to do.'

'How can a man in this state know?' he answered, protesting with both his tremulous hands, with an action so vigorously angry that he shook the water from his sleeves upon the floor, as if he had wrung them. 'How can I plan anything, if I haven't sleep?'

'Why, that's what I as good as said,' returned the other. 'Didn't I say lie down?'

'Well, perhaps you did.'

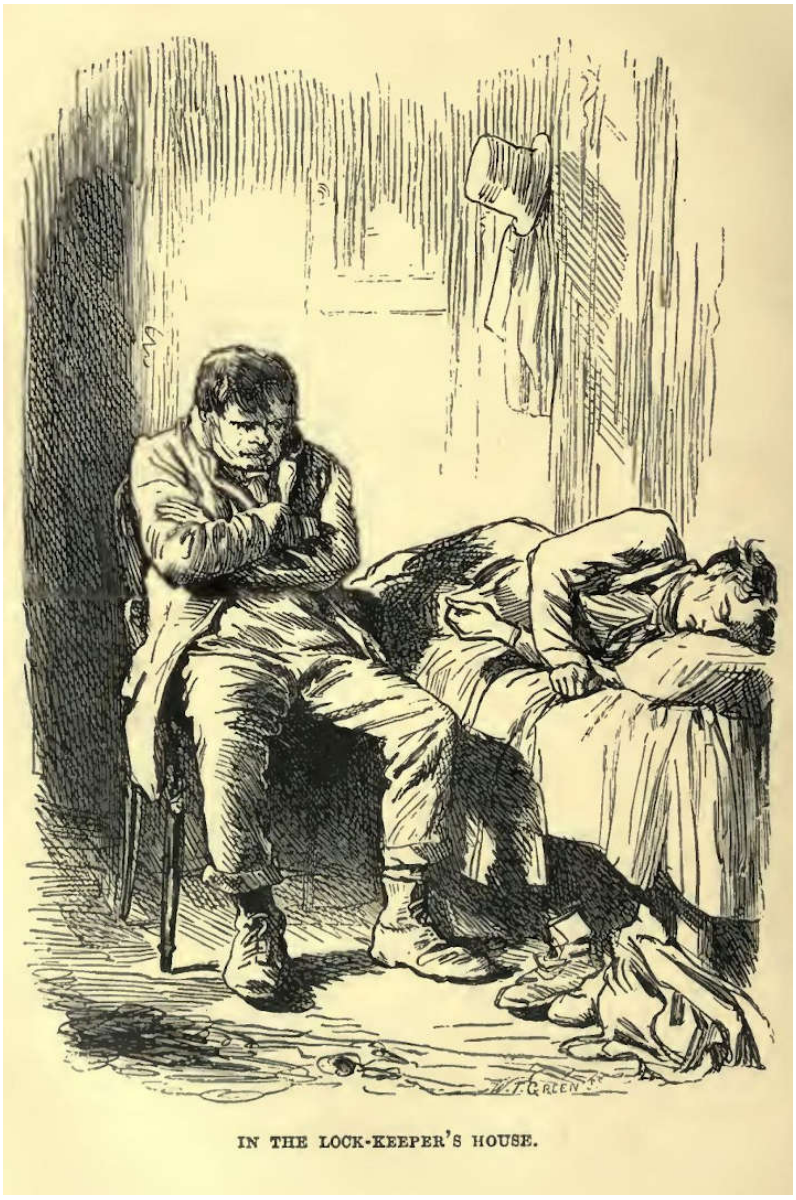
'Well! Anyways I says it again. Sleep where you slept last; the sounder and longer you can sleep, the better you'll know arterwards what you're up to.'

His pointing to the truckle bed in the corner, seemed gradually to bring that poor couch to Bradley's wandering remembrance. He slipped off his worn down-trodden shoes, and cast himself

heavily, all wet as he was, upon the bed.

Riderhood sat down in his wooden arm-chair, and looked through the window at the lightning, and listened to the thunder. But, his thoughts were far from being absorbed by the thunder and the lightning, for again and again and again he looked very curiously at the exhausted man upon the bed. The man had turned up the collar of the rough coat he wore, to shelter himself from the storm, and had buttoned it about his neck. Unconscious of that, and of most things, he had left the coat so, both when he had laved his face in the river, and when he had cast himself upon the bed; though it would have been much easier to him if he had unloosened it.

The thunder rolled heavily, and the forked lightning seemed to make jagged rents in every part of the vast curtain without, as Riderhood sat by the window, glancing at the bed. Sometimes, he saw the man upon the bed, by a red light; sometimes, by a blue; sometimes, he scarcely saw him in the darkness of the storm; sometimes he saw nothing of him in the blinding glare of palpitating white fire. Anon, the rain would come again with a tremendous rush, and the river would seem to rise to meet it, and a blast of wind, bursting upon the door, would flutter the hair and dress of the man, as if invisible messengers were come around the bed to carry him away. From all these phases of the storm, Riderhood would turn, as if they were interruptions–rather striking interruptions possibly, but interruptions still–of his scrutiny of the sleeper.



IN THE LOCK-KEEPER'S HOUSE.

'He sleeps sound,' he said within himself; 'yet he's that up to me and that noticing of me that my getting out of my chair may wake him, when a rattling peal won't; let alone my touching of him.'

He very cautiously rose to his feet. 'T'otherest,' he said, in a low, calm voice, 'are you a lying easy? There's a chill in the air, governor. Shall I put a coat over you?'

No answer.

'That's about what it is a'ready, you see,' muttered Riderhood in a lower and a different voice; 'a coat over you, a coat over you!'

The sleeper moving an arm, he sat down again in his chair, and feigned to watch the storm from the window. It was a grand spectacle, but not so grand as to keep his eyes, for half a minute together, from stealing a look at the man upon the bed.

It was at the concealed throat of the sleeper that Riderhood so often looked so curiously, until the sleep seemed to deepen into the stupor of the dead-tired in mind and body. Then, Riderhood came from the window cautiously, and stood by the bed.

'Poor man!' he murmured in a low tone, with a crafty face, and a very watchful eye and ready foot, lest he should start up; 'this here coat of his must make him uneasy in his sleep. Shall I loosen it for him, and make him more comfortable? Ah! I think I ought to do it, poor man. I think I will.'

He touched the first button with a very cautious hand, and a step backward. But, the sleeper remaining in profound unconsciousness, he touched the other buttons with a more assured hand, and perhaps the more lightly on that account. Softly and slowly, he opened the coat and drew it back.

The draggling ends of a bright-red neckerchief were then disclosed, and he had even been at the pains of dipping parts of it in some liquid, to give it the appearance of having become stained by wear. With a much-perplexed face, Riderhood looked from it to the sleeper, and from the sleeper to it, and finally crept back to his chair, and there, with his hand to his chin, sat long in a brown study, looking at both.

Part V

Take Note!

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