BARNABY RUDGE

A TALE OF THE RIOTS OF 'EIGHTY

by Charles Dickens

Contibutor's Note:

I've left in archaic forms such as 'to-morrow' or 'to-day' as they

occured in my copy. Also please be aware if spell-checking, that within

dialog many 'mispelled' words exist, i.e. 'wery' for 'very', as intended

by the author.

D.L.

PREFACE

The late Mr Waterton having, some time ago, expressed his opinion that

ravens are gradually becoming extinct in England, I offered the few

following words about my experience of these birds.

The raven in this story is a compound of two great originals, of whom I

was, at different times, the proud possessor. The first was in the bloom

of his youth, when he was discovered in a modest retirement in London,

by a friend of mine, and given to me. He had from the first, as Sir Hugh

Evans says of Anne Page, 'good gifts', which he improved by study and

attention in a most exemplary manner. He slept in a stable--generally

on horseback--and so terrified a Newfoundland dog by his preternatural

sagacity, that he has been known, by the mere superiority of his genius,

to walk off unmolested with the dog's dinner, from before his face. He

was rapidly rising in acquirements and virtues, when, in an evil hour,

his stable was newly painted. He observed the workmen closely, saw that

they were careful of the paint, and immediately burned to possess it. On

their going to dinner, he ate up all they had left behind, consisting of

a pound or two of white lead; and this youthful indiscretion terminated

in death.

While I was yet inconsolable for his loss, another friend of mine

in Yorkshire discovered an older and more gifted raven at a village

public-house, which he prevailed upon the landlord to part with for a

consideration, and sent up to me. The first act of this Sage, was, to

administer to the effects of his predecessor, by disinterring all the

cheese and halfpence he had buried in the garden--a work of immense

labour and research, to which he devoted all the energies of his mind.

When he had achieved this task, he applied himself to the acquisition

of stable language, in which he soon became such an adept, that he would

perch outside my window and drive imaginary horses with great skill,

all day. Perhaps even I never saw him at his best, for his former master

sent his duty with him, 'and if I wished the bird to come out very

strong, would I be so good as to show him a drunken man'--which I never

did, having (unfortunately) none but sober people at hand.

But I could hardly have respected him more, whatever the stimulating

influences of this sight might have been. He had not the least respect,

I am sorry to say, for me in return, or for anybody but the cook; to

whom he was attached--but only, I fear, as a Policeman might have been.

Once, I met him unexpectedly, about half-a-mile from my house, walking

down the middle of a public street, attended by a pretty large crowd,

and spontaneously exhibiting the whole of his accomplishments. His

gravity under those trying circumstances, I can never forget, nor the

extraordinary gallantry with which, refusing to be brought home, he

defended himself behind a pump, until overpowered by numbers. It may

have been that he was too bright a genius to live long, or it may have

been that he took some pernicious substance into his bill, and thence

into his maw--which is not improbable, seeing that he new-pointed

the greater part of the garden-wall by digging out the mortar, broke

countless squares of glass by scraping away the putty all round the

frames, and tore up and swallowed, in splinters, the greater part of a

wooden staircase of six steps and a landing--but after some three years

he too was taken ill, and died before the kitchen fire. He kept his eye

to the last upon the meat as it roasted, and suddenly turned over

on his back with a sepulchral cry of 'Cuckoo!' Since then I have been

ravenless.

No account of the Gordon Riots having been to my knowledge introduced

into any Work of Fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary

and remarkable features, I was led to project this Tale.

It is unnecessary to say, that those shameful tumults, while they

reflect indelible disgrace upon the time in which they occurred, and all

who had act or part in them, teach a good lesson. That what we falsely

call a religious cry is easily raised by men who have no religion, and

who in their daily practice set at nought the commonest principles of

right and wrong; that it is begotten of intolerance and persecution;

that it is senseless, besotted, inveterate and unmerciful; all History

teaches us. But perhaps we do not know it in our hearts too well,

to profit by even so humble an example as the 'No Popery' riots of

Seventeen Hundred and Eighty.

However imperfectly those disturbances are set forth in the following

pages, they are impartially painted by one who has no sympathy with the

Romish Church, though he acknowledges, as most men do, some esteemed

friends among the followers of its creed.

In the description of the principal outrages, reference has been had to

the best authorities of that time, such as they are; the account given

in this Tale, of all the main features of the Riots, is substantially

correct.

Mr Dennis's allusions to the flourishing condition of his trade in those

days, have their foundation in Truth, and not in the Author's fancy. Any

file of old Newspapers, or odd volume of the Annual Register, will prove

this with terrible ease.

Even the case of Mary Jones, dwelt upon with so much pleasure by the

same character, is no effort of invention. The facts were stated,

exactly as they are stated here, in the House of Commons. Whether they

afforded as much entertainment to the merry gentlemen assembled there,

as some other most affecting circumstances of a similar nature mentioned

by Sir Samuel Romilly, is not recorded.

That the case of Mary Jones may speak the more emphatically for

itself, I subjoin it, as related by SIR WILLIAM MEREDITH in a speech in

Parliament, 'on Frequent Executions', made in 1777.

'Under this act,' the Shop-lifting Act, 'one Mary Jones was executed,

whose case I shall just mention; it was at the time when press warrants

were issued, on the alarm about Falkland Islands. The woman's husband

was pressed, their goods seized for some debts of his, and she, with two

small children, turned into the streets a-begging. It is a circumstance

not to be forgotten, that she was very young (under nineteen), and most

remarkably handsome. She went to a linen-draper's shop, took some coarse

linen off the counter, and slipped it under her cloak; the shopman saw

her, and she laid it down: for this she was hanged. Her defence was (I

have the trial in my pocket), "that she had lived in credit, and wanted

for nothing, till a press-gang came and stole her husband from her; but

since then, she had no bed to lie on; nothing to give her children

to eat; and they were almost naked; and perhaps she might have done

something wrong, for she hardly knew what she did." The parish officers

testified the truth of this story; but it seems, there had been a good

deal of shop-lifting about Ludgate; an example was thought necessary;

and this woman was hanged for the comfort and satisfaction of

shopkeepers in Ludgate Street. When brought to receive sentence,

she behaved in such a frantic manner, as proved her mind to be in a

distracted and desponding state; and the child was sucking at her breast

when she set out for Tyburn.'

Chapter 1

In the year 1775, there stood upon the borders of Epping Forest, at a

distance of about twelve miles from London--measuring from the Standard

in Cornhill,' or rather from the spot on or near to which the Standard

used to be in days of yore--a house of public entertainment called the

Maypole; which fact was demonstrated to all such travellers as

could neither read nor write (and at that time a vast number both of

travellers and stay-at-homes were in this condition) by the emblem

reared on the roadside over against the house, which, if not of those

goodly proportions that Maypoles were wont to present in olden times,

was a fair young ash, thirty feet in height, and straight as any arrow

that ever English yeoman drew.

The Maypole--by which term from henceforth is meant the house, and not

its sign--the Maypole was an old building, with more gable ends than a

lazy man would care to count on a sunny day; huge zig-zag chimneys, out

of which it seemed as though even smoke could not choose but come in

more than naturally fantastic shapes, imparted to it in its tortuous

progress; and vast stables, gloomy, ruinous, and empty. The place was

said to have been built in the days of King Henry the Eighth; and there

was a legend, not only that Queen Elizabeth had slept there one night

while upon a hunting excursion, to wit, in a certain oak-panelled room

with a deep bay window, but that next morning, while standing on a

mounting block before the door with one foot in the stirrup, the virgin

monarch had then and there boxed and cuffed an unlucky page for some

neglect of duty. The matter-of-fact and doubtful folks, of whom there

were a few among the Maypole customers, as unluckily there always are

in every little community, were inclined to look upon this tradition as

rather apocryphal; but, whenever the landlord of that ancient hostelry

appealed to the mounting block itself as evidence, and triumphantly

pointed out that there it stood in the same place to that very day, the

doubters never failed to be put down by a large majority, and all true

believers exulted as in a victory.

Whether these, and many other stories of the like nature, were true or

untrue, the Maypole was really an old house, a very old house, perhaps

as old as it claimed to be, and perhaps older, which will sometimes

happen with houses of an uncertain, as with ladies of a certain, age.

Its windows were old diamond-pane lattices, its floors were sunken

and uneven, its ceilings blackened by the hand of time, and heavy with

massive beams. Over the doorway was an ancient porch, quaintly and

grotesquely carved; and here on summer evenings the more favoured

customers smoked and drank--ay, and sang many a good song too,

sometimes--reposing on two grim-looking high-backed settles, which,

like the twin dragons of some fairy tale, guarded the entrance to the

mansion.

In the chimneys of the disused rooms, swallows had built their nests

for many a long year, and from earliest spring to latest autumn whole

colonies of sparrows chirped and twittered in the eaves. There were more

pigeons about the dreary stable-yard and out-buildings than anybody

but the landlord could reckon up. The wheeling and circling flights

of runts, fantails, tumblers, and pouters, were perhaps not quite

consistent with the grave and sober character of the building, but the

monotonous cooing, which never ceased to be raised by some among them

all day long, suited it exactly, and seemed to lull it to rest. With its

overhanging stories, drowsy little panes of glass, and front bulging

out and projecting over the pathway, the old house looked as if it were

nodding in its sleep. Indeed, it needed no very great stretch of fancy

to detect in it other resemblances to humanity. The bricks of which it

was built had originally been a deep dark red, but had grown yellow and

discoloured like an old man's skin; the sturdy timbers had decayed like

teeth; and here and there the ivy, like a warm garment to comfort it in

its age, wrapt its green leaves closely round the time-worn walls.

It was a hale and hearty age though, still: and in the summer or

autumn evenings, when the glow of the setting sun fell upon the oak and

chestnut trees of the adjacent forest, the old house, partaking of its

lustre, seemed their fit companion, and to have many good years of life

in him yet.

The evening with which we have to do, was neither a summer nor an autumn

one, but the twilight of a day in March, when the wind howled dismally

among the bare branches of the trees, and rumbling in the wide chimneys

and driving the rain against the windows of the Maypole Inn, gave such

of its frequenters as chanced to be there at the moment an undeniable

reason for prolonging their stay, and caused the landlord to prophesy

that the night would certainly clear at eleven o'clock precisely,--which

by a remarkable coincidence was the hour at which he always closed his

house.

The name of him upon whom the spirit of prophecy thus descended was

John Willet, a burly, large-headed man with a fat face, which betokened

profound obstinacy and slowness of apprehension, combined with a very

strong reliance upon his own merits. It was John Willet's ordinary

boast in his more placid moods that if he were slow he was sure; which

assertion could, in one sense at least, be by no means gainsaid, seeing

that he was in everything unquestionably the reverse of fast, and withal

one of the most dogged and positive fellows in existence--always sure

that what he thought or said or did was right, and holding it as a thing

quite settled and ordained by the laws of nature and Providence, that

anybody who said or did or thought otherwise must be inevitably and of

necessity wrong.

Mr Willet walked slowly up to the window, flattened his fat nose

against the cold glass, and shading his eyes that his sight might not

be affected by the ruddy glow of the fire, looked abroad. Then he

walked slowly back to his old seat in the chimney-corner, and, composing

himself in it with a slight shiver, such as a man might give way to and

so acquire an additional relish for the warm blaze, said, looking round

upon his guests:

'It'll clear at eleven o'clock. No sooner and no later. Not before and

not arterwards.'

'How do you make out that?' said a little man in the opposite corner.

'The moon is past the full, and she rises at nine.'

John looked sedately and solemnly at his questioner until he had brought

his mind to bear upon the whole of his observation, and then made

answer, in a tone which seemed to imply that the moon was peculiarly his

business and nobody else's:

'Never you mind about the moon. Don't you trouble yourself about her.

You let the moon alone, and I'll let you alone.'

'No offence I hope?' said the little man.

Again John waited leisurely until the observation had thoroughly

penetrated to his brain, and then replying, 'No offence as YET,' applied

a light to his pipe and smoked in placid silence; now and then casting

a sidelong look at a man wrapped in a loose riding-coat with huge cuffs

ornamented with tarnished silver lace and large metal buttons, who

sat apart from the regular frequenters of the house, and wearing a hat

flapped over his face, which was still further shaded by the hand on

which his forehead rested, looked unsociable enough.

There was another guest, who sat, booted and spurred, at some distance

from the fire also, and whose thoughts--to judge from his folded

arms and knitted brows, and from the untasted liquor before him--were

occupied with other matters than the topics under discussion or

the persons who discussed them. This was a young man of about

eight-and-twenty, rather above the middle height, and though of somewhat

slight figure, gracefully and strongly made. He wore his own dark hair,

and was accoutred in a riding dress, which together with his large boots

(resembling in shape and fashion those worn by our Life Guardsmen at

the present day), showed indisputable traces of the bad condition of

the roads. But travel-stained though he was, he was well and even richly

attired, and without being overdressed looked a gallant gentleman.

Lying upon the table beside him, as he had carelessly thrown them down,

were a heavy riding-whip and a slouched hat, the latter worn no doubt as

being best suited to the inclemency of the weather. There, too, were a

pair of pistols in a holster-case, and a short riding-cloak. Little of

his face was visible, except the long dark lashes which concealed his

downcast eyes, but an air of careless ease and natural gracefulness

of demeanour pervaded the figure, and seemed to comprehend even those

slight accessories, which were all handsome, and in good keeping.

Towards this young gentleman the eyes of Mr Willet wandered but once,

and then as if in mute inquiry whether he had observed his silent

neighbour. It was plain that John and the young gentleman had often met

before. Finding that his look was not returned, or indeed observed by

the person to whom it was addressed, John gradually concentrated the

whole power of his eyes into one focus, and brought it to bear upon the

man in the flapped hat, at whom he came to stare in course of time with

an intensity so remarkable, that it affected his fireside cronies, who

all, as with one accord, took their pipes from their lips, and stared

with open mouths at the stranger likewise.

The sturdy landlord had a large pair of dull fish-like eyes, and the

little man who had hazarded the remark about the moon (and who was the

parish-clerk and bell-ringer of Chigwell, a village hard by) had little

round black shiny eyes like beads; moreover this little man wore at the

knees of his rusty black breeches, and on his rusty black coat, and

all down his long flapped waistcoat, little queer buttons like nothing

except his eyes; but so like them, that as they twinkled and glistened

in the light of the fire, which shone too in his bright shoe-buckles,

he seemed all eyes from head to foot, and to be gazing with every one of

them at the unknown customer. No wonder that a man should grow restless

under such an inspection as this, to say nothing of the eyes belonging

to short Tom Cobb the general chandler and post-office keeper, and long

Phil Parkes the ranger, both of whom, infected by the example of their

companions, regarded him of the flapped hat no less attentively.

The stranger became restless; perhaps from being exposed to this raking

fire of eyes, perhaps from the nature of his previous meditations--most

probably from the latter cause, for as he changed his position and

looked hastily round, he started to find himself the object of such keen

regard, and darted an angry and suspicious glance at the fireside group.

It had the effect of immediately diverting all eyes to the chimney,

except those of John Willet, who finding himself as it were, caught in

the fact, and not being (as has been already observed) of a very ready

nature, remained staring at his guest in a particularly awkward and

disconcerted manner.

'Well?' said the stranger.

Well. There was not much in well. It was not a long speech. 'I thought

you gave an order,' said the landlord, after a pause of two or three

minutes for consideration.

The stranger took off his hat, and disclosed the hard features of a man

of sixty or thereabouts, much weatherbeaten and worn by time, and

the naturally harsh expression of which was not improved by a dark

handkerchief which was bound tightly round his head, and, while it

served the purpose of a wig, shaded his forehead, and almost hid his

eyebrows. If it were intended to conceal or divert attention from a deep

gash, now healed into an ugly seam, which when it was first inflicted

must have laid bare his cheekbone, the object was but indifferently

attained, for it could scarcely fail to be noted at a glance. His

complexion was of a cadaverous hue, and he had a grizzly jagged beard

of some three weeks' date. Such was the figure (very meanly and poorly

clad) that now rose from the seat, and stalking across the room sat down

in a corner of the chimney, which the politeness or fears of the little

clerk very readily assigned to him.

'A highwayman!' whispered Tom Cobb to Parkes the ranger.

'Do you suppose highwaymen don't dress handsomer than that?' replied

Parkes. 'It's a better business than you think for, Tom, and highwaymen

don't need or use to be shabby, take my word for it.'

Meanwhile the subject of their speculations had done due honour to the

house by calling for some drink, which was promptly supplied by the

landlord's son Joe, a broad-shouldered strapping young fellow of twenty,

whom it pleased his father still to consider a little boy, and to treat

accordingly. Stretching out his hands to warm them by the blazing fire,

the man turned his head towards the company, and after running his eye

sharply over them, said in a voice well suited to his appearance:

'What house is that which stands a mile or so from here?'

'Public-house?' said the landlord, with his usual deliberation.

'Public-house, father!' exclaimed Joe, 'where's the public-house

within a mile or so of the Maypole? He means the great house--the

Warren--naturally and of course. The old red brick house, sir, that

stands in its own grounds--?'

'Aye,' said the stranger.

'And that fifteen or twenty years ago stood in a park five times as

broad, which with other and richer property has bit by bit changed hands

and dwindled away--more's the pity!' pursued the young man.

'Maybe,' was the reply. 'But my question related to the owner. What it

has been I don't care to know, and what it is I can see for myself.'

The heir-apparent to the Maypole pressed his finger on his lips, and

glancing at the young gentleman already noticed, who had changed his

attitude when the house was first mentioned, replied in a lower tone:

'The owner's name is Haredale, Mr Geoffrey Haredale, and'--again

he glanced in the same direction as before--'and a worthy gentleman

too--hem!'

Paying as little regard to this admonitory cough, as to the significant

gesture that had preceded it, the stranger pursued his questioning.

'I turned out of my way coming here, and took the footpath that crosses

the grounds. Who was the young lady that I saw entering a carriage? His

daughter?'

'Why, how should I know, honest man?' replied Joe, contriving in the

course of some arrangements about the hearth, to advance close to his

questioner and pluck him by the sleeve, 'I didn't see the young lady,

you know. Whew! There's the wind again--AND rain--well it IS a night!'

Rough weather indeed!' observed the strange man.

'You're used to it?' said Joe, catching at anything which seemed to

promise a diversion of the subject.

'Pretty well,' returned the other. 'About the young lady--has Mr

Haredale a daughter?'

'No, no,' said the young fellow fretfully, 'he's a single

gentleman--he's--be quiet, can't you, man? Don't you see this talk is

not relished yonder?'

Regardless of this whispered remonstrance, and affecting not to hear it,

his tormentor provokingly continued:

'Single men have had daughters before now. Perhaps she may be his

daughter, though he is not married.'

'What do you mean?' said Joe, adding in an undertone as he approached

him again, 'You'll come in for it presently, I know you will!'

'I mean no harm'--returned the traveller boldly, 'and have said none

that I know of. I ask a few questions--as any stranger may, and not

unnaturally--about the inmates of a remarkable house in a neighbourhood

which is new to me, and you are as aghast and disturbed as if I were

talking treason against King George. Perhaps you can tell me why, sir,

for (as I say) I am a stranger, and this is Greek to me?'

The latter observation was addressed to the obvious cause of Joe

Willet's discomposure, who had risen and was adjusting his riding-cloak

preparatory to sallying abroad. Briefly replying that he could give him

no information, the young man beckoned to Joe, and handing him a piece

of money in payment of his reckoning, hurried out attended by young

Willet himself, who taking up a candle followed to light him to the

house-door.

While Joe was absent on this errand, the elder Willet and his three

companions continued to smoke with profound gravity, and in a deep

silence, each having his eyes fixed on a huge copper boiler that was

suspended over the fire. After some time John Willet slowly shook his

head, and thereupon his friends slowly shook theirs; but no man withdrew

his eyes from the boiler, or altered the solemn expression of his

countenance in the slightest degree.

At length Joe returned--very talkative and conciliatory, as though with

a strong presentiment that he was going to be found fault with.

'Such a thing as love is!' he said, drawing a chair near the fire, and

looking round for sympathy. 'He has set off to walk to London,--all

the way to London. His nag gone lame in riding out here this blessed

afternoon, and comfortably littered down in our stable at this minute;

and he giving up a good hot supper and our best bed, because Miss

Haredale has gone to a masquerade up in town, and he has set his heart

upon seeing her! I don't think I could persuade myself to do that,

beautiful as she is,--but then I'm not in love (at least I don't think I

am) and that's the whole difference.'

'He is in love then?' said the stranger.

'Rather,' replied Joe. 'He'll never be more in love, and may very easily

be less.'

'Silence, sir!' cried his father.

'What a chap you are, Joe!' said Long Parkes.

'Such a inconsiderate lad!' murmured Tom Cobb.

'Putting himself forward and wringing the very nose off his own father's

face!' exclaimed the parish-clerk, metaphorically.

'What HAVE I done?' reasoned poor Joe.

'Silence, sir!' returned his father, 'what do you mean by talking, when

you see people that are more than two or three times your age, sitting

still and silent and not dreaming of saying a word?'

'Why that's the proper time for me to talk, isn't it?' said Joe

rebelliously.

'The proper time, sir!' retorted his father, 'the proper time's no

time.'

'Ah to be sure!' muttered Parkes, nodding gravely to the other two who

nodded likewise, observing under their breaths that that was the point.

'The proper time's no time, sir,' repeated John Willet; 'when I was

your age I never talked, I never wanted to talk. I listened and improved

myself that's what I did.'

'And you'd find your father rather a tough customer in argeyment, Joe,

if anybody was to try and tackle him,' said Parkes.

'For the matter o' that, Phil!' observed Mr Willet, blowing a long,

thin, spiral cloud of smoke out of the corner of his mouth, and staring

at it abstractedly as it floated away; 'For the matter o' that, Phil,

argeyment is a gift of Natur. If Natur has gifted a man with powers

of argeyment, a man has a right to make the best of 'em, and has not

a right to stand on false delicacy, and deny that he is so gifted; for

that is a turning of his back on Natur, a flouting of her, a slighting

of her precious caskets, and a proving of one's self to be a swine that

isn't worth her scattering pearls before.'

The landlord pausing here for a very long time, Mr Parkes naturally

concluded that he had brought his discourse to an end; and therefore,

turning to the young man with some austerity, exclaimed:

'You hear what your father says, Joe? You wouldn't much like to tackle

him in argeyment, I'm thinking, sir.'

'IF,' said John Willet, turning his eyes from the ceiling to the face of

his interrupter, and uttering the monosyllable in capitals, to apprise

him that he had put in his oar, as the vulgar say, with unbecoming

and irreverent haste; 'IF, sir, Natur has fixed upon me the gift of

argeyment, why should I not own to it, and rather glory in the same?

Yes, sir, I AM a tough customer that way. You are right, sir. My

toughness has been proved, sir, in this room many and many a time, as I

think you know; and if you don't know,' added John, putting his pipe in

his mouth again, 'so much the better, for I an't proud and am not going

to tell you.'

A general murmur from his three cronies, and a general shaking of

heads at the copper boiler, assured John Willet that they had had good

experience of his powers and needed no further evidence to assure them

of his superiority. John smoked with a little more dignity and surveyed

them in silence.

'It's all very fine talking,' muttered Joe, who had been fidgeting in

his chair with divers uneasy gestures. 'But if you mean to tell me that

I'm never to open my lips--'

'Silence, sir!' roared his father. 'No, you never are. When your

opinion's wanted, you give it. When you're spoke to, you speak. When

your opinion's not wanted and you're not spoke to, don't you give an

opinion and don't you speak. The world's undergone a nice alteration

since my time, certainly. My belief is that there an't any boys

left--that there isn't such a thing as a boy--that there's nothing now

between a male baby and a man--and that all the boys went out with his

blessed Majesty King George the Second.'

'That's a very true observation, always excepting the young princes,'

said the parish-clerk, who, as the representative of church and state in

that company, held himself bound to the nicest loyalty. 'If it's godly

and righteous for boys, being of the ages of boys, to behave themselves

like boys, then the young princes must be boys and cannot be otherwise.'

'Did you ever hear tell of mermaids, sir?' said Mr Willet.

'Certainly I have,' replied the clerk.

'Very good,' said Mr Willet. 'According to the constitution of mermaids,

so much of a mermaid as is not a woman must be a fish. According to the

constitution of young princes, so much of a young prince (if anything)

as is not actually an angel, must be godly and righteous. Therefore if

it's becoming and godly and righteous in the young princes (as it is

at their ages) that they should be boys, they are and must be boys, and

cannot by possibility be anything else.'

This elucidation of a knotty point being received with such marks of

approval as to put John Willet into a good humour, he contented himself

with repeating to his son his command of silence, and addressing the

stranger, said:

'If you had asked your questions of a grown-up person--of me or any of

these gentlemen--you'd have had some satisfaction, and wouldn't have

wasted breath. Miss Haredale is Mr Geoffrey Haredale's niece.'

'Is her father alive?' said the man, carelessly.

'No,' rejoined the landlord, 'he is not alive, and he is not dead--'

'Not dead!' cried the other.

'Not dead in a common sort of way,' said the landlord.

The cronies nodded to each other, and Mr Parkes remarked in an

undertone, shaking his head meanwhile as who should say, 'let no man

contradict me, for I won't believe him,' that John Willet was in amazing

force to-night, and fit to tackle a Chief Justice.

The stranger suffered a short pause to elapse, and then asked abruptly,

'What do you mean?'

'More than you think for, friend,' returned John Willet. 'Perhaps

there's more meaning in them words than you suspect.'

'Perhaps there is,' said the strange man, gruffly; 'but what the devil

do you speak in such mysteries for? You tell me, first, that a man is

not alive, nor yet dead--then, that he's not dead in a common sort of

way--then, that you mean a great deal more than I think for. To tell

you the truth, you may do that easily; for so far as I can make out, you

mean nothing. What DO you mean, I ask again?'

'That,' returned the landlord, a little brought down from his dignity

by the stranger's surliness, 'is a Maypole story, and has been any time

these four-and-twenty years. That story is Solomon Daisy's story. It

belongs to the house; and nobody but Solomon Daisy has ever told it

under this roof, or ever shall--that's more.'

The man glanced at the parish-clerk, whose air of consciousness and

importance plainly betokened him to be the person referred to, and,

observing that he had taken his pipe from his lips, after a very long

whiff to keep it alight, and was evidently about to tell his story

without further solicitation, gathered his large coat about him, and

shrinking further back was almost lost in the gloom of the spacious

chimney-corner, except when the flame, struggling from under a great

faggot, whose weight almost crushed it for the time, shot upward with a

strong and sudden glare, and illumining his figure for a moment, seemed

afterwards to cast it into deeper obscurity than before.

By this flickering light, which made the old room, with its heavy

timbers and panelled walls, look as if it were built of polished

ebony--the wind roaring and howling without, now rattling the latch

and creaking the hinges of the stout oaken door, and now driving at

the casement as though it would beat it in--by this light, and under

circumstances so auspicious, Solomon Daisy began his tale:

'It was Mr Reuben Haredale, Mr Geoffrey's elder brother--'

Here he came to a dead stop, and made so long a pause that even John

Willet grew impatient and asked why he did not proceed.

'Cobb,' said Solomon Daisy, dropping his voice and appealing to the

post-office keeper; 'what day of the month is this?'

'The nineteenth.'

'Of March,' said the clerk, bending forward, 'the nineteenth of March;

that's very strange.'

In a low voice they all acquiesced, and Solomon went on:

'It was Mr Reuben Haredale, Mr Geoffrey's elder brother, that twenty-two

years ago was the owner of the Warren, which, as Joe has said--not that

you remember it, Joe, for a boy like you can't do that, but because you

have often heard me say so--was then a much larger and better place, and

a much more valuable property than it is now. His lady was lately

dead, and he was left with one child--the Miss Haredale you have been

inquiring about--who was then scarcely a year old.'

Although the speaker addressed himself to the man who had shown so much

curiosity about this same family, and made a pause here as if expecting

some exclamation of surprise or encouragement, the latter made no

remark, nor gave any indication that he heard or was interested in what

was said. Solomon therefore turned to his old companions, whose noses

were brightly illuminated by the deep red glow from the bowls of their

pipes; assured, by long experience, of their attention, and resolved to

show his sense of such indecent behaviour.

'Mr Haredale,' said Solomon, turning his back upon the strange man,

'left this place when his lady died, feeling it lonely like, and went

up to London, where he stopped some months; but finding that place as

lonely as this--as I suppose and have always heard say--he suddenly

came back again with his little girl to the Warren, bringing with him

besides, that day, only two women servants, and his steward, and a

gardener.'

Mr Daisy stopped to take a whiff at his pipe, which was going out,

and then proceeded--at first in a snuffling tone, occasioned by keen

enjoyment of the tobacco and strong pulling at the pipe, and afterwards

with increasing distinctness:

'--Bringing with him two women servants, and his steward, and a

gardener. The rest stopped behind up in London, and were to follow next

day. It happened that that night, an old gentleman who lived at Chigwell

Row, and had long been poorly, deceased, and an order came to me at half

after twelve o'clock at night to go and toll the passing-bell.'

There was a movement in the little group of listeners, sufficiently

indicative of the strong repugnance any one of them would have felt to

have turned out at such a time upon such an errand. The clerk felt and

understood it, and pursued his theme accordingly.

'It WAS a dreary thing, especially as the grave-digger was laid up in

his bed, from long working in a damp soil and sitting down to take his

dinner on cold tombstones, and I was consequently under obligation to go

alone, for it was too late to hope to get any other companion. However,

I wasn't unprepared for it; as the old gentleman had often made it a

request that the bell should be tolled as soon as possible after the

breath was out of his body, and he had been expected to go for some

days. I put as good a face upon it as I could, and muffling myself up

(for it was mortal cold), started out with a lighted lantern in one hand

and the key of the church in the other.'

At this point of the narrative, the dress of the strange man rustled as

if he had turned himself to hear more distinctly. Slightly pointing over

his shoulder, Solomon elevated his eyebrows and nodded a silent inquiry

to Joe whether this was the case. Joe shaded his eyes with his hand and

peered into the corner, but could make out nothing, and so shook his

head.

'It was just such a night as this; blowing a hurricane, raining heavily,

and very dark--I often think now, darker than I ever saw it before or

since; that may be my fancy, but the houses were all close shut and the

folks in doors, and perhaps there is only one other man who knows how

dark it really was. I got into the church, chained the door back so that

it should keep ajar--for, to tell the truth, I didn't like to be shut

in there alone--and putting my lantern on the stone seat in the little

corner where the bell-rope is, sat down beside it to trim the candle.

'I sat down to trim the candle, and when I had done so I could not

persuade myself to get up again, and go about my work. I don't know how

it was, but I thought of all the ghost stories I had ever heard, even

those that I had heard when I was a boy at school, and had forgotten

long ago; and they didn't come into my mind one after another, but

all crowding at once, like. I recollected one story there was in the

village, how that on a certain night in the year (it might be that very

night for anything I knew), all the dead people came out of the ground

and sat at the heads of their own graves till morning. This made me

think how many people I had known, were buried between the church-door

and the churchyard gate, and what a dreadful thing it would be to have

to pass among them and know them again, so earthy and unlike themselves.

I had known all the niches and arches in the church from a child; still,

I couldn't persuade myself that those were their natural shadows which

I saw on the pavement, but felt sure there were some ugly figures hiding

among 'em and peeping out. Thinking on in this way, I began to think of

the old gentleman who was just dead, and I could have sworn, as I looked

up the dark chancel, that I saw him in his usual place, wrapping his

shroud about him and shivering as if he felt it cold. All this time I

sat listening and listening, and hardly dared to breathe. At length

I started up and took the bell-rope in my hands. At that minute there

rang--not that bell, for I had hardly touched the rope--but another!

'I heard the ringing of another bell, and a deep bell too, plainly. It

was only for an instant, and even then the wind carried the sound away,

but I heard it. I listened for a long time, but it rang no more. I had

heard of corpse candles, and at last I persuaded myself that this must

be a corpse bell tolling of itself at midnight for the dead. I tolled my

bell--how, or how long, I don't know--and ran home to bed as fast as I

could touch the ground.

'I was up early next morning after a restless night, and told the story

to my neighbours. Some were serious and some made light of it; I don't

think anybody believed it real. But, that morning, Mr Reuben Haredale

was found murdered in his bedchamber; and in his hand was a piece of the

cord attached to an alarm-bell outside the roof, which hung in his room

and had been cut asunder, no doubt by the murderer, when he seized it.

'That was the bell I heard.

'A bureau was found opened, and a cash-box, which Mr Haredale had

brought down that day, and was supposed to contain a large sum of money,

was gone. The steward and gardener were both missing and both suspected

for a long time, but they were never found, though hunted far and wide.

And far enough they might have looked for poor Mr Rudge the steward,

whose body--scarcely to be recognised by his clothes and the watch and

ring he wore--was found, months afterwards, at the bottom of a piece of

water in the grounds, with a deep gash in the breast where he had been

stabbed with a knife. He was only partly dressed; and people all agreed

that he had been sitting up reading in his own room, where there were

many traces of blood, and was suddenly fallen upon and killed before his

master.

Everybody now knew that the gardener must be the murderer, and though

he has never been heard of from that day to this, he will be, mark my

words. The crime was committed this day two-and-twenty years--on the

nineteenth of March, one thousand seven hundred and fifty-three. On the

nineteenth of March in some year--no matter when--I know it, I am sure

of it, for we have always, in some strange way or other, been brought

back to the subject on that day ever since--on the nineteenth of March

in some year, sooner or later, that man will be discovered.'

Chapter 2

'A strange story!' said the man who had been the cause of the

narration.--'Stranger still if it comes about as you predict. Is that

all?'

A question so unexpected, nettled Solomon Daisy not a little. By dint of

relating the story very often, and ornamenting it (according to village

report) with a few flourishes suggested by the various hearers from time

to time, he had come by degrees to tell it with great effect; and 'Is

that all?' after the climax, was not what he was accustomed to.

'Is that all?' he repeated, 'yes, that's all, sir. And enough too, I

think.'

'I think so too. My horse, young man! He is but a hack hired from a

roadside posting house, but he must carry me to London to-night.'

'To-night!' said Joe.

'To-night,' returned the other. 'What do you stare at? This tavern

would seem to be a house of call for all the gaping idlers of the

neighbourhood!'

At this remark, which evidently had reference to the scrutiny he had

undergone, as mentioned in the foregoing chapter, the eyes of John

Willet and his friends were diverted with marvellous rapidity to the

copper boiler again. Not so with Joe, who, being a mettlesome fellow,

returned the stranger's angry glance with a steady look, and rejoined:

'It is not a very bold thing to wonder at your going on to-night. Surely

you have been asked such a harmless question in an inn before, and in

better weather than this. I thought you mightn't know the way, as you

seem strange to this part.'

'The way--' repeated the other, irritably.

'Yes. DO you know it?'

'I'll--humph!--I'll find it,' replied the man, waving his hand and

turning on his heel. 'Landlord, take the reckoning here.'

John Willet did as he was desired; for on that point he was seldom slow,

except in the particulars of giving change, and testing the goodness of

any piece of coin that was proffered to him, by the application of his

teeth or his tongue, or some other test, or in doubtful cases, by a long

series of tests terminating in its rejection. The guest then wrapped his

garments about him so as to shelter himself as effectually as he could

from the rough weather, and without any word or sign of farewell betook

himself to the stableyard. Here Joe (who had left the room on the

conclusion of their short dialogue) was protecting himself and the horse

from the rain under the shelter of an old penthouse roof.

'He's pretty much of my opinion,' said Joe, patting the horse upon the

neck. 'I'll wager that your stopping here to-night would please him

better than it would please me.'

'He and I are of different opinions, as we have been more than once on

our way here,' was the short reply.

'So I was thinking before you came out, for he has felt your spurs, poor

beast.'

The stranger adjusted his coat-collar about his face, and made no

answer.

'You'll know me again, I see,' he said, marking the young fellow's

earnest gaze, when he had sprung into the saddle.

'The man's worth knowing, master, who travels a road he don't know,

mounted on a jaded horse, and leaves good quarters to do it on such a

night as this.'

'You have sharp eyes and a sharp tongue, I find.'

'Both I hope by nature, but the last grows rusty sometimes for want of

using.'

'Use the first less too, and keep their sharpness for your sweethearts,

boy,' said the man.

So saying he shook his hand from the bridle, struck him roughly on the

head with the butt end of his whip, and galloped away; dashing through

the mud and darkness with a headlong speed, which few badly mounted

horsemen would have cared to venture, even had they been thoroughly

acquainted with the country; and which, to one who knew nothing of the

way he rode, was attended at every step with great hazard and danger.

The roads, even within twelve miles of London, were at that time

ill paved, seldom repaired, and very badly made. The way this rider

traversed had been ploughed up by the wheels of heavy waggons, and

rendered rotten by the frosts and thaws of the preceding winter, or

possibly of many winters. Great holes and gaps had been worn into the

soil, which, being now filled with water from the late rains, were not

easily distinguishable even by day; and a plunge into any one of them

might have brought down a surer-footed horse than the poor beast now

urged forward to the utmost extent of his powers. Sharp flints and

stones rolled from under his hoofs continually; the rider could scarcely

see beyond the animal's head, or farther on either side than his own

arm would have extended. At that time, too, all the roads in the

neighbourhood of the metropolis were infested by footpads or highwaymen,

and it was a night, of all others, in which any evil-disposed person of

this class might have pursued his unlawful calling with little fear of

detection.

Still, the traveller dashed forward at the same reckless pace,

regardless alike of the dirt and wet which flew about his head, the

profound darkness of the night, and the probability of encountering

some desperate characters abroad. At every turn and angle, even where

a deviation from the direct course might have been least expected, and

could not possibly be seen until he was close upon it, he guided the

bridle with an unerring hand, and kept the middle of the road. Thus he

sped onward, raising himself in the stirrups, leaning his body forward

until it almost touched the horse's neck, and flourishing his heavy whip

above his head with the fervour of a madman.

There are times when, the elements being in unusual commotion, those who

are bent on daring enterprises, or agitated by great thoughts, whether

of good or evil, feel a mysterious sympathy with the tumult of nature,

and are roused into corresponding violence. In the midst of thunder,

lightning, and storm, many tremendous deeds have been committed; men,

self-possessed before, have given a sudden loose to passions they could

no longer control. The demons of wrath and despair have striven to

emulate those who ride the whirlwind and direct the storm; and man,

lashed into madness with the roaring winds and boiling waters, has

become for the time as wild and merciless as the elements themselves.

Whether the traveller was possessed by thoughts which the fury of the

night had heated and stimulated into a quicker current, or was merely

impelled by some strong motive to reach his journey's end, on he swept

more like a hunted phantom than a man, nor checked his pace until,

arriving at some cross roads, one of which led by a longer route to

the place whence he had lately started, he bore down so suddenly upon a

vehicle which was coming towards him, that in the effort to avoid it he

well-nigh pulled his horse upon his haunches, and narrowly escaped being

thrown.

'Yoho!' cried the voice of a man. 'What's that? Who goes there?'

'A friend!' replied the traveller.

'A friend!' repeated the voice. 'Who calls himself a friend and rides

like that, abusing Heaven's gifts in the shape of horseflesh, and

endangering, not only his own neck (which might be no great matter) but

the necks of other people?'

'You have a lantern there, I see,' said the traveller dismounting, 'lend

it me for a moment. You have wounded my horse, I think, with your shaft

or wheel.'

'Wounded him!' cried the other, 'if I haven't killed him, it's no fault

of yours. What do you mean by galloping along the king's highway like

that, eh?'

'Give me the light,' returned the traveller, snatching it from his hand,

'and don't ask idle questions of a man who is in no mood for talking.'

'If you had said you were in no mood for talking before, I should

perhaps have been in no mood for lighting,' said the voice. 'Hows'ever

as it's the poor horse that's damaged and not you, one of you is welcome

to the light at all events--but it's not the crusty one.'

The traveller returned no answer to this speech, but holding the light

near to his panting and reeking beast, examined him in limb and carcass.

Meanwhile, the other man sat very composedly in his vehicle, which was

a kind of chaise with a depository for a large bag of tools, and watched

his proceedings with a careful eye.

The looker-on was a round, red-faced, sturdy yeoman, with a double chin,

and a voice husky with good living, good sleeping, good humour, and good

health. He was past the prime of life, but Father Time is not always a

hard parent, and, though he tarries for none of his children, often lays

his hand lightly upon those who have used him well; making them old men

and women inexorably enough, but leaving their hearts and spirits young

and in full vigour. With such people the grey head is but the impression

of the old fellow's hand in giving them his blessing, and every wrinkle

but a notch in the quiet calendar of a well-spent life.

The person whom the traveller had so abruptly encountered was of

this kind: bluff, hale, hearty, and in a green old age: at peace with

himself, and evidently disposed to be so with all the world. Although

muffled up in divers coats and handkerchiefs--one of which, passed over

his crown, and tied in a convenient crease of his double chin, secured

his three-cornered hat and bob-wig from blowing off his head--there

was no disguising his plump and comfortable figure; neither did certain

dirty finger-marks upon his face give it any other than an odd and

comical expression, through which its natural good humour shone with

undiminished lustre.

'He is not hurt,' said the traveller at length, raising his head and the

lantern together.

'You have found that out at last, have you?' rejoined the old man. 'My

eyes have seen more light than yours, but I wouldn't change with you.'

'What do you mean?'

'Mean! I could have told you he wasn't hurt, five minutes ago. Give me

the light, friend; ride forward at a gentler pace; and good night.'

In handing up the lantern, the man necessarily cast its rays full on the

speaker's face. Their eyes met at the instant. He suddenly dropped it

and crushed it with his foot.

'Did you never see a locksmith before, that you start as if you had come

upon a ghost?' cried the old man in the chaise, 'or is this,' he added

hastily, thrusting his hand into the tool basket and drawing out a

hammer, 'a scheme for robbing me? I know these roads, friend. When I

travel them, I carry nothing but a few shillings, and not a crown's

worth of them. I tell you plainly, to save us both trouble, that there's

nothing to be got from me but a pretty stout arm considering my years,

and this tool, which, mayhap from long acquaintance with, I can use

pretty briskly. You shall not have it all your own way, I promise you,

if you play at that game. With these words he stood upon the defensive.

'I am not what you take me for, Gabriel Varden,' replied the other.

'Then what and who are you?' returned the locksmith. 'You know my name,

it seems. Let me know yours.'

'I have not gained the information from any confidence of yours, but

from the inscription on your cart which tells it to all the town,'

replied the traveller.

'You have better eyes for that than you had for your horse, then,' said

Varden, descending nimbly from his chaise; 'who are you? Let me see your

face.'

While the locksmith alighted, the traveller had regained his saddle,

from which he now confronted the old man, who, moving as the horse moved

in chafing under the tightened rein, kept close beside him.

'Let me see your face, I say.'

'Stand off!'

'No masquerading tricks,' said the locksmith, 'and tales at the club

to-morrow, how Gabriel Varden was frightened by a surly voice and a dark

night. Stand--let me see your face.'

Finding that further resistance would only involve him in a personal

struggle with an antagonist by no means to be despised, the traveller

threw back his coat, and stooping down looked steadily at the locksmith.

Perhaps two men more powerfully contrasted, never opposed each other

face to face. The ruddy features of the locksmith so set off and

heightened the excessive paleness of the man on horseback, that he

looked like a bloodless ghost, while the moisture, which hard riding had

brought out upon his skin, hung there in dark and heavy drops, like dews

of agony and death. The countenance of the old locksmith lighted up with

the smile of one expecting to detect in this unpromising stranger some

latent roguery of eye or lip, which should reveal a familiar person in

that arch disguise, and spoil his jest. The face of the other, sullen

and fierce, but shrinking too, was that of a man who stood at bay; while

his firmly closed jaws, his puckered mouth, and more than all a certain

stealthy motion of the hand within his breast, seemed to announce a

desperate purpose very foreign to acting, or child's play.

Thus they regarded each other for some time, in silence.

'Humph!' he said when he had scanned his features; 'I don't know you.'

'Don't desire to?'--returned the other, muffling himself as before.

'I don't,' said Gabriel; 'to be plain with you, friend, you don't carry

in your countenance a letter of recommendation.'

'It's not my wish,' said the traveller. 'My humour is to be avoided.'

'Well,' said the locksmith bluntly, 'I think you'll have your humour.'

'I will, at any cost,' rejoined the traveller. 'In proof of it, lay this

to heart--that you were never in such peril of your life as you have

been within these few moments; when you are within five minutes of

breathing your last, you will not be nearer death than you have been

to-night!'

'Aye!' said the sturdy locksmith.

'Aye! and a violent death.'

'From whose hand?'

'From mine,' replied the traveller.

With that he put spurs to his horse, and rode away; at first plashing

heavily through the mire at a smart trot, but gradually increasing in

speed until the last sound of his horse's hoofs died away upon the wind;

when he was again hurrying on at the same furious gallop, which had been

his pace when the locksmith first encountered him.

Gabriel Varden remained standing in the road with the broken lantern in

his hand, listening in stupefied silence until no sound reached his ear

but the moaning of the wind, and the fast-falling rain; when he struck

himself one or two smart blows in the breast by way of rousing himself,

and broke into an exclamation of surprise.

'What in the name of wonder can this fellow be! a madman? a highwayman?

a cut-throat? If he had not scoured off so fast, we'd have seen who was

in most danger, he or I. I never nearer death than I have been to-night!

I hope I may be no nearer to it for a score of years to come--if so,

I'll be content to be no farther from it. My stars!--a pretty brag this

to a stout man--pooh, pooh!'

Gabriel resumed his seat, and looked wistfully up the road by which the

traveller had come; murmuring in a half whisper:

'The Maypole--two miles to the Maypole. I came the other road from the

Warren after a long day's work at locks and bells, on purpose that I

should not come by the Maypole and break my promise to Martha by looking

in--there's resolution! It would be dangerous to go on to London without

a light; and it's four miles, and a good half mile besides, to the

Halfway-House; and between this and that is the very place where one

needs a light most. Two miles to the Maypole! I told Martha I wouldn't;

I said I wouldn't, and I didn't--there's resolution!'

Repeating these two last words very often, as if to compensate for the

little resolution he was going to show by piquing himself on the great

resolution he had shown, Gabriel Varden quietly turned back, determining

to get a light at the Maypole, and to take nothing but a light.

When he got to the Maypole, however, and Joe, responding to his

well-known hail, came running out to the horse's head, leaving the door

open behind him, and disclosing a delicious perspective of warmth and

brightness--when the ruddy gleam of the fire, streaming through the old

red curtains of the common room, seemed to bring with it, as part of

itself, a pleasant hum of voices, and a fragrant odour of steaming grog

and rare tobacco, all steeped as it were in the cheerful glow--when the

shadows, flitting across the curtain, showed that those inside had risen

from their snug seats, and were making room in the snuggest corner (how

well he knew that corner!) for the honest locksmith, and a broad glare,

suddenly streaming up, bespoke the goodness of the crackling log from

which a brilliant train of sparks was doubtless at that moment whirling

up the chimney in honour of his coming--when, superadded to these

enticements, there stole upon him from the distant kitchen a gentle

sound of frying, with a musical clatter of plates and dishes, and a

savoury smell that made even the boisterous wind a perfume--Gabriel

felt his firmness oozing rapidly away. He tried to look stoically at the

tavern, but his features would relax into a look of fondness. He turned

his head the other way, and the cold black country seemed to frown him

off, and drive him for a refuge into its hospitable arms.

'The merciful man, Joe,' said the locksmith, 'is merciful to his beast.

I'll get out for a little while.'

And how natural it was to get out! And how unnatural it seemed for a

sober man to be plodding wearily along through miry roads, encountering

the rude buffets of the wind and pelting of the rain, when there was

a clean floor covered with crisp white sand, a well swept hearth, a

blazing fire, a table decorated with white cloth, bright pewter flagons,

and other tempting preparations for a well-cooked meal--when there were

these things, and company disposed to make the most of them, all ready

to his hand, and entreating him to enjoyment!

Chapter 3

Such were the locksmith's thoughts when first seated in the snug corner,

and slowly recovering from a pleasant defect of vision--pleasant,

because occasioned by the wind blowing in his eyes--which made it a

matter of sound policy and duty to himself, that he should take refuge

from the weather, and tempted him, for the same reason, to aggravate

a slight cough, and declare he felt but poorly. Such were still his

thoughts more than a full hour afterwards, when, supper over, he still

sat with shining jovial face in the same warm nook, listening to the

cricket-like chirrup of little Solomon Daisy, and bearing no unimportant

or slightly respected part in the social gossip round the Maypole fire.

'I wish he may be an honest man, that's all,' said Solomon, winding up

a variety of speculations relative to the stranger, concerning whom

Gabriel had compared notes with the company, and so raised a grave

discussion; 'I wish he may be an honest man.'

'So we all do, I suppose, don't we?' observed the locksmith.

'I don't,' said Joe.

'No!' cried Gabriel.

'No. He struck me with his whip, the coward, when he was mounted and I

afoot, and I should be better pleased that he turned out what I think

him.'

'And what may that be, Joe?'

'No good, Mr Varden. You may shake your head, father, but I say no good,

and will say no good, and I would say no good a hundred times over, if

that would bring him back to have the drubbing he deserves.'

'Hold your tongue, sir,' said John Willet.

'I won't, father. It's all along of you that he ventured to do what he

did. Seeing me treated like a child, and put down like a fool, HE plucks

up a heart and has a fling at a fellow that he thinks--and may well

think too--hasn't a grain of spirit. But he's mistaken, as I'll show

him, and as I'll show all of you before long.'

'Does the boy know what he's a saying of!' cried the astonished John

Willet.

'Father,' returned Joe, 'I know what I say and mean, well--better than

you do when you hear me. I can bear with you, but I cannot bear the

contempt that your treating me in the way you do, brings upon me from

others every day. Look at other young men of my age. Have they no

liberty, no will, no right to speak? Are they obliged to sit mumchance,

and to be ordered about till they are the laughing-stock of young and

old? I am a bye-word all over Chigwell, and I say--and it's fairer

my saying so now, than waiting till you are dead, and I have got your

money--I say, that before long I shall be driven to break such bounds,

and that when I do, it won't be me that you'll have to blame, but your

own self, and no other.'

John Willet was so amazed by the exasperation and boldness of his

hopeful son, that he sat as one bewildered, staring in a ludicrous

manner at the boiler, and endeavouring, but quite ineffectually, to

collect his tardy thoughts, and invent an answer. The guests, scarcely

less disturbed, were equally at a loss; and at length, with a variety

of muttered, half-expressed condolences, and pieces of advice, rose to

depart; being at the same time slightly muddled with liquor.

The honest locksmith alone addressed a few words of coherent and

sensible advice to both parties, urging John Willet to remember that

Joe was nearly arrived at man's estate, and should not be ruled with

too tight a hand, and exhorting Joe himself to bear with his father's

caprices, and rather endeavour to turn them aside by temperate

remonstrance than by ill-timed rebellion. This advice was received as

such advice usually is. On John Willet it made almost as much impression

as on the sign outside the door, while Joe, who took it in the best

part, avowed himself more obliged than he could well express, but

politely intimated his intention nevertheless of taking his own course

uninfluenced by anybody.

'You have always been a very good friend to me, Mr Varden,' he said,

as they stood without, in the porch, and the locksmith was equipping

himself for his journey home; 'I take it very kind of you to say all

this, but the time's nearly come when the Maypole and I must part

company.'

'Roving stones gather no moss, Joe,' said Gabriel.

'Nor milestones much,' replied Joe. 'I'm little better than one here,

and see as much of the world.'

'Then, what would you do, Joe?' pursued the locksmith, stroking his chin

reflectively. 'What could you be? Where could you go, you see?'

'I must trust to chance, Mr Varden.'

'A bad thing to trust to, Joe. I don't like it. I always tell my girl

when we talk about a husband for her, never to trust to chance, but to

make sure beforehand that she has a good man and true, and then chance

will neither make her nor break her. What are you fidgeting about there,

Joe? Nothing gone in the harness, I hope?'

'No no,' said Joe--finding, however, something very engrossing to do in

the way of strapping and buckling--'Miss Dolly quite well?'

'Hearty, thankye. She looks pretty enough to be well, and good too.'

'She's always both, sir'--

'So she is, thank God!'

'I hope,' said Joe after some hesitation, 'that you won't tell this

story against me--this of my having been beat like the boy they'd make

of me--at all events, till I have met this man again and settled the

account. It'll be a better story then.'

'Why who should I tell it to?' returned Gabriel. 'They know it here, and

I'm not likely to come across anybody else who would care about it.'

'That's true enough,' said the young fellow with a sigh. 'I quite forgot

that. Yes, that's true!'

So saying, he raised his face, which was very red,--no doubt from the

exertion of strapping and buckling as aforesaid,--and giving the reins

to the old man, who had by this time taken his seat, sighed again and

bade him good night.

'Good night!' cried Gabriel. 'Now think better of what we have just

been speaking of; and don't be rash, there's a good fellow! I have an

interest in you, and wouldn't have you cast yourself away. Good night!'

Returning his cheery farewell with cordial goodwill, Joe Willet lingered

until the sound of wheels ceased to vibrate in his ears, and then,

shaking his head mournfully, re-entered the house.

Gabriel Varden went his way towards London, thinking of a great

many things, and most of all of flaming terms in which to relate his

adventure, and so account satisfactorily to Mrs Varden for visiting the

Maypole, despite certain solemn covenants between himself and that lady.

Thinking begets, not only thought, but drowsiness occasionally, and the

more the locksmith thought, the more sleepy he became.

A man may be very sober--or at least firmly set upon his legs on that

neutral ground which lies between the confines of perfect sobriety and

slight tipsiness--and yet feel a strong tendency to mingle up present

circumstances with others which have no manner of connection with them;

to confound all consideration of persons, things, times, and places;

and to jumble his disjointed thoughts together in a kind of mental

kaleidoscope, producing combinations as unexpected as they are

transitory. This was Gabriel Varden's state, as, nodding in his dog

sleep, and leaving his horse to pursue a road with which he was well

acquainted, he got over the ground unconsciously, and drew nearer and

nearer home. He had roused himself once, when the horse stopped until

the turnpike gate was opened, and had cried a lusty 'good night!' to the

toll-keeper; but then he awoke out of a dream about picking a lock in

the stomach of the Great Mogul, and even when he did wake, mixed up the

turnpike man with his mother-in-law who had been dead twenty years. It

is not surprising, therefore, that he soon relapsed, and jogged heavily

along, quite insensible to his progress.

And, now, he approached the great city, which lay outstretched before

him like a dark shadow on the ground, reddening the sluggish air with a

deep dull light, that told of labyrinths of public ways and shops, and

swarms of busy people. Approaching nearer and nearer yet, this halo

began to fade, and the causes which produced it slowly to develop

themselves. Long lines of poorly lighted streets might be faintly

traced, with here and there a lighter spot, where lamps were clustered

round a square or market, or round some great building; after a time

these grew more distinct, and the lamps themselves were visible; slight

yellow specks, that seemed to be rapidly snuffed out, one by one, as

intervening obstacles hid them from the sight. Then, sounds arose--the

striking of church clocks, the distant bark of dogs, the hum of traffic

in the streets; then outlines might be traced--tall steeples looming

in the air, and piles of unequal roofs oppressed by chimneys; then,

the noise swelled into a louder sound, and forms grew more distinct and

numerous still, and London--visible in the darkness by its own faint

light, and not by that of Heaven--was at hand.

The locksmith, however, all unconscious of its near vicinity, still

jogged on, half sleeping and half waking, when a loud cry at no great

distance ahead, roused him with a start.

For a moment or two he looked about him like a man who had been

transported to some strange country in his sleep, but soon recognising

familiar objects, rubbed his eyes lazily and might have relapsed again,

but that the cry was repeated--not once or twice or thrice, but many

times, and each time, if possible, with increased vehemence. Thoroughly

aroused, Gabriel, who was a bold man and not easily daunted, made

straight to the spot, urging on his stout little horse as if for life or

death.

The matter indeed looked sufficiently serious, for, coming to the place

whence the cries had proceeded, he descried the figure of a man extended

in an apparently lifeless state upon the pathway, and, hovering round

him, another person with a torch in his hand, which he waved in the air

with a wild impatience, redoubling meanwhile those cries for help which

had brought the locksmith to the spot.

'What's here to do?' said the old man, alighting. 'How's

this--what--Barnaby?'

The bearer of the torch shook his long loose hair back from his eyes,

and thrusting his face eagerly into that of the locksmith, fixed upon

him a look which told his history at once.

'You know me, Barnaby?' said Varden.

He nodded--not once or twice, but a score of times, and that with a

fantastic exaggeration which would have kept his head in motion for

an hour, but that the locksmith held up his finger, and fixing his eye

sternly upon him caused him to desist; then pointed to the body with an

inquiring look.

'There's blood upon him,' said Barnaby with a shudder. 'It makes me

sick!'

'How came it there?' demanded Varden.

'Steel, steel, steel!' he replied fiercely, imitating with his hand the

thrust of a sword.

'Is he robbed?' said the locksmith.

Barnaby caught him by the arm, and nodded 'Yes;' then pointed towards

the city.

'Oh!' said the old man, bending over the body and looking round as he

spoke into Barnaby's pale face, strangely lighted up by something that

was NOT intellect. 'The robber made off that way, did he? Well, well,

never mind that just now. Hold your torch this way--a little farther

off--so. Now stand quiet, while I try to see what harm is done.'

With these words, he applied himself to a closer examination of

the prostrate form, while Barnaby, holding the torch as he had been

directed, looked on in silence, fascinated by interest or curiosity, but

repelled nevertheless by some strong and secret horror which convulsed

him in every nerve.

As he stood, at that moment, half shrinking back and half bending

forward, both his face and figure were full in the strong glare of the

link, and as distinctly revealed as though it had been broad day. He

was about three-and-twenty years old, and though rather spare, of a fair

height and strong make. His hair, of which he had a great profusion, was

red, and hanging in disorder about his face and shoulders, gave to his

restless looks an expression quite unearthly--enhanced by the paleness

of his complexion, and the glassy lustre of his large protruding eyes.

Startling as his aspect was, the features were good, and there was

something even plaintive in his wan and haggard aspect. But, the absence

of the soul is far more terrible in a living man than in a dead one; and

in this unfortunate being its noblest powers were wanting.

His dress was of green, clumsily trimmed here and there--apparently by

his own hands--with gaudy lace; brightest where the cloth was most

worn and soiled, and poorest where it was at the best. A pair of tawdry

ruffles dangled at his wrists, while his throat was nearly bare. He had

ornamented his hat with a cluster of peacock's feathers, but they were

limp and broken, and now trailed negligently down his back. Girt to his

side was the steel hilt of an old sword without blade or scabbard; and

some particoloured ends of ribands and poor glass toys completed the

ornamental portion of his attire. The fluttered and confused disposition

of all the motley scraps that formed his dress, bespoke, in a scarcely

less degree than his eager and unsettled manner, the disorder of his

mind, and by a grotesque contrast set off and heightened the more

impressive wildness of his face.

'Barnaby,' said the locksmith, after a hasty but careful inspection,

'this man is not dead, but he has a wound in his side, and is in a

fainting-fit.'

'I know him, I know him!' cried Barnaby, clapping his hands.

'Know him?' repeated the locksmith.

'Hush!' said Barnaby, laying his fingers upon his lips. 'He went out

to-day a wooing. I wouldn't for a light guinea that he should never go

a wooing again, for, if he did, some eyes would grow dim that are now as

bright as--see, when I talk of eyes, the stars come out! Whose eyes are

they? If they are angels' eyes, why do they look down here and see good

men hurt, and only wink and sparkle all the night?'

'Now Heaven help this silly fellow,' murmured the perplexed locksmith;

'can he know this gentleman? His mother's house is not far off; I had

better see if she can tell me who he is. Barnaby, my man, help me to put

him in the chaise, and we'll ride home together.'

'I can't touch him!' cried the idiot falling back, and shuddering as

with a strong spasm; he's bloody!'

'It's in his nature, I know,' muttered the locksmith, 'it's cruel to ask

him, but I must have help. Barnaby--good Barnaby--dear Barnaby--if you

know this gentleman, for the sake of his life and everybody's life that

loves him, help me to raise him and lay him down.'

'Cover him then, wrap him close--don't let me see it--smell it--hear the

word. Don't speak the word--don't!'

'No, no, I'll not. There, you see he's covered now. Gently. Well done,

well done!'

They placed him in the carriage with great ease, for Barnaby was strong

and active, but all the time they were so occupied he shivered from head

to foot, and evidently experienced an ecstasy of terror.

This accomplished, and the wounded man being covered with Varden's own

greatcoat which he took off for the purpose, they proceeded onward at

a brisk pace: Barnaby gaily counting the stars upon his fingers, and

Gabriel inwardly congratulating himself upon having an adventure now,

which would silence Mrs Varden on the subject of the Maypole, for that

night, or there was no faith in woman.

Chapter 4

In the venerable suburb--it was a suburb once--of Clerkenwell, towards

that part of its confines which is nearest to the Charter House, and in

one of those cool, shady Streets, of which a few, widely scattered

and dispersed, yet remain in such old parts of the metropolis,--each

tenement quietly vegetating like an ancient citizen who long ago retired

from business, and dozing on in its infirmity until in course of time it

tumbles down, and is replaced by some extravagant young heir, flaunting

in stucco and ornamental work, and all the vanities of modern days,--in

this quarter, and in a street of this description, the business of the

present chapter lies.

At the time of which it treats, though only six-and-sixty years ago,

a very large part of what is London now had no existence. Even in the

brains of the wildest speculators, there had sprung up no long rows of

streets connecting Highgate with Whitechapel, no assemblages of palaces

in the swampy levels, nor little cities in the open fields. Although

this part of town was then, as now, parcelled out in streets, and

plentifully peopled, it wore a different aspect. There were gardens

to many of the houses, and trees by the pavement side; with an air of

freshness breathing up and down, which in these days would be sought

in vain. Fields were nigh at hand, through which the New River took its

winding course, and where there was merry haymaking in the summer time.

Nature was not so far removed, or hard to get at, as in these days; and

although there were busy trades in Clerkenwell, and working jewellers

by scores, it was a purer place, with farm-houses nearer to it than many

modern Londoners would readily believe, and lovers' walks at no great

distance, which turned into squalid courts, long before the lovers of

this age were born, or, as the phrase goes, thought of.

In one of these streets, the cleanest of them all, and on the shady

side of the way--for good housewives know that sunlight damages their

cherished furniture, and so choose the shade rather than its intrusive

glare--there stood the house with which we have to deal. It was a modest

building, not very straight, not large, not tall; not bold-faced, with

great staring windows, but a shy, blinking house, with a conical roof

going up into a peak over its garret window of four small panes of

glass, like a cocked hat on the head of an elderly gentleman with one

eye. It was not built of brick or lofty stone, but of wood and plaster;

it was not planned with a dull and wearisome regard to regularity,

for no one window matched the other, or seemed to have the slightest

reference to anything besides itself.

The shop--for it had a shop--was, with reference to the first floor,

where shops usually are; and there all resemblance between it and any

other shop stopped short and ceased. People who went in and out didn't

go up a flight of steps to it, or walk easily in upon a level with the

street, but dived down three steep stairs, as into a cellar. Its floor

was paved with stone and brick, as that of any other cellar might be;

and in lieu of window framed and glazed it had a great black wooden flap

or shutter, nearly breast high from the ground, which turned back in

the day-time, admitting as much cold air as light, and very often more.

Behind this shop was a wainscoted parlour, looking first into a paved

yard, and beyond that again into a little terrace garden, raised some

feet above it. Any stranger would have supposed that this wainscoted

parlour, saving for the door of communication by which he had entered,

was cut off and detached from all the world; and indeed most strangers

on their first entrance were observed to grow extremely thoughtful, as

weighing and pondering in their minds whether the upper rooms were only

approachable by ladders from without; never suspecting that two of

the most unassuming and unlikely doors in existence, which the most

ingenious mechanician on earth must of necessity have supposed to be

the doors of closets, opened out of this room--each without the smallest

preparation, or so much as a quarter of an inch of passage--upon two

dark winding flights of stairs, the one upward, the other downward,

which were the sole means of communication between that chamber and the

other portions of the house.

With all these oddities, there was not a neater, more scrupulously tidy,

or more punctiliously ordered house, in Clerkenwell, in London, in all

England. There were not cleaner windows, or whiter floors, or brighter

Stoves, or more highly shining articles of furniture in old mahogany;

there was not more rubbing, scrubbing, burnishing and polishing, in the

whole street put together. Nor was this excellence attained without some

cost and trouble and great expenditure of voice, as the neighbours

were frequently reminded when the good lady of the house overlooked and

assisted in its being put to rights on cleaning days--which were usually

from Monday morning till Saturday night, both days inclusive.

Leaning against the door-post of this, his dwelling, the locksmith

stood early on the morning after he had met with the wounded man, gazing

disconsolately at a great wooden emblem of a key, painted in vivid

yellow to resemble gold, which dangled from the house-front, and swung

to and fro with a mournful creaking noise, as if complaining that it had

nothing to unlock. Sometimes, he looked over his shoulder into the shop,

which was so dark and dingy with numerous tokens of his trade, and so

blackened by the smoke of a little forge, near which his 'prentice

was at work, that it would have been difficult for one unused to such

espials to have distinguished anything but various tools of uncouth make

and shape, great bunches of rusty keys, fragments of iron, half-finished

locks, and such like things, which garnished the walls and hung in

clusters from the ceiling.

After a long and patient contemplation of the golden key, and many such

backward glances, Gabriel stepped into the road, and stole a look at the

upper windows. One of them chanced to be thrown open at the moment,

and a roguish face met his; a face lighted up by the loveliest pair of

sparkling eyes that ever locksmith looked upon; the face of a pretty,

laughing, girl; dimpled and fresh, and healthful--the very impersonation

of good-humour and blooming beauty.

'Hush!' she whispered, bending forward and pointing archly to the window

underneath. 'Mother is still asleep.'

'Still, my dear,' returned the locksmith in the same tone. 'You talk as

if she had been asleep all night, instead of little more than half an

hour. But I'm very thankful. Sleep's a blessing--no doubt about it.' The

last few words he muttered to himself.

'How cruel of you to keep us up so late this morning, and never tell us

where you were, or send us word!' said the girl.

'Ah Dolly, Dolly!' returned the locksmith, shaking his head, and

smiling, 'how cruel of you to run upstairs to bed! Come down to

breakfast, madcap, and come down lightly, or you'll wake your mother.

She must be tired, I am sure--I am.'

Keeping these latter words to himself, and returning his daughter's nod,

he was passing into the workshop, with the smile she had awakened still

beaming on his face, when he just caught sight of his 'prentice's brown

paper cap ducking down to avoid observation, and shrinking from the

window back to its former place, which the wearer no sooner reached than

he began to hammer lustily.

'Listening again, Simon!' said Gabriel to himself. 'That's bad. What in

the name of wonder does he expect the girl to say, that I always catch

him listening when SHE speaks, and never at any other time! A bad habit,

Sim, a sneaking, underhanded way. Ah! you may hammer, but you won't beat

that out of me, if you work at it till your time's up!'

So saying, and shaking his head gravely, he re-entered the workshop, and

confronted the subject of these remarks.

'There's enough of that just now,' said the locksmith. 'You needn't make

any more of that confounded clatter. Breakfast's ready.'

'Sir,' said Sim, looking up with amazing politeness, and a peculiar

little bow cut short off at the neck, 'I shall attend you immediately.'

'I suppose,' muttered Gabriel, 'that's out of the 'Prentice's Garland or

the 'Prentice's Delight, or the 'Prentice's Warbler, or the Prentice's

Guide to the Gallows, or some such improving textbook. Now he's going to

beautify himself--here's a precious locksmith!'

Quite unconscious that his master was looking on from the dark corner by

the parlour door, Sim threw off the paper cap, sprang from his seat,

and in two extraordinary steps, something between skating and minuet

dancing, bounded to a washing place at the other end of the shop,

and there removed from his face and hands all traces of his previous

work--practising the same step all the time with the utmost gravity.

This done, he drew from some concealed place a little scrap of

looking-glass, and with its assistance arranged his hair, and

ascertained the exact state of a little carbuncle on his nose. Having

now completed his toilet, he placed the fragment of mirror on a low

bench, and looked over his shoulder at so much of his legs as could be

reflected in that small compass, with the greatest possible complacency

and satisfaction.

Sim, as he was called in the locksmith's family, or Mr Simon Tappertit,

as he called himself, and required all men to style him out of doors,

on holidays, and Sundays out,--was an old-fashioned, thin-faced,

sleek-haired, sharp-nosed, small-eyed little fellow, very little more

than five feet high, and thoroughly convinced in his own mind that he

was above the middle size; rather tall, in fact, than otherwise. Of his

figure, which was well enough formed, though somewhat of the leanest,

he entertained the highest admiration; and with his legs, which, in

knee-breeches, were perfect curiosities of littleness, he was enraptured

to a degree amounting to enthusiasm. He also had some majestic, shadowy

ideas, which had never been quite fathomed by his intimate friends,

concerning the power of his eye. Indeed he had been known to go so far

as to boast that he could utterly quell and subdue the haughtiest beauty

by a simple process, which he termed 'eyeing her over;' but it must

be added, that neither of this faculty, nor of the power he claimed

to have, through the same gift, of vanquishing and heaving down dumb

animals, even in a rabid state, had he ever furnished evidence which

could be deemed quite satisfactory and conclusive.

It may be inferred from these premises, that in the small body of Mr

Tappertit there was locked up an ambitious and aspiring soul. As

certain liquors, confined in casks too cramped in their dimensions, will

ferment, and fret, and chafe in their imprisonment, so the spiritual

essence or soul of Mr Tappertit would sometimes fume within that

precious cask, his body, until, with great foam and froth and splutter,

it would force a vent, and carry all before it. It was his custom to

remark, in reference to any one of these occasions, that his soul had

got into his head; and in this novel kind of intoxication many scrapes

and mishaps befell him, which he had frequently concealed with no small

difficulty from his worthy master.

Sim Tappertit, among the other fancies upon which his before-mentioned

soul was for ever feasting and regaling itself (and which fancies,

like the liver of Prometheus, grew as they were fed upon), had a mighty

notion of his order; and had been heard by the servant-maid openly

expressing his regret that the 'prentices no longer carried clubs

wherewith to mace the citizens: that was his strong expression. He was

likewise reported to have said that in former times a stigma had been

cast upon the body by the execution of George Barnwell, to which they

should not have basely submitted, but should have demanded him of

the legislature--temperately at first; then by an appeal to arms, if

necessary--to be dealt with as they in their wisdom might think fit.

These thoughts always led him to consider what a glorious engine the

'prentices might yet become if they had but a master spirit at their

head; and then he would darkly, and to the terror of his hearers, hint

at certain reckless fellows that he knew of, and at a certain Lion Heart

ready to become their captain, who, once afoot, would make the Lord

Mayor tremble on his throne.

In respect of dress and personal decoration, Sim Tappertit was no less

of an adventurous and enterprising character. He had been seen, beyond

dispute, to pull off ruffles of the finest quality at the corner of the

street on Sunday nights, and to put them carefully in his pocket before

returning home; and it was quite notorious that on all great holiday

occasions it was his habit to exchange his plain steel knee-buckles for

a pair of glittering paste, under cover of a friendly post, planted most

conveniently in that same spot. Add to this that he was in years just

twenty, in his looks much older, and in conceit at least two hundred;

that he had no objection to be jested with, touching his admiration

of his master's daughter; and had even, when called upon at a certain

obscure tavern to pledge the lady whom he honoured with his love,

toasted, with many winks and leers, a fair creature whose Christian

name, he said, began with a D--;--and as much is known of Sim Tappertit,

who has by this time followed the locksmith in to breakfast, as is

necessary to be known in making his acquaintance.

It was a substantial meal; for, over and above the ordinary tea

equipage, the board creaked beneath the weight of a jolly round of beef,

a ham of the first magnitude, and sundry towers of buttered Yorkshire

cake, piled slice upon slice in most alluring order. There was also

a goodly jug of well-browned clay, fashioned into the form of an old

gentleman, not by any means unlike the locksmith, atop of whose bald

head was a fine white froth answering to his wig, indicative, beyond

dispute, of sparkling home-brewed ale. But, better far than fair

home-brewed, or Yorkshire cake, or ham, or beef, or anything to eat or

drink that earth or air or water can supply, there sat, presiding over

all, the locksmith's rosy daughter, before whose dark eyes even beef

grew insignificant, and malt became as nothing.

Fathers should never kiss their daughters when young men are by. It's

too much. There are bounds to human endurance. So thought Sim Tappertit

when Gabriel drew those rosy lips to his--those lips within Sim's reach

from day to day, and yet so far off. He had a respect for his master,

but he wished the Yorkshire cake might choke him.

'Father,' said the locksmith's daughter, when this salute was over, and

they took their seats at table, 'what is this I hear about last night?'

'All true, my dear; true as the Gospel, Doll.'

'Young Mr Chester robbed, and lying wounded in the road, when you came

up!'

'Ay--Mr Edward. And beside him, Barnaby, calling for help with all his

might. It was well it happened as it did; for the road's a lonely one,

the hour was late, and, the night being cold, and poor Barnaby even less

sensible than usual from surprise and fright, the young gentleman might

have met his death in a very short time.'

'I dread to think of it!' cried his daughter with a shudder. 'How did

you know him?'

'Know him!' returned the locksmith. 'I didn't know him--how could I? I

had never seen him, often as I had heard and spoken of him. I took him

to Mrs Rudge's; and she no sooner saw him than the truth came out.'

'Miss Emma, father--If this news should reach her, enlarged upon as it

is sure to be, she will go distracted.'

'Why, lookye there again, how a man suffers for being good-natured,'

said the locksmith. 'Miss Emma was with her uncle at the masquerade at

Carlisle House, where she had gone, as the people at the Warren told me,

sorely against her will. What does your blockhead father when he and Mrs

Rudge have laid their heads together, but goes there when he ought to be

abed, makes interest with his friend the doorkeeper, slips him on a mask

and domino, and mixes with the masquers.'

'And like himself to do so!' cried the girl, putting her fair arm round

his neck, and giving him a most enthusiastic kiss.

'Like himself!' repeated Gabriel, affecting to grumble, but evidently

delighted with the part he had taken, and with her praise. 'Very like

himself--so your mother said. However, he mingled with the crowd,

and prettily worried and badgered he was, I warrant you, with people

squeaking, "Don't you know me?" and "I've found you out," and all that

kind of nonsense in his ears. He might have wandered on till now, but

in a little room there was a young lady who had taken off her mask, on

account of the place being very warm, and was sitting there alone.'

'And that was she?' said his daughter hastily.

'And that was she,' replied the locksmith; 'and I no sooner whispered to

her what the matter was--as softly, Doll, and with nearly as much art as

you could have used yourself--than she gives a kind of scream and faints

away.'

'What did you do--what happened next?' asked his daughter. 'Why, the

masks came flocking round, with a general noise and hubbub, and I

thought myself in luck to get clear off, that's all,' rejoined the

locksmith. 'What happened when I reached home you may guess, if you

didn't hear it. Ah! Well, it's a poor heart that never rejoices.--Put

Toby this way, my dear.'

This Toby was the brown jug of which previous mention has been made.

Applying his lips to the worthy old gentleman's benevolent forehead, the

locksmith, who had all this time been ravaging among the eatables, kept

them there so long, at the same time raising the vessel slowly in

the air, that at length Toby stood on his head upon his nose, when he

smacked his lips, and set him on the table again with fond reluctance.

Although Sim Tappertit had taken no share in this conversation, no part

of it being addressed to him, he had not been wanting in such silent

manifestations of astonishment, as he deemed most compatible with the

favourable display of his eyes. Regarding the pause which now ensued, as

a particularly advantageous opportunity for doing great execution with

them upon the locksmith's daughter (who he had no doubt was looking

at him in mute admiration), he began to screw and twist his face,

and especially those features, into such extraordinary, hideous, and

unparalleled contortions, that Gabriel, who happened to look towards

him, was stricken with amazement.

'Why, what the devil's the matter with the lad?' cried the locksmith.

'Is he choking?'

'Who?' demanded Sim, with some disdain.

'Who? Why, you,' returned his master. 'What do you mean by making those

horrible faces over your breakfast?'

'Faces are matters of taste, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, rather

discomfited; not the less so because he saw the locksmith's daughter

smiling.

'Sim,' rejoined Gabriel, laughing heartily. 'Don't be a fool, for I'd

rather see you in your senses. These young fellows,' he added, turning

to his daughter, 'are always committing some folly or another. There was

a quarrel between Joe Willet and old John last night though I can't say

Joe was much in fault either. He'll be missing one of these mornings,

and will have gone away upon some wild-goose errand, seeking his

fortune.--Why, what's the matter, Doll? YOU are making faces now. The

girls are as bad as the boys every bit!'

'It's the tea,' said Dolly, turning alternately very red and very white,

which is no doubt the effect of a slight scald--'so very hot.'

Mr Tappertit looked immensely big at a quartern loaf on the table, and

breathed hard.

'Is that all?' returned the locksmith. 'Put some more milk in it.--Yes,

I am sorry for Joe, because he is a likely young fellow, and gains upon

one every time one sees him. But he'll start off, you'll find. Indeed he

told me as much himself!'

'Indeed!' cried Dolly in a faint voice. 'In-deed!'

'Is the tea tickling your throat still, my dear?' said the locksmith.

But, before his daughter could make him any answer, she was taken with

a troublesome cough, and it was such a very unpleasant cough, that,

when she left off, the tears were starting in her bright eyes. The

good-natured locksmith was still patting her on the back and applying

such gentle restoratives, when a message arrived from Mrs Varden, making

known to all whom it might concern, that she felt too much indisposed

to rise after her great agitation and anxiety of the previous night; and

therefore desired to be immediately accommodated with the little black

teapot of strong mixed tea, a couple of rounds of buttered toast, a

middling-sized dish of beef and ham cut thin, and the Protestant Manual

in two volumes post octavo. Like some other ladies who in remote

ages flourished upon this globe, Mrs Varden was most devout when most

ill-tempered. Whenever she and her husband were at unusual variance,

then the Protestant Manual was in high feather.

Knowing from experience what these requests portended, the triumvirate

broke up; Dolly, to see the orders executed with all despatch; Gabriel,

to some out-of-door work in his little chaise; and Sim, to his daily

duty in the workshop, to which retreat he carried the big look, although

the loaf remained behind.

Indeed the big look increased immensely, and when he had tied his apron

on, became quite gigantic. It was not until he had several times walked

up and down with folded arms, and the longest strides he could take,

and had kicked a great many small articles out of his way, that his lip

began to curl. At length, a gloomy derision came upon his features, and

he smiled; uttering meanwhile with supreme contempt the monosyllable

'Joe!'

'I eyed her over, while he talked about the fellow,' he said, 'and that

was of course the reason of her being confused. Joe!'

He walked up and down again much quicker than before, and if possible

with longer strides; sometimes stopping to take a glance at his legs,

and sometimes to jerk out, and cast from him, another 'Joe!' In the

course of a quarter of an hour or so he again assumed the paper cap and

tried to work. No. It could not be done.

'I'll do nothing to-day,' said Mr Tappertit, dashing it down again, 'but

grind. I'll grind up all the tools. Grinding will suit my present humour

well. Joe!'

Whirr-r-r-r. The grindstone was soon in motion; the sparks were flying

off in showers. This was the occupation for his heated spirit.

Whirr-r-r-r-r-r-r.

'Something will come of this!' said Mr Tappertit, pausing as if in

triumph, and wiping his heated face upon his sleeve. 'Something will

come of this. I hope it mayn't be human gore!'

Whirr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r.

Chapter 5

As soon as the business of the day was over, the locksmith sallied

forth, alone, to visit the wounded gentleman and ascertain the progress

of his recovery. The house where he had left him was in a by-street

in Southwark, not far from London Bridge; and thither he hied with all

speed, bent upon returning with as little delay as might be, and getting

to bed betimes.

The evening was boisterous--scarcely better than the previous night had

been. It was not easy for a stout man like Gabriel to keep his legs at

the street corners, or to make head against the high wind, which often

fairly got the better of him, and drove him back some paces, or, in

defiance of all his energy, forced him to take shelter in an arch or

doorway until the fury of the gust was spent. Occasionally a hat or wig,

or both, came spinning and trundling past him, like a mad thing; while

the more serious spectacle of falling tiles and slates, or of masses of

brick and mortar or fragments of stone-coping rattling upon the pavement

near at hand, and splitting into fragments, did not increase the

pleasure of the journey, or make the way less dreary.

'A trying night for a man like me to walk in!' said the locksmith, as

he knocked softly at the widow's door. 'I'd rather be in old John's

chimney-corner, faith!'

'Who's there?' demanded a woman's voice from within. Being answered, it

added a hasty word of welcome, and the door was quickly opened.

She was about forty--perhaps two or three years older--with a cheerful

aspect, and a face that had once been pretty. It bore traces of

affliction and care, but they were of an old date, and Time had smoothed

them. Any one who had bestowed but a casual glance on Barnaby might

have known that this was his mother, from the strong resemblance between

them; but where in his face there was wildness and vacancy, in hers

there was the patient composure of long effort and quiet resignation.

One thing about this face was very strange and startling. You could not

look upon it in its most cheerful mood without feeling that it had some

extraordinary capacity of expressing terror. It was not on the surface.

It was in no one feature that it lingered. You could not take the

eyes or mouth, or lines upon the cheek, and say, if this or that were

otherwise, it would not be so. Yet there it always lurked--something for

ever dimly seen, but ever there, and never absent for a moment. It was

the faintest, palest shadow of some look, to which an instant of intense

and most unutterable horror only could have given birth; but indistinct

and feeble as it was, it did suggest what that look must have been, and

fixed it in the mind as if it had had existence in a dream.

More faintly imaged, and wanting force and purpose, as it were, because

of his darkened intellect, there was this same stamp upon the son.

Seen in a picture, it must have had some legend with it, and would have

haunted those who looked upon the canvas. They who knew the Maypole

story, and could remember what the widow was, before her husband's and

his master's murder, understood it well. They recollected how the change

had come, and could call to mind that when her son was born, upon the

very day the deed was known, he bore upon his wrist what seemed a smear

of blood but half washed out.

'God save you, neighbour!' said the locksmith, as he followed her, with

the air of an old friend, into a little parlour where a cheerful fire

was burning.

'And you,' she answered smiling. 'Your kind heart has brought you

here again. Nothing will keep you at home, I know of old, if there are

friends to serve or comfort, out of doors.'

'Tut, tut,' returned the locksmith, rubbing his hands and warming them.

'You women are such talkers. What of the patient, neighbour?'

'He is sleeping now. He was very restless towards daylight, and for

some hours tossed and tumbled sadly. But the fever has left him, and the

doctor says he will soon mend. He must not be removed until to-morrow.'

'He has had visitors to-day--humph?' said Gabriel, slyly.

'Yes. Old Mr Chester has been here ever since we sent for him, and had

not been gone many minutes when you knocked.'

'No ladies?' said Gabriel, elevating his eyebrows and looking

disappointed.

'A letter,' replied the widow.

'Come. That's better than nothing!' replied the locksmith. 'Who was the

bearer?'

'Barnaby, of course.'

'Barnaby's a jewel!' said Varden; 'and comes and goes with ease where we

who think ourselves much wiser would make but a poor hand of it. He is

not out wandering, again, I hope?'

'Thank Heaven he is in his bed; having been up all night, as you know,

and on his feet all day. He was quite tired out. Ah, neighbour, if I

could but see him oftener so--if I could but tame down that terrible

restlessness--'

'In good time,' said the locksmith, kindly, 'in good time--don't be

down-hearted. To my mind he grows wiser every day.'

The widow shook her head. And yet, though she knew the locksmith sought

to cheer her, and spoke from no conviction of his own, she was glad to

hear even this praise of her poor benighted son.

'He will be a 'cute man yet,' resumed the locksmith. 'Take care, when we

are growing old and foolish, Barnaby doesn't put us to the blush, that's

all. But our other friend,' he added, looking under the table and

about the floor--'sharpest and cunningest of all the sharp and cunning

ones--where's he?'

'In Barnaby's room,' rejoined the widow, with a faint smile.

'Ah! He's a knowing blade!' said Varden, shaking his head. 'I should

be sorry to talk secrets before him. Oh! He's a deep customer. I've no

doubt he can read, and write, and cast accounts if he chooses. What was

that? Him tapping at the door?'

'No,' returned the widow. 'It was in the street, I think. Hark! Yes.

There again! 'Tis some one knocking softly at the shutter. Who can it

be!'

They had been speaking in a low tone, for the invalid lay overhead, and

the walls and ceilings being thin and poorly built, the sound of their

voices might otherwise have disturbed his slumber. The party without,

whoever it was, could have stood close to the shutter without hearing

anything spoken; and, seeing the light through the chinks and finding

all so quiet, might have been persuaded that only one person was there.

'Some thief or ruffian maybe,' said the locksmith. 'Give me the light.'

'No, no,' she returned hastily. 'Such visitors have never come to this

poor dwelling. Do you stay here. You're within call, at the worst. I

would rather go myself--alone.'

'Why?' said the locksmith, unwillingly relinquishing the candle he had

caught up from the table.

'Because--I don't know why--because the wish is so strong upon me,' she

rejoined. 'There again--do not detain me, I beg of you!'

Gabriel looked at her, in great surprise to see one who was usually so

mild and quiet thus agitated, and with so little cause. She left the

room and closed the door behind her. She stood for a moment as if

hesitating, with her hand upon the lock. In this short interval the

knocking came again, and a voice close to the window--a voice the

locksmith seemed to recollect, and to have some disagreeable association

with--whispered 'Make haste.'

The words were uttered in that low distinct voice which finds its way so

readily to sleepers' ears, and wakes them in a fright. For a moment

it startled even the locksmith; who involuntarily drew back from the

window, and listened.

The wind rumbling in the chimney made it difficult to hear what passed,

but he could tell that the door was opened, that there was the tread of

a man upon the creaking boards, and then a moment's silence--broken by a

suppressed something which was not a shriek, or groan, or cry for help,

and yet might have been either or all three; and the words 'My God!'

uttered in a voice it chilled him to hear.

He rushed out upon the instant. There, at last, was that dreadful

look--the very one he seemed to know so well and yet had never seen

before--upon her face. There she stood, frozen to the ground, gazing

with starting eyes, and livid cheeks, and every feature fixed and

ghastly, upon the man he had encountered in the dark last night. His

eyes met those of the locksmith. It was but a flash, an instant, a

breath upon a polished glass, and he was gone.

The locksmith was upon him--had the skirts of his streaming garment

almost in his grasp--when his arms were tightly clutched, and the widow

flung herself upon the ground before him.

'The other way--the other way,' she cried. 'He went the other way.

Turn--turn!'

'The other way! I see him now,' rejoined the locksmith,

pointing--'yonder--there--there is his shadow passing by that light.

What--who is this? Let me go.'

'Come back, come back!' exclaimed the woman, clasping him; 'Do not

touch him on your life. I charge you, come back. He carries other lives

besides his own. Come back!'

'What does this mean?' cried the locksmith.

'No matter what it means, don't ask, don't speak, don't think about it.

He is not to be followed, checked, or stopped. Come back!'

The old man looked at her in wonder, as she writhed and clung about him;

and, borne down by her passion, suffered her to drag him into the house.

It was not until she had chained and double-locked the door, fastened

every bolt and bar with the heat and fury of a maniac, and drawn him

back into the room, that she turned upon him, once again, that stony

look of horror, and, sinking down into a chair, covered her face, and

shuddered, as though the hand of death were on her.

Chapter 6

Beyond all measure astonished by the strange occurrences which had

passed with so much violence and rapidity, the locksmith gazed upon the

shuddering figure in the chair like one half stupefied, and would have

gazed much longer, had not his tongue been loosened by compassion and

humanity.

'You are ill,' said Gabriel. 'Let me call some neighbour in.'

'Not for the world,' she rejoined, motioning to him with her trembling

hand, and holding her face averted. 'It is enough that you have been by,

to see this.'

'Nay, more than enough--or less,' said Gabriel.

'Be it so,' she returned. 'As you like. Ask me no questions, I entreat

you.'

'Neighbour,' said the locksmith, after a pause. 'Is this fair, or

reasonable, or just to yourself? Is it like you, who have known me so

long and sought my advice in all matters--like you, who from a girl have

had a strong mind and a staunch heart?'

'I have need of them,' she replied. 'I am growing old, both in years and

care. Perhaps that, and too much trial, have made them weaker than they

used to be. Do not speak to me.'

'How can I see what I have seen, and hold my peace!' returned the

locksmith. 'Who was that man, and why has his coming made this change in

you?'

She was silent, but held to the chair as though to save herself from

falling on the ground.

'I take the licence of an old acquaintance, Mary,' said the locksmith,

'who has ever had a warm regard for you, and maybe has tried to prove it

when he could. Who is this ill-favoured man, and what has he to do with

you? Who is this ghost, that is only seen in the black nights and bad

weather? How does he know, and why does he haunt, this house, whispering

through chinks and crevices, as if there was that between him and you,

which neither durst so much as speak aloud of? Who is he?'

'You do well to say he haunts this house,' returned the widow, faintly.

'His shadow has been upon it and me, in light and darkness, at noonday

and midnight. And now, at last, he has come in the body!'

'But he wouldn't have gone in the body,' returned the locksmith with

some irritation, 'if you had left my arms and legs at liberty. What

riddle is this?'

'It is one,' she answered, rising as she spoke, 'that must remain for

ever as it is. I dare not say more than that.'

'Dare not!' repeated the wondering locksmith.

'Do not press me,' she replied. 'I am sick and faint, and every faculty

of life seems dead within me.--No!--Do not touch me, either.'

Gabriel, who had stepped forward to render her assistance, fell back as

she made this hasty exclamation, and regarded her in silent wonder.

'Let me go my way alone,' she said in a low voice, 'and let the hands of

no honest man touch mine to-night.' When she had tottered to the door,

she turned, and added with a stronger effort, 'This is a secret, which,

of necessity, I trust to you. You are a true man. As you have ever been

good and kind to me,--keep it. If any noise was heard above, make some

excuse--say anything but what you really saw, and never let a word or

look between us, recall this circumstance. I trust to you. Mind, I trust

to you. How much I trust, you never can conceive.'

Casting her eyes upon him for an instant, she withdrew, and left him

there alone.

Gabriel, not knowing what to think, stood staring at the door with a

countenance full of surprise and dismay. The more he pondered on

what had passed, the less able he was to give it any favourable

interpretation. To find this widow woman, whose life for so many years

had been supposed to be one of solitude and retirement, and who, in her

quiet suffering character, had gained the good opinion and respect of

all who knew her--to find her linked mysteriously with an ill-omened

man, alarmed at his appearance, and yet favouring his escape, was a

discovery that pained as much as startled him. Her reliance on his

secrecy, and his tacit acquiescence, increased his distress of mind. If

he had spoken boldly, persisted in questioning her, detained her

when she rose to leave the room, made any kind of protest, instead of

silently compromising himself, as he felt he had done, he would have

been more at ease.

'Why did I let her say it was a secret, and she trusted it to me!' said

Gabriel, putting his wig on one side to scratch his head with greater

ease, and looking ruefully at the fire. 'I have no more readiness than

old John himself. Why didn't I say firmly, "You have no right to such

secrets, and I demand of you to tell me what this means," instead of

standing gaping at her, like an old moon-calf as I am! But there's my

weakness. I can be obstinate enough with men if need be, but women may

twist me round their fingers at their pleasure.'

He took his wig off outright as he made this reflection, and, warming

his handkerchief at the fire began to rub and polish his bald head with

it, until it glistened again.

'And yet,' said the locksmith, softening under this soothing process,

and stopping to smile, 'it MAY be nothing. Any drunken brawler trying to

make his way into the house, would have alarmed a quiet soul like her.

But then'--and here was the vexation--'how came it to be that man; how

comes he to have this influence over her; how came she to favour his

getting away from me; and, more than all, how came she not to say it

was a sudden fright, and nothing more? It's a sad thing to have, in one

minute, reason to mistrust a person I have known so long, and an old

sweetheart into the bargain; but what else can I do, with all this upon

my mind!--Is that Barnaby outside there?'

'Ay!' he cried, looking in and nodding. 'Sure enough it's Barnaby--how

did you guess?'

'By your shadow,' said the locksmith.

'Oho!' cried Barnaby, glancing over his shoulder, 'He's a merry fellow,

that shadow, and keeps close to me, though I AM silly. We have such

pranks, such walks, such runs, such gambols on the grass! Sometimes

he'll be half as tall as a church steeple, and sometimes no bigger

than a dwarf. Now, he goes on before, and now behind, and anon he'll

be stealing on, on this side, or on that, stopping whenever I stop, and

thinking I can't see him, though I have my eye on him sharp enough. Oh!

he's a merry fellow. Tell me--is he silly too? I think he is.'

'Why?' asked Gabriel.

'Because he never tires of mocking me, but does it all day long.--Why

don't you come?'

'Where?'

'Upstairs. He wants you. Stay--where's HIS shadow? Come. You're a wise

man; tell me that.'

'Beside him, Barnaby; beside him, I suppose,' returned the locksmith.

'No!' he replied, shaking his head. 'Guess again.'

'Gone out a walking, maybe?'

'He has changed shadows with a woman,' the idiot whispered in his ear,

and then fell back with a look of triumph. 'Her shadow's always with

him, and his with her. That's sport I think, eh?'

'Barnaby,' said the locksmith, with a grave look; 'come hither, lad.'

'I know what you want to say. I know!' he replied, keeping away from

him. 'But I'm cunning, I'm silent. I only say so much to you--are you

ready?' As he spoke, he caught up the light, and waved it with a wild

laugh above his head.

'Softly--gently,' said the locksmith, exerting all his influence to keep

him calm and quiet. 'I thought you had been asleep.'

'So I HAVE been asleep,' he rejoined, with widely-opened eyes. 'There

have been great faces coming and going--close to my face, and then a

mile away--low places to creep through, whether I would or no--high

churches to fall down from--strange creatures crowded up together neck

and heels, to sit upon the bed--that's sleep, eh?'

'Dreams, Barnaby, dreams,' said the locksmith.

'Dreams!' he echoed softly, drawing closer to him. 'Those are not

dreams.'

'What are,' replied the locksmith, 'if they are not?'

'I dreamed,' said Barnaby, passing his arm through Varden's, and peering

close into his face as he answered in a whisper, 'I dreamed just now

that something--it was in the shape of a man--followed me--came softly

after me--wouldn't let me be--but was always hiding and crouching, like

a cat in dark corners, waiting till I should pass; when it crept out and

came softly after me.--Did you ever see me run?'

'Many a time, you know.'

'You never saw me run as I did in this dream. Still it came creeping on

to worry me. Nearer, nearer, nearer--I ran faster--leaped--sprung out

of bed, and to the window--and there, in the street below--but he is

waiting for us. Are you coming?'

'What in the street below, Barnaby?' said Varden, imagining that

he traced some connection between this vision and what had actually

occurred.

Barnaby looked into his face, muttered incoherently, waved the light

above his head again, laughed, and drawing the locksmith's arm more

tightly through his own, led him up the stairs in silence.

They entered a homely bedchamber, garnished in a scanty way with chairs,

whose spindle-shanks bespoke their age, and other furniture of very

little worth; but clean and neatly kept. Reclining in an easy-chair

before the fire, pale and weak from waste of blood, was Edward Chester,

the young gentleman who had been the first to quit the Maypole on the

previous night, and who, extending his hand to the locksmith, welcomed

him as his preserver and friend.

'Say no more, sir, say no more,' said Gabriel. 'I hope I would have done

at least as much for any man in such a strait, and most of all for you,

sir. A certain young lady,' he added, with some hesitation, 'has done us

many a kind turn, and we naturally feel--I hope I give you no offence in

saying this, sir?'

The young man smiled and shook his head; at the same time moving in his

chair as if in pain.

'It's no great matter,' he said, in answer to the locksmith's

sympathising look, 'a mere uneasiness arising at least as much from

being cooped up here, as from the slight wound I have, or from the loss

of blood. Be seated, Mr Varden.'

'If I may make so bold, Mr Edward, as to lean upon your chair,' returned

the locksmith, accommodating his action to his speech, and bending over

him, 'I'll stand here for the convenience of speaking low. Barnaby is

not in his quietest humour to-night, and at such times talking never

does him good.'

They both glanced at the subject of this remark, who had taken a seat on

the other side of the fire, and, smiling vacantly, was making puzzles on

his fingers with a skein of string.

'Pray, tell me, sir,' said Varden, dropping his voice still lower,

'exactly what happened last night. I have my reason for inquiring. You

left the Maypole, alone?'

'And walked homeward alone, until I had nearly reached the place where

you found me, when I heard the gallop of a horse.'

'Behind you?' said the locksmith.

'Indeed, yes--behind me. It was a single rider, who soon overtook me,

and checking his horse, inquired the way to London.'

'You were on the alert, sir, knowing how many highwaymen there are,

scouring the roads in all directions?' said Varden.

'I was, but I had only a stick, having imprudently left my pistols

in their holster-case with the landlord's son. I directed him as he

desired. Before the words had passed my lips, he rode upon me furiously,

as if bent on trampling me down beneath his horse's hoofs. In starting

aside, I slipped and fell. You found me with this stab and an ugly

bruise or two, and without my purse--in which he found little enough for

his pains. And now, Mr Varden,' he added, shaking the locksmith by the

hand, 'saving the extent of my gratitude to you, you know as much as I.'

'Except,' said Gabriel, bending down yet more, and looking cautiously

towards their silent neighhour, 'except in respect of the robber

himself. What like was he, sir? Speak low, if you please. Barnaby means

no harm, but I have watched him oftener than you, and I know, little as

you would think it, that he's listening now.'

It required a strong confidence in the locksmith's veracity to lead any

one to this belief, for every sense and faculty that Barnahy possessed,

seemed to be fixed upon his game, to the exclusion of all other things.

Something in the young man's face expressed this opinion, for Gabriel

repeated what he had just said, more earnestly than before, and with

another glance towards Barnaby, again asked what like the man was.

'The night was so dark,' said Edward, 'the attack so sudden, and he so

wrapped and muffled up, that I can hardly say. It seems that--'

'Don't mention his name, sir,' returned the locksmith, following his

look towards Barnaby; 'I know HE saw him. I want to know what YOU saw.'

'All I remember is,' said Edward, 'that as he checked his horse his

hat was blown off. He caught it, and replaced it on his head, which

I observed was bound with a dark handkerchief. A stranger entered the

Maypole while I was there, whom I had not seen--for I had sat apart for

reasons of my own--and when I rose to leave the room and glanced round,

he was in the shadow of the chimney and hidden from my sight. But, if he

and the robber were two different persons, their voices were strangely

and most remarkably alike; for directly the man addressed me in the

road, I recognised his speech again.'

'It is as I feared. The very man was here to-night,' thought the

locksmith, changing colour. 'What dark history is this!'

'Halloa!' cried a hoarse voice in his ear. 'Halloa, halloa, halloa! Bow

wow wow. What's the matter here! Hal-loa!'

The speaker--who made the locksmith start as if he had been some

supernatural agent--was a large raven, who had perched upon the top of

the easy-chair, unseen by him and Edward, and listened with a polite

attention and a most extraordinary appearance of comprehending every

word, to all they had said up to this point; turning his head from one

to the other, as if his office were to judge between them, and it were

of the very last importance that he should not lose a word.

'Look at him!' said Varden, divided between admiration of the bird and a

kind of fear of him. 'Was there ever such a knowing imp as that! Oh he's

a dreadful fellow!'

The raven, with his head very much on one side, and his bright eye

shining like a diamond, preserved a thoughtful silence for a few

seconds, and then replied in a voice so hoarse and distant, that it

seemed to come through his thick feathers rather than out of his mouth.

'Halloa, halloa, halloa! What's the matter here! Keep up your spirits.

Never say die. Bow wow wow. I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil.

Hurrah!'--And then, as if exulting in his infernal character, he began

to whistle.

'I more than half believe he speaks the truth. Upon my word I do,'

said Varden. 'Do you see how he looks at me, as if he knew what I was

saying?'

To which the bird, balancing himself on tiptoe, as it were, and moving

his body up and down in a sort of grave dance, rejoined, 'I'm a devil,

I'm a devil, I'm a devil,' and flapped his wings against his sides as

if he were bursting with laughter. Barnaby clapped his hands, and fairly

rolled upon the ground in an ecstasy of delight.

'Strange companions, sir,' said the locksmith, shaking his head, and

looking from one to the other. 'The bird has all the wit.'

'Strange indeed!' said Edward, holding out his forefinger to the raven,

who, in acknowledgment of the attention, made a dive at it immediately

with his iron bill. 'Is he old?'

'A mere boy, sir,' replied the locksmith. 'A hundred and twenty, or

thereabouts. Call him down, Barnaby, my man.'

'Call him!' echoed Barnaby, sitting upright upon the floor, and staring

vacantly at Gabriel, as he thrust his hair back from his face. 'But who

can make him come! He calls me, and makes me go where he will. He goes

on before, and I follow. He's the master, and I'm the man. Is that the

truth, Grip?'

The raven gave a short, comfortable, confidential kind of croak;--a most

expressive croak, which seemed to say, 'You needn't let these fellows

into our secrets. We understand each other. It's all right.'

'I make HIM come?' cried Barnaby, pointing to the bird. 'Him, who never

goes to sleep, or so much as winks!--Why, any time of night, you may see

his eyes in my dark room, shining like two sparks. And every night, and

all night too, he's broad awake, talking to himself, thinking what he

shall do to-morrow, where we shall go, and what he shall steal, and

hide, and bury. I make HIM come! Ha ha ha!'

On second thoughts, the bird appeared disposed to come of himself. After

a short survey of the ground, and a few sidelong looks at the ceiling

and at everybody present in turn, he fluttered to the floor, and went

to Barnaby--not in a hop, or walk, or run, but in a pace like that of

a very particular gentleman with exceedingly tight boots on, trying to

walk fast over loose pebbles. Then, stepping into his extended hand,

and condescending to be held out at arm's length, he gave vent to a

succession of sounds, not unlike the drawing of some eight or ten dozen

of long corks, and again asserted his brimstone birth and parentage with

great distinctness.

The locksmith shook his head--perhaps in some doubt of the creature's

being really nothing but a bird--perhaps in pity for Barnaby, who by

this time had him in his arms, and was rolling about, with him, on the

ground. As he raised his eyes from the poor fellow he encountered those

of his mother, who had entered the room, and was looking on in silence.

She was quite white in the face, even to her lips, but had wholly

subdued her emotion, and wore her usual quiet look. Varden fancied as he

glanced at her that she shrunk from his eye; and that she busied herself

about the wounded gentleman to avoid him the better.

It was time he went to bed, she said. He was to be removed to his own

home on the morrow, and he had already exceeded his time for sitting up,

by a full hour. Acting on this hint, the locksmith prepared to take his

leave.

'By the bye,' said Edward, as he shook him by the hand, and looked from

him to Mrs Rudge and back again, 'what noise was that below? I heard

your voice in the midst of it, and should have inquired before, but our

other conversation drove it from my memory. What was it?'

The locksmith looked towards her, and bit his lip. She leant against the

chair, and bent her eyes upon the ground. Barnaby too--he was listening.

--'Some mad or drunken fellow, sir,' Varden at length made answer,

looking steadily at the widow as he spoke. 'He mistook the house, and

tried to force an entrance.'

She breathed more freely, but stood quite motionless. As the locksmith

said 'Good night,' and Barnaby caught up the candle to light him down

the stairs, she took it from him, and charged him--with more haste and

earnestness than so slight an occasion appeared to warrant--not to stir.

The raven followed them to satisfy himself that all was right below,

and when they reached the street-door, stood on the bottom stair drawing

corks out of number.

With a trembling hand she unfastened the chain and bolts, and turned

the key. As she had her hand upon the latch, the locksmith said in a low

voice,

'I have told a lie to-night, for your sake, Mary, and for the sake of

bygone times and old acquaintance, when I would scorn to do so for my

own. I hope I may have done no harm, or led to none. I can't help the

suspicions you have forced upon me, and I am loth, I tell you plainly,

to leave Mr Edward here. Take care he comes to no hurt. I doubt the

safety of this roof, and am glad he leaves it so soon. Now, let me go.'

For a moment she hid her face in her hands and wept; but resisting the

strong impulse which evidently moved her to reply, opened the door--no

wider than was sufficient for the passage of his body--and motioned him

away. As the locksmith stood upon the step, it was chained and locked

behind him, and the raven, in furtherance of these precautions, barked

like a lusty house-dog.

'In league with that ill-looking figure that might have fallen from a

gibbet--he listening and hiding here--Barnaby first upon the spot last

night--can she who has always borne so fair a name be guilty of such

crimes in secret!' said the locksmith, musing. 'Heaven forgive me if I

am wrong, and send me just thoughts; but she is poor, the temptation

may be great, and we daily hear of things as strange.--Ay, bark away, my

friend. If there's any wickedness going on, that raven's in it, I'll be

sworn.'

Chapter 7

Mrs Varden was a lady of what is commonly called an uncertain temper--a

phrase which being interpreted signifies a temper tolerably certain to

make everybody more or less uncomfortable. Thus it generally happened,

that when other people were merry, Mrs Varden was dull; and that

when other people were dull, Mrs Varden was disposed to be amazingly

cheerful. Indeed the worthy housewife was of such a capricious nature,

that she not only attained a higher pitch of genius than Macbeth, in

respect of her ability to be wise, amazed, temperate and furious,

loyal and neutral in an instant, but would sometimes ring the changes

backwards and forwards on all possible moods and flights in one short

quarter of an hour; performing, as it were, a kind of triple bob major

on the peal of instruments in the female belfry, with a skilfulness and

rapidity of execution that astonished all who heard her.

It had been observed in this good lady (who did not want for personal

attractions, being plump and buxom to look at, though like her

fair daughter, somewhat short in stature) that this uncertainty of

disposition strengthened and increased with her temporal prosperity; and

divers wise men and matrons, on friendly terms with the locksmith and

his family, even went so far as to assert, that a tumble down some

half-dozen rounds in the world's ladder--such as the breaking of the

bank in which her husband kept his money, or some little fall of that

kind--would be the making of her, and could hardly fail to render her

one of the most agreeable companions in existence. Whether they were

right or wrong in this conjecture, certain it is that minds, like

bodies, will often fall into a pimpled ill-conditioned state from

mere excess of comfort, and like them, are often successfully cured by

remedies in themselves very nauseous and unpalatable.

Mrs Varden's chief aider and abettor, and at the same time her principal

victim and object of wrath, was her single domestic servant, one Miss

Miggs; or as she was called, in conformity with those prejudices of

society which lop and top from poor hand-maidens all such genteel

excrescences--Miggs. This Miggs was a tall young lady, very much

addicted to pattens in private life; slender and shrewish, of a rather

uncomfortable figure, and though not absolutely ill-looking, of a sharp

and acid visage. As a general principle and abstract proposition, Miggs

held the male sex to be utterly contemptible and unworthy of notice;

to be fickle, false, base, sottish, inclined to perjury, and wholly

undeserving. When particularly exasperated against them (which, scandal

said, was when Sim Tappertit slighted her most) she was accustomed to

wish with great emphasis that the whole race of women could but die off,

in order that the men might be brought to know the real value of the

blessings by which they set so little store; nay, her feeling for her

order ran so high, that she sometimes declared, if she could only have

good security for a fair, round number--say ten thousand--of young

virgins following her example, she would, to spite mankind, hang, drown,

stab, or poison herself, with a joy past all expression.

It was the voice of Miggs that greeted the locksmith, when he knocked at

his own house, with a shrill cry of 'Who's there?'

'Me, girl, me,' returned Gabriel.

What, already, sir!' said Miggs, opening the door with a look of

surprise. 'We were just getting on our nightcaps to sit up,--me and

mistress. Oh, she has been SO bad!'

Miggs said this with an air of uncommon candour and concern; but the

parlour-door was standing open, and as Gabriel very well knew for whose

ears it was designed, he regarded her with anything but an approving

look as he passed in.

'Master's come home, mim,' cried Miggs, running before him into the

parlour. 'You was wrong, mim, and I was right. I thought he wouldn't

keep us up so late, two nights running, mim. Master's always considerate

so far. I'm so glad, mim, on your account. I'm a little'--here Miggs

simpered--'a little sleepy myself; I'll own it now, mim, though I said I

wasn't when you asked me. It ain't of no consequence, mim, of course.'

'You had better,' said the locksmith, who most devoutly wished that

Barnaby's raven was at Miggs's ankles, 'you had better get to bed at

once then.'

'Thanking you kindly, sir,' returned Miggs, 'I couldn't take my rest in

peace, nor fix my thoughts upon my prayers, otherways than that I knew

mistress was comfortable in her bed this night; by rights she ought to

have been there, hours ago.'

'You're talkative, mistress,' said Varden, pulling off his greatcoat,

and looking at her askew.

'Taking the hint, sir,' cried Miggs, with a flushed face, 'and thanking

you for it most kindly, I will make bold to say, that if I give offence

by having consideration for my mistress, I do not ask your pardon, but

am content to get myself into trouble and to be in suffering.'

Here Mrs Varden, who, with her countenance shrouded in a large nightcap,

had been all this time intent upon the Protestant Manual, looked round,

and acknowledged Miggs's championship by commanding her to hold her

tongue.

Every little bone in Miggs's throat and neck developed itself with a

spitefulness quite alarming, as she replied, 'Yes, mim, I will.'

'How do you find yourself now, my dear?' said the locksmith, taking a

chair near his wife (who had resumed her book), and rubbing his knees

hard as he made the inquiry.

'You're very anxious to know, an't you?' returned Mrs Varden, with

her eyes upon the print. 'You, that have not been near me all day, and

wouldn't have been if I was dying!'

'My dear Martha--' said Gabriel.

Mrs Varden turned over to the next page; then went back again to the

bottom line over leaf to be quite sure of the last words; and then went

on reading with an appearance of the deepest interest and study.

'My dear Martha,' said the locksmith, 'how can you say such things,

when you know you don't mean them? If you were dying! Why, if there was

anything serious the matter with you, Martha, shouldn't I be in constant

attendance upon you?'

'Yes!' cried Mrs Varden, bursting into tears, 'yes, you would. I don't

doubt it, Varden. Certainly you would. That's as much as to tell me that

you would be hovering round me like a vulture, waiting till the breath

was out of my body, that you might go and marry somebody else.'

Miggs groaned in sympathy--a little short groan, checked in its birth,

and changed into a cough. It seemed to say, 'I can't help it. It's wrung

from me by the dreadful brutality of that monster master.'

'But you'll break my heart one of these days,' added Mrs Varden, with

more resignation, 'and then we shall both be happy. My only desire is

to see Dolly comfortably settled, and when she is, you may settle ME as

soon as you like.'

'Ah!' cried Miggs--and coughed again.

Poor Gabriel twisted his wig about in silence for a long time, and then

said mildly, 'Has Dolly gone to bed?'

'Your master speaks to you,' said Mrs Varden, looking sternly over her

shoulder at Miss Miggs in waiting.

'No, my dear, I spoke to you,' suggested the locksmith.

'Did you hear me, Miggs?' cried the obdurate lady, stamping her foot

upon the ground. 'YOU are beginning to despise me now, are you? But this

is example!'

At this cruel rebuke, Miggs, whose tears were always ready, for large

or small parties, on the shortest notice and the most reasonable terms,

fell a crying violently; holding both her hands tight upon her heart

meanwhile, as if nothing less would prevent its splitting into small

fragments. Mrs Varden, who likewise possessed that faculty in high

perfection, wept too, against Miggs; and with such effect that Miggs

gave in after a time, and, except for an occasional sob, which seemed to

threaten some remote intention of breaking out again, left her mistress

in possession of the field. Her superiority being thoroughly asserted,

that lady soon desisted likewise, and fell into a quiet melancholy.

The relief was so great, and the fatiguing occurrences of last night so

completely overpowered the locksmith, that he nodded in his chair, and

would doubtless have slept there all night, but for the voice of Mrs

Varden, which, after a pause of some five minutes, awoke him with a

start.

'If I am ever,' said Mrs V.--not scolding, but in a sort of monotonous

remonstrance--'in spirits, if I am ever cheerful, if I am ever more than

usually disposed to be talkative and comfortable, this is the way I am

treated.'

'Such spirits as you was in too, mim, but half an hour ago!' cried

Miggs. 'I never see such company!'

'Because,' said Mrs Varden, 'because I never interfere or interrupt;

because I never question where anybody comes or goes; because my whole

mind and soul is bent on saving where I can save, and labouring in this

house;--therefore, they try me as they do.'

'Martha,' urged the locksmith, endeavouring to look as wakeful as

possible, 'what is it you complain of? I really came home with every

wish and desire to be happy. I did, indeed.'

'What do I complain of!' retorted his wife. 'Is it a chilling thing to

have one's husband sulking and falling asleep directly he comes home--to

have him freezing all one's warm-heartedness, and throwing cold water

over the fireside? Is it natural, when I know he went out upon a matter

in which I am as much interested as anybody can be, that I should wish

to know all that has happened, or that he should tell me without my

begging and praying him to do it? Is that natural, or is it not?'

'I am very sorry, Martha,' said the good-natured locksmith. 'I was

really afraid you were not disposed to talk pleasantly; I'll tell you

everything; I shall only be too glad, my dear.'

'No, Varden,' returned his wife, rising with dignity. 'I dare say--thank

you! I'm not a child to be corrected one minute and petted the next--I'm

a little too old for that, Varden. Miggs, carry the light.--YOU can be

cheerful, Miggs, at least.'

Miggs, who, to this moment, had been in the very depths of compassionate

despondency, passed instantly into the liveliest state conceivable,

and tossing her head as she glanced towards the locksmith, bore off her

mistress and the light together.

'Now, who would think,' thought Varden, shrugging his shoulders and

drawing his chair nearer to the fire, 'that that woman could ever be

pleasant and agreeable? And yet she can be. Well, well, all of us have

our faults. I'll not be hard upon hers. We have been man and wife too

long for that.'

He dozed again--not the less pleasantly, perhaps, for his hearty temper.

While his eyes were closed, the door leading to the upper stairs was

partially opened; and a head appeared, which, at sight of him, hastily

drew back again.

'I wish,' murmured Gabriel, waking at the noise, and looking round

the room, 'I wish somebody would marry Miggs. But that's impossible! I

wonder whether there's any madman alive, who would marry Miggs!'

This was such a vast speculation that he fell into a doze again, and

slept until the fire was quite burnt out. At last he roused himself; and

having double-locked the street-door according to custom, and put the

key in his pocket, went off to bed.

He had not left the room in darkness many minutes, when the head again

appeared, and Sim Tappertit entered, bearing in his hand a little lamp.

'What the devil business has he to stop up so late!' muttered Sim,

passing into the workshop, and setting it down upon the forge. 'Here's

half the night gone already. There's only one good that has ever come to

me, out of this cursed old rusty mechanical trade, and that's this piece

of ironmongery, upon my soul!'

As he spoke, he drew from the right hand, or rather right leg pocket of

his smalls, a clumsy large-sized key, which he inserted cautiously in

the lock his master had secured, and softly opened the door. That done,

he replaced his piece of secret workmanship in his pocket; and leaving

the lamp burning, and closing the door carefully and without noise,

stole out into the street--as little suspected by the locksmith in his

sound deep sleep, as by Barnaby himself in his phantom-haunted dreams.

Chapter 8

Clear of the locksmith's house, Sim Tappertit laid aside his cautious

manner, and assuming in its stead that of a ruffling, swaggering, roving

blade, who would rather kill a man than otherwise, and eat him too if

needful, made the best of his way along the darkened streets.

Half pausing for an instant now and then to smite his pocket and assure

himself of the safety of his master key, he hurried on to Barbican, and

turning into one of the narrowest of the narrow streets which diverged

from that centre, slackened his pace and wiped his heated brow, as if

the termination of his walk were near at hand.

It was not a very choice spot for midnight expeditions, being in truth

one of more than questionable character, and of an appearance by no

means inviting. From the main street he had entered, itself little

better than an alley, a low-browed doorway led into a blind court, or

yard, profoundly dark, unpaved, and reeking with stagnant odours. Into

this ill-favoured pit, the locksmith's vagrant 'prentice groped his way;

and stopping at a house from whose defaced and rotten front the rude

effigy of a bottle swung to and fro like some gibbeted malefactor,

struck thrice upon an iron grating with his foot. After listening in

vain for some response to his signal, Mr Tappertit became impatient, and

struck the grating thrice again.

A further delay ensued, but it was not of long duration. The ground

seemed to open at his feet, and a ragged head appeared.

'Is that the captain?' said a voice as ragged as the head.

'Yes,' replied Mr Tappertit haughtily, descending as he spoke, 'who

should it be?'

'It's so late, we gave you up,' returned the voice, as its owner stopped

to shut and fasten the grating. 'You're late, sir.'

'Lead on,' said Mr Tappertit, with a gloomy majesty, 'and make remarks

when I require you. Forward!'

This latter word of command was perhaps somewhat theatrical and

unnecessary, inasmuch as the descent was by a very narrow, steep, and

slippery flight of steps, and any rashness or departure from the beaten

track must have ended in a yawning water-butt. But Mr Tappertit being,

like some other great commanders, favourable to strong effects, and

personal display, cried 'Forward!' again, in the hoarsest voice he could

assume; and led the way, with folded arms and knitted brows, to the

cellar down below, where there was a small copper fixed in one corner,

a chair or two, a form and table, a glimmering fire, and a truckle-bed,

covered with a ragged patchwork rug.

'Welcome, noble captain!' cried a lanky figure, rising as from a nap.

The captain nodded. Then, throwing off his outer coat, he stood composed

in all his dignity, and eyed his follower over.

'What news to-night?' he asked, when he had looked into his very soul.

'Nothing particular,' replied the other, stretching himself--and he was

so long already that it was quite alarming to see him do it--'how come

you to be so late?'

'No matter,' was all the captain deigned to say in answer. 'Is the room

prepared?'

'It is,' replied the follower.

'The comrade--is he here?'

'Yes. And a sprinkling of the others--you hear 'em?'

'Playing skittles!' said the captain moodily. 'Light-hearted revellers!'

There was no doubt respecting the particular amusement in which these

heedless spirits were indulging, for even in the close and stifling

atmosphere of the vault, the noise sounded like distant thunder. It

certainly appeared, at first sight, a singular spot to choose, for that

or any other purpose of relaxation, if the other cellars answered to

the one in which this brief colloquy took place; for the floors were of

sodden earth, the walls and roof of damp bare brick tapestried with

the tracks of snails and slugs; the air was sickening, tainted, and

offensive. It seemed, from one strong flavour which was uppermost among

the various odours of the place, that it had, at no very distant period,

been used as a storehouse for cheeses; a circumstance which, while it

accounted for the greasy moisture that hung about it, was agreeably

suggestive of rats. It was naturally damp besides, and little trees of

fungus sprung from every mouldering corner.

The proprietor of this charming retreat, and owner of the ragged head

before mentioned--for he wore an old tie-wig as bare and frowzy as a

stunted hearth-broom--had by this time joined them; and stood a little

apart, rubbing his hands, wagging his hoary bristled chin, and smiling

in silence. His eyes were closed; but had they been wide open, it would

have been easy to tell, from the attentive expression of the face he

turned towards them--pale and unwholesome as might be expected in one

of his underground existence--and from a certain anxious raising and

quivering of the lids, that he was blind.

'Even Stagg hath been asleep,' said the long comrade, nodding towards

this person.

'Sound, captain, sound!' cried the blind man; 'what does my noble

captain drink--is it brandy, rum, usquebaugh? Is it soaked gunpowder, or

blazing oil? Give it a name, heart of oak, and we'd get it for you, if

it was wine from a bishop's cellar, or melted gold from King George's

mint.'

'See,' said Mr Tappertit haughtily, 'that it's something strong, and

comes quick; and so long as you take care of that, you may bring it from

the devil's cellar, if you like.'

'Boldly said, noble captain!' rejoined the blind man. 'Spoken like the

'Prentices' Glory. Ha, ha! From the devil's cellar! A brave joke! The

captain joketh. Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'll tell you what, my fine feller,' said Mr Tappertit, eyeing the

host over as he walked to a closet, and took out a bottle and glass as

carelessly as if he had been in full possession of his sight, 'if you

make that row, you'll find that the captain's very far from joking, and

so I tell you.'

'He's got his eyes on me!' cried Stagg, stopping short on his way back,

and affecting to screen his face with the bottle. 'I feel 'em though I

can't see 'em. Take 'em off, noble captain. Remove 'em, for they pierce

like gimlets.'

Mr Tappertit smiled grimly at his comrade; and twisting out one more

look--a kind of ocular screw--under the influence of which the blind man

feigned to undergo great anguish and torture, bade him, in a softened

tone, approach, and hold his peace.

'I obey you, captain,' cried Stagg, drawing close to him and filling

out a bumper without spilling a drop, by reason that he held his little

finger at the brim of the glass, and stopped at the instant the liquor

touched it, 'drink, noble governor. Death to all masters, life to all

'prentices, and love to all fair damsels. Drink, brave general, and warm

your gallant heart!'

Mr Tappertit condescended to take the glass from his outstretched hand.

Stagg then dropped on one knee, and gently smoothed the calves of his

legs, with an air of humble admiration.

'That I had but eyes!' he cried, 'to behold my captain's symmetrical

proportions! That I had but eyes, to look upon these twin invaders of

domestic peace!'

'Get out!' said Mr Tappertit, glancing downward at his favourite limbs.

'Go along, will you, Stagg!'

'When I touch my own afterwards,' cried the host, smiting them

reproachfully, 'I hate 'em. Comparatively speaking, they've no more

shape than wooden legs, beside these models of my noble captain's.'

'Yours!' exclaimed Mr Tappertit. 'No, I should think not. Don't talk

about those precious old toothpicks in the same breath with mine; that's

rather too much. Here. Take the glass. Benjamin. Lead on. To business!'

With these words, he folded his arms again; and frowning with a sullen

majesty, passed with his companion through a little door at the upper

end of the cellar, and disappeared; leaving Stagg to his private

meditations.

The vault they entered, strewn with sawdust and dimly lighted, was

between the outer one from which they had just come, and that in which

the skittle-players were diverting themselves; as was manifested by

the increased noise and clamour of tongues, which was suddenly stopped,

however, and replaced by a dead silence, at a signal from the long

comrade. Then, this young gentleman, going to a little cupboard,

returned with a thigh-bone, which in former times must have been part

and parcel of some individual at least as long as himself, and placed

the same in the hands of Mr Tappertit; who, receiving it as a sceptre

and staff of authority, cocked his three-cornered hat fiercely on the

top of his head, and mounted a large table, whereon a chair of state,

cheerfully ornamented with a couple of skulls, was placed ready for his

reception.

He had no sooner assumed this position, than another young gentleman

appeared, bearing in his arms a huge clasped book, who made him a

profound obeisance, and delivering it to the long comrade, advanced to

the table, and turning his back upon it, stood there Atlas-wise. Then,

the long comrade got upon the table too; and seating himself in a lower

chair than Mr Tappertit's, with much state and ceremony, placed the

large book on the shoulders of their mute companion as deliberately as

if he had been a wooden desk, and prepared to make entries therein with

a pen of corresponding size.

When the long comrade had made these preparations, he looked towards Mr

Tappertit; and Mr Tappertit, flourishing the bone, knocked nine times

therewith upon one of the skulls. At the ninth stroke, a third young

gentleman emerged from the door leading to the skittle ground, and

bowing low, awaited his commands.

'Prentice!' said the mighty captain, 'who waits without?'

The 'prentice made answer that a stranger was in attendance, who claimed

admission into that secret society of 'Prentice Knights, and a free

participation in their rights, privileges, and immunities. Thereupon

Mr Tappertit flourished the bone again, and giving the other skull a

prodigious rap on the nose, exclaimed 'Admit him!' At these dread words

the 'prentice bowed once more, and so withdrew as he had come.

There soon appeared at the same door, two other 'prentices, having

between them a third, whose eyes were bandaged, and who was attired in a

bag-wig, and a broad-skirted coat, trimmed with tarnished lace; and who

was girded with a sword, in compliance with the laws of the Institution

regulating the introduction of candidates, which required them to

assume this courtly dress, and kept it constantly in lavender, for

their convenience. One of the conductors of this novice held a rusty

blunderbuss pointed towards his ear, and the other a very ancient

sabre, with which he carved imaginary offenders as he came along in a

sanguinary and anatomical manner.

As this silent group advanced, Mr Tappertit fixed his hat upon his head.

The novice then laid his hand upon his breast and bent before him. When

he had humbled himself sufficiently, the captain ordered the bandage to

be removed, and proceeded to eye him over.

'Ha!' said the captain, thoughtfully, when he had concluded this ordeal.

'Proceed.'

The long comrade read aloud as follows:--'Mark Gilbert. Age, nineteen.

Bound to Thomas Curzon, hosier, Golden Fleece, Aldgate. Loves Curzon's

daughter. Cannot say that Curzon's daughter loves him. Should think it

probable. Curzon pulled his ears last Tuesday week.'

'How!' cried the captain, starting.

'For looking at his daughter, please you,' said the novice.

'Write Curzon down, Denounced,' said the captain. 'Put a black cross

against the name of Curzon.'

'So please you,' said the novice, 'that's not the worst--he calls his

'prentice idle dog, and stops his beer unless he works to his liking. He

gives Dutch cheese, too, eating Cheshire, sir, himself; and Sundays out,

are only once a month.'

'This,' said Mr Tappert gravely, 'is a flagrant case. Put two black

crosses to the name of Curzon.'

'If the society,' said the novice, who was an ill-looking, one-sided,

shambling lad, with sunken eyes set close together in his head--'if the

society would burn his house down--for he's not insured--or beat him

as he comes home from his club at night, or help me to carry off his

daughter, and marry her at the Fleet, whether she gave consent or no--'

Mr Tappertit waved his grizzly truncheon as an admonition to him not to

interrupt, and ordered three black crosses to the name of Curzon.

'Which means,' he said in gracious explanation, 'vengeance, complete and

terrible. 'Prentice, do you love the Constitution?'

To which the novice (being to that end instructed by his attendant

sponsors) replied 'I do!'

'The Church, the State, and everything established--but the masters?'

quoth the captain.

Again the novice said 'I do.'

Having said it, he listened meekly to the captain, who in an address

prepared for such occasions, told him how that under that same

Constitution (which was kept in a strong box somewhere, but where

exactly he could not find out, or he would have endeavoured to procure a

copy of it), the 'prentices had, in times gone by, had frequent holidays

of right, broken people's heads by scores, defied their masters, nay,

even achieved some glorious murders in the streets, which privileges

had gradually been wrested from them, and in all which noble aspirations

they were now restrained; how the degrading checks imposed upon them

were unquestionably attributable to the innovating spirit of the times,

and how they united therefore to resist all change, except such change

as would restore those good old English customs, by which they would

stand or fall. After illustrating the wisdom of going backward, by

reference to that sagacious fish, the crab, and the not unfrequent

practice of the mule and donkey, he described their general objects;

which were briefly vengeance on their Tyrant Masters (of whose grievous

and insupportable oppression no 'prentice could entertain a moment's

doubt) and the restoration, as aforesaid, of their ancient rights and

holidays; for neither of which objects were they now quite ripe, being

barely twenty strong, but which they pledged themselves to pursue with

fire and sword when needful. Then he described the oath which every

member of that small remnant of a noble body took, and which was of a

dreadful and impressive kind; binding him, at the bidding of his chief,

to resist and obstruct the Lord Mayor, sword-bearer, and chaplain; to

despise the authority of the sheriffs; and to hold the court of aldermen

as nought; but not on any account, in case the fulness of time should

bring a general rising of 'prentices, to damage or in any way disfigure

Temple Bar, which was strictly constitutional and always to be

approached with reverence. Having gone over these several heads with

great eloquence and force, and having further informed the novice that

this society had its origin in his own teeming brain, stimulated by a

swelling sense of wrong and outrage, Mr Tappertit demanded whether he

had strength of heart to take the mighty pledge required, or whether he

would withdraw while retreat was yet in his power.

To this the novice made rejoinder, that he would take the vow, though

it should choke him; and it was accordingly administered with many

impressive circumstances, among which the lighting up of the two skulls

with a candle-end inside of each, and a great many flourishes with

the bone, were chiefly conspicuous; not to mention a variety of grave

exercises with the blunderbuss and sabre, and some dismal groaning by

unseen 'prentices without. All these dark and direful ceremonies

being at length completed, the table was put aside, the chair of state

removed, the sceptre locked up in its usual cupboard, the doors of

communication between the three cellars thrown freely open, and the

'Prentice Knights resigned themselves to merriment.

But Mr Tappertit, who had a soul above the vulgar herd, and who, on

account of his greatness, could only afford to be merry now and then,

threw himself on a bench with the air of a man who was faint with

dignity. He looked with an indifferent eye, alike on skittles, cards,

and dice, thinking only of the locksmith's daughter, and the base

degenerate days on which he had fallen.

'My noble captain neither games, nor sings, nor dances,' said his host,

taking a seat beside him. 'Drink, gallant general!'

Mr Tappertit drained the proffered goblet to the dregs; then thrust

his hands into his pockets, and with a lowering visage walked among the

skittles, while his followers (such is the influence of superior genius)

restrained the ardent ball, and held his little shins in dumb respect.

'If I had been born a corsair or a pirate, a brigand, genteel highwayman

or patriot--and they're the same thing,' thought Mr Tappertit, musing

among the nine-pins, 'I should have been all right. But to drag out a

ignoble existence unbeknown to mankind in general--patience! I will be

famous yet. A voice within me keeps on whispering Greatness. I shall

burst out one of these days, and when I do, what power can keep me down?

I feel my soul getting into my head at the idea. More drink there!'

'The novice,' pursued Mr Tappertit, not exactly in a voice of thunder,

for his tones, to say the truth were rather cracked and shrill--but very

impressively, notwithstanding--'where is he?'

'Here, noble captain!' cried Stagg. 'One stands beside me who I feel is

a stranger.'

'Have you,' said Mr Tappertit, letting his gaze fall on the party

indicated, who was indeed the new knight, by this time restored to his

own apparel; 'Have you the impression of your street-door key in wax?'

The long comrade anticipated the reply, by producing it from the shelf

on which it had been deposited.

'Good,' said Mr Tappertit, scrutinising it attentively, while a

breathless silence reigned around; for he had constructed secret

door-keys for the whole society, and perhaps owed something of his

influence to that mean and trivial circumstance--on such slight

accidents do even men of mind depend!--'This is easily made. Come

hither, friend.'

With that, he beckoned the new knight apart, and putting the pattern in

his pocket, motioned to him to walk by his side.

'And so,' he said, when they had taken a few turns up and down, you--you

love your master's daughter?'

'I do,' said the 'prentice. 'Honour bright. No chaff, you know.'

'Have you,' rejoined Mr Tappertit, catching him by the wrist, and

giving him a look which would have been expressive of the most deadly

malevolence, but for an accidental hiccup that rather interfered with

it; 'have you a--a rival?'

'Not as I know on,' replied the 'prentice.

'If you had now--' said Mr Tappertit--'what would you--eh?--'

The 'prentice looked fierce and clenched his fists.

'It is enough,' cried Mr Tappertit hastily, 'we understand each other.

We are observed. I thank you.'

So saying, he cast him off again; and calling the long comrade aside

after taking a few hasty turns by himself, bade him immediately write

and post against the wall, a notice, proscribing one Joseph Willet

(commonly known as Joe) of Chigwell; forbidding all 'Prentice Knights

to succour, comfort, or hold communion with him; and requiring them,

on pain of excommunication, to molest, hurt, wrong, annoy, and pick

quarrels with the said Joseph, whensoever and wheresoever they, or any

of them, should happen to encounter him.

Having relieved his mind by this energetic proceeding, he condescended

to approach the festive board, and warming by degrees, at length deigned

to preside, and even to enchant the company with a song. After this,

he rose to such a pitch as to consent to regale the society with a

hornpipe, which he actually performed to the music of a fiddle (played

by an ingenious member) with such surpassing agility and brilliancy of

execution, that the spectators could not be sufficiently enthusiastic in

their admiration; and their host protested, with tears in his eyes, that

he had never truly felt his blindness until that moment.

But the host withdrawing--probably to weep in secret--soon returned with

the information that it wanted little more than an hour of day, and that

all the cocks in Barbican had already begun to crow, as if their lives

depended on it. At this intelligence, the 'Prentice Knights arose in

haste, and marshalling into a line, filed off one by one and dispersed

with all speed to their several homes, leaving their leader to pass the

grating last.

'Good night, noble captain,' whispered the blind man as he held it open

for his passage out; 'Farewell, brave general. Bye, bye, illustrious

commander. Good luck go with you for a--conceited, bragging,

empty-headed, duck-legged idiot.'

With which parting words, coolly added as he listened to his receding

footsteps and locked the grate upon himself, he descended the steps,

and lighting the fire below the little copper, prepared, without

any assistance, for his daily occupation; which was to retail at the

area-head above pennyworths of broth and soup, and savoury puddings,

compounded of such scraps as were to be bought in the heap for the least

money at Fleet Market in the evening time; and for the sale of which

he had need to have depended chiefly on his private connection, for the

court had no thoroughfare, and was not that kind of place in which

many people were likely to take the air, or to frequent as an agreeable

promenade.

Chapter 9

Chronicler's are privileged to enter where they list, to come and go

through keyholes, to ride upon the wind, to overcome, in their soarings

up and down, all obstacles of distance, time, and place. Thrice blessed

be this last consideration, since it enables us to follow the disdainful

Miggs even into the sanctity of her chamber, and to hold her in sweet

companionship through the dreary watches of the night!

Miss Miggs, having undone her mistress, as she phrased it (which means,

assisted to undress her), and having seen her comfortably to bed in

the back room on the first floor, withdrew to her own apartment, in

the attic story. Notwithstanding her declaration in the locksmith's

presence, she was in no mood for sleep; so, putting her light upon the

table and withdrawing the little window curtain, she gazed out pensively

at the wild night sky.

Perhaps she wondered what star was destined for her habitation when

she had run her little course below; perhaps speculated which of those

glimmering spheres might be the natal orb of Mr Tappertit; perhaps

marvelled how they could gaze down on that perfidious creature, man, and

not sicken and turn green as chemists' lamps; perhaps thought of nothing

in particular. Whatever she thought about, there she sat, until her

attention, alive to anything connected with the insinuating 'prentice,

was attracted by a noise in the next room to her own--his room; the room

in which he slept, and dreamed--it might be, sometimes dreamed of her.

That he was not dreaming now, unless he was taking a walk in his sleep,

was clear, for every now and then there came a shuffling noise, as

though he were engaged in polishing the whitewashed wall; then a gentle

creaking of his door; then the faintest indication of his stealthy

footsteps on the landing-place outside. Noting this latter circumstance,

Miss Miggs turned pale and shuddered, as mistrusting his intentions; and

more than once exclaimed, below her breath, 'Oh! what a Providence it

is, as I am bolted in!'--which, owing doubtless to her alarm, was a

confusion of ideas on her part between a bolt and its use; for though

there was one on the door, it was not fastened.

Miss Miggs's sense of hearing, however, having as sharp an edge as her

temper, and being of the same snappish and suspicious kind, very soon

informed her that the footsteps passed her door, and appeared to have

some object quite separate and disconnected from herself. At this

discovery she became more alarmed than ever, and was about to give

utterance to those cries of 'Thieves!' and 'Murder!' which she had

hitherto restrained, when it occurred to her to look softly out, and see

that her fears had some good palpable foundation.

Looking out accordingly, and stretching her neck over the handrail,

she descried, to her great amazement, Mr Tappertit completely dressed,

stealing downstairs, one step at a time, with his shoes in one hand

and a lamp in the other. Following him with her eyes, and going down a

little way herself to get the better of an intervening angle, she beheld

him thrust his head in at the parlour-door, draw it back again with

great swiftness, and immediately begin a retreat upstairs with all

possible expedition.

'Here's mysteries!' said the damsel, when she was safe in her own room

again, quite out of breath. 'Oh, gracious, here's mysteries!'

The prospect of finding anybody out in anything, would have kept Miss

Miggs awake under the influence of henbane. Presently, she heard the

step again, as she would have done if it had been that of a feather

endowed with motion and walking down on tiptoe. Then gliding out as

before, she again beheld the retreating figure of the 'prentice; again

he looked cautiously in at the parlour-door, but this time instead of

retreating, he passed in and disappeared.

Miggs was back in her room, and had her head out of the window, before

an elderly gentleman could have winked and recovered from it. Out he

came at the street-door, shut it carefully behind him, tried it with

his knee, and swaggered off, putting something in his pocket as he

went along. At this spectacle Miggs cried 'Gracious!' again, and then

'Goodness gracious!' and then 'Goodness gracious me!' and then, candle

in hand, went downstairs as he had done. Coming to the workshop, she saw

the lamp burning on the forge, and everything as Sim had left it.

'Why I wish I may only have a walking funeral, and never be buried

decent with a mourning-coach and feathers, if the boy hasn't been and

made a key for his own self!' cried Miggs. 'Oh the little villain!'

This conclusion was not arrived at without consideration, and much

peeping and peering about; nor was it unassisted by the recollection

that she had on several occasions come upon the 'prentice suddenly,

and found him busy at some mysterious occupation. Lest the fact of Miss

Miggs calling him, on whom she stooped to cast a favourable eye, a

boy, should create surprise in any breast, it may be observed that she

invariably affected to regard all male bipeds under thirty as mere chits

and infants; which phenomenon is not unusual in ladies of Miss Miggs's

temper, and is indeed generally found to be the associate of such

indomitable and savage virtue.

Miss Miggs deliberated within herself for some little time, looking hard

at the shop-door while she did so, as though her eyes and thoughts were

both upon it; and then, taking a sheet of paper from a drawer, twisted

it into a long thin spiral tube. Having filled this instrument with a

quantity of small coal-dust from the forge, she approached the door,

and dropping on one knee before it, dexterously blew into the keyhole as

much of these fine ashes as the lock would hold. When she had filled it

to the brim in a very workmanlike and skilful manner, she crept upstairs

again, and chuckled as she went.

'There!' cried Miggs, rubbing her hands, 'now let's see whether you

won't be glad to take some notice of me, mister. He, he, he! You'll have

eyes for somebody besides Miss Dolly now, I think. A fat-faced puss she

is, as ever I come across!'

As she uttered this criticism, she glanced approvingly at her small

mirror, as who should say, I thank my stars that can't be said of

me!--as it certainly could not; for Miss Miggs's style of beauty was of

that kind which Mr Tappertit himself had not inaptly termed, in private,

'scraggy.'

'I don't go to bed this night!' said Miggs, wrapping herself in a shawl,

and drawing a couple of chairs near the window, flouncing down upon

one, and putting her feet upon the other, 'till you come home, my lad. I

wouldn't,' said Miggs viciously, 'no, not for five-and-forty pound!'

With that, and with an expression of face in which a great number of

opposite ingredients, such as mischief, cunning, malice, triumph,

and patient expectation, were all mixed up together in a kind of

physiognomical punch, Miss Miggs composed herself to wait and listen,

like some fair ogress who had set a trap and was watching for a nibble

from a plump young traveller.

She sat there, with perfect composure, all night. At length, just upon

break of day, there was a footstep in the street, and presently she

could hear Mr Tappertit stop at the door. Then she could make out that

he tried his key--that he was blowing into it--that he knocked it on the

nearest post to beat the dust out--that he took it under a lamp to look

at it--that he poked bits of stick into the lock to clear it--that

he peeped into the keyhole, first with one eye, and then with the

other--that he tried the key again--that he couldn't turn it, and what

was worse, couldn't get it out--that he bent it--that then it was much

less disposed to come out than before--that he gave it a mighty twist

and a great pull, and then it came out so suddenly that he staggered

backwards--that he kicked the door--that he shook it--finally, that he

smote his forehead, and sat down on the step in despair.

When this crisis had arrived, Miss Miggs, affecting to be exhausted

with terror, and to cling to the window-sill for support, put out her

nightcap, and demanded in a faint voice who was there.

Mr Tappertit cried 'Hush!' and, backing to the road, exhorted her in

frenzied pantomime to secrecy and silence.

'Tell me one thing,' said Miggs. 'Is it thieves?'

'No--no--no!' cried Mr Tappertit.

'Then,' said Miggs, more faintly than before, 'it's fire. Where is it,

sir? It's near this room, I know. I've a good conscience, sir, and would

much rather die than go down a ladder. All I wish is, respecting my love

to my married sister, Golden Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, second

bell-handle on the right-hand door-post.'

'Miggs!' cried Mr Tappertit, 'don't you know me? Sim, you know--Sim--'

'Oh! what about him!' cried Miggs, clasping her hands. 'Is he in any

danger? Is he in the midst of flames and blazes! Oh gracious, gracious!'

'Why I'm here, an't I?' rejoined Mr Tappertit, knocking himself on the

breast. 'Don't you see me? What a fool you are, Miggs!'

'There!' cried Miggs, unmindful of this compliment. 'Why--so

it--Goodness, what is the meaning of--If you please, mim, here's--'

'No, no!' cried Mr Tappertit, standing on tiptoe, as if by that means

he, in the street, were any nearer being able to stop the mouth of Miggs

in the garret. 'Don't!--I've been out without leave, and something or

another's the matter with the lock. Come down, and undo the shop window,

that I may get in that way.'

'I dursn't do it, Simmun,' cried Miggs--for that was her pronunciation

of his Christian name. 'I dursn't do it, indeed. You know as well as

anybody, how particular I am. And to come down in the dead of night,

when the house is wrapped in slumbers and weiled in obscurity.' And

there she stopped and shivered, for her modesty caught cold at the very

thought.

'But Miggs,' cried Mr Tappertit, getting under the lamp, that she might

see his eyes. 'My darling Miggs--'

Miggs screamed slightly.

'--That I love so much, and never can help thinking of,' and it

is impossible to describe the use he made of his eyes when he said

this--'do--for my sake, do.'

'Oh Simmun,' cried Miggs, 'this is worse than all. I know if I come

down, you'll go, and--'

'And what, my precious?' said Mr Tappertit.

'And try,' said Miggs, hysterically, 'to kiss me, or some such

dreadfulness; I know you will!'

'I swear I won't,' said Mr Tappertit, with remarkable earnestness. 'Upon

my soul I won't. It's getting broad day, and the watchman's waking

up. Angelic Miggs! If you'll only come and let me in, I promise you

faithfully and truly I won't.'

Miss Miggs, whose gentle heart was touched, did not wait for the oath

(knowing how strong the temptation was, and fearing he might forswear

himself), but tripped lightly down the stairs, and with her own fair

hands drew back the rough fastenings of the workshop window. Having

helped the wayward 'prentice in, she faintly articulated the words

'Simmun is safe!' and yielding to her woman's nature, immediately became

insensible.

'I knew I should quench her,' said Sim, rather embarrassed by this

circumstance. 'Of course I was certain it would come to this, but there

was nothing else to be done--if I hadn't eyed her over, she wouldn't

have come down. Here. Keep up a minute, Miggs. What a slippery figure

she is! There's no holding her, comfortably. Do keep up a minute, Miggs,

will you?'

As Miggs, however, was deaf to all entreaties, Mr Tappertit leant her

against the wall as one might dispose of a walking-stick or umbrella,

until he had secured the window, when he took her in his arms again,

and, in short stages and with great difficulty--arising from her being

tall and his being short, and perhaps in some degree from that peculiar

physical conformation on which he had already remarked--carried her

upstairs, and planting her, in the same umbrella and walking-stick

fashion, just inside her own door, left her to her repose.

'He may be as cool as he likes,' said Miss Miggs, recovering as soon

as she was left alone; 'but I'm in his confidence and he can't help

himself, nor couldn't if he was twenty Simmunses!'

Chapter 10

It was on one of those mornings, common in early spring, when the year,

fickle and changeable in its youth like all other created things, is

undecided whether to step backward into winter or forward into summer,

and in its uncertainty inclines now to the one and now to the other, and

now to both at once--wooing summer in the sunshine, and lingering still

with winter in the shade--it was, in short, on one of those mornings,

when it is hot and cold, wet and dry, bright and lowering, sad and

cheerful, withering and genial, in the compass of one short hour, that

old John Willet, who was dropping asleep over the copper boiler, was

roused by the sound of a horse's feet, and glancing out at window,

beheld a traveller of goodly promise, checking his bridle at the Maypole

door.

He was none of your flippant young fellows, who would call for a tankard

of mulled ale, and make themselves as much at home as if they had

ordered a hogshead of wine; none of your audacious young swaggerers, who

would even penetrate into the bar--that solemn sanctuary--and, smiting

old John upon the back, inquire if there was never a pretty girl in the

house, and where he hid his little chambermaids, with a hundred other

impertinences of that nature; none of your free-and-easy companions, who

would scrape their boots upon the firedogs in the common room, and

be not at all particular on the subject of spittoons; none of your

unconscionable blades, requiring impossible chops, and taking unheard-of

pickles for granted. He was a staid, grave, placid gentleman, something

past the prime of life, yet upright in his carriage, for all that, and

slim as a greyhound. He was well-mounted upon a sturdy chestnut cob, and

had the graceful seat of an experienced horseman; while his riding gear,

though free from such fopperies as were then in vogue, was handsome and

well chosen. He wore a riding-coat of a somewhat brighter green than

might have been expected to suit the taste of a gentleman of his years,

with a short, black velvet cape, and laced pocket-holes and cuffs, all

of a jaunty fashion; his linen, too, was of the finest kind, worked in a

rich pattern at the wrists and throat, and scrupulously white. Although

he seemed, judging from the mud he had picked up on the way, to have

come from London, his horse was as smooth and cool as his own iron-grey

periwig and pigtail. Neither man nor beast had turned a single hair; and

saving for his soiled skirts and spatter-dashes, this gentleman, with

his blooming face, white teeth, exactly-ordered dress, and perfect

calmness, might have come from making an elaborate and leisurely toilet,

to sit for an equestrian portrait at old John Willet's gate.

It must not be supposed that John observed these several characteristics

by other than very slow degrees, or that he took in more than half a one

at a time, or that he even made up his mind upon that, without a great

deal of very serious consideration. Indeed, if he had been distracted in

the first instance by questionings and orders, it would have taken him

at the least a fortnight to have noted what is here set down; but it

happened that the gentleman, being struck with the old house, or with

the plump pigeons which were skimming and curtseying about it, or with

the tall maypole, on the top of which a weathercock, which had been out

of order for fifteen years, performed a perpetual walk to the music of

its own creaking, sat for some little time looking round in silence.

Hence John, standing with his hand upon the horse's bridle, and

his great eyes on the rider, and with nothing passing to divert his

thoughts, had really got some of these little circumstances into his

brain by the time he was called upon to speak.

'A quaint place this,' said the gentleman--and his voice was as rich as

his dress. 'Are you the landlord?'

'At your service, sir,' replied John Willet.

'You can give my horse good stabling, can you, and me an early dinner (I

am not particular what, so that it be cleanly served), and a decent

room of which there seems to be no lack in this great mansion,' said the

stranger, again running his eyes over the exterior.

'You can have, sir,' returned John with a readiness quite surprising,

'anything you please.'

'It's well I am easily satisfied,' returned the other with a smile,

'or that might prove a hardy pledge, my friend.' And saying so, he

dismounted, with the aid of the block before the door, in a twinkling.

'Halloa there! Hugh!' roared John. 'I ask your pardon, sir, for keeping

you standing in the porch; but my son has gone to town on business, and

the boy being, as I may say, of a kind of use to me, I'm rather put

out when he's away. Hugh!--a dreadful idle vagrant fellow, sir, half

a gipsy, as I think--always sleeping in the sun in summer, and in

the straw in winter time, sir--Hugh! Dear Lord, to keep a gentleman

a waiting here through him!--Hugh! I wish that chap was dead, I do

indeed.'

'Possibly he is,' returned the other. 'I should think if he were living,

he would have heard you by this time.'

'In his fits of laziness, he sleeps so desperate hard,' said the

distracted host, 'that if you were to fire off cannon-balls into his

ears, it wouldn't wake him, sir.'

The guest made no remark upon this novel cure for drowsiness, and recipe

for making people lively, but, with his hands clasped behind him, stood

in the porch, very much amused to see old John, with the bridle in his

hand, wavering between a strong impulse to abandon the animal to his

fate, and a half disposition to lead him into the house, and shut him up

in the parlour, while he waited on his master.

'Pillory the fellow, here he is at last!' cried John, in the very height

and zenith of his distress. 'Did you hear me a calling, villain?'

The figure he addressed made no answer, but putting his hand upon the

saddle, sprung into it at a bound, turned the horse's head towards the

stable, and was gone in an instant.

'Brisk enough when he is awake,' said the guest.

'Brisk enough, sir!' replied John, looking at the place where the horse

had been, as if not yet understanding quite, what had become of him. 'He

melts, I think. He goes like a drop of froth. You look at him, and there

he is. You look at him again, and--there he isn't.'

Having, in the absence of any more words, put this sudden climax to what

he had faintly intended should be a long explanation of the whole life

and character of his man, the oracular John Willet led the gentleman up

his wide dismantled staircase into the Maypole's best apartment.

It was spacious enough in all conscience, occupying the whole depth of

the house, and having at either end a great bay window, as large as many

modern rooms; in which some few panes of stained glass, emblazoned

with fragments of armorial bearings, though cracked, and patched, and

shattered, yet remained; attesting, by their presence, that the former

owner had made the very light subservient to his state, and pressed the

sun itself into his list of flatterers; bidding it, when it shone into

his chamber, reflect the badges of his ancient family, and take new hues

and colours from their pride.

But those were old days, and now every little ray came and went as it

would; telling the plain, bare, searching truth. Although the best room

of the inn, it had the melancholy aspect of grandeur in decay, and was

much too vast for comfort. Rich rustling hangings, waving on the walls;

and, better far, the rustling of youth and beauty's dress; the light of

women's eyes, outshining the tapers and their own rich jewels; the sound

of gentle tongues, and music, and the tread of maiden feet, had once

been there, and filled it with delight. But they were gone, and with

them all its gladness. It was no longer a home; children were never born

and bred there; the fireside had become mercenary--a something to be

bought and sold--a very courtezan: let who would die, or sit beside, or

leave it, it was still the same--it missed nobody, cared for nobody,

had equal warmth and smiles for all. God help the man whose heart ever

changes with the world, as an old mansion when it becomes an inn!

No effort had been made to furnish this chilly waste, but before the

broad chimney a colony of chairs and tables had been planted on a square

of carpet, flanked by a ghostly screen, enriched with figures, grinning

and grotesque. After lighting with his own hands the faggots which were

heaped upon the hearth, old John withdrew to hold grave council with his

cook, touching the stranger's entertainment; while the guest himself,

seeing small comfort in the yet unkindled wood, opened a lattice in the

distant window, and basked in a sickly gleam of cold March sun.

Leaving the window now and then, to rake the crackling logs together,

or pace the echoing room from end to end, he closed it when the fire was

quite burnt up, and having wheeled the easiest chair into the warmest

corner, summoned John Willet.

'Sir,' said John.

He wanted pen, ink, and paper. There was an old standish on the

mantelshelf containing a dusty apology for all three. Having set this

before him, the landlord was retiring, when he motioned him to stay.

'There's a house not far from here,' said the guest when he had written

a few lines, 'which you call the Warren, I believe?'

As this was said in the tone of one who knew the fact, and asked the

question as a thing of course, John contented himself with nodding his

head in the affirmative; at the same time taking one hand out of his

pockets to cough behind, and then putting it in again.

'I want this note'--said the guest, glancing on what he had written, and

folding it, 'conveyed there without loss of time, and an answer brought

back here. Have you a messenger at hand?'

John was thoughtful for a minute or thereabouts, and then said Yes.

'Let me see him,' said the guest.

This was disconcerting; for Joe being out, and Hugh engaged in rubbing

down the chestnut cob, he designed sending on the errand, Barnaby, who

had just then arrived in one of his rambles, and who, so that he thought

himself employed on a grave and serious business, would go anywhere.

'Why the truth is,' said John after a long pause, 'that the person who'd

go quickest, is a sort of natural, as one may say, sir; and though quick

of foot, and as much to be trusted as the post itself, he's not good at

talking, being touched and flighty, sir.'

'You don't,' said the guest, raising his eyes to John's fat face, 'you

don't mean--what's the fellow's name--you don't mean Barnaby?'

'Yes, I do,' returned the landlord, his features turning quite

expressive with surprise.

'How comes he to be here?' inquired the guest, leaning back in his

chair; speaking in the bland, even tone, from which he never varied; and

with the same soft, courteous, never-changing smile upon his face. 'I

saw him in London last night.'

'He's, for ever, here one hour, and there the next,' returned old John,

after the usual pause to get the question in his mind. 'Sometimes he

walks, and sometimes runs. He's known along the road by everybody, and

sometimes comes here in a cart or chaise, and sometimes riding double.

He comes and goes, through wind, rain, snow, and hail, and on the

darkest nights. Nothing hurts HIM.'

'He goes often to the Warren, does he not?' said the guest carelessly.

'I seem to remember his mother telling me something to that effect

yesterday. But I was not attending to the good woman much.'

'You're right, sir,' John made answer, 'he does. His father, sir, was

murdered in that house.'

'So I have heard,' returned the guest, taking a gold toothpick from his

pocket with the same sweet smile. 'A very disagreeable circumstance for

the family.'

'Very,' said John with a puzzled look, as if it occurred to him, dimly

and afar off, that this might by possibility be a cool way of treating

the subject.

'All the circumstances after a murder,' said the guest soliloquising,

'must be dreadfully unpleasant--so much bustle and disturbance--no

repose--a constant dwelling upon one subject--and the running in and

out, and up and down stairs, intolerable. I wouldn't have such a thing

happen to anybody I was nearly interested in, on any account. 'Twould

be enough to wear one's life out.--You were going to say, friend--' he

added, turning to John again.

'Only that Mrs Rudge lives on a little pension from the family, and that

Barnaby's as free of the house as any cat or dog about it,' answered

John. 'Shall he do your errand, sir?'

'Oh yes,' replied the guest. 'Oh certainly. Let him do it by all means.

Please to bring him here that I may charge him to be quick. If he

objects to come you may tell him it's Mr Chester. He will remember my

name, I dare say.'

John was so very much astonished to find who his visitor was, that he

could express no astonishment at all, by looks or otherwise, but left

the room as if he were in the most placid and imperturbable of all

possible conditions. It has been reported that when he got downstairs,

he looked steadily at the boiler for ten minutes by the clock, and all

that time never once left off shaking his head; for which statement

there would seem to be some ground of truth and feasibility, inasmuch

as that interval of time did certainly elapse, before he returned with

Barnaby to the guest's apartment.

'Come hither, lad,' said Mr Chester. 'You know Mr Geoffrey Haredale?'

Barnaby laughed, and looked at the landlord as though he would say,

'You hear him?' John, who was greatly shocked at this breach of decorum,

clapped his finger to his nose, and shook his head in mute remonstrance.

'He knows him, sir,' said John, frowning aside at Barnaby, 'as well as

you or I do.'

'I haven't the pleasure of much acquaintance with the gentleman,'

returned his guest. 'YOU may have. Limit the comparison to yourself, my

friend.'

Although this was said with the same easy affability, and the same

smile, John felt himself put down, and laying the indignity at Barnaby's

door, determined to kick his raven, on the very first opportunity.

'Give that,' said the guest, who had by this time sealed the note, and

who beckoned his messenger towards him as he spoke, 'into Mr Haredale's

own hands. Wait for an answer, and bring it back to me here. If you

should find that Mr Haredale is engaged just now, tell him--can he

remember a message, landlord?'

'When he chooses, sir,' replied John. 'He won't forget this one.'

'How are you sure of that?'

John merely pointed to him as he stood with his head bent forward, and

his earnest gaze fixed closely on his questioner's face; and nodded

sagely.

'Tell him then, Barnaby, should he be engaged,' said Mr Chester, 'that

I shall be glad to wait his convenience here, and to see him (if he will

call) at any time this evening.--At the worst I can have a bed here,

Willet, I suppose?'

Old John, immensely flattered by the personal notoriety implied in this

familiar form of address, answered, with something like a knowing look,

'I should believe you could, sir,' and was turning over in his mind

various forms of eulogium, with the view of selecting one appropriate to

the qualities of his best bed, when his ideas were put to flight by Mr

Chester giving Barnaby the letter, and bidding him make all speed away.

'Speed!' said Barnaby, folding the little packet in his breast, 'Speed!

If you want to see hurry and mystery, come here. Here!'

With that, he put his hand, very much to John Willet's horror, on the

guest's fine broadcloth sleeve, and led him stealthily to the back

window.

'Look down there,' he said softly; 'do you mark how they whisper in each

other's ears; then dance and leap, to make believe they are in sport?

Do you see how they stop for a moment, when they think there is no one

looking, and mutter among themselves again; and then how they roll and

gambol, delighted with the mischief they've been plotting? Look at

'em now. See how they whirl and plunge. And now they stop again, and

whisper, cautiously together--little thinking, mind, how often I have

lain upon the grass and watched them. I say what is it that they plot

and hatch? Do you know?'

'They are only clothes,' returned the guest, 'such as we wear; hanging

on those lines to dry, and fluttering in the wind.'

'Clothes!' echoed Barnaby, looking close into his face, and falling

quickly back. 'Ha ha! Why, how much better to be silly, than as wise

as you! You don't see shadowy people there, like those that live in

sleep--not you. Nor eyes in the knotted panes of glass, nor swift ghosts

when it blows hard, nor do you hear voices in the air, nor see men

stalking in the sky--not you! I lead a merrier life than you, with all

your cleverness. You're the dull men. We're the bright ones. Ha! ha!

I'll not change with you, clever as you are,--not I!'

With that, he waved his hat above his head, and darted off.

'A strange creature, upon my word!' said the guest, pulling out a

handsome box, and taking a pinch of snuff.

'He wants imagination,' said Mr Willet, very slowly, and after a long

silence; 'that's what he wants. I've tried to instil it into him, many

and many's the time; but'--John added this in confidence--'he an't made

for it; that's the fact.'

To record that Mr Chester smiled at John's remark would be little to the

purpose, for he preserved the same conciliatory and pleasant look at all

times. He drew his chair nearer to the fire though, as a kind of hint

that he would prefer to be alone, and John, having no reasonable excuse

for remaining, left him to himself.

Very thoughtful old John Willet was, while the dinner was preparing; and

if his brain were ever less clear at one time than another, it is but

reasonable to suppose that he addled it in no slight degree by shaking

his head so much that day. That Mr Chester, between whom and Mr

Haredale, it was notorious to all the neighbourhood, a deep and bitter

animosity existed, should come down there for the sole purpose, as it

seemed, of seeing him, and should choose the Maypole for their place

of meeting, and should send to him express, were stumbling blocks John

could not overcome. The only resource he had, was to consult the boiler,

and wait impatiently for Barnaby's return.

But Barnaby delayed beyond all precedent. The visitor's dinner was

served, removed, his wine was set, the fire replenished, the hearth

clean swept; the light waned without, it grew dusk, became quite dark,

and still no Barnaby appeared. Yet, though John Willet was full of

wonder and misgiving, his guest sat cross-legged in the easy-chair, to

all appearance as little ruffled in his thoughts as in his dress--the

same calm, easy, cool gentleman, without a care or thought beyond his

golden toothpick.

'Barnaby's late,' John ventured to observe, as he placed a pair of

tarnished candlesticks, some three feet high, upon the table, and

snuffed the lights they held.

'He is rather so,' replied the guest, sipping his wine. 'He will not be

much longer, I dare say.'

John coughed and raked the fire together.

'As your roads bear no very good character, if I may judge from my son's

mishap, though,' said Mr Chester, 'and as I have no fancy to be knocked

on the head--which is not only disconcerting at the moment, but places

one, besides, in a ridiculous position with respect to the people who

chance to pick one up--I shall stop here to-night. I think you said you

had a bed to spare.'

'Such a bed, sir,' returned John Willet; 'ay, such a bed as few, even

of the gentry's houses, own. A fixter here, sir. I've heard say that

bedstead is nigh two hundred years of age. Your noble son--a fine young

gentleman--slept in it last, sir, half a year ago.'

'Upon my life, a recommendation!' said the guest, shrugging his

shoulders and wheeling his chair nearer to the fire. 'See that it be

well aired, Mr Willet, and let a blazing fire be lighted there at once.

This house is something damp and chilly.'

John raked the faggots up again, more from habit than presence of mind,

or any reference to this remark, and was about to withdraw, when a

bounding step was heard upon the stair, and Barnaby came panting in.

'He'll have his foot in the stirrup in an hour's time,' he cried,

advancing. 'He has been riding hard all day--has just come home--but

will be in the saddle again as soon as he has eat and drank, to meet his

loving friend.'

'Was that his message?' asked the visitor, looking up, but without the

smallest discomposure--or at least without the show of any.

'All but the last words,' Barnaby rejoined. 'He meant those. I saw that,

in his face.'

'This for your pains,' said the other, putting money in his hand, and

glancing at him steadfastly.' This for your pains, sharp Barnaby.'

'For Grip, and me, and Hugh, to share among us,' he rejoined, putting

it up, and nodding, as he counted it on his fingers. 'Grip one, me two,

Hugh three; the dog, the goat, the cats--well, we shall spend it pretty

soon, I warn you. Stay.--Look. Do you wise men see nothing there, now?'

He bent eagerly down on one knee, and gazed intently at the smoke, which

was rolling up the chimney in a thick black cloud. John Willet, who

appeared to consider himself particularly and chiefly referred to under

the term wise men, looked that way likewise, and with great solidity of

feature.

'Now, where do they go to, when they spring so fast up there,' asked

Barnaby; 'eh? Why do they tread so closely on each other's heels, and

why are they always in a hurry--which is what you blame me for, when I

only take pattern by these busy folk about me? More of 'em! catching to

each other's skirts; and as fast as they go, others come! What a merry

dance it is! I would that Grip and I could frisk like that!'

'What has he in that basket at his back?' asked the guest after a few

moments, during which Barnaby was still bending down to look higher up

the chimney, and earnestly watching the smoke.

'In this?' he answered, jumping up, before John Willet could

reply--shaking it as he spoke, and stooping his head to listen. 'In

this! What is there here? Tell him!'

'A devil, a devil, a devil!' cried a hoarse voice.

'Here's money!' said Barnaby, chinking it in his hand, 'money for a

treat, Grip!'

'Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!' replied the raven, 'keep up your spirits.

Never say die. Bow, wow, wow!'

Mr Willet, who appeared to entertain strong doubts whether a customer in

a laced coat and fine linen could be supposed to have any acquaintance

even with the existence of such unpolite gentry as the bird claimed

to belong to, took Barnaby off at this juncture, with the view of

preventing any other improper declarations, and quitted the room with

his very best bow.

Chapter 11

There was great news that night for the regular Maypole customers, to

each of whom, as he straggled in to occupy his allotted seat in the

chimney-corner, John, with a most impressive slowness of delivery, and

in an apoplectic whisper, communicated the fact that Mr Chester was

alone in the large room upstairs, and was waiting the arrival of

Mr Geoffrey Haredale, to whom he had sent a letter (doubtless of a

threatening nature) by the hands of Barnaby, then and there present.

For a little knot of smokers and solemn gossips, who had seldom any

new topics of discussion, this was a perfect Godsend. Here was a good,

dark-looking mystery progressing under that very roof--brought home to

the fireside, as it were, and enjoyable without the smallest pains

or trouble. It is extraordinary what a zest and relish it gave to the

drink, and how it heightened the flavour of the tobacco. Every man

smoked his pipe with a face of grave and serious delight, and looked at

his neighbour with a sort of quiet congratulation. Nay, it was felt

to be such a holiday and special night, that, on the motion of little

Solomon Daisy, every man (including John himself) put down his sixpence

for a can of flip, which grateful beverage was brewed with all despatch,

and set down in the midst of them on the brick floor; both that it might

simmer and stew before the fire, and that its fragrant steam, rising

up among them, and mixing with the wreaths of vapour from their pipes,

might shroud them in a delicious atmosphere of their own, and shut

out all the world. The very furniture of the room seemed to mellow and

deepen in its tone; the ceiling and walls looked blacker and more highly

polished, the curtains of a ruddier red; the fire burnt clear and high,

and the crickets in the hearthstone chirped with a more than wonted

satisfaction.

There were present two, however, who showed but little interest in the

general contentment. Of these, one was Barnaby himself, who slept,

or, to avoid being beset with questions, feigned to sleep, in the

chimney-corner; the other, Hugh, who, sleeping too, lay stretched upon

the bench on the opposite side, in the full glare of the blazing fire.

The light that fell upon this slumbering form, showed it in all its

muscular and handsome proportions. It was that of a young man, of a hale

athletic figure, and a giant's strength, whose sunburnt face and swarthy

throat, overgrown with jet black hair, might have served a painter for

a model. Loosely attired, in the coarsest and roughest garb, with scraps

of straw and hay--his usual bed--clinging here and there, and mingling

with his uncombed locks, he had fallen asleep in a posture as careless

as his dress. The negligence and disorder of the whole man, with

something fierce and sullen in his features, gave him a picturesque

appearance, that attracted the regards even of the Maypole customers who

knew him well, and caused Long Parkes to say that Hugh looked more like

a poaching rascal to-night than ever he had seen him yet.

'He's waiting here, I suppose,' said Solomon, 'to take Mr Haredale's

horse.'

'That's it, sir,' replied John Willet. 'He's not often in the house, you

know. He's more at his ease among horses than men. I look upon him as a

animal himself.'

Following up this opinion with a shrug that seemed meant to say, 'we

can't expect everybody to be like us,' John put his pipe into his mouth

again, and smoked like one who felt his superiority over the general run

of mankind.

'That chap, sir,' said John, taking it out again after a time, and

pointing at him with the stem, 'though he's got all his faculties

about him--bottled up and corked down, if I may say so, somewheres or

another--'

'Very good!' said Parkes, nodding his head. 'A very good expression,

Johnny. You'll be a tackling somebody presently. You're in twig

to-night, I see.'

'Take care,' said Mr Willet, not at all grateful for the compliment,

'that I don't tackle you, sir, which I shall certainly endeavour to do,

if you interrupt me when I'm making observations.--That chap, I was

a saying, though he has all his faculties about him, somewheres or

another, bottled up and corked down, has no more imagination than

Barnaby has. And why hasn't he?'

The three friends shook their heads at each other; saying by that

action, without the trouble of opening their lips, 'Do you observe what

a philosophical mind our friend has?'

'Why hasn't he?' said John, gently striking the table with his open

hand. 'Because they was never drawed out of him when he was a boy.

That's why. What would any of us have been, if our fathers hadn't drawed

our faculties out of us? What would my boy Joe have been, if I hadn't

drawed his faculties out of him?--Do you mind what I'm a saying of,

gentlemen?'

'Ah! we mind you,' cried Parkes. 'Go on improving of us, Johnny.'

'Consequently, then,' said Mr Willet, 'that chap, whose mother was

hung when he was a little boy, along with six others, for passing bad

notes--and it's a blessed thing to think how many people are hung in

batches every six weeks for that, and such like offences, as showing how

wide awake our government is--that chap that was then turned loose, and

had to mind cows, and frighten birds away, and what not, for a few pence

to live on, and so got on by degrees to mind horses, and to sleep in

course of time in lofts and litter, instead of under haystacks and

hedges, till at last he come to be hostler at the Maypole for his board

and lodging and a annual trifle--that chap that can't read nor write,

and has never had much to do with anything but animals, and has never

lived in any way but like the animals he has lived among, IS a animal.

And,' said Mr Willet, arriving at his logical conclusion, 'is to be

treated accordingly.'

'Willet,' said Solomon Daisy, who had exhibited some impatience at the

intrusion of so unworthy a subject on their more interesting theme,

'when Mr Chester come this morning, did he order the large room?'

'He signified, sir,' said John, 'that he wanted a large apartment. Yes.

Certainly.'

'Why then, I'll tell you what,' said Solomon, speaking softly and with

an earnest look. 'He and Mr Haredale are going to fight a duel in it.'

Everybody looked at Mr Willet, after this alarming suggestion. Mr Willet

looked at the fire, weighing in his own mind the effect which such an

occurrence would be likely to have on the establishment.

'Well,' said John, 'I don't know--I am sure--I remember that when I went

up last, he HAD put the lights upon the mantel-shelf.'

'It's as plain,' returned Solomon, 'as the nose on Parkes's face'--Mr

Parkes, who had a large nose, rubbed it, and looked as if he considered

this a personal allusion--'they'll fight in that room. You know by

the newspapers what a common thing it is for gentlemen to fight in

coffee-houses without seconds. One of 'em will be wounded or perhaps

killed in this house.'

'That was a challenge that Barnaby took then, eh?' said John.

'--Inclosing a slip of paper with the measure of his sword upon it, I'll

bet a guinea,' answered the little man. 'We know what sort of gentleman

Mr Haredale is. You have told us what Barnaby said about his looks, when

he came back. Depend upon it, I'm right. Now, mind.'

The flip had had no flavour till now. The tobacco had been of mere

English growth, compared with its present taste. A duel in that great

old rambling room upstairs, and the best bed ordered already for the

wounded man!

'Would it be swords or pistols, now?' said John.

'Heaven knows. Perhaps both,' returned Solomon. 'The gentlemen wear

swords, and may easily have pistols in their pockets--most likely have,

indeed. If they fire at each other without effect, then they'll draw,

and go to work in earnest.'

A shade passed over Mr Willet's face as he thought of broken windows and

disabled furniture, but bethinking himself that one of the parties would

probably be left alive to pay the damage, he brightened up again.

'And then,' said Solomon, looking from face to face, 'then we shall have

one of those stains upon the floor that never come out. If Mr Haredale

wins, depend upon it, it'll be a deep one; or if he loses, it will

perhaps be deeper still, for he'll never give in unless he's beaten

down. We know him better, eh?'

'Better indeed!' they whispered all together.

'As to its ever being got out again,' said Solomon, 'I tell you it never

will, or can be. Why, do you know that it has been tried, at a certain

house we are acquainted with?'

'The Warren!' cried John. 'No, sure!'

'Yes, sure--yes. It's only known by very few. It has been whispered

about though, for all that. They planed the board away, but there it

was. They went deep, but it went deeper. They put new boards down, but

there was one great spot that came through still, and showed itself in

the old place. And--harkye--draw nearer--Mr Geoffrey made that room his

study, and sits there, always, with his foot (as I have heard) upon it;

and he believes, through thinking of it long and very much, that it will

never fade until he finds the man who did the deed.'

As this recital ended, and they all drew closer round the fire, the

tramp of a horse was heard without.

'The very man!' cried John, starting up. 'Hugh! Hugh!'

The sleeper staggered to his feet, and hurried after him. John quickly

returned, ushering in with great attention and deference (for Mr

Haredale was his landlord) the long-expected visitor, who strode into

the room clanking his heavy boots upon the floor; and looking keenly

round upon the bowing group, raised his hat in acknowledgment of their

profound respect.

'You have a stranger here, Willet, who sent to me,' he said, in a voice

which sounded naturally stern and deep. 'Where is he?'

'In the great room upstairs, sir,' answered John.

'Show the way. Your staircase is dark, I know. Gentlemen, good night.'

With that, he signed to the landlord to go on before; and went clanking

out, and up the stairs; old John, in his agitation, ingeniously lighting

everything but the way, and making a stumble at every second step.

'Stop!' he said, when they reached the landing. 'I can announce myself.

Don't wait.'

He laid his hand upon the door, entered, and shut it heavily. Mr Willet

was by no means disposed to stand there listening by himself, especially

as the walls were very thick; so descended, with much greater alacrity

than he had come up, and joined his friends below.

Chapter 12

There was a brief pause in the state-room of the Maypole, as Mr Haredale

tried the lock to satisfy himself that he had shut the door securely,

and, striding up the dark chamber to where the screen inclosed a little

patch of light and warmth, presented himself, abruptly and in silence,

before the smiling guest.

If the two had no greater sympathy in their inward thoughts than in

their outward bearing and appearance, the meeting did not seem likely to

prove a very calm or pleasant one. With no great disparity between them

in point of years, they were, in every other respect, as unlike and

far removed from each other as two men could well be. The one was

soft-spoken, delicately made, precise, and elegant; the other, a burly

square-built man, negligently dressed, rough and abrupt in manner,

stern, and, in his present mood, forbidding both in look and speech. The

one preserved a calm and placid smile; the other, a distrustful frown.

The new-comer, indeed, appeared bent on showing by his every tone and

gesture his determined opposition and hostility to the man he had come

to meet. The guest who received him, on the other hand, seemed to feel

that the contrast between them was all in his favour, and to derive a

quiet exultation from it which put him more at his ease than ever.

'Haredale,' said this gentleman, without the least appearance of

embarrassment or reserve, 'I am very glad to see you.'

'Let us dispense with compliments. They are misplaced between us,'

returned the other, waving his hand, 'and say plainly what we have to

say. You have asked me to meet you. I am here. Why do we stand face to

face again?'

'Still the same frank and sturdy character, I see!'

'Good or bad, sir, I am,' returned the other, leaning his arm upon

the chimney-piece, and turning a haughty look upon the occupant of

the easy-chair, 'the man I used to be. I have lost no old likings or

dislikings; my memory has not failed me by a hair's-breadth. You ask me

to give you a meeting. I say, I am here.'

'Our meeting, Haredale,' said Mr Chester, tapping his snuff-box, and

following with a smile the impatient gesture he had made--perhaps

unconsciously--towards his sword, 'is one of conference and peace, I

hope?'

'I have come here,' returned the other, 'at your desire, holding myself

bound to meet you, when and where you would. I have not come to bandy

pleasant speeches, or hollow professions. You are a smooth man of the

world, sir, and at such play have me at a disadvantage. The very last

man on this earth with whom I would enter the lists to combat with

gentle compliments and masked faces, is Mr Chester, I do assure you. I

am not his match at such weapons, and have reason to believe that few

men are.'

'You do me a great deal of honour Haredale,' returned the other, most

composedly, 'and I thank you. I will be frank with you--'

'I beg your pardon--will be what?'

'Frank--open--perfectly candid.'

'Hab!' cried Mr Haredale, drawing his breath. 'But don't let me

interrupt you.'

'So resolved am I to hold this course,' returned the other, tasting his

wine with great deliberation; 'that I have determined not to quarrel

with you, and not to be betrayed into a warm expression or a hasty

word.'

'There again,' said Mr Haredale, 'you have me at a great advantage. Your

self-command--'

'Is not to be disturbed, when it will serve my purpose, you would

say'--rejoined the other, interrupting him with the same complacency.

'Granted. I allow it. And I have a purpose to serve now. So have you. I

am sure our object is the same. Let us attain it like sensible men, who

have ceased to be boys some time.--Do you drink?'

'With my friends,' returned the other.

'At least,' said Mr Chester, 'you will be seated?'

'I will stand,' returned Mr Haredale impatiently, 'on this dismantled,

beggared hearth, and not pollute it, fallen as it is, with mockeries. Go

on.'

'You are wrong, Haredale,' said the other, crossing his legs, and

smiling as he held his glass up in the bright glow of the fire. 'You are

really very wrong. The world is a lively place enough, in which we must

accommodate ourselves to circumstances, sail with the stream as glibly

as we can, be content to take froth for substance, the surface for the

depth, the counterfeit for the real coin. I wonder no philosopher has

ever established that our globe itself is hollow. It should be, if

Nature is consistent in her works.'

'YOU think it is, perhaps?'

'I should say,' he returned, sipping his wine, 'there could be no doubt

about it. Well; we, in trifling with this jingling toy, have had

the ill-luck to jostle and fall out. We are not what the world calls

friends; but we are as good and true and loving friends for all that, as

nine out of every ten of those on whom it bestows the title. You have a

niece, and I a son--a fine lad, Haredale, but foolish. They fall in

love with each other, and form what this same world calls an attachment;

meaning a something fanciful and false like the rest, which, if it took

its own free time, would break like any other bubble. But it may not

have its own free time--will not, if they are left alone--and the

question is, shall we two, because society calls us enemies, stand

aloof, and let them rush into each other's arms, when, by approaching

each other sensibly, as we do now, we can prevent it, and part them?'

'I love my niece,' said Mr Haredale, after a short silence. 'It may

sound strangely in your ears; but I love her.'

'Strangely, my good fellow!' cried Mr Chester, lazily filling his glass

again, and pulling out his toothpick. 'Not at all. I like Ned too--or,

as you say, love him--that's the word among such near relations.

I'm very fond of Ned. He's an amazingly good fellow, and a handsome

fellow--foolish and weak as yet; that's all. But the thing

is, Haredale--for I'll be very frank, as I told you I would at

first--independently of any dislike that you and I might have to being

related to each other, and independently of the religious differences

between us--and damn it, that's important--I couldn't afford a match of

this description. Ned and I couldn't do it. It's impossible.'

'Curb your tongue, in God's name, if this conversation is to last,'

retorted Mr Haredale fiercely. 'I have said I love my niece. Do you

think that, loving her, I would have her fling her heart away on any man

who had your blood in his veins?'

'You see,' said the other, not at all disturbed, 'the advantage of being

so frank and open. Just what I was about to add, upon my honour! I am

amazingly attached to Ned--quite doat upon him, indeed--and even if we

could afford to throw ourselves away, that very objection would be quite

insuperable.--I wish you'd take some wine?'

'Mark me,' said Mr Haredale, striding to the table, and laying his hand

upon it heavily. 'If any man believes--presumes to think--that I, in

word or deed, or in the wildest dream, ever entertained remotely the

idea of Emma Haredale's favouring the suit of any one who was akin to

you--in any way--I care not what--he lies. He lies, and does me grievous

wrong, in the mere thought.'

'Haredale,' returned the other, rocking himself to and fro as in assent,

and nodding at the fire, 'it's extremely manly, and really very generous

in you, to meet me in this unreserved and handsome way. Upon my word,

those are exactly my sentiments, only expressed with much more force and

power than I could use--you know my sluggish nature, and will forgive

me, I am sure.'

'While I would restrain her from all correspondence with your son, and

sever their intercourse here, though it should cause her death,' said

Mr Haredale, who had been pacing to and fro, 'I would do it kindly and

tenderly if I can. I have a trust to discharge, which my nature is not

formed to understand, and, for this reason, the bare fact of there

being any love between them comes upon me to-night, almost for the first

time.'

'I am more delighted than I can possibly tell you,' rejoined Mr Chester

with the utmost blandness, 'to find my own impression so confirmed. You

see the advantage of our having met. We understand each other. We quite

agree. We have a most complete and thorough explanation, and we know

what course to take.--Why don't you taste your tenant's wine? It's

really very good.'

'Pray who,' said Mr Haredale, 'have aided Emma, or your son? Who are

their go-betweens, and agents--do you know?'

'All the good people hereabouts--the neighbourhood in general, I think,'

returned the other, with his most affable smile. 'The messenger I sent

to you to-day, foremost among them all.'

'The idiot? Barnaby?'

'You are surprised? I am glad of that, for I was rather so myself. Yes.

I wrung that from his mother--a very decent sort of woman--from whom,

indeed, I chiefly learnt how serious the matter had become, and so

determined to ride out here to-day, and hold a parley with you on this

neutral ground.--You're stouter than you used to be, Haredale, but you

look extremely well.'

'Our business, I presume, is nearly at an end,' said Mr Haredale, with

an expression of impatience he was at no pains to conceal. 'Trust me, Mr

Chester, my niece shall change from this time. I will appeal,' he added

in a lower tone, 'to her woman's heart, her dignity, her pride, her

duty--'

'I shall do the same by Ned,' said Mr Chester, restoring some errant

faggots to their places in the grate with the toe of his boot. 'If there

is anything real in this world, it is those amazingly fine feelings and

those natural obligations which must subsist between father and son. I

shall put it to him on every ground of moral and religious feeling. I

shall represent to him that we cannot possibly afford it--that I have

always looked forward to his marrying well, for a genteel provision for

myself in the autumn of life--that there are a great many clamorous dogs

to pay, whose claims are perfectly just and right, and who must be paid

out of his wife's fortune. In short, that the very highest and most

honourable feelings of our nature, with every consideration of filial

duty and affection, and all that sort of thing, imperatively demand that

he should run away with an heiress.'

'And break her heart as speedily as possible?' said Mr Haredale, drawing

on his glove.

'There Ned will act exactly as he pleases,' returned the other,

sipping his wine; 'that's entirely his affair. I wouldn't for the

world interfere with my son, Haredale, beyond a certain point. The

relationship between father and son, you know, is positively quite a

holy kind of bond.--WON'T you let me persuade you to take one glass of

wine? Well! as you please, as you please,' he added, helping himself

again.

'Chester,' said Mr Haredale, after a short silence, during which he had

eyed his smiling face from time to time intently, 'you have the head and

heart of an evil spirit in all matters of deception.'

'Your health!' said the other, with a nod. 'But I have interrupted

you--'

'If now,' pursued Mr Haredale, 'we should find it difficult to separate

these young people, and break off their intercourse--if, for instance,

you find it difficult on your side, what course do you intend to take?'

'Nothing plainer, my good fellow, nothing easier,' returned the other,

shrugging his shoulders and stretching himself more comfortably before

the fire. 'I shall then exert those powers on which you flatter me so

highly--though, upon my word, I don't deserve your compliments to their

full extent--and resort to a few little trivial subterfuges for rousing

jealousy and resentment. You see?'

'In short, justifying the means by the end, we are, as a last resource

for tearing them asunder, to resort to treachery and--and lying,' said

Mr Haredale.

'Oh dear no. Fie, fie!' returned the other, relishing a pinch of snuff

extremely. 'Not lying. Only a little management, a little diplomacy, a

little--intriguing, that's the word.'

'I wish,' said Mr Haredale, moving to and fro, and stopping, and moving

on again, like one who was ill at ease, 'that this could have been

foreseen or prevented. But as it has gone so far, and it is necessary

for us to act, it is of no use shrinking or regretting. Well! I shall

second your endeavours to the utmost of my power. There is one topic in

the whole wide range of human thoughts on which we both agree. We shall

act in concert, but apart. There will be no need, I hope, for us to meet

again.'

'Are you going?' said Mr Chester, rising with a graceful indolence. 'Let

me light you down the stairs.'

'Pray keep your seat,' returned the other drily, 'I know the way. So,

waving his hand slightly, and putting on his hat as he turned upon his

heel, he went clanking out as he had come, shut the door behind him, and

tramped down the echoing stairs.

'Pah! A very coarse animal, indeed!' said Mr Chester, composing himself

in the easy-chair again. 'A rough brute. Quite a human badger!'

John Willet and his friends, who had been listening intently for the

clash of swords, or firing of pistols in the great room, and had indeed

settled the order in which they should rush in when summoned--in which

procession old John had carefully arranged that he should bring up the

rear--were very much astonished to see Mr Haredale come down without a

scratch, call for his horse, and ride away thoughtfully at a footpace.

After some consideration, it was decided that he had left the gentleman

above, for dead, and had adopted this stratagem to divert suspicion or

pursuit.

As this conclusion involved the necessity of their going upstairs

forthwith, they were about to ascend in the order they had agreed

upon, when a smart ringing at the guest's bell, as if he had pulled it

vigorously, overthrew all their speculations, and involved them in

great uncertainty and doubt. At length Mr Willet agreed to go upstairs

himself, escorted by Hugh and Barnaby, as the strongest and stoutest

fellows on the premises, who were to make their appearance under

pretence of clearing away the glasses.

Under this protection, the brave and broad-faced John boldly entered

the room, half a foot in advance, and received an order for a boot-jack

without trembling. But when it was brought, and he leant his sturdy

shoulder to the guest, Mr Willet was observed to look very hard into his

boots as he pulled them off, and, by opening his eyes much wider than

usual, to appear to express some surprise and disappointment at not

finding them full of blood. He took occasion, too, to examine the

gentleman as closely as he could, expecting to discover sundry loopholes

in his person, pierced by his adversary's sword. Finding none,

however, and observing in course of time that his guest was as cool and

unruffled, both in his dress and temper, as he had been all day, old

John at last heaved a deep sigh, and began to think no duel had been

fought that night.

'And now, Willet,' said Mr Chester, 'if the room's well aired, I'll try

the merits of that famous bed.'

'The room, sir,' returned John, taking up a candle, and nudging Barnaby

and Hugh to accompany them, in case the gentleman should unexpectedly

drop down faint or dead from some internal wound, 'the room's as warm as

any toast in a tankard. Barnaby, take you that other candle, and go on

before. Hugh! Follow up, sir, with the easy-chair.'

In this order--and still, in his earnest inspection, holding his candle

very close to the guest; now making him feel extremely warm about the

legs, now threatening to set his wig on fire, and constantly begging his

pardon with great awkwardness and embarrassment--John led the party to

the best bedroom, which was nearly as large as the chamber from which

they had come, and held, drawn out near the fire for warmth, a great old

spectral bedstead, hung with faded brocade, and ornamented, at the top

of each carved post, with a plume of feathers that had once been white,

but with dust and age had now grown hearse-like and funereal.

'Good night, my friends,' said Mr Chester with a sweet smile, seating

himself, when he had surveyed the room from end to end, in the

easy-chair which his attendants wheeled before the fire. 'Good night!

Barnaby, my good fellow, you say some prayers before you go to bed, I

hope?'

Barnaby nodded. 'He has some nonsense that he calls his prayers, sir,'

returned old John, officiously. 'I'm afraid there an't much good in em.'

'And Hugh?' said Mr Chester, turning to him.

'Not I,' he answered. 'I know his'--pointing to Barnaby--'they're well

enough. He sings 'em sometimes in the straw. I listen.'

'He's quite a animal, sir,' John whispered in his ear with dignity.

'You'll excuse him, I'm sure. If he has any soul at all, sir, it must be

such a very small one, that it don't signify what he does or doesn't in

that way. Good night, sir!'

The guest rejoined 'God bless you!' with a fervour that was quite

affecting; and John, beckoning his guards to go before, bowed himself

out of the room, and left him to his rest in the Maypole's ancient bed.

Chapter 13

If Joseph Willet, the denounced and proscribed of 'prentices, had

happened to be at home when his father's courtly guest presented himself

before the Maypole door--that is, if it had not perversely chanced to be

one of the half-dozen days in the whole year on which he was at liberty

to absent himself for as many hours without question or reproach--he

would have contrived, by hook or crook, to dive to the very bottom of Mr

Chester's mystery, and to come at his purpose with as much certainty as

though he had been his confidential adviser. In that fortunate case, the

lovers would have had quick warning of the ills that threatened them,

and the aid of various timely and wise suggestions to boot; for all

Joe's readiness of thought and action, and all his sympathies and good

wishes, were enlisted in favour of the young people, and were staunch in

devotion to their cause. Whether this disposition arose out of his old

prepossessions in favour of the young lady, whose history had surrounded

her in his mind, almost from his cradle, with circumstances of unusual

interest; or from his attachment towards the young gentleman, into

whose confidence he had, through his shrewdness and alacrity, and the

rendering of sundry important services as a spy and messenger, almost

imperceptibly glided; whether they had their origin in either of these

sources, or in the habit natural to youth, or in the constant badgering

and worrying of his venerable parent, or in any hidden little love

affair of his own which gave him something of a fellow-feeling in the

matter, it is needless to inquire--especially as Joe was out of the way,

and had no opportunity on that particular occasion of testifying to his

sentiments either on one side or the other.

It was, in fact, the twenty-fifth of March, which, as most people

know to their cost, is, and has been time out of mind, one of those

unpleasant epochs termed quarter-days. On this twenty-fifth of March,

it was John Willet's pride annually to settle, in hard cash, his account

with a certain vintner and distiller in the city of London; to give into

whose hands a canvas bag containing its exact amount, and not a penny

more or less, was the end and object of a journey for Joe, so surely as

the year and day came round.

This journey was performed upon an old grey mare, concerning whom John

had an indistinct set of ideas hovering about him, to the effect that

she could win a plate or cup if she tried. She never had tried, and

probably never would now, being some fourteen or fifteen years of age,

short in wind, long in body, and rather the worse for wear in respect of

her mane and tail. Notwithstanding these slight defects, John perfectly

gloried in the animal; and when she was brought round to the door by

Hugh, actually retired into the bar, and there, in a secret grove of

lemons, laughed with pride.

'There's a bit of horseflesh, Hugh!' said John, when he had recovered

enough self-command to appear at the door again. 'There's a comely

creature! There's high mettle! There's bone!'

There was bone enough beyond all doubt; and so Hugh seemed to think, as

he sat sideways in the saddle, lazily doubled up with his chin nearly

touching his knees; and heedless of the dangling stirrups and loose

bridle-rein, sauntered up and down on the little green before the door.

'Mind you take good care of her, sir,' said John, appealing from this

insensible person to his son and heir, who now appeared, fully equipped

and ready. 'Don't you ride hard.'

'I should be puzzled to do that, I think, father,' Joe replied, casting

a disconsolate look at the animal.

'None of your impudence, sir, if you please,' retorted old John. 'What

would you ride, sir? A wild ass or zebra would be too tame for you,

wouldn't he, eh sir? You'd like to ride a roaring lion, wouldn't you,

sir, eh sir? Hold your tongue, sir.' When Mr Willet, in his differences

with his son, had exhausted all the questions that occurred to him, and

Joe had said nothing at all in answer, he generally wound up by bidding

him hold his tongue.

'And what does the boy mean,' added Mr Willet, after he had stared at

him for a little time, in a species of stupefaction, 'by cocking his

hat, to such an extent! Are you going to kill the wintner, sir?'

'No,' said Joe, tartly; 'I'm not. Now your mind's at ease, father.'

'With a milintary air, too!' said Mr Willet, surveying him from top to

toe; 'with a swaggering, fire-eating, biling-water drinking sort of way

with him! And what do you mean by pulling up the crocuses and snowdrops,

eh sir?'

'It's only a little nosegay,' said Joe, reddening. 'There's no harm in

that, I hope?'

'You're a boy of business, you are, sir!' said Mr Willet, disdainfully,

'to go supposing that wintners care for nosegays.'

'I don't suppose anything of the kind,' returned Joe. 'Let them keep

their red noses for bottles and tankards. These are going to Mr Varden's

house.'

'And do you suppose HE minds such things as crocuses?' demanded John.

'I don't know, and to say the truth, I don't care,' said Joe. 'Come,

father, give me the money, and in the name of patience let me go.'

'There it is, sir,' replied John; 'and take care of it; and mind you

don't make too much haste back, but give the mare a long rest.--Do you

mind?'

'Ay, I mind,' returned Joe. 'She'll need it, Heaven knows.'

'And don't you score up too much at the Black Lion,' said John. 'Mind

that too.'

'Then why don't you let me have some money of my own?' retorted Joe,

sorrowfully; 'why don't you, father? What do you send me into London

for, giving me only the right to call for my dinner at the Black Lion,

which you're to pay for next time you go, as if I was not to be trusted

with a few shillings? Why do you use me like this? It's not right of

you. You can't expect me to be quiet under it.'

'Let him have money!' cried John, in a drowsy reverie. 'What does he

call money--guineas? Hasn't he got money? Over and above the tolls,

hasn't he one and sixpence?'

'One and sixpence!' repeated his son contemptuously.

'Yes, sir,' returned John, 'one and sixpence. When I was your age, I

had never seen so much money, in a heap. A shilling of it is in case

of accidents--the mare casting a shoe, or the like of that. The other

sixpence is to spend in the diversions of London; and the diversion

I recommend is going to the top of the Monument, and sitting there.

There's no temptation there, sir--no drink--no young women--no bad

characters of any sort--nothing but imagination. That's the way I

enjoyed myself when I was your age, sir.'

To this, Joe made no answer, but beckoning Hugh, leaped into the saddle

and rode away; and a very stalwart, manly horseman he looked, deserving

a better charger than it was his fortune to bestride. John stood staring

after him, or rather after the grey mare (for he had no eyes for her

rider), until man and beast had been out of sight some twenty minutes,

when he began to think they were gone, and slowly re-entering the house,

fell into a gentle doze.

The unfortunate grey mare, who was the agony of Joe's life, floundered

along at her own will and pleasure until the Maypole was no longer

visible, and then, contracting her legs into what in a puppet would have

been looked upon as a clumsy and awkward imitation of a canter, mended

her pace all at once, and did it of her own accord. The acquaintance

with her rider's usual mode of proceeding, which suggested this

improvement in hers, impelled her likewise to turn up a bye-way,

leading--not to London, but through lanes running parallel with the road

they had come, and passing within a few hundred yards of the Maypole,

which led finally to an inclosure surrounding a large, old, red-brick

mansion--the same of which mention was made as the Warren in the

first chapter of this history. Coming to a dead stop in a little copse

thereabout, she suffered her rider to dismount with right goodwill, and

to tie her to the trunk of a tree.

'Stay there, old girl,' said Joe, 'and let us see whether there's any

little commission for me to-day.' So saying, he left her to browze upon

such stunted grass and weeds as happened to grow within the length of

her tether, and passing through a wicket gate, entered the grounds on

foot.

The pathway, after a very few minutes' walking, brought him close to the

house, towards which, and especially towards one particular window, he

directed many covert glances. It was a dreary, silent building, with

echoing courtyards, desolated turret-chambers, and whole suites of rooms

shut up and mouldering to ruin.

The terrace-garden, dark with the shade of overhanging trees, had an air

of melancholy that was quite oppressive. Great iron gates, disused for

many years, and red with rust, drooping on their hinges and overgrown

with long rank grass, seemed as though they tried to sink into the

ground, and hide their fallen state among the friendly weeds. The

fantastic monsters on the walls, green with age and damp, and covered

here and there with moss, looked grim and desolate. There was a sombre

aspect even on that part of the mansion which was inhabited and kept

in good repair, that struck the beholder with a sense of sadness; of

something forlorn and failing, whence cheerfulness was banished. It

would have been difficult to imagine a bright fire blazing in the dull

and darkened rooms, or to picture any gaiety of heart or revelry that

the frowning walls shut in. It seemed a place where such things had

been, but could be no more--the very ghost of a house, haunting the old

spot in its old outward form, and that was all.

Much of this decayed and sombre look was attributable, no doubt, to the

death of its former master, and the temper of its present occupant;

but remembering the tale connected with the mansion, it seemed the very

place for such a deed, and one that might have been its predestined

theatre years upon years ago. Viewed with reference to this legend, the

sheet of water where the steward's body had been found appeared to wear

a black and sullen character, such as no other pool might own; the bell

upon the roof that had told the tale of murder to the midnight wind,

became a very phantom whose voice would raise the listener's hair on

end; and every leafless bough that nodded to another, had its stealthy

whispering of the crime.

Joe paced up and down the path, sometimes stopping in affected

contemplation of the building or the prospect, sometimes leaning against

a tree with an assumed air of idleness and indifference, but always

keeping an eye upon the window he had singled out at first. After some

quarter of an hour's delay, a small white hand was waved to him for an

instant from this casement, and the young man, with a respectful bow,

departed; saying under his breath as he crossed his horse again, 'No

errand for me to-day!'

But the air of smartness, the cock of the hat to which John Willet had

objected, and the spring nosegay, all betokened some little errand

of his own, having a more interesting object than a vintner or even a

locksmith. So, indeed, it turned out; for when he had settled with the

vintner--whose place of business was down in some deep cellars hard by

Thames Street, and who was as purple-faced an old gentleman as if he

had all his life supported their arched roof on his head--when he had

settled the account, and taken the receipt, and declined tasting more

than three glasses of old sherry, to the unbounded astonishment of the

purple-faced vintner, who, gimlet in hand, had projected an attack upon

at least a score of dusty casks, and who stood transfixed, or morally

gimleted as it were, to his own wall--when he had done all this, and

disposed besides of a frugal dinner at the Black Lion in Whitechapel;

spurning the Monument and John's advice, he turned his steps towards the

locksmith's house, attracted by the eyes of blooming Dolly Varden.

Joe was by no means a sheepish fellow, but, for all that, when he got

to the corner of the street in which the locksmith lived, he could by no

means make up his mind to walk straight to the house. First, he resolved

to stroll up another street for five minutes, then up another street for

five minutes more, and so on until he had lost full half an hour, when

he made a bold plunge and found himself with a red face and a beating

heart in the smoky workshop.

'Joe Willet, or his ghost?' said Varden, rising from the desk at which

he was busy with his books, and looking at him under his spectacles.

'Which is it? Joe in the flesh, eh? That's hearty. And how are all the

Chigwell company, Joe?'

'Much as usual, sir--they and I agree as well as ever.'

'Well, well!' said the locksmith. 'We must be patient, Joe, and bear

with old folks' foibles. How's the mare, Joe? Does she do the four miles

an hour as easily as ever? Ha, ha, ha! Does she, Joe? Eh!--What have we

there, Joe--a nosegay!'

'A very poor one, sir--I thought Miss Dolly--'

'No, no,' said Gabriel, dropping his voice, and shaking his head, 'not

Dolly. Give 'em to her mother, Joe. A great deal better give 'em to her

mother. Would you mind giving 'em to Mrs Varden, Joe?'

'Oh no, sir,' Joe replied, and endeavouring, but not with the greatest

possible success, to hide his disappointment. 'I shall be very glad, I'm

sure.'

'That's right,' said the locksmith, patting him on the back. 'It don't

matter who has 'em, Joe?'

'Not a bit, sir.'--Dear heart, how the words stuck in his throat!

'Come in,' said Gabriel. 'I have just been called to tea. She's in the

parlour.'

'She,' thought Joe. 'Which of 'em I wonder--Mrs or Miss?' The locksmith

settled the doubt as neatly as if it had been expressed aloud, by

leading him to the door, and saying, 'Martha, my dear, here's young Mr

Willet.'

Now, Mrs Varden, regarding the Maypole as a sort of human mantrap,

or decoy for husbands; viewing its proprietor, and all who aided and

abetted him, in the light of so many poachers among Christian men; and

believing, moreover, that the publicans coupled with sinners in Holy

Writ were veritable licensed victuallers; was far from being favourably

disposed towards her visitor. Wherefore she was taken faint directly;

and being duly presented with the crocuses and snowdrops, divined on

further consideration that they were the occasion of the languor which

had seized upon her spirits. 'I'm afraid I couldn't bear the room

another minute,' said the good lady, 'if they remained here. WOULD you

excuse my putting them out of window?'

Joe begged she wouldn't mention it on any account, and smiled feebly as

he saw them deposited on the sill outside. If anybody could have known

the pains he had taken to make up that despised and misused bunch of

flowers!--

'I feel it quite a relief to get rid of them, I assure you,' said Mrs

Varden. 'I'm better already.' And indeed she did appear to have plucked

up her spirits.

Joe expressed his gratitude to Providence for this favourable

dispensation, and tried to look as if he didn't wonder where Dolly was.

'You're sad people at Chigwell, Mr Joseph,' said Mrs V.

'I hope not, ma'am,' returned Joe.

'You're the cruellest and most inconsiderate people in the world,' said

Mrs Varden, bridling. 'I wonder old Mr Willet, having been a married

man himself, doesn't know better than to conduct himself as he does. His

doing it for profit is no excuse. I would rather pay the money twenty

times over, and have Varden come home like a respectable and sober

tradesman. If there is one character,' said Mrs Varden with great

emphasis, 'that offends and disgusts me more than another, it is a sot.'

'Come, Martha, my dear,' said the locksmith cheerily, 'let us have tea,

and don't let us talk about sots. There are none here, and Joe don't

want to hear about them, I dare say.'

At this crisis, Miggs appeared with toast.

'I dare say he does not,' said Mrs Varden; 'and I dare say you do not,

Varden. It's a very unpleasant subject, I have no doubt, though I

won't say it's personal'--Miggs coughed--'whatever I may be forced to

think'--Miggs sneezed expressively. 'You never will know, Varden, and

nobody at young Mr Willet's age--you'll excuse me, sir--can be expected

to know, what a woman suffers when she is waiting at home under such

circumstances. If you don't believe me, as I know you don't, here's

Miggs, who is only too often a witness of it--ask her.'

'Oh! she were very bad the other night, sir, indeed she were, said

Miggs. 'If you hadn't the sweetness of an angel in you, mim, I don't

think you could abear it, I raly don't.'

'Miggs,' said Mrs Varden, 'you're profane.'

'Begging your pardon, mim,' returned Miggs, with shrill rapidity, 'such

was not my intentions, and such I hope is not my character, though I am

but a servant.'

'Answering me, Miggs, and providing yourself,' retorted her mistress,

looking round with dignity, 'is one and the same thing. How

dare you speak of angels in connection with your sinful

fellow-beings--mere'--said Mrs Varden, glancing at herself in a

neighbouring mirror, and arranging the ribbon of her cap in a more

becoming fashion--'mere worms and grovellers as we are!'

'I did not intend, mim, if you please, to give offence,' said Miggs,

confident in the strength of her compliment, and developing strongly in

the throat as usual, 'and I did not expect it would be took as such. I

hope I know my own unworthiness, and that I hate and despise myself and

all my fellow-creatures as every practicable Christian should.'

'You'll have the goodness, if you please,' said Mrs Varden, loftily, 'to

step upstairs and see if Dolly has finished dressing, and to tell her

that the chair that was ordered for her will be here in a minute, and

that if she keeps it waiting, I shall send it away that instant.--I'm

sorry to see that you don't take your tea, Varden, and that you don't

take yours, Mr Joseph; though of course it would be foolish of me to

expect that anything that can be had at home, and in the company of

females, would please YOU.'

This pronoun was understood in the plural sense, and included both

gentlemen, upon both of whom it was rather hard and undeserved, for

Gabriel had applied himself to the meal with a very promising appetite,

until it was spoilt by Mrs Varden herself, and Joe had as great a liking

for the female society of the locksmith's house--or for a part of it at

all events--as man could well entertain.

But he had no opportunity to say anything in his own defence, for at

that moment Dolly herself appeared, and struck him quite dumb with her

beauty. Never had Dolly looked so handsome as she did then, in all the

glow and grace of youth, with all her charms increased a hundredfold by

a most becoming dress, by a thousand little coquettish ways which nobody

could assume with a better grace, and all the sparkling expectation of

that accursed party. It is impossible to tell how Joe hated that party

wherever it was, and all the other people who were going to it, whoever

they were.

And she hardly looked at him--no, hardly looked at him. And when

the chair was seen through the open door coming blundering into the

workshop, she actually clapped her hands and seemed glad to go. But Joe

gave her his arm--there was some comfort in that--and handed her into

it. To see her seat herself inside, with her laughing eyes brighter

than diamonds, and her hand--surely she had the prettiest hand in

the world--on the ledge of the open window, and her little finger

provokingly and pertly tilted up, as if it wondered why Joe didn't

squeeze or kiss it! To think how well one or two of the modest snowdrops

would have become that delicate bodice, and how they were lying

neglected outside the parlour window! To see how Miggs looked on with

a face expressive of knowing how all this loveliness was got up, and

of being in the secret of every string and pin and hook and eye, and

of saying it ain't half as real as you think, and I could look quite as

well myself if I took the pains! To hear that provoking precious little

scream when the chair was hoisted on its poles, and to catch that

transient but not-to-be-forgotten vision of the happy face within--what

torments and aggravations, and yet what delights were these! The very

chairmen seemed favoured rivals as they bore her down the street.

There never was such an alteration in a small room in a small time as in

that parlour when they went back to finish tea. So dark, so deserted,

so perfectly disenchanted. It seemed such sheer nonsense to be sitting

tamely there, when she was at a dance with more lovers than man could

calculate fluttering about her--with the whole party doting on and

adoring her, and wanting to marry her. Miggs was hovering about too; and

the fact of her existence, the mere circumstance of her ever having been

born, appeared, after Dolly, such an unaccountable practical joke. It

was impossible to talk. It couldn't be done. He had nothing left for it

but to stir his tea round, and round, and round, and ruminate on all the

fascinations of the locksmith's lovely daughter.

Gabriel was dull too. It was a part of the certain uncertainty of Mrs

Varden's temper, that when they were in this condition, she should be

gay and sprightly.

'I need have a cheerful disposition, I am sure,' said the smiling

housewife, 'to preserve any spirits at all; and how I do it I can

scarcely tell.'

'Ah, mim,' sighed Miggs, 'begging your pardon for the interruption,

there an't a many like you.'

'Take away, Miggs,' said Mrs Varden, rising, 'take away, pray. I know

I'm a restraint here, and as I wish everybody to enjoy themselves as

they best can, I feel I had better go.'

'No, no, Martha,' cried the locksmith. 'Stop here. I'm sure we shall be

very sorry to lose you, eh Joe!' Joe started, and said 'Certainly.'

'Thank you, Varden, my dear,' returned his wife; 'but I know your wishes

better. Tobacco and beer, or spirits, have much greater attractions than

any I can boast of, and therefore I shall go and sit upstairs and look

out of window, my love. Good night, Mr Joseph. I'm very glad to have

seen you, and I only wish I could have provided something more suitable

to your taste. Remember me very kindly if you please to old Mr Willet,

and tell him that whenever he comes here I have a crow to pluck with

him. Good night!'

Having uttered these words with great sweetness of manner, the good

lady dropped a curtsey remarkable for its condescension, and serenely

withdrew.

And it was for this Joe had looked forward to the twenty-fifth of March

for weeks and weeks, and had gathered the flowers with so much care, and

had cocked his hat, and made himself so smart! This was the end of all

his bold determination, resolved upon for the hundredth time, to speak

out to Dolly and tell her how he loved her! To see her for a minute--for

but a minute--to find her going out to a party and glad to go; to be

looked upon as a common pipe-smoker, beer-bibber, spirit-guzzler, and

tosspot! He bade farewell to his friend the locksmith, and hastened to

take horse at the Black Lion, thinking as he turned towards home, as

many another Joe has thought before and since, that here was an end to

all his hopes--that the thing was impossible and never could be--that

she didn't care for him--that he was wretched for life--and that the

only congenial prospect left him, was to go for a soldier or a sailor,

and get some obliging enemy to knock his brains out as soon as possible.

Chapter 14

Joe Willet rode leisurely along in his desponding mood, picturing the

locksmith's daughter going down long country-dances, and poussetting

dreadfully with bold strangers--which was almost too much to bear--when

he heard the tramp of a horse's feet behind him, and looking back, saw

a well-mounted gentleman advancing at a smart canter. As this rider

passed, he checked his steed, and called him of the Maypole by his name.

Joe set spurs to the grey mare, and was at his side directly.

'I thought it was you, sir,' he said, touching his hat. 'A fair evening,

sir. Glad to see you out of doors again.'

The gentleman smiled and nodded. 'What gay doings have been going on

to-day, Joe? Is she as pretty as ever? Nay, don't blush, man.'

'If I coloured at all, Mr Edward,' said Joe, 'which I didn't know I did,

it was to think I should have been such a fool as ever to have any hope

of her. She's as far out of my reach as--as Heaven is.'

'Well, Joe, I hope that's not altogether beyond it,' said Edward,

good-humouredly. 'Eh?'

'Ah!' sighed Joe. 'It's all very fine talking, sir. Proverbs are easily

made in cold blood. But it can't be helped. Are you bound for our house,

sir?'

'Yes. As I am not quite strong yet, I shall stay there to-night, and

ride home coolly in the morning.'

'If you're in no particular hurry,' said Joe after a short silence, 'and

will bear with the pace of this poor jade, I shall be glad to ride on

with you to the Warren, sir, and hold your horse when you dismount.

It'll save you having to walk from the Maypole, there and back again. I

can spare the time well, sir, for I am too soon.'

'And so am I,' returned Edward, 'though I was unconsciously riding fast

just now, in compliment I suppose to the pace of my thoughts, which were

travelling post. We will keep together, Joe, willingly, and be as good

company as may be. And cheer up, cheer up, think of the locksmith's

daughter with a stout heart, and you shall win her yet.'

Joe shook his head; but there was something so cheery in the buoyant

hopeful manner of this speech, that his spirits rose under its

influence, and communicated as it would seem some new impulse even to

the grey mare, who, breaking from her sober amble into a gentle trot,

emulated the pace of Edward Chester's horse, and appeared to flatter

herself that he was doing his very best.

It was a fine dry night, and the light of a young moon, which was then

just rising, shed around that peace and tranquillity which gives to

evening time its most delicious charm. The lengthened shadows of the

trees, softened as if reflected in still water, threw their carpet on

the path the travellers pursued, and the light wind stirred yet more

softly than before, as though it were soothing Nature in her sleep. By

little and little they ceased talking, and rode on side by side in a

pleasant silence.

'The Maypole lights are brilliant to-night,' said Edward, as they rode

along the lane from which, while the intervening trees were bare of

leaves, that hostelry was visible.

'Brilliant indeed, sir,' returned Joe, rising in his stirrups to get

a better view. 'Lights in the large room, and a fire glimmering in the

best bedchamber? Why, what company can this be for, I wonder!'

'Some benighted horseman wending towards London, and deterred from

going on to-night by the marvellous tales of my friend the highwayman, I

suppose,' said Edward.

'He must be a horseman of good quality to have such accommodations. Your

bed too, sir--!'

'No matter, Joe. Any other room will do for me. But come--there's nine

striking. We may push on.'

They cantered forward at as brisk a pace as Joe's charger could attain,

and presently stopped in the little copse where he had left her in the

morning. Edward dismounted, gave his bridle to his companion, and walked

with a light step towards the house.

A female servant was waiting at a side gate in the garden-wall, and

admitted him without delay. He hurried along the terrace-walk, and

darted up a flight of broad steps leading into an old and gloomy hall,

whose walls were ornamented with rusty suits of armour, antlers, weapons

of the chase, and suchlike garniture. Here he paused, but not long; for

as he looked round, as if expecting the attendant to have followed, and

wondering she had not done so, a lovely girl appeared, whose dark hair

next moment rested on his breast. Almost at the same instant a heavy

hand was laid upon her arm, Edward felt himself thrust away, and Mr

Haredale stood between them.

He regarded the young man sternly without removing his hat; with

one hand clasped his niece, and with the other, in which he held his

riding-whip, motioned him towards the door. The young man drew himself

up, and returned his gaze.

'This is well done of you, sir, to corrupt my servants, and enter my

house unbidden and in secret, like a thief!' said Mr Haredale. 'Leave

it, sir, and return no more.'

'Miss Haredale's presence,' returned the young man, 'and your

relationship to her, give you a licence which, if you are a brave man,

you will not abuse. You have compelled me to this course, and the fault

is yours--not mine.'

'It is neither generous, nor honourable, nor the act of a true man,

sir,' retorted the other, 'to tamper with the affections of a weak,

trusting girl, while you shrink, in your unworthiness, from her guardian

and protector, and dare not meet the light of day. More than this I will

not say to you, save that I forbid you this house, and require you to be

gone.'

'It is neither generous, nor honourable, nor the act of a true man to

play the spy,' said Edward. 'Your words imply dishonour, and I reject

them with the scorn they merit.'

'You will find,' said Mr Haredale, calmly, 'your trusty go-between in

waiting at the gate by which you entered. I have played no spy's part,

sir. I chanced to see you pass the gate, and followed. You might have

heard me knocking for admission, had you been less swift of foot,

or lingered in the garden. Please to withdraw. Your presence here is

offensive to me and distressful to my niece.' As he said these words,

he passed his arm about the waist of the terrified and weeping girl, and

drew her closer to him; and though the habitual severity of his manner

was scarcely changed, there was yet apparent in the action an air of

kindness and sympathy for her distress.

'Mr Haredale,' said Edward, 'your arm encircles her on whom I have set

my every hope and thought, and to purchase one minute's happiness for

whom I would gladly lay down my life; this house is the casket that

holds the precious jewel of my existence. Your niece has plighted her

faith to me, and I have plighted mine to her. What have I done that

you should hold me in this light esteem, and give me these discourteous

words?'

'You have done that, sir,' answered Mr Haredale, 'which must be undone.

You have tied a lover'-knot here which must be cut asunder. Take good

heed of what I say. Must. I cancel the bond between ye. I reject you,

and all of your kith and kin--all the false, hollow, heartless stock.'

'High words, sir,' said Edward, scornfully.

'Words of purpose and meaning, as you will find,' replied the other.

'Lay them to heart.'

'Lay you then, these,' said Edward. 'Your cold and sullen temper, which

chills every breast about you, which turns affection into fear, and

changes duty into dread, has forced us on this secret course, repugnant

to our nature and our wish, and far more foreign, sir, to us than you.

I am not a false, a hollow, or a heartless man; the character is yours,

who poorly venture on these injurious terms, against the truth, and

under the shelter whereof I reminded you just now. You shall not cancel

the bond between us. I will not abandon this pursuit. I rely upon your

niece's truth and honour, and set your influence at nought. I leave her

with a confidence in her pure faith, which you will never weaken, and

with no concern but that I do not leave her in some gentler care.'

With that, he pressed her cold hand to his lips, and once more

encountering and returning Mr Haredale's steady look, withdrew.

A few words to Joe as he mounted his horse sufficiently explained what

had passed, and renewed all that young gentleman's despondency with

tenfold aggravation. They rode back to the Maypole without exchanging a

syllable, and arrived at the door with heavy hearts.

Old John, who had peeped from behind the red curtain as they rode up

shouting for Hugh, was out directly, and said with great importance as

he held the young man's stirrup,

'He's comfortable in bed--the best bed. A thorough gentleman; the

smilingest, affablest gentleman I ever had to do with.'

'Who, Willet?' said Edward carelessly, as he dismounted.

'Your worthy father, sir,' replied John. 'Your honourable, venerable

father.'

'What does he mean?' said Edward, looking with a mixture of alarm and

doubt, at Joe.

'What DO you mean?' said Joe. 'Don't you see Mr Edward doesn't

understand, father?'

'Why, didn't you know of it, sir?' said John, opening his eyes wide.

'How very singular! Bless you, he's been here ever since noon to-day,

and Mr Haredale has been having a long talk with him, and hasn't been

gone an hour.'

'My father, Willet!'

'Yes, sir, he told me so--a handsome, slim, upright gentleman, in

green-and-gold. In your old room up yonder, sir. No doubt you can go in,

sir,' said John, walking backwards into the road and looking up at the

window. 'He hasn't put out his candles yet, I see.'

Edward glanced at the window also, and hastily murmuring that he had

changed his mind--forgotten something--and must return to London,

mounted his horse again and rode away; leaving the Willets, father and

son, looking at each other in mute astonishment.

Chapter 15

At noon next day, John Willet's guest sat lingering over his breakfast

in his own home, surrounded by a variety of comforts, which left the

Maypole's highest flight and utmost stretch of accommodation at an

infinite distance behind, and suggested comparisons very much to the

disadvantage and disfavour of that venerable tavern.

In the broad old-fashioned window-seat--as capacious as many modern

sofas, and cushioned to serve the purpose of a luxurious settee--in the

broad old-fashioned window-seat of a roomy chamber, Mr Chester lounged,

very much at his ease, over a well-furnished breakfast-table. He had

exchanged his riding-coat for a handsome morning-gown, his boots for

slippers; had been at great pains to atone for the having been obliged

to make his toilet when he rose without the aid of dressing-case and

tiring equipage; and, having gradually forgotten through these means the

discomforts of an indifferent night and an early ride, was in a state of

perfect complacency, indolence, and satisfaction.

The situation in which he found himself, indeed, was particularly

favourable to the growth of these feelings; for, not to mention the lazy

influence of a late and lonely breakfast, with the additional sedative

of a newspaper, there was an air of repose about his place of residence

peculiar to itself, and which hangs about it, even in these times, when

it is more bustling and busy than it was in days of yore.

There are, still, worse places than the Temple, on a sultry day,

for basking in the sun, or resting idly in the shade. There is yet a

drowsiness in its courts, and a dreamy dulness in its trees and gardens;

those who pace its lanes and squares may yet hear the echoes of their

footsteps on the sounding stones, and read upon its gates, in passing

from the tumult of the Strand or Fleet Street, 'Who enters here leaves

noise behind.' There is still the plash of falling water in fair

Fountain Court, and there are yet nooks and corners where dun-haunted

students may look down from their dusty garrets, on a vagrant ray of

sunlight patching the shade of the tall houses, and seldom troubled

to reflect a passing stranger's form. There is yet, in the Temple,

something of a clerkly monkish atmosphere, which public offices of law

have not disturbed, and even legal firms have failed to scare away. In

summer time, its pumps suggest to thirsty idlers, springs cooler, and

more sparkling, and deeper than other wells; and as they trace the

spillings of full pitchers on the heated ground, they snuff the

freshness, and, sighing, cast sad looks towards the Thames, and think of

baths and boats, and saunter on, despondent.

It was in a room in Paper Buildings--a row of goodly tenements, shaded

in front by ancient trees, and looking, at the back, upon the Temple

Gardens--that this, our idler, lounged; now taking up again the paper

he had laid down a hundred times; now trifling with the fragments of

his meal; now pulling forth his golden toothpick, and glancing leisurely

about the room, or out at window into the trim garden walks, where a few

early loiterers were already pacing to and fro. Here a pair of lovers

met to quarrel and make up; there a dark-eyed nursery-maid had better

eyes for Templars than her charge; on this hand an ancient spinster,

with her lapdog in a string, regarded both enormities with scornful

sidelong looks; on that a weazen old gentleman, ogling the nursery-maid,

looked with like scorn upon the spinster, and wondered she didn't know

she was no longer young. Apart from all these, on the river's margin two

or three couple of business-talkers walked slowly up and down in earnest

conversation; and one young man sat thoughtfully on a bench, alone.

'Ned is amazingly patient!' said Mr Chester, glancing at this last-named

person as he set down his teacup and plied the golden toothpick,

'immensely patient! He was sitting yonder when I began to dress, and has

scarcely changed his posture since. A most eccentric dog!'

As he spoke, the figure rose, and came towards him with a rapid pace.

'Really, as if he had heard me,' said the father, resuming his newspaper

with a yawn. 'Dear Ned!'

Presently the room-door opened, and the young man entered; to whom his

father gently waved his hand, and smiled.

'Are you at leisure for a little conversation, sir?' said Edward.

'Surely, Ned. I am always at leisure. You know my constitution.--Have

you breakfasted?'

'Three hours ago.'

'What a very early dog!' cried his father, contemplating him from behind

the toothpick, with a languid smile.

'The truth is,' said Edward, bringing a chair forward, and seating

himself near the table, 'that I slept but ill last night, and was glad

to rise. The cause of my uneasiness cannot but be known to you, sir; and

it is upon that I wish to speak.'

'My dear boy,' returned his father, 'confide in me, I beg. But you know

my constitution--don't be prosy, Ned.'

'I will be plain, and brief,' said Edward.

'Don't say you will, my good fellow,' returned his father, crossing his

legs, 'or you certainly will not. You are going to tell me'--

'Plainly this, then,' said the son, with an air of great concern, 'that

I know where you were last night--from being on the spot, indeed--and

whom you saw, and what your purpose was.'

'You don't say so!' cried his father. 'I am delighted to hear it. It

saves us the worry, and terrible wear and tear of a long explanation,

and is a great relief for both. At the very house! Why didn't you come

up? I should have been charmed to see you.'

'I knew that what I had to say would be better said after a night's

reflection, when both of us were cool,' returned the son.

''Fore Gad, Ned,' rejoined the father, 'I was cool enough last night.

That detestable Maypole! By some infernal contrivance of the builder,

it holds the wind, and keeps it fresh. You remember the sharp east wind

that blew so hard five weeks ago? I give you my honour it was rampant

in that old house last night, though out of doors there was a dead calm.

But you were saying'--

'I was about to say, Heaven knows how seriously and earnestly, that you

have made me wretched, sir. Will you hear me gravely for a moment?'

'My dear Ned,' said his father, 'I will hear you with the patience of an

anchorite. Oblige me with the milk.'

'I saw Miss Haredale last night,' Edward resumed, when he had complied

with this request; 'her uncle, in her presence, immediately after your

interview, and, as of course I know, in consequence of it, forbade

me the house, and, with circumstances of indignity which are of your

creation I am sure, commanded me to leave it on the instant.'

'For his manner of doing so, I give you my honour, Ned, I am not

accountable,' said his father. 'That you must excuse. He is a mere boor,

a log, a brute, with no address in life.--Positively a fly in the jug.

The first I have seen this year.'

Edward rose, and paced the room. His imperturbable parent sipped his

tea.

'Father,' said the young man, stopping at length before him, 'we must

not trifle in this matter. We must not deceive each other, or ourselves.

Let me pursue the manly open part I wish to take, and do not repel me by

this unkind indifference.'

'Whether I am indifferent or no,' returned the other, 'I leave you, my

dear boy, to judge. A ride of twenty-five or thirty miles, through miry

roads--a Maypole dinner--a tete-a-tete with Haredale, which, vanity

apart, was quite a Valentine and Orson business--a Maypole bed--a

Maypole landlord, and a Maypole retinue of idiots and centaurs;--whether

the voluntary endurance of these things looks like indifference, dear

Ned, or like the excessive anxiety, and devotion, and all that sort of

thing, of a parent, you shall determine for yourself.'

'I wish you to consider, sir,' said Edward, 'in what a cruel situation I

am placed. Loving Miss Haredale as I do'--

'My dear fellow,' interrupted his father with a compassionate smile,

'you do nothing of the kind. You don't know anything about it. There's

no such thing, I assure you. Now, do take my word for it. You have good

sense, Ned,--great good sense. I wonder you should be guilty of such

amazing absurdities. You really surprise me.'

'I repeat,' said his son firmly, 'that I love her. You have interposed

to part us, and have, to the extent I have just now told you of,

succeeded. May I induce you, sir, in time, to think more favourably of

our attachment, or is it your intention and your fixed design to hold us

asunder if you can?'

'My dear Ned,' returned his father, taking a pinch of snuff and pushing

his box towards him, 'that is my purpose most undoubtedly.'

'The time that has elapsed,' rejoined his son, 'since I began to know

her worth, has flown in such a dream that until now I have hardly once

paused to reflect upon my true position. What is it? From my childhood

I have been accustomed to luxury and idleness, and have been bred as

though my fortune were large, and my expectations almost without a

limit. The idea of wealth has been familiarised to me from my cradle. I

have been taught to look upon those means, by which men raise themselves

to riches and distinction, as being beyond my heeding, and beneath my

care. I have been, as the phrase is, liberally educated, and am fit

for nothing. I find myself at last wholly dependent upon you, with no

resource but in your favour. In this momentous question of my life we do

not, and it would seem we never can, agree. I have shrunk instinctively

alike from those to whom you have urged me to pay court, and from the

motives of interest and gain which have rendered them in your eyes

visible objects for my suit. If there never has been thus much

plain-speaking between us before, sir, the fault has not been mine,

indeed. If I seem to speak too plainly now, it is, believe me father, in

the hope that there may be a franker spirit, a worthier reliance, and a

kinder confidence between us in time to come.'

'My good fellow,' said his smiling father, 'you quite affect me. Go

on, my dear Edward, I beg. But remember your promise. There is great

earnestness, vast candour, a manifest sincerity in all you say, but I

fear I observe the faintest indications of a tendency to prose.'

'I am very sorry, sir.'

'I am very sorry, too, Ned, but you know that I cannot fix my mind for

any long period upon one subject. If you'll come to the point at once,

I'll imagine all that ought to go before, and conclude it said. Oblige

me with the milk again. Listening, invariably makes me feverish.'

'What I would say then, tends to this,' said Edward. 'I cannot bear

this absolute dependence, sir, even upon you. Time has been lost and

opportunity thrown away, but I am yet a young man, and may retrieve it.

Will you give me the means of devoting such abilities and energies as I

possess, to some worthy pursuit? Will you let me try to make for myself

an honourable path in life? For any term you please to name--say for

five years if you will--I will pledge myself to move no further in the

matter of our difference without your fall concurrence. During that

period, I will endeavour earnestly and patiently, if ever man did, to

open some prospect for myself, and free you from the burden you fear

I should become if I married one whose worth and beauty are her chief

endowments. Will you do this, sir? At the expiration of the term we

agree upon, let us discuss this subject again. Till then, unless it is

revived by you, let it never be renewed between us.'

'My dear Ned,' returned his father, laying down the newspaper at which

he had been glancing carelessly, and throwing himself back in the

window-seat, 'I believe you know how very much I dislike what are called

family affairs, which are only fit for plebeian Christmas days, and

have no manner of business with people of our condition. But as you

are proceeding upon a mistake, Ned--altogether upon a mistake--I will

conquer my repugnance to entering on such matters, and give you a

perfectly plain and candid answer, if you will do me the favour to shut

the door.'

Edward having obeyed him, he took an elegant little knife from his

pocket, and paring his nails, continued:

'You have to thank me, Ned, for being of good family; for your mother,

charming person as she was, and almost broken-hearted, and so forth, as

she left me, when she was prematurely compelled to become immortal--had

nothing to boast of in that respect.'

'Her father was at least an eminent lawyer, sir,' said Edward.

'Quite right, Ned; perfectly so. He stood high at the bar, had a great

name and great wealth, but having risen from nothing--I have

always closed my eyes to the circumstance and steadily resisted its

contemplation, but I fear his father dealt in pork, and that his

business did once involve cow-heel and sausages--he wished to marry his

daughter into a good family. He had his heart's desire, Ned. I was a

younger son's younger son, and I married her. We each had our object,

and gained it. She stepped at once into the politest and best circles,

and I stepped into a fortune which I assure you was very necessary to my

comfort--quite indispensable. Now, my good fellow, that fortune is among

the things that have been. It is gone, Ned, and has been gone--how old

are you? I always forget.'

'Seven-and-twenty, sir.'

'Are you indeed?' cried his father, raising his eyelids in a languishing

surprise. 'So much! Then I should say, Ned, that as nearly as I

remember, its skirts vanished from human knowledge, about eighteen or

nineteen years ago. It was about that time when I came to live in these

chambers (once your grandfather's, and bequeathed by that extremely

respectable person to me), and commenced to live upon an inconsiderable

annuity and my past reputation.'

'You are jesting with me, sir,' said Edward.

'Not in the slightest degree, I assure you,' returned his father with

great composure. 'These family topics are so extremely dry, that I am

sorry to say they don't admit of any such relief. It is for that reason,

and because they have an appearance of business, that I dislike them so

very much. Well! You know the rest. A son, Ned, unless he is old enough

to be a companion--that is to say, unless he is some two or three and

twenty--is not the kind of thing to have about one. He is a restraint

upon his father, his father is a restraint upon him, and they make each

other mutually uncomfortable. Therefore, until within the last four

years or so--I have a poor memory for dates, and if I mistake, you will

correct me in your own mind--you pursued your studies at a distance, and

picked up a great variety of accomplishments. Occasionally we passed a

week or two together here, and disconcerted each other as only such near

relations can. At last you came home. I candidly tell you, my dear boy,

that if you had been awkward and overgrown, I should have exported you

to some distant part of the world.'

'I wish with all my soul you had, sir,' said Edward.

'No you don't, Ned,' said his father coolly; 'you are mistaken, I assure

you. I found you a handsome, prepossessing, elegant fellow, and I threw

you into the society I can still command. Having done that, my dear

fellow, I consider that I have provided for you in life, and rely upon

your doing something to provide for me in return.'

'I do not understand your meaning, sir.'

'My meaning, Ned, is obvious--I observe another fly in the cream-jug,

but have the goodness not to take it out as you did the first, for

their walk when their legs are milky, is extremely ungraceful and

disagreeable--my meaning is, that you must do as I did; that you must

marry well and make the most of yourself.'

'A mere fortune-hunter!' cried the son, indignantly.

'What in the devil's name, Ned, would you be!' returned the father. 'All

men are fortune-hunters, are they not? The law, the church, the court,

the camp--see how they are all crowded with fortune-hunters, jostling

each other in the pursuit. The stock-exchange, the pulpit, the

counting-house, the royal drawing-room, the senate,--what but

fortune-hunters are they filled with? A fortune-hunter! Yes. You

ARE one; and you would be nothing else, my dear Ned, if you were

the greatest courtier, lawyer, legislator, prelate, or merchant, in

existence. If you are squeamish and moral, Ned, console yourself with

the reflection that at the very worst your fortune-hunting can make but

one person miserable or unhappy. How many people do you suppose these

other kinds of huntsmen crush in following their sport--hundreds at a

step? Or thousands?'

The young man leant his head upon his hand, and made no answer.

'I am quite charmed,' said the father rising, and walking slowly to and

fro--stopping now and then to glance at himself in the mirror, or survey

a picture through his glass, with the air of a connoisseur, 'that we

have had this conversation, Ned, unpromising as it was. It establishes

a confidence between us which is quite delightful, and was certainly

necessary, though how you can ever have mistaken our positions and

designs, I confess I cannot understand. I conceived, until I found your

fancy for this girl, that all these points were tacitly agreed upon

between us.'

'I knew you were embarrassed, sir,' returned the son, raising his head

for a moment, and then falling into his former attitude, 'but I had no

idea we were the beggared wretches you describe. How could I suppose it,

bred as I have been; witnessing the life you have always led; and the

appearance you have always made?'

'My dear child,' said the father--'for you really talk so like a child

that I must call you one--you were bred upon a careful principle;

the very manner of your education, I assure you, maintained my credit

surprisingly. As to the life I lead, I must lead it, Ned. I must have

these little refinements about me. I have always been used to them, and

I cannot exist without them. They must surround me, you observe, and

therefore they are here. With regard to our circumstances, Ned, you

may set your mind at rest upon that score. They are desperate. Your own

appearance is by no means despicable, and our joint pocket-money alone

devours our income. That's the truth.'

'Why have I never known this before? Why have you encouraged me, sir, to

an expenditure and mode of life to which we have no right or title?'

'My good fellow,' returned his father more compassionately than ever,

'if you made no appearance, how could you possibly succeed in the

pursuit for which I destined you? As to our mode of life, every man

has a right to live in the best way he can; and to make himself as

comfortable as he can, or he is an unnatural scoundrel. Our debts, I

grant, are very great, and therefore it the more behoves you, as a young

man of principle and honour, to pay them off as speedily as possible.'

'The villain's part,' muttered Edward, 'that I have unconsciously

played! I to win the heart of Emma Haredale! I would, for her sake, I

had died first!'

'I am glad you see, Ned,' returned his father, 'how perfectly

self-evident it is, that nothing can be done in that quarter. But apart

from this, and the necessity of your speedily bestowing yourself on

another (as you know you could to-morrow, if you chose), I wish you'd

look upon it pleasantly. In a religious point of view alone, how

could you ever think of uniting yourself to a Catholic, unless she was

amazingly rich? You ought to be so very Protestant, coming of such a

Protestant family as you do. Let us be moral, Ned, or we are nothing.

Even if one could set that objection aside, which is impossible, we come

to another which is quite conclusive. The very idea of marrying a girl

whose father was killed, like meat! Good God, Ned, how disagreeable!

Consider the impossibility of having any respect for your father-in-law

under such unpleasant circumstances--think of his having been "viewed"

by jurors, and "sat upon" by coroners, and of his very doubtful position

in the family ever afterwards. It seems to me such an indelicate sort

of thing that I really think the girl ought to have been put to death by

the state to prevent its happening. But I tease you perhaps. You would

rather be alone? My dear Ned, most willingly. God bless you. I shall

be going out presently, but we shall meet to-night, or if not to-night,

certainly to-morrow. Take care of yourself in the mean time, for both

our sakes. You are a person of great consequence to me, Ned--of vast

consequence indeed. God bless you!'

With these words, the father, who had been arranging his cravat in

the glass, while he uttered them in a disconnected careless manner,

withdrew, humming a tune as he went. The son, who had appeared so lost

in thought as not to hear or understand them, remained quite still and

silent. After the lapse of half an hour or so, the elder Chester, gaily

dressed, went out. The younger still sat with his head resting on his

hands, in what appeared to be a kind of stupor.

Chapter 16

A series of pictures representing the streets of London in the night,

even at the comparatively recent date of this tale, would present to the

eye something so very different in character from the reality which is

witnessed in these times, that it would be difficult for the beholder to

recognise his most familiar walks in the altered aspect of little more

than half a century ago.

They were, one and all, from the broadest and best to the narrowest and

least frequented, very dark. The oil and cotton lamps, though regularly

trimmed twice or thrice in the long winter nights, burnt feebly at the

best; and at a late hour, when they were unassisted by the lamps and

candles in the shops, cast but a narrow track of doubtful light upon the

footway, leaving the projecting doors and house-fronts in the deepest

gloom. Many of the courts and lanes were left in total darkness; those

of the meaner sort, where one glimmering light twinkled for a score of

houses, being favoured in no slight degree. Even in these places, the

inhabitants had often good reason for extinguishing their lamp as soon

as it was lighted; and the watch being utterly inefficient and powerless

to prevent them, they did so at their pleasure. Thus, in the lightest

thoroughfares, there was at every turn some obscure and dangerous spot

whither a thief might fly or shelter, and few would care to follow; and

the city being belted round by fields, green lanes, waste grounds, and

lonely roads, dividing it at that time from the suburbs that have joined

it since, escape, even where the pursuit was hot, was rendered easy.

It is no wonder that with these favouring circumstances in full and

constant operation, street robberies, often accompanied by cruel wounds,

and not unfrequently by loss of life, should have been of nightly

occurrence in the very heart of London, or that quiet folks should have

had great dread of traversing its streets after the shops were closed.

It was not unusual for those who wended home alone at midnight, to

keep the middle of the road, the better to guard against surprise from

lurking footpads; few would venture to repair at a late hour to Kentish

Town or Hampstead, or even to Kensington or Chelsea, unarmed and

unattended; while he who had been loudest and most valiant at the

supper-table or the tavern, and had but a mile or so to go, was glad to

fee a link-boy to escort him home.

There were many other characteristics--not quite so disagreeable--about

the thoroughfares of London then, with which they had been long

familiar. Some of the shops, especially those to the eastward of Temple

Bar, still adhered to the old practice of hanging out a sign; and the

creaking and swinging of these boards in their iron frames on windy

nights, formed a strange and mournful concert for the ears of those

who lay awake in bed or hurried through the streets. Long stands of

hackney-chairs and groups of chairmen, compared with whom the coachmen

of our day are gentle and polite, obstructed the way and filled the

air with clamour; night-cellars, indicated by a little stream of light

crossing the pavement, and stretching out half-way into the road, and

by the stifled roar of voices from below, yawned for the reception and

entertainment of the most abandoned of both sexes; under every shed and

bulk small groups of link-boys gamed away the earnings of the day; or

one more weary than the rest, gave way to sleep, and let the fragment of

his torch fall hissing on the puddled ground.

Then there was the watch with staff and lantern crying the hour, and

the kind of weather; and those who woke up at his voice and turned them

round in bed, were glad to hear it rained, or snowed, or blew, or froze,

for very comfort's sake. The solitary passenger was startled by the

chairmen's cry of 'By your leave there!' as two came trotting past

him with their empty vehicle--carried backwards to show its being

disengaged--and hurried to the nearest stand. Many a private chair,

too, inclosing some fine lady, monstrously hooped and furbelowed, and

preceded by running-footmen bearing flambeaux--for which extinguishers

are yet suspended before the doors of a few houses of the better

sort--made the way gay and light as it danced along, and darker and more

dismal when it had passed. It was not unusual for these running gentry,

who carried it with a very high hand, to quarrel in the servants' hall

while waiting for their masters and mistresses; and, falling to blows

either there or in the street without, to strew the place of skirmish

with hair-powder, fragments of bag-wigs, and scattered nosegays. Gaming,

the vice which ran so high among all classes (the fashion being of

course set by the upper), was generally the cause of these disputes;

for cards and dice were as openly used, and worked as much mischief, and

yielded as much excitement below stairs, as above. While incidents like

these, arising out of drums and masquerades and parties at quadrille,

were passing at the west end of the town, heavy stagecoaches and scarce

heavier waggons were lumbering slowly towards the city, the coachmen,

guard, and passengers, armed to the teeth, and the coach--a day or so

perhaps behind its time, but that was nothing--despoiled by highwaymen;

who made no scruple to attack, alone and single-handed, a whole caravan

of goods and men, and sometimes shot a passenger or two, and were

sometimes shot themselves, as the case might be. On the morrow, rumours

of this new act of daring on the road yielded matter for a few hours'

conversation through the town, and a Public Progress of some fine

gentleman (half-drunk) to Tyburn, dressed in the newest fashion, and

damning the ordinary with unspeakable gallantry and grace, furnished to

the populace, at once a pleasant excitement and a wholesome and profound

example.

Among all the dangerous characters who, in such a state of society,

prowled and skulked in the metropolis at night, there was one man from

whom many as uncouth and fierce as he, shrunk with an involuntary dread.

Who he was, or whence he came, was a question often asked, but which

none could answer. His name was unknown, he had never been seen until

within about eight days or thereabouts, and was equally a stranger to

the old ruffians, upon whose haunts he ventured fearlessly, as to the

young. He could be no spy, for he never removed his slouched hat to look

about him, entered into conversation with no man, heeded nothing that

passed, listened to no discourse, regarded nobody that came or went.

But so surely as the dead of night set in, so surely this man was in the

midst of the loose concourse in the night-cellar where outcasts of every

grade resorted; and there he sat till morning.

He was not only a spectre at their licentious feasts; a something in the

midst of their revelry and riot that chilled and haunted them; but out

of doors he was the same. Directly it was dark, he was abroad--never in

company with any one, but always alone; never lingering or loitering,

but always walking swiftly; and looking (so they said who had seen him)

over his shoulder from time to time, and as he did so quickening his

pace. In the fields, the lanes, the roads, in all quarters of the

town--east, west, north, and south--that man was seen gliding on like a

shadow. He was always hurrying away. Those who encountered him, saw him

steal past, caught sight of the backward glance, and so lost him in the

darkness.

This constant restlessness, and flitting to and fro, gave rise to

strange stories. He was seen in such distant and remote places, at times

so nearly tallying with each other, that some doubted whether there were

not two of them, or more--some, whether he had not unearthly means of

travelling from spot to spot. The footpad hiding in a ditch had marked

him passing like a ghost along its brink; the vagrant had met him on the

dark high-road; the beggar had seen him pause upon the bridge to look

down at the water, and then sweep on again; they who dealt in bodies

with the surgeons could swear he slept in churchyards, and that they

had beheld him glide away among the tombs on their approach. And as they

told these stories to each other, one who had looked about him would

pull his neighbour by the sleeve, and there he would be among them.

At last, one man--he was one of those whose commerce lay among the

graves--resolved to question this strange companion. Next night, when

he had eat his poor meal voraciously (he was accustomed to do that, they

had observed, as though he had no other in the day), this fellow sat

down at his elbow.

'A black night, master!'

'It is a black night.'

'Blacker than last, though that was pitchy too. Didn't I pass you near

the turnpike in the Oxford Road?'

'It's like you may. I don't know.'

'Come, come, master,' cried the fellow, urged on by the looks of his

comrades, and slapping him on the shoulder; 'be more companionable and

communicative. Be more the gentleman in this good company. There are

tales among us that you have sold yourself to the devil, and I know not

what.'

'We all have, have we not?' returned the stranger, looking up. 'If we

were fewer in number, perhaps he would give better wages.'

'It goes rather hard with you, indeed,' said the fellow, as the stranger

disclosed his haggard unwashed face, and torn clothes. 'What of that? Be

merry, master. A stave of a roaring song now'--

'Sing you, if you desire to hear one,' replied the other, shaking him

roughly off; 'and don't touch me if you're a prudent man; I carry

arms which go off easily--they have done so, before now--and make it

dangerous for strangers who don't know the trick of them, to lay hands

upon me.'

'Do you threaten?' said the fellow.

'Yes,' returned the other, rising and turning upon him, and looking

fiercely round as if in apprehension of a general attack.

His voice, and look, and bearing--all expressive of the wildest

recklessness and desperation--daunted while they repelled the

bystanders. Although in a very different sphere of action now, they were

not without much of the effect they had wrought at the Maypole Inn.

'I am what you all are, and live as you all do,' said the man sternly,

after a short silence. 'I am in hiding here like the rest, and if we

were surprised would perhaps do my part with the best of ye. If it's my

humour to be left to myself, let me have it. Otherwise,'--and here

he swore a tremendous oath--'there'll be mischief done in this place,

though there ARE odds of a score against me.'

A low murmur, having its origin perhaps in a dread of the man and the

mystery that surrounded him, or perhaps in a sincere opinion on the part

of some of those present, that it would be an inconvenient precedent to

meddle too curiously with a gentleman's private affairs if he saw reason

to conceal them, warned the fellow who had occasioned this discussion

that he had best pursue it no further. After a short time the strange

man lay down upon a bench to sleep, and when they thought of him again,

they found he was gone.

Next night, as soon as it was dark, he was abroad again and traversing

the streets; he was before the locksmith's house more than once, but

the family were out, and it was close shut. This night he crossed London

Bridge and passed into Southwark. As he glided down a bye street, a

woman with a little basket on her arm, turned into it at the other end.

Directly he observed her, he sought the shelter of an archway, and

stood aside until she had passed. Then he emerged cautiously from his

hiding-place, and followed.

She went into several shops to purchase various kinds of household

necessaries, and round every place at which she stopped he hovered like

her evil spirit; following her when she reappeared. It was nigh eleven

o'clock, and the passengers in the streets were thinning fast, when she

turned, doubtless to go home. The phantom still followed her.

She turned into the same bye street in which he had seen her first,

which, being free from shops, and narrow, was extremely dark. She

quickened her pace here, as though distrustful of being stopped, and

robbed of such trifling property as she carried with her. He crept along

on the other side of the road. Had she been gifted with the speed of

wind, it seemed as if his terrible shadow would have tracked her down.

At length the widow--for she it was--reached her own door, and, panting

for breath, paused to take the key from her basket. In a flush and glow,

with the haste she had made, and the pleasure of being safe at home,

she stooped to draw it out, when, raising her head, she saw him standing

silently beside her: the apparition of a dream.

His hand was on her mouth, but that was needless, for her tongue clove

to its roof, and her power of utterance was gone. 'I have been looking

for you many nights. Is the house empty? Answer me. Is any one inside?'

She could only answer by a rattle in her throat.

'Make me a sign.'

She seemed to indicate that there was no one there. He took the key,

unlocked the door, carried her in, and secured it carefully behind them.

Chapter 17

It was a chilly night, and the fire in the widow's parlour had burnt

low. Her strange companion placed her in a chair, and stooping down

before the half-extinguished ashes, raked them together and fanned them

with his hat. From time to time he glanced at her over his shoulder, as

though to assure himself of her remaining quiet and making no effort to

depart; and that done, busied himself about the fire again.

It was not without reason that he took these pains, for his dress was

dank and drenched with wet, his jaws rattled with cold, and he shivered

from head to foot. It had rained hard during the previous night and for

some hours in the morning, but since noon it had been fine. Wheresoever

he had passed the hours of darkness, his condition sufficiently

betokened that many of them had been spent beneath the open sky.

Besmeared with mire; his saturated clothes clinging with a damp embrace

about his limbs; his beard unshaven, his face unwashed, his meagre

cheeks worn into deep hollows,--a more miserable wretch could hardly be,

than this man who now cowered down upon the widow's hearth, and watched

the struggling flame with bloodshot eyes.

She had covered her face with her hands, fearing, as it seemed, to look

towards him. So they remained for some short time in silence. Glancing

round again, he asked at length:

'Is this your house?'

'It is. Why, in the name of Heaven, do you darken it?'

'Give me meat and drink,' he answered sullenly, 'or I dare do more than

that. The very marrow in my bones is cold, with wet and hunger. I must

have warmth and food, and I will have them here.'

'You were the robber on the Chigwell road.'

'I was.'

'And nearly a murderer then.'

'The will was not wanting. There was one came upon me and raised the

hue-and-cry', that it would have gone hard with, but for his nimbleness.

I made a thrust at him.'

'You thrust your sword at HIM!' cried the widow, looking upwards. 'You

hear this man! you hear and saw!'

He looked at her, as, with her head thrown back, and her hands tight

clenched together, she uttered these words in an agony of appeal. Then,

starting to his feet as she had done, he advanced towards her.

'Beware!' she cried in a suppressed voice, whose firmness stopped him

midway. 'Do not so much as touch me with a finger, or you are lost; body

and soul, you are lost.'

'Hear me,' he replied, menacing her with his hand. 'I, that in the form

of a man live the life of a hunted beast; that in the body am a spirit,

a ghost upon the earth, a thing from which all creatures shrink, save

those curst beings of another world, who will not leave me;--I am, in my

desperation of this night, past all fear but that of the hell in which I

exist from day to day. Give the alarm, cry out, refuse to shelter me. I

will not hurt you. But I will not be taken alive; and so surely as you

threaten me above your breath, I fall a dead man on this floor. The

blood with which I sprinkle it, be on you and yours, in the name of the

Evil Spirit that tempts men to their ruin!'

As he spoke, he took a pistol from his breast, and firmly clutched it in

his hand.

'Remove this man from me, good Heaven!' cried the widow. 'In thy grace

and mercy, give him one minute's penitence, and strike him dead!'

'It has no such purpose,' he said, confronting her. 'It is deaf. Give me

to eat and drink, lest I do that it cannot help my doing, and will not

do for you.'

'Will you leave me, if I do thus much? Will you leave me and return no

more?'

'I will promise nothing,' he rejoined, seating himself at the table,

'nothing but this--I will execute my threat if you betray me.'

She rose at length, and going to a closet or pantry in the room, brought

out some fragments of cold meat and bread and put them on the table. He

asked for brandy, and for water. These she produced likewise; and he ate

and drank with the voracity of a famished hound. All the time he was so

engaged she kept at the uttermost distance of the chamber, and sat there

shuddering, but with her face towards him. She never turned her back

upon him once; and although when she passed him (as she was obliged to

do in going to and from the cupboard) she gathered the skirts of her

garment about her, as if even its touching his by chance were horrible

to think of, still, in the midst of all this dread and terror, she kept

her face towards his own, and watched his every movement.

His repast ended--if that can be called one, which was a mere ravenous

satisfying of the calls of hunger--he moved his chair towards the

fire again, and warming himself before the blaze which had now sprung

brightly up, accosted her once more.

'I am an outcast, to whom a roof above his head is often an uncommon

luxury, and the food a beggar would reject is delicate fare. You live

here at your ease. Do you live alone?'

'I do not,' she made answer with an effort.

'Who dwells here besides?'

'One--it is no matter who. You had best begone, or he may find you here.

Why do you linger?'

'For warmth,' he replied, spreading out his hands before the fire. 'For

warmth. You are rich, perhaps?'

'Very,' she said faintly. 'Very rich. No doubt I am very rich.'

'At least you are not penniless. You have some money. You were making

purchases to-night.'

'I have a little left. It is but a few shillings.'

'Give me your purse. You had it in your hand at the door. Give it to

me.'

She stepped to the table and laid it down. He reached across, took it

up, and told the contents into his hand. As he was counting them, she

listened for a moment, and sprung towards him.

'Take what there is, take all, take more if more were there, but go

before it is too late. I have heard a wayward step without, I know full

well. It will return directly. Begone.'

'What do you mean?'

'Do not stop to ask. I will not answer. Much as I dread to touch you, I

would drag you to the door if I possessed the strength, rather than you

should lose an instant. Miserable wretch! fly from this place.'

'If there are spies without, I am safer here,' replied the man, standing

aghast. 'I will remain here, and will not fly till the danger is past.'

'It is too late!' cried the widow, who had listened for the step, and

not to him. 'Hark to that foot upon the ground. Do you tremble to hear

it! It is my son, my idiot son!'

As she said this wildly, there came a heavy knocking at the door. He

looked at her, and she at him.

'Let him come in,' said the man, hoarsely. 'I fear him less than the

dark, houseless night. He knocks again. Let him come in!'

'The dread of this hour,' returned the widow, 'has been upon me all my

life, and I will not. Evil will fall upon him, if you stand eye to eye.

My blighted boy! Oh! all good angels who know the truth--hear a poor

mother's prayer, and spare my boy from knowledge of this man!'

'He rattles at the shutters!' cried the man. 'He calls you. That voice

and cry! It was he who grappled with me in the road. Was it he?'

She had sunk upon her knees, and so knelt down, moving her lips, but

uttering no sound. As he gazed upon her, uncertain what to do or where

to turn, the shutters flew open. He had barely time to catch a knife

from the table, sheathe it in the loose sleeve of his coat, hide in the

closet, and do all with the lightning's speed, when Barnaby tapped at

the bare glass, and raised the sash exultingly.

'Why, who can keep out Grip and me!' he cried, thrusting in his head,

and staring round the room. 'Are you there, mother? How long you keep us

from the fire and light.'

She stammered some excuse and tendered him her hand. But Barnaby sprung

lightly in without assistance, and putting his arms about her neck,

kissed her a hundred times.

'We have been afield, mother--leaping ditches, scrambling through

hedges, running down steep banks, up and away, and hurrying on. The wind

has been blowing, and the rushes and young plants bowing and bending to

it, lest it should do them harm, the cowards--and Grip--ha ha ha!--brave

Grip, who cares for nothing, and when the wind rolls him over in the

dust, turns manfully to bite it--Grip, bold Grip, has quarrelled with

every little bowing twig--thinking, he told me, that it mocked him--and

has worried it like a bulldog. Ha ha ha!'

The raven, in his little basket at his master's back, hearing this

frequent mention of his name in a tone of exultation, expressed his

sympathy by crowing like a cock, and afterwards running over his various

phrases of speech with such rapidity, and in so many varieties of

hoarseness, that they sounded like the murmurs of a crowd of people.

'He takes such care of me besides!' said Barnaby. 'Such care, mother! He

watches all the time I sleep, and when I shut my eyes and make-believe

to slumber, he practises new learning softly; but he keeps his eye on

me the while, and if he sees me laugh, though never so little, stops

directly. He won't surprise me till he's perfect.'

The raven crowed again in a rapturous manner which plainly said, 'Those

are certainly some of my characteristics, and I glory in them.' In the

meantime, Barnaby closed the window and secured it, and coming to the

fireplace, prepared to sit down with his face to the closet. But

his mother prevented this, by hastily taking that side herself, and

motioning him towards the other.

'How pale you are to-night!' said Barnaby, leaning on his stick. 'We

have been cruel, Grip, and made her anxious!'

Anxious in good truth, and sick at heart! The listener held the door

of his hiding-place open with his hand, and closely watched her son.

Grip--alive to everything his master was unconscious of--had his head

out of the basket, and in return was watching him intently with his

glistening eye.

'He flaps his wings,' said Barnaby, turning almost quickly enough to

catch the retreating form and closing door, 'as if there were strangers

here, but Grip is wiser than to fancy that. Jump then!'

Accepting this invitation with a dignity peculiar to himself, the bird

hopped up on his master's shoulder, from that to his extended hand, and

so to the ground. Barnaby unstrapping the basket and putting it down in

a corner with the lid open, Grip's first care was to shut it down with

all possible despatch, and then to stand upon it. Believing, no doubt,

that he had now rendered it utterly impossible, and beyond the power of

mortal man, to shut him up in it any more, he drew a great many corks in

triumph, and uttered a corresponding number of hurrahs.

'Mother!' said Barnaby, laying aside his hat and stick, and returning

to the chair from which he had risen, 'I'll tell you where we have been

to-day, and what we have been doing,--shall I?'

She took his hand in hers, and holding it, nodded the word she could not

speak.

'You mustn't tell,' said Barnaby, holding up his finger, 'for it's a

secret, mind, and only known to me, and Grip, and Hugh. We had the dog

with us, but he's not like Grip, clever as he is, and doesn't guess it

yet, I'll wager.--Why do you look behind me so?'

'Did I?' she answered faintly. 'I didn't know I did. Come nearer me.'

'You are frightened!' said Barnaby, changing colour. 'Mother--you don't

see'--

'See what?'

'There's--there's none of this about, is there?' he answered in a

whisper, drawing closer to her and clasping the mark upon his wrist.

'I am afraid there is, somewhere. You make my hair stand on end, and my

flesh creep. Why do you look like that? Is it in the room as I have seen

it in my dreams, dashing the ceiling and the walls with red? Tell me. Is

it?'

He fell into a shivering fit as he put the question, and shutting out

the light with his hands, sat shaking in every limb until it had passed

away. After a time, he raised his head and looked about him.

'Is it gone?'

'There has been nothing here,' rejoined his mother, soothing him.

'Nothing indeed, dear Barnaby. Look! You see there are but you and me.'

He gazed at her vacantly, and, becoming reassured by degrees, burst into

a wild laugh.

'But let us see,' he said, thoughtfully. 'Were we talking? Was it you

and me? Where have we been?'

'Nowhere but here.'

'Aye, but Hugh, and I,' said Barnaby,--'that's it. Maypole Hugh, and

I, you know, and Grip--we have been lying in the forest, and among the

trees by the road side, with a dark lantern after night came on, and the

dog in a noose ready to slip him when the man came by.'

'What man?'

'The robber; him that the stars winked at. We have waited for him

after dark these many nights, and we shall have him. I'd know him in a

thousand. Mother, see here! This is the man. Look!'

He twisted his handkerchief round his head, pulled his hat upon his

brow, wrapped his coat about him, and stood up before her: so like the

original he counterfeited, that the dark figure peering out behind him

might have passed for his own shadow.

'Ha ha ha! We shall have him,' he cried, ridding himself of the

semblance as hastily as he had assumed it. 'You shall see him, mother,

bound hand and foot, and brought to London at a saddle-girth; and you

shall hear of him at Tyburn Tree if we have luck. So Hugh says. You're

pale again, and trembling. And why DO you look behind me so?'

'It is nothing,' she answered. 'I am not quite well. Go you to bed,

dear, and leave me here.'

'To bed!' he answered. 'I don't like bed. I like to lie before the fire,

watching the prospects in the burning coals--the rivers, hills, and

dells, in the deep, red sunset, and the wild faces. I am hungry too,

and Grip has eaten nothing since broad noon. Let us to supper. Grip! To

supper, lad!'

The raven flapped his wings, and, croaking his satisfaction, hopped to

the feet of his master, and there held his bill open, ready for snapping

up such lumps of meat as he should throw him. Of these he received about

a score in rapid succession, without the smallest discomposure.

'That's all,' said Barnaby.

'More!' cried Grip. 'More!'

But it appearing for a certainty that no more was to be had, he

retreated with his store; and disgorging the morsels one by one from his

pouch, hid them in various corners--taking particular care, however, to

avoid the closet, as being doubtful of the hidden man's propensities and

power of resisting temptation. When he had concluded these arrangements,

he took a turn or two across the room with an elaborate assumption of

having nothing on his mind (but with one eye hard upon his treasure all

the time), and then, and not till then, began to drag it out, piece by

piece, and eat it with the utmost relish.

Barnaby, for his part, having pressed his mother to eat in vain, made a

hearty supper too. Once during the progress of his meal, he wanted more

bread from the closet and rose to get it. She hurriedly interposed to

prevent him, and summoning her utmost fortitude, passed into the recess,

and brought it out herself.

'Mother,' said Barnaby, looking at her steadfastly as she sat down

beside him after doing so; 'is to-day my birthday?'

'To-day!' she answered. 'Don't you recollect it was but a week or so

ago, and that summer, autumn, and winter have to pass before it comes

again?'

'I remember that it has been so till now,' said Barnaby. 'But I think

to-day must be my birthday too, for all that.'

She asked him why? 'I'll tell you why,' he said. 'I have always seen

you--I didn't let you know it, but I have--on the evening of that day

grow very sad. I have seen you cry when Grip and I were most glad; and

look frightened with no reason; and I have touched your hand, and felt

that it was cold--as it is now. Once, mother (on a birthday that was,

also), Grip and I thought of this after we went upstairs to bed, and

when it was midnight, striking one o'clock, we came down to your door to

see if you were well. You were on your knees. I forget what it was you

said. Grip, what was it we heard her say that night?'

'I'm a devil!' rejoined the raven promptly.

'No, no,' said Barnaby. 'But you said something in a prayer; and when

you rose and walked about, you looked (as you have done ever since,

mother, towards night on my birthday) just as you do now. I have found

that out, you see, though I am silly. So I say you're wrong; and this

must be my birthday--my birthday, Grip!'

The bird received this information with a crow of such duration as a

cock, gifted with intelligence beyond all others of his kind, might

usher in the longest day with. Then, as if he had well considered the

sentiment, and regarded it as apposite to birthdays, he cried, 'Never

say die!' a great many times, and flapped his wings for emphasis.

The widow tried to make light of Barnaby's remark, and endeavoured to

divert his attention to some new subject; too easy a task at all times,

as she knew. His supper done, Barnaby, regardless of her entreaties,

stretched himself on the mat before the fire; Grip perched upon his

leg, and divided his time between dozing in the grateful warmth, and

endeavouring (as it presently appeared) to recall a new accomplishment

he had been studying all day.

A long and profound silence ensued, broken only by some change of

position on the part of Barnaby, whose eyes were still wide open and

intently fixed upon the fire; or by an effort of recollection on the

part of Grip, who would cry in a low voice from time to time, 'Polly put

the ket--' and there stop short, forgetting the remainder, and go off in

a doze again.

After a long interval, Barnaby's breathing grew more deep and regular,

and his eyes were closed. But even then the unquiet spirit of the raven

interposed. 'Polly put the ket--' cried Grip, and his master was broad

awake again.

At length Barnaby slept soundly, and the bird with his bill sunk

upon his breast, his breast itself puffed out into a comfortable

alderman-like form, and his bright eye growing smaller and smaller,

really seemed to be subsiding into a state of repose. Now and then he

muttered in a sepulchral voice, 'Polly put the ket--' but very drowsily,

and more like a drunken man than a reflecting raven.

The widow, scarcely venturing to breathe, rose from her seat. The man

glided from the closet, and extinguished the candle.

'--tle on,' cried Grip, suddenly struck with an idea and very much

excited. '--tle on. Hurrah! Polly put the ket-tle on, we'll all have

tea; Polly put the ket-tle on, we'll all have tea. Hurrah, hurrah,

hurrah! I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a ket-tle on, Keep up your

spirits, Never say die, Bow, wow, wow, I'm a devil, I'm a ket-tle, I'm

a--Polly put the ket-tle on, we'll all have tea.'

They stood rooted to the ground, as though it had been a voice from the

grave.

But even this failed to awaken the sleeper. He turned over towards the

fire, his arm fell to the ground, and his head drooped heavily upon it.

The widow and her unwelcome visitor gazed at him and at each other for a

moment, and then she motioned him towards the door.

'Stay,' he whispered. 'You teach your son well.'

'I have taught him nothing that you heard to-night. Depart instantly, or

I will rouse him.'

'You are free to do so. Shall I rouse him?'

'You dare not do that.'

'I dare do anything, I have told you. He knows me well, it seems. At

least I will know him.'

'Would you kill him in his sleep?' cried the widow, throwing herself

between them.

'Woman,' he returned between his teeth, as he motioned her aside, 'I

would see him nearer, and I will. If you want one of us to kill the

other, wake him.'

With that he advanced, and bending down over the prostrate form, softly

turned back the head and looked into the face. The light of the fire

was upon it, and its every lineament was revealed distinctly. He

contemplated it for a brief space, and hastily uprose.

'Observe,' he whispered in the widow's ear: 'In him, of whose existence

I was ignorant until to-night, I have you in my power. Be careful how

you use me. Be careful how you use me. I am destitute and starving, and

a wanderer upon the earth. I may take a sure and slow revenge.'

'There is some dreadful meaning in your words. I do not fathom it.'

'There is a meaning in them, and I see you fathom it to its very depth.

You have anticipated it for years; you have told me as much. I leave you

to digest it. Do not forget my warning.'

He pointed, as he left her, to the slumbering form, and stealthily

withdrawing, made his way into the street. She fell on her knees beside

the sleeper, and remained like one stricken into stone, until the tears

which fear had frozen so long, came tenderly to her relief.

'Oh Thou,' she cried, 'who hast taught me such deep love for this one

remnant of the promise of a happy life, out of whose affliction, even,

perhaps the comfort springs that he is ever a relying, loving child to

me--never growing old or cold at heart, but needing my care and duty in

his manly strength as in his cradle-time--help him, in his darkened walk

through this sad world, or he is doomed, and my poor heart is broken!'

Chapter 18

Gliding along the silent streets, and holding his course where they were

darkest and most gloomy, the man who had left the widow's house crossed

London Bridge, and arriving in the City, plunged into the backways,

lanes, and courts, between Cornhill and Smithfield; with no more

fixedness of purpose than to lose himself among their windings, and

baffle pursuit, if any one were dogging his steps.

It was the dead time of the night, and all was quiet. Now and then a

drowsy watchman's footsteps sounded on the pavement, or the lamplighter

on his rounds went flashing past, leaving behind a little track of smoke

mingled with glowing morsels of his hot red link. He hid himself even

from these partakers of his lonely walk, and, shrinking in some arch or

doorway while they passed, issued forth again when they were gone and so

pursued his solitary way.

To be shelterless and alone in the open country, hearing the wind moan

and watching for day through the whole long weary night; to listen to

the falling rain, and crouch for warmth beneath the lee of some old

barn or rick, or in the hollow of a tree; are dismal things--but not

so dismal as the wandering up and down where shelter is, and beds and

sleepers are by thousands; a houseless rejected creature. To pace

the echoing stones from hour to hour, counting the dull chimes of the

clocks; to watch the lights twinkling in chamber windows, to think what

happy forgetfulness each house shuts in; that here are children coiled

together in their beds, here youth, here age, here poverty, here wealth,

all equal in their sleep, and all at rest; to have nothing in common

with the slumbering world around, not even sleep, Heaven's gift to

all its creatures, and be akin to nothing but despair; to feel, by the

wretched contrast with everything on every hand, more utterly alone and

cast away than in a trackless desert; this is a kind of suffering, on

which the rivers of great cities close full many a time, and which the

solitude in crowds alone awakens.

The miserable man paced up and down the streets--so long, so wearisome,

so like each other--and often cast a wistful look towards the east,

hoping to see the first faint streaks of day. But obdurate night had

yet possession of the sky, and his disturbed and restless walk found no

relief.

One house in a back street was bright with the cheerful glare of lights;

there was the sound of music in it too, and the tread of dancers,

and there were cheerful voices, and many a burst of laughter. To this

place--to be near something that was awake and glad--he returned again

and again; and more than one of those who left it when the merriment

was at its height, felt it a check upon their mirthful mood to see him

flitting to and fro like an uneasy ghost. At last the guests departed,

one and all; and then the house was close shut up, and became as dull

and silent as the rest.

His wanderings brought him at one time to the city jail. Instead of

hastening from it as a place of ill omen, and one he had cause to shun,

he sat down on some steps hard by, and resting his chin upon his hand,

gazed upon its rough and frowning walls as though even they became a

refuge in his jaded eyes. He paced it round and round, came back to the

same spot, and sat down again. He did this often, and once, with a hasty

movement, crossed to where some men were watching in the prison lodge,

and had his foot upon the steps as though determined to accost them. But

looking round, he saw that the day began to break, and failing in his

purpose, turned and fled.

He was soon in the quarter he had lately traversed, and pacing to and

fro again as he had done before. He was passing down a mean street, when

from an alley close at hand some shouts of revelry arose, and there came

straggling forth a dozen madcaps, whooping and calling to each other,

who, parting noisily, took different ways and dispersed in smaller

groups.

Hoping that some low place of entertainment which would afford him a

safe refuge might be near at hand, he turned into this court when they

were all gone, and looked about for a half-opened door, or lighted

window, or other indication of the place whence they had come. It was

so profoundly dark, however, and so ill-favoured, that he concluded they

had but turned up there, missing their way, and were pouring out again

when he observed them. With this impression, and finding there was no

outlet but that by which he had entered, he was about to turn, when from

a grating near his feet a sudden stream of light appeared, and the sound

of talking came. He retreated into a doorway to see who these talkers

were, and to listen to them.

The light came to the level of the pavement as he did this, and a man

ascended, bearing in his hand a torch. This figure unlocked and held

open the grating as for the passage of another, who presently

appeared, in the form of a young man of small stature and uncommon

self-importance, dressed in an obsolete and very gaudy fashion.

'Good night, noble captain,' said he with the torch. 'Farewell,

commander. Good luck, illustrious general!'

In return to these compliments the other bade him hold his tongue, and

keep his noise to himself, and laid upon him many similar injunctions,

with great fluency of speech and sternness of manner.

'Commend me, captain, to the stricken Miggs,' returned the torch-bearer

in a lower voice. 'My captain flies at higher game than Miggses. Ha, ha,

ha! My captain is an eagle, both as respects his eye and soaring wings.

My captain breaketh hearts as other bachelors break eggs at breakfast.'

'What a fool you are, Stagg!' said Mr Tappertit, stepping on the

pavement of the court, and brushing from his legs the dust he had

contracted in his passage upward.

'His precious limbs!' cried Stagg, clasping one of his ankles. 'Shall a

Miggs aspire to these proportions! No, no, my captain. We will inveigle

ladies fair, and wed them in our secret cavern. We will unite ourselves

with blooming beauties, captain.'

'I'll tell you what, my buck,' said Mr Tappertit, releasing his leg;

'I'll trouble you not to take liberties, and not to broach certain

questions unless certain questions are broached to you. Speak when

you're spoke to on particular subjects, and not otherways. Hold

the torch up till I've got to the end of the court, and then kennel

yourself, do you hear?'

'I hear you, noble captain.'

'Obey then,' said Mr Tappertit haughtily. 'Gentlemen, lead on!' With

which word of command (addressed to an imaginary staff or retinue) he

folded his arms, and walked with surpassing dignity down the court.

His obsequious follower stood holding the torch above his head, and then

the observer saw for the first time, from his place of concealment, that

he was blind. Some involuntary motion on his part caught the quick

ear of the blind man, before he was conscious of having moved an inch

towards him, for he turned suddenly and cried, 'Who's there?'

'A man,' said the other, advancing. 'A friend.'

'A stranger!' rejoined the blind man. 'Strangers are not my friends.

What do you do there?'

'I saw your company come out, and waited here till they were gone. I

want a lodging.'

'A lodging at this time!' returned Stagg, pointing towards the dawn as

though he saw it. 'Do you know the day is breaking?'

'I know it,' rejoined the other, 'to my cost. I have been traversing

this iron-hearted town all night.'

'You had better traverse it again,' said the blind man, preparing to

descend, 'till you find some lodgings suitable to your taste. I don't

let any.'

'Stay!' cried the other, holding him by the arm.

'I'll beat this light about that hangdog face of yours (for hangdog it

is, if it answers to your voice), and rouse the neighbourhood besides,

if you detain me,' said the blind man. 'Let me go. Do you hear?'

'Do YOU hear!' returned the other, chinking a few shillings together,

and hurriedly pressing them into his hand. 'I beg nothing of you. I will

pay for the shelter you give me. Death! Is it much to ask of such as

you! I have come from the country, and desire to rest where there are

none to question me. I am faint, exhausted, worn out, almost dead. Let

me lie down, like a dog, before your fire. I ask no more than that. If

you would be rid of me, I will depart to-morrow.'

'If a gentleman has been unfortunate on the road,' muttered Stagg,

yielding to the other, who, pressing on him, had already gained a

footing on the steps--'and can pay for his accommodation--'

'I will pay you with all I have. I am just now past the want of food,

God knows, and wish but to purchase shelter. What companion have you

below?'

'None.'

'Then fasten your grate there, and show me the way. Quick!'

The blind man complied after a moment's hesitation, and they descended

together. The dialogue had passed as hurriedly as the words could be

spoken, and they stood in his wretched room before he had had time to

recover from his first surprise.

'May I see where that door leads to, and what is beyond?' said the man,

glancing keenly round. 'You will not mind that?'

'I will show you myself. Follow me, or go before. Take your choice.'

He bade him lead the way, and, by the light of the torch which his

conductor held up for the purpose, inspected all three cellars narrowly.

Assured that the blind man had spoken truth, and that he lived there

alone, the visitor returned with him to the first, in which a fire was

burning, and flung himself with a deep groan upon the ground before it.

His host pursued his usual occupation without seeming to heed him any

further. But directly he fell asleep--and he noted his falling into a

slumber, as readily as the keenest-sighted man could have done--he knelt

down beside him, and passed his hand lightly but carefully over his face

and person.

His sleep was checkered with starts and moans, and sometimes with a

muttered word or two. His hands were clenched, his brow bent, and his

mouth firmly set. All this, the blind man accurately marked; and as if

his curiosity were strongly awakened, and he had already some inkling

of his mystery, he sat watching him, if the expression may be used, and

listening, until it was broad day.

Chapter 19

Dolly Varden's pretty little head was yet bewildered by various

recollections of the party, and her bright eyes were yet dazzled by a

crowd of images, dancing before them like motes in the sunbeams, among

which the effigy of one partner in particular did especially figure, the

same being a young coachmaker (a master in his own right) who had given

her to understand, when he handed her into the chair at parting, that

it was his fixed resolve to neglect his business from that time, and die

slowly for the love of her--Dolly's head, and eyes, and thoughts, and

seven senses, were all in a state of flutter and confusion for which the

party was accountable, although it was now three days old, when, as

she was sitting listlessly at breakfast, reading all manner of fortunes

(that is to say, of married and flourishing fortunes) in the grounds of

her teacup, a step was heard in the workshop, and Mr Edward Chester

was descried through the glass door, standing among the rusty locks and

keys, like love among the roses--for which apt comparison the historian

may by no means take any credit to himself, the same being the

invention, in a sentimental mood, of the chaste and modest Miggs, who,

beholding him from the doorsteps she was then cleaning, did, in her

maiden meditation, give utterance to the simile.

The locksmith, who happened at the moment to have his eyes thrown upward

and his head backward, in an intense communing with Toby, did not see

his visitor, until Mrs Varden, more watchful than the rest, had desired

Sim Tappertit to open the glass door and give him admission--from which

untoward circumstance the good lady argued (for she could deduce a

precious moral from the most trifling event) that to take a draught of

small ale in the morning was to observe a pernicious, irreligious, and

Pagan custom, the relish whereof should be left to swine, and Satan, or

at least to Popish persons, and should be shunned by the righteous as

a work of sin and evil. She would no doubt have pursued her admonition

much further, and would have founded on it a long list of precious

precepts of inestimable value, but that the young gentleman standing by

in a somewhat uncomfortable and discomfited manner while she read

her spouse this lecture, occasioned her to bring it to a premature

conclusion.

'I'm sure you'll excuse me, sir,' said Mrs Varden, rising and

curtseying. 'Varden is so very thoughtless, and needs so much

reminding--Sim, bring a chair here.'

Mr Tappertit obeyed, with a flourish implying that he did so, under

protest.

'And you can go, Sim,' said the locksmith.

Mr Tappertit obeyed again, still under protest; and betaking himself to

the workshop, began seriously to fear that he might find it necessary to

poison his master, before his time was out.

In the meantime, Edward returned suitable replies to Mrs Varden's

courtesies, and that lady brightened up very much; so that when he

accepted a dish of tea from the fair hands of Dolly, she was perfectly

agreeable.

'I am sure if there's anything we can do,--Varden, or I, or Dolly

either,--to serve you, sir, at any time, you have only to say it, and it

shall be done,' said Mrs V.

'I am much obliged to you, I am sure,' returned Edward. 'You encourage

me to say that I have come here now, to beg your good offices.'

Mrs Varden was delighted beyond measure.

'It occurred to me that probably your fair daughter might be going to

the Warren, either to-day or to-morrow,' said Edward, glancing at Dolly;

'and if so, and you will allow her to take charge of this letter, ma'am,

you will oblige me more than I can tell you. The truth is, that while

I am very anxious it should reach its destination, I have particular

reasons for not trusting it to any other conveyance; so that without

your help, I am wholly at a loss.'

'She was not going that way, sir, either to-day, or to-morrow, nor

indeed all next week,' the lady graciously rejoined, 'but we shall be

very glad to put ourselves out of the way on your account, and if you

wish it, you may depend upon its going to-day. You might suppose,' said

Mrs Varden, frowning at her husband, 'from Varden's sitting there so

glum and silent, that he objected to this arrangement; but you must not

mind that, sir, if you please. It's his way at home. Out of doors, he

can be cheerful and talkative enough.'

Now, the fact was, that the unfortunate locksmith, blessing his stars to

find his helpmate in such good humour, had been sitting with a beaming

face, hearing this discourse with a joy past all expression. Wherefore

this sudden attack quite took him by surprise.

'My dear Martha--' he said.

'Oh yes, I dare say,' interrupted Mrs Varden, with a smile of mingled

scorn and pleasantry. 'Very dear! We all know that.'

'No, but my good soul,' said Gabriel, 'you are quite mistaken. You are

indeed. I was delighted to find you so kind and ready. I waited, my

dear, anxiously, I assure you, to hear what you would say.'

'You waited anxiously,' repeated Mrs V. 'Yes! Thank you, Varden. You

waited, as you always do, that I might bear the blame, if any came of

it. But I am used to it,' said the lady with a kind of solemn titter,

'and that's my comfort!'

'I give you my word, Martha--' said Gabriel.

'Let me give you MY word, my dear,' interposed his wife with a Christian

smile, 'that such discussions as these between married people, are much

better left alone. Therefore, if you please, Varden, we'll drop the

subject. I have no wish to pursue it. I could. I might say a great deal.

But I would rather not. Pray don't say any more.'

'I don't want to say any more,' rejoined the goaded locksmith.

'Well then, don't,' said Mrs Varden.

'Nor did I begin it, Martha,' added the locksmith, good-humouredly, 'I

must say that.'

'You did not begin it, Varden!' exclaimed his wife, opening her eyes

very wide and looking round upon the company, as though she would say,

You hear this man! 'You did not begin it, Varden! But you shall not say

I was out of temper. No, you did not begin it, oh dear no, not you, my

dear!'

'Well, well,' said the locksmith. 'That's settled then.'

'Oh yes,' rejoined his wife, 'quite. If you like to say Dolly began it,

my dear, I shall not contradict you. I know my duty. I need know it,

I am sure. I am often obliged to bear it in mind, when my inclination

perhaps would be for the moment to forget it. Thank you, Varden.' And

so, with a mighty show of humility and forgiveness, she folded her

hands, and looked round again, with a smile which plainly said, 'If you

desire to see the first and foremost among female martyrs, here she is,

on view!'

This little incident, illustrative though it was of Mrs Varden's

extraordinary sweetness and amiability, had so strong a tendency to

check the conversation and to disconcert all parties but that excellent

lady, that only a few monosyllables were uttered until Edward withdrew;

which he presently did, thanking the lady of the house a great many

times for her condescension, and whispering in Dolly's ear that he would

call on the morrow, in case there should happen to be an answer to the

note--which, indeed, she knew without his telling, as Barnaby and his

friend Grip had dropped in on the previous night to prepare her for the

visit which was then terminating.

Gabriel, who had attended Edward to the door, came back with his hands

in his pockets; and, after fidgeting about the room in a very uneasy

manner, and casting a great many sidelong looks at Mrs Varden (who

with the calmest countenance in the world was five fathoms deep in

the Protestant Manual), inquired of Dolly how she meant to go. Dolly

supposed by the stage-coach, and looked at her lady mother, who finding

herself silently appealed to, dived down at least another fathom into

the Manual, and became unconscious of all earthly things.

'Martha--' said the locksmith.

'I hear you, Varden,' said his wife, without rising to the surface.

'I am sorry, my dear, you have such an objection to the Maypole and old

John, for otherways as it's a very fine morning, and Saturday's not

a busy day with us, we might have all three gone to Chigwell in the

chaise, and had quite a happy day of it.'

Mrs Varden immediately closed the Manual, and bursting into tears,

requested to be led upstairs.

'What is the matter now, Martha?' inquired the locksmith.

To which Martha rejoined, 'Oh! don't speak to me,' and protested in

agony that if anybody had told her so, she wouldn't have believed it.

'But, Martha,' said Gabriel, putting himself in the way as she was

moving off with the aid of Dolly's shoulder, 'wouldn't have believed

what? Tell me what's wrong now. Do tell me. Upon my soul I don't know.

Do you know, child? Damme!' cried the locksmith, plucking at his wig in

a kind of frenzy, 'nobody does know, I verily believe, but Miggs!'

'Miggs,' said Mrs Varden faintly, and with symptoms of approaching

incoherence, 'is attached to me, and that is sufficient to draw down

hatred upon her in this house. She is a comfort to me, whatever she may

be to others.'

'She's no comfort to me,' cried Gabriel, made bold by despair. 'She's

the misery of my life. She's all the plagues of Egypt in one.'

'She's considered so, I have no doubt,' said Mrs Varden. 'I was prepared

for that; it's natural; it's of a piece with the rest. When you taunt

me as you do to my face, how can I wonder that you taunt her behind her

back!' And here the incoherence coming on very strong, Mrs Varden wept,

and laughed, and sobbed, and shivered, and hiccoughed, and choked; and

said she knew it was very foolish but she couldn't help it; and that

when she was dead and gone, perhaps they would be sorry for it--which

really under the circumstances did not appear quite so probable as she

seemed to think--with a great deal more to the same effect. In a word,

she passed with great decency through all the ceremonies incidental to

such occasions; and being supported upstairs, was deposited in a highly

spasmodic state on her own bed, where Miss Miggs shortly afterwards

flung herself upon the body.

The philosophy of all this was, that Mrs Varden wanted to go to

Chigwell; that she did not want to make any concession or explanation;

that she would only go on being implored and entreated so to do; and

that she would accept no other terms. Accordingly, after a vast amount

of moaning and crying upstairs, and much damping of foreheads, and

vinegaring of temples, and hartshorning of noses, and so forth;

and after most pathetic adjurations from Miggs, assisted by warm

brandy-and-water not over-weak, and divers other cordials, also of

a stimulating quality, administered at first in teaspoonfuls and

afterwards in increasing doses, and of which Miss Miggs herself partook

as a preventive measure (for fainting is infectious); after all these

remedies, and many more too numerous to mention, but not to take,

had been applied; and many verbal consolations, moral, religious, and

miscellaneous, had been super-added thereto; the locksmith humbled

himself, and the end was gained.

'If it's only for the sake of peace and quietness, father,' said Dolly,

urging him to go upstairs.

'Oh, Doll, Doll,' said her good-natured father. 'If you ever have a

husband of your own--'

Dolly glanced at the glass.

'--Well, WHEN you have,' said the locksmith, 'never faint, my darling.

More domestic unhappiness has come of easy fainting, Doll, than from all

the greater passions put together. Remember that, my dear, if you would

be really happy, which you never can be, if your husband isn't. And a

word in your ear, my precious. Never have a Miggs about you!'

With this advice he kissed his blooming daughter on the cheek, and

slowly repaired to Mrs Varden's room; where that lady, lying all pale

and languid on her couch, was refreshing herself with a sight of her

last new bonnet, which Miggs, as a means of calming her scattered

spirits, displayed to the best advantage at her bedside.

'Here's master, mim,' said Miggs. 'Oh, what a happiness it is when man

and wife come round again! Oh gracious, to think that him and her should

ever have a word together!' In the energy of these sentiments, which

were uttered as an apostrophe to the Heavens in general, Miss Miggs

perched the bonnet on the top of her own head, and folding her hands,

turned on her tears.

'I can't help it,' cried Miggs. 'I couldn't, if I was to be drownded in

'em. She has such a forgiving spirit! She'll forget all that has passed,

and go along with you, sir--Oh, if it was to the world's end, she'd go

along with you.'

Mrs Varden with a faint smile gently reproved her attendant for this

enthusiasm, and reminded her at the same time that she was far too

unwell to venture out that day.

'Oh no, you're not, mim, indeed you're not,' said Miggs; 'I repeal to

master; master knows you're not, mim. The hair, and motion of the shay,

will do you good, mim, and you must not give way, you must not raly. She

must keep up, mustn't she, sir, for all out sakes? I was a telling

her that, just now. She must remember us, even if she forgets herself.

Master will persuade you, mim, I'm sure. There's Miss Dolly's a-going

you know, and master, and you, and all so happy and so comfortable. Oh!'

cried Miggs, turning on the tears again, previous to quitting the room

in great emotion, 'I never see such a blessed one as she is for the

forgiveness of her spirit, I never, never, never did. Not more did

master neither; no, nor no one--never!'

For five minutes or thereabouts, Mrs Varden remained mildly opposed to

all her husband's prayers that she would oblige him by taking a day's

pleasure, but relenting at length, she suffered herself to be persuaded,

and granting him her free forgiveness (the merit whereof, she meekly

said, rested with the Manual and not with her), desired that Miggs might

come and help her dress. The handmaid attended promptly, and it is but

justice to their joint exertions to record that, when the good lady came

downstairs in course of time, completely decked out for the journey, she

really looked as if nothing had happened, and appeared in the very best

health imaginable.

As to Dolly, there she was again, the very pink and pattern of good

looks, in a smart little cherry-coloured mantle, with a hood of the same

drawn over her head, and upon the top of that hood, a little straw hat

trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons, and worn the merest trifle on one

side--just enough in short to make it the wickedest and most provoking

head-dress that ever malicious milliner devised. And not to speak of the

manner in which these cherry-coloured decorations brightened her eyes,

or vied with her lips, or shed a new bloom on her face, she wore such

a cruel little muff, and such a heart-rending pair of shoes, and was so

surrounded and hemmed in, as it were, by aggravations of all kinds, that

when Mr Tappettit, holding the horse's head, saw her come out of the

house alone, such impulses came over him to decoy her into the chaise

and drive off like mad, that he would unquestionably have done it, but

for certain uneasy doubts besetting him as to the shortest way to

Gretna Green; whether it was up the street or down, or up the right-hand

turning or the left; and whether, supposing all the turnpikes to be

carried by storm, the blacksmith in the end would marry them on credit;

which by reason of his clerical office appeared, even to his excited

imagination, so unlikely, that he hesitated. And while he stood

hesitating, and looking post-chaises-and-six at Dolly, out came his

master and his mistress, and the constant Miggs, and the opportunity

was gone for ever. For now the chaise creaked upon its springs, and Mrs

Varden was inside; and now it creaked again, and more than ever, and

the locksmith was inside; and now it bounded once, as if its heart beat

lightly, and Dolly was inside; and now it was gone and its place

was empty, and he and that dreary Miggs were standing in the street

together.

The hearty locksmith was in as good a humour as if nothing had occurred

for the last twelve months to put him out of his way, Dolly was all

smiles and graces, and Mrs Varden was agreeable beyond all precedent. As

they jogged through the streets talking of this thing and of that, who

should be descried upon the pavement but that very coachmaker, looking

so genteel that nobody would have believed he had ever had anything to

do with a coach but riding in it, and bowing like any nobleman. To

be sure Dolly was confused when she bowed again, and to be sure the

cherry-coloured ribbons trembled a little when she met his mournful eye,

which seemed to say, 'I have kept my word, I have begun, the business is

going to the devil, and you're the cause of it.' There he stood, rooted

to the ground: as Dolly said, like a statue; and as Mrs Varden said,

like a pump; till they turned the corner: and when her father thought

it was like his impudence, and her mother wondered what he meant by it,

Dolly blushed again till her very hood was pale.

But on they went, not the less merrily for this, and there was the

locksmith in the incautious fulness of his heart 'pulling-up' at all

manner of places, and evincing a most intimate acquaintance with all the

taverns on the road, and all the landlords and all the landladies, with

whom, indeed, the little horse was on equally friendly terms, for he

kept on stopping of his own accord. Never were people so glad to see

other people as these landlords and landladies were to behold Mr Varden

and Mrs Varden and Miss Varden; and wouldn't they get out, said one; and

they really must walk upstairs, said another; and she would take it

ill and be quite certain they were proud if they wouldn't have a little

taste of something, said a third; and so on, that it was really quite a

Progress rather than a ride, and one continued scene of hospitality from

beginning to end. It was pleasant enough to be held in such esteem, not

to mention the refreshments; so Mrs Varden said nothing at the time,

and was all affability and delight--but such a body of evidence as

she collected against the unfortunate locksmith that day, to be used

thereafter as occasion might require, never was got together for

matrimonial purposes.

In course of time--and in course of a pretty long time too, for these

agreeable interruptions delayed them not a little,--they arrived upon

the skirts of the Forest, and riding pleasantly on among the trees, came

at last to the Maypole, where the locksmith's cheerful 'Yoho!' speedily

brought to the porch old John, and after him young Joe, both of whom

were so transfixed at sight of the ladies, that for a moment they were

perfectly unable to give them any welcome, and could do nothing but

stare.

It was only for a moment, however, that Joe forgot himself, for speedily

reviving he thrust his drowsy father aside--to Mr Willet's mighty and

inexpressible indignation--and darting out, stood ready to help them to

alight. It was necessary for Dolly to get out first. Joe had her in his

arms;--yes, though for a space of time no longer than you could count

one in, Joe had her in his arms. Here was a glimpse of happiness!

It would be difficult to describe what a flat and commonplace affair the

helping Mrs Varden out afterwards was, but Joe did it, and did it too

with the best grace in the world. Then old John, who, entertaining a

dull and foggy sort of idea that Mrs Varden wasn't fond of him, had been

in some doubt whether she might not have come for purposes of assault

and battery, took courage, hoped she was well, and offered to conduct

her into the house. This tender being amicably received, they marched

in together; Joe and Dolly followed, arm-in-arm, (happiness again!) and

Varden brought up the rear.

Old John would have it that they must sit in the bar, and nobody

objecting, into the bar they went. All bars are snug places, but the

Maypole's was the very snuggest, cosiest, and completest bar, that ever

the wit of man devised. Such amazing bottles in old oaken pigeon-holes;

such gleaming tankards dangling from pegs at about the same inclination

as thirsty men would hold them to their lips; such sturdy little Dutch

kegs ranged in rows on shelves; so many lemons hanging in separate nets,

and forming the fragrant grove already mentioned in this chronicle,

suggestive, with goodly loaves of snowy sugar stowed away hard by,

of punch, idealised beyond all mortal knowledge; such closets, such

presses, such drawers full of pipes, such places for putting things

away in hollow window-seats, all crammed to the throat with eatables,

drinkables, or savoury condiments; lastly, and to crown all, as typical

of the immense resources of the establishment, and its defiances to all

visitors to cut and come again, such a stupendous cheese!

It is a poor heart that never rejoices--it must have been the poorest,

weakest, and most watery heart that ever beat, which would not have

warmed towards the Maypole bar. Mrs Varden's did directly. She could no

more have reproached John Willet among those household gods, the kegs

and bottles, lemons, pipes, and cheese, than she could have stabbed him

with his own bright carving-knife. The order for dinner too--it might

have soothed a savage. 'A bit of fish,' said John to the cook, 'and some

lamb chops (breaded, with plenty of ketchup), and a good salad, and a

roast spring chicken, with a dish of sausages and mashed potatoes, or

something of that sort.' Something of that sort! The resources of

these inns! To talk carelessly about dishes, which in themselves were

a first-rate holiday kind of dinner, suitable to one's wedding-day, as

something of that sort: meaning, if you can't get a spring chicken, any

other trifle in the way of poultry will do--such as a peacock, perhaps!

The kitchen too, with its great broad cavernous chimney; the kitchen,

where nothing in the way of cookery seemed impossible; where you could

believe in anything to eat, they chose to tell you of. Mrs Varden

returned from the contemplation of these wonders to the bar again, with

a head quite dizzy and bewildered. Her housekeeping capacity was not

large enough to comprehend them. She was obliged to go to sleep. Waking

was pain, in the midst of such immensity.

Dolly in the meanwhile, whose gay heart and head ran upon other matters,

passed out at the garden door, and glancing back now and then (but of

course not wondering whether Joe saw her), tripped away by a path across

the fields with which she was well acquainted, to discharge her mission

at the Warren; and this deponent hath been informed and verily

believes, that you might have seen many less pleasant objects than the

cherry-coloured mantle and ribbons, as they went fluttering along the

green meadows in the bright light of the day, like giddy things as they

were.

Chapter 20

The proud consciousness of her trust, and the great importance she

derived from it, might have advertised it to all the house if she had

had to run the gauntlet of its inhabitants; but as Dolly had played in

every dull room and passage many and many a time, when a child, and had

ever since been the humble friend of Miss Haredale, whose foster-sister

she was, she was as free of the building as the young lady herself.

So, using no greater precaution than holding her breath and walking on

tiptoe as she passed the library door, she went straight to Emma's room

as a privileged visitor.

It was the liveliest room in the building. The chamber was sombre like

the rest for the matter of that, but the presence of youth and beauty

would make a prison cheerful (saving alas! that confinement withers

them), and lend some charms of their own to the gloomiest scene. Birds,

flowers, books, drawing, music, and a hundred such graceful tokens of

feminine loves and cares, filled it with more of life and human sympathy

than the whole house besides seemed made to hold. There was heart in

the room; and who that has a heart, ever fails to recognise the silent

presence of another!

Dolly had one undoubtedly, and it was not a tough one either, though

there was a little mist of coquettishness about it, such as sometimes

surrounds that sun of life in its morning, and slightly dims its lustre.

Thus, when Emma rose to greet her, and kissing her affectionately on the

cheek, told her, in her quiet way, that she had been very unhappy, the

tears stood in Dolly's eyes, and she felt more sorry than she could

tell; but next moment she happened to raise them to the glass, and

really there was something there so exceedingly agreeable, that as she

sighed, she smiled, and felt surprisingly consoled.

'I have heard about it, miss,' said Dolly, 'and it's very sad indeed,

but when things are at the worst they are sure to mend.'

'But are you sure they are at the worst?' asked Emma with a smile.

'Why, I don't see how they can very well be more unpromising than they

are; I really don't,' said Dolly. 'And I bring something to begin with.'

'Not from Edward?'

Dolly nodded and smiled, and feeling in her pockets (there were pockets

in those days) with an affectation of not being able to find what she

wanted, which greatly enhanced her importance, at length produced

the letter. As Emma hastily broke the seal and became absorbed in its

contents, Dolly's eyes, by one of those strange accidents for which

there is no accounting, wandered to the glass again. She could not help

wondering whether the coach-maker suffered very much, and quite pitied

the poor man.

It was a long letter--a very long letter, written close on all four

sides of the sheet of paper, and crossed afterwards; but it was not a

consolatory letter, for as Emma read it she stopped from time to time to

put her handkerchief to her eyes. To be sure Dolly marvelled greatly to

see her in so much distress, for to her thinking a love affair ought

to be one of the best jokes, and the slyest, merriest kind of thing in

life. But she set it down in her own mind that all this came from Miss

Haredale's being so constant, and that if she would only take on with

some other young gentleman--just in the most innocent way possible,

to keep her first lover up to the mark--she would find herself

inexpressibly comforted.

'I am sure that's what I should do if it was me,' thought Dolly. 'To

make one's sweetheart miserable is well enough and quite right, but to

be made miserable one's self is a little too much!'

However it wouldn't do to say so, and therefore she sat looking on in

silence. She needed a pretty considerable stretch of patience, for when

the long letter had been read once all through it was read again, and

when it had been read twice all through it was read again. During this

tedious process, Dolly beguiled the time in the most improving manner

that occurred to her, by curling her hair on her fingers, with the

aid of the looking-glass before mentioned, and giving it some killing

twists.

Everything has an end. Even young ladies in love cannot read their

letters for ever. In course of time the packet was folded up, and it

only remained to write the answer.

But as this promised to be a work of time likewise, Emma said she would

put it off until after dinner, and that Dolly must dine with her. As

Dolly had made up her mind to do so beforehand, she required very little

pressing; and when they had settled this point, they went to walk in the

garden.

They strolled up and down the terrace walks, talking incessantly--at

least, Dolly never left off once--and making that quarter of the sad and

mournful house quite gay. Not that they talked loudly or laughed much,

but they were both so very handsome, and it was such a breezy day, and

their light dresses and dark curls appeared so free and joyous in

their abandonment, and Emma was so fair, and Dolly so rosy, and Emma

so delicately shaped, and Dolly so plump, and--in short, there are no

flowers for any garden like such flowers, let horticulturists say what

they may, and both house and garden seemed to know it, and to brighten

up sensibly.

After this, came the dinner and the letter writing, and some more

talking, in the course of which Miss Haredale took occasion to

charge upon Dolly certain flirtish and inconstant propensities, which

accusations Dolly seemed to think very complimentary indeed, and to be

mightily amused with. Finding her quite incorrigible in this respect,

Emma suffered her to depart; but not before she had confided to her that

important and never-sufficiently-to-be-taken-care-of answer, and endowed

her moreover with a pretty little bracelet as a keepsake. Having clasped

it on her arm, and again advised her half in jest and half in earnest to

amend her roguish ways, for she knew she was fond of Joe at heart (which

Dolly stoutly denied, with a great many haughty protestations that she

hoped she could do better than that indeed! and so forth), she bade

her farewell; and after calling her back to give her more supplementary

messages for Edward, than anybody with tenfold the gravity of Dolly

Varden could be reasonably expected to remember, at length dismissed

her.

Dolly bade her good bye, and tripping lightly down the stairs arrived at

the dreaded library door, and was about to pass it again on tiptoe, when

it opened, and behold! there stood Mr Haredale. Now, Dolly had from her

childhood associated with this gentleman the idea of something grim and

ghostly, and being at the moment conscience-stricken besides, the sight

of him threw her into such a flurry that she could neither acknowledge

his presence nor run away, so she gave a great start, and then with

downcast eyes stood still and trembled.

'Come here, girl,' said Mr Haredale, taking her by the hand. 'I want to

speak to you.'

'If you please, sir, I'm in a hurry,' faltered Dolly, 'and--you have

frightened me by coming so suddenly upon me, sir--I would rather go,

sir, if you'll be so good as to let me.'

'Immediately,' said Mr Haredale, who had by this time led her into the

room and closed the door. You shall go directly. You have just left

Emma?'

'Yes, sir, just this minute.--Father's waiting for me, sir, if you'll

please to have the goodness--'

I know. I know,' said Mr Haredale. 'Answer me a question. What did you

bring here to-day?'

'Bring here, sir?' faltered Dolly.

'You will tell me the truth, I am sure. Yes.'

Dolly hesitated for a little while, and somewhat emboldened by his

manner, said at last, 'Well then, sir. It was a letter.'

'From Mr Edward Chester, of course. And you are the bearer of the

answer?'

Dolly hesitated again, and not being able to decide upon any other

course of action, burst into tears.

'You alarm yourself without cause,' said Mr Haredale. 'Why are you so

foolish? Surely you can answer me. You know that I have but to put the

question to Emma and learn the truth directly. Have you the answer with

you?'

Dolly had what is popularly called a spirit of her own, and being now

fairly at bay, made the best of it.

'Yes, sir,' she rejoined, trembling and frightened as she was. 'Yes,

sir, I have. You may kill me if you please, sir, but I won't give it up.

I'm very sorry,--but I won't. There, sir.'

'I commend your firmness and your plain-speaking,' said Mr Haredale.

'Rest assured that I have as little desire to take your letter as your

life. You are a very discreet messenger and a good girl.'

Not feeling quite certain, as she afterwards said, whether he might not

be 'coming over her' with these compliments, Dolly kept as far from him

as she could, cried again, and resolved to defend her pocket (for the

letter was there) to the last extremity.

'I have some design,' said Mr Haredale after a short silence, during

which a smile, as he regarded her, had struggled through the gloom and

melancholy that was natural to his face, 'of providing a companion for

my niece; for her life is a very lonely one. Would you like the office?

You are the oldest friend she has, and the best entitled to it.'

'I don't know, sir,' answered Dolly, not sure but he was bantering her;

'I can't say. I don't know what they might wish at home. I couldn't give

an opinion, sir.'

'If your friends had no objection, would you have any?' said Mr

Haredale. 'Come. There's a plain question; and easy to answer.'

'None at all that I know of sir,' replied Dolly. 'I should be very glad

to be near Miss Emma of course, and always am.'

'That's well,' said Mr Haredale. 'That is all I had to say. You are

anxious to go. Don't let me detain you.'

Dolly didn't let him, nor did she wait for him to try, for the words

had no sooner passed his lips than she was out of the room, out of the

house, and in the fields again.

The first thing to be done, of course, when she came to herself and

considered what a flurry she had been in, was to cry afresh; and the

next thing, when she reflected how well she had got over it, was to

laugh heartily. The tears once banished gave place to the smiles, and at

last Dolly laughed so much that she was fain to lean against a tree,

and give vent to her exultation. When she could laugh no longer, and was

quite tired, she put her head-dress to rights, dried her eyes, looked

back very merrily and triumphantly at the Warren chimneys, which were

just visible, and resumed her walk.

The twilight had come on, and it was quickly growing dusk, but the path

was so familiar to her from frequent traversing that she hardly thought

of this, and certainly felt no uneasiness at being left alone. Moreover,

there was the bracelet to admire; and when she had given it a good

rub, and held it out at arm's length, it sparkled and glittered so

beautifully on her wrist, that to look at it in every point of view and

with every possible turn of the arm, was quite an absorbing business.

There was the letter too, and it looked so mysterious and knowing, when

she took it out of her pocket, and it held, as she knew, so much inside,

that to turn it over and over, and think about it, and wonder how it

began, and how it ended, and what it said all through, was another

matter of constant occupation. Between the bracelet and the letter,

there was quite enough to do without thinking of anything else; and

admiring each by turns, Dolly went on gaily.

As she passed through a wicket-gate to where the path was narrow, and

lay between two hedges garnished here and there with trees, she heard

a rustling close at hand, which brought her to a sudden stop. She

listened. All was very quiet, and she went on again--not absolutely

frightened, but a little quicker than before perhaps, and possibly not

quite so much at her ease, for a check of that kind is startling.

She had no sooner moved on again, than she was conscious of the same

sound, which was like that of a person tramping stealthily among bushes

and brushwood. Looking towards the spot whence it appeared to come, she

almost fancied she could make out a crouching figure. She stopped

again. All was quiet as before. On she went once more--decidedly faster

now--and tried to sing softly to herself. It must be the wind.

But how came the wind to blow only when she walked, and cease when she

stood still? She stopped involuntarily as she made the reflection, and

the rustling noise stopped likewise. She was really frightened now, and

was yet hesitating what to do, when the bushes crackled and snapped, and

a man came plunging through them, close before her.

Chapter 21

It was for the moment an inexpressible relief to Dolly, to recognise in

the person who forced himself into the path so abruptly, and now stood

directly in her way, Hugh of the Maypole, whose name she uttered in a

tone of delighted surprise that came from her heart.

'Was it you?' she said, 'how glad I am to see you! and how could you

terrify me so!'

In answer to which, he said nothing at all, but stood quite still,

looking at her.

'Did you come to meet me?' asked Dolly.

Hugh nodded, and muttered something to the effect that he had been

waiting for her, and had expected her sooner.

'I thought it likely they would send,' said Dolly, greatly reassured by

this.

'Nobody sent me,' was his sullen answer. 'I came of my own accord.'

The rough bearing of this fellow, and his wild, uncouth appearance, had

often filled the girl with a vague apprehension even when other people

were by, and had occasioned her to shrink from him involuntarily. The

having him for an unbidden companion in so solitary a place, with the

darkness fast gathering about them, renewed and even increased the alarm

she had felt at first.

If his manner had been merely dogged and passively fierce, as usual,

she would have had no greater dislike to his company than she always

felt--perhaps, indeed, would have been rather glad to have had him at

hand. But there was something of coarse bold admiration in his look,

which terrified her very much. She glanced timidly towards him,

uncertain whether to go forward or retreat, and he stood gazing at her

like a handsome satyr; and so they remained for some short time without

stirring or breaking silence. At length Dolly took courage, shot past

him, and hurried on.

'Why do you spend so much breath in avoiding me?' said Hugh,

accommodating his pace to hers, and keeping close at her side.

'I wish to get back as quickly as I can, and you walk too near me,

answered Dolly.'

'Too near!' said Hugh, stooping over her so that she could feel his

breath upon her forehead. 'Why too near? You're always proud to ME,

mistress.'

'I am proud to no one. You mistake me,' answered Dolly. 'Fall back, if

you please, or go on.'

'Nay, mistress,' he rejoined, endeavouring to draw her arm through his,

'I'll walk with you.'

She released herself and clenching her little hand, struck him with

right good will. At this, Maypole Hugh burst into a roar of laughter,

and passing his arm about her waist, held her in his strong grasp as

easily as if she had been a bird.

'Ha ha ha! Well done, mistress! Strike again. You shall beat my face,

and tear my hair, and pluck my beard up by the roots, and welcome, for

the sake of your bright eyes. Strike again, mistress. Do. Ha ha ha! I

like it.'

'Let me go,' she cried, endeavouring with both her hands to push him

off. 'Let me go this moment.'

'You had as good be kinder to me, Sweetlips,' said Hugh. 'You had,

indeed. Come. Tell me now. Why are you always so proud? I don't quarrel

with you for it. I love you when you're proud. Ha ha ha! You can't hide

your beauty from a poor fellow; that's a comfort!'

She gave him no answer, but as he had not yet checked her progress,

continued to press forward as rapidly as she could. At length, between

the hurry she had made, her terror, and the tightness of his embrace,

her strength failed her, and she could go no further.

'Hugh,' cried the panting girl, 'good Hugh; if you will leave me I will

give you anything--everything I have--and never tell one word of this to

any living creature.'

'You had best not,' he answered. 'Harkye, little dove, you had best not.

All about here know me, and what I dare do if I have a mind. If ever you

are going to tell, stop when the words are on your lips, and think of

the mischief you'll bring, if you do, upon some innocent heads that you

wouldn't wish to hurt a hair of. Bring trouble on me, and I'll bring

trouble and something more on them in return. I care no more for them

than for so many dogs; not so much--why should I? I'd sooner kill a man

than a dog any day. I've never been sorry for a man's death in all my

life, and I have for a dog's.'

There was something so thoroughly savage in the manner of these

expressions, and the looks and gestures by which they were accompanied,

that her great fear of him gave her new strength, and enabled her by a

sudden effort to extricate herself and run fleetly from him. But Hugh

was as nimble, strong, and swift of foot, as any man in broad England,

and it was but a fruitless expenditure of energy, for he had her in his

encircling arms again before she had gone a hundred yards.

'Softly, darling--gently--would you fly from rough Hugh, that loves you

as well as any drawing-room gallant?'

'I would,' she answered, struggling to free herself again. 'I will.

Help!'

'A fine for crying out,' said Hugh. 'Ha ha ha! A fine, pretty one, from

your lips. I pay myself! Ha ha ha!'

'Help! help! help!' As she shrieked with the utmost violence she could

exert, a shout was heard in answer, and another, and another.

'Thank Heaven!' cried the girl in an ecstasy. 'Joe, dear Joe, this way.

Help!'

Her assailant paused, and stood irresolute for a moment, but the shouts

drawing nearer and coming quick upon them, forced him to a speedy

decision. He released her, whispered with a menacing look, 'Tell HIM:

and see what follows!' and leaping the hedge, was gone in an instant.

Dolly darted off, and fairly ran into Joe Willet's open arms.

'What is the matter? are you hurt? what was it? who was it? where is

he? what was he like?' with a great many encouraging expressions and

assurances of safety, were the first words Joe poured forth. But poor

little Dolly was so breathless and terrified that for some time she

was quite unable to answer him, and hung upon his shoulder, sobbing and

crying as if her heart would break.

Joe had not the smallest objection to have her hanging on his shoulder;

no, not the least, though it crushed the cherry-coloured ribbons sadly,

and put the smart little hat out of all shape. But he couldn't bear to

see her cry; it went to his very heart. He tried to console her, bent

over her, whispered to her--some say kissed her, but that's a fable. At

any rate he said all the kind and tender things he could think of and

Dolly let him go on and didn't interrupt him once, and it was a good ten

minutes before she was able to raise her head and thank him.

'What was it that frightened you?' said Joe.

A man whose person was unknown to her had followed her, she answered; he

began by begging, and went on to threats of robbery, which he was on the

point of carrying into execution, and would have executed, but for Joe's

timely aid. The hesitation and confusion with which she said this, Joe

attributed to the fright she had sustained, and no suspicion of the

truth occurred to him for a moment.

'Stop when the words are on your lips.' A hundred times that night, and

very often afterwards, when the disclosure was rising to her tongue,

Dolly thought of that, and repressed it. A deeply rooted dread of the

man; the conviction that his ferocious nature, once roused, would stop

at nothing; and the strong assurance that if she impeached him, the

full measure of his wrath and vengeance would be wreaked on Joe, who

had preserved her; these were considerations she had not the courage to

overcome, and inducements to secrecy too powerful for her to surmount.

Joe, for his part, was a great deal too happy to inquire very curiously

into the matter; and Dolly being yet too tremulous to walk without

assistance, they went forward very slowly, and in his mind very

pleasantly, until the Maypole lights were near at hand, twinkling their

cheerful welcome, when Dolly stopped suddenly and with a half scream

exclaimed,

'The letter!'

'What letter?' cried Joe.

'That I was carrying--I had it in my hand. My bracelet too,' she said,

clasping her wrist. 'I have lost them both.'

'Do you mean just now?' said Joe.

'Either I dropped them then, or they were taken from me,' answered

Dolly, vainly searching her pocket and rustling her dress. 'They are

gone, both gone. What an unhappy girl I am!' With these words poor

Dolly, who to do her justice was quite as sorry for the loss of the

letter as for her bracelet, fell a-crying again, and bemoaned her fate

most movingly.

Joe tried to comfort her with the assurance that directly he had housed

her in the Maypole, he would return to the spot with a lantern (for it

was now quite dark) and make strict search for the missing articles,

which there was great probability of his finding, as it was not likely

that anybody had passed that way since, and she was not conscious that

they had been forcibly taken from her. Dolly thanked him very heartily

for this offer, though with no great hope of his quest being successful;

and so with many lamentations on her side, and many hopeful words on

his, and much weakness on the part of Dolly and much tender supporting

on the part of Joe, they reached the Maypole bar at last, where the

locksmith and his wife and old John were yet keeping high festival.

Mr Willet received the intelligence of Dolly's trouble with that

surprising presence of mind and readiness of speech for which he was so

eminently distinguished above all other men. Mrs Varden expressed her

sympathy for her daughter's distress by scolding her roundly for being

so late; and the honest locksmith divided himself between condoling with

and kissing Dolly, and shaking hands heartily with Joe, whom he could

not sufficiently praise or thank.

In reference to this latter point, old John was far from agreeing with

his friend; for besides that he by no means approved of an adventurous

spirit in the abstract, it occurred to him that if his son and heir had

been seriously damaged in a scuffle, the consequences would assuredly

have been expensive and inconvenient, and might perhaps have proved

detrimental to the Maypole business. Wherefore, and because he looked

with no favourable eye upon young girls, but rather considered that they

and the whole female sex were a kind of nonsensical mistake on the part

of Nature, he took occasion to retire and shake his head in private at

the boiler; inspired by which silent oracle, he was moved to give Joe

various stealthy nudges with his elbow, as a parental reproof and gentle

admonition to mind his own business and not make a fool of himself.

Joe, however, took down the lantern and lighted it; and arming himself

with a stout stick, asked whether Hugh was in the stable.

'He's lying asleep before the kitchen fire, sir,' said Mr Willet. 'What

do you want him for?'

'I want him to come with me to look after this bracelet and letter,'

answered Joe. 'Halloa there! Hugh!'

Dolly turned pale as death, and felt as if she must faint forthwith.

After a few moments, Hugh came staggering in, stretching himself and

yawning according to custom, and presenting every appearance of having

been roused from a sound nap.

'Here, sleepy-head,' said Joe, giving him the lantern. 'Carry this, and

bring the dog, and that small cudgel of yours. And woe betide the fellow

if we come upon him.'

'What fellow?' growled Hugh, rubbing his eyes and shaking himself.

'What fellow?' returned Joe, who was in a state of great valour and

bustle; 'a fellow you ought to know of and be more alive about. It's

well for the like of you, lazy giant that you are, to be snoring your

time away in chimney-corners, when honest men's daughters can't cross

even our quiet meadows at nightfall without being set upon by footpads,

and frightened out of their precious lives.'

'They never rob me,' cried Hugh with a laugh. 'I have got nothing to

lose. But I'd as lief knock them at head as any other men. How many are

there?'

'Only one,' said Dolly faintly, for everybody looked at her.

'And what was he like, mistress?' said Hugh with a glance at young

Willet, so slight and momentary that the scowl it conveyed was lost on

all but her. 'About my height?'

'Not--not so tall,' Dolly replied, scarce knowing what she said.

'His dress,' said Hugh, looking at her keenly, 'like--like any of ours

now? I know all the people hereabouts, and maybe could give a guess at

the man, if I had anything to guide me.'

Dolly faltered and turned paler yet; then answered that he was wrapped

in a loose coat and had his face hidden by a handkerchief and that she

could give no other description of him.

'You wouldn't know him if you saw him then, belike?' said Hugh with a

malicious grin.

'I should not,' answered Dolly, bursting into tears again. 'I don't wish

to see him. I can't bear to think of him. I can't talk about him any

more. Don't go to look for these things, Mr Joe, pray don't. I entreat

you not to go with that man.'

'Not to go with me!' cried Hugh. 'I'm too rough for them all. They're

all afraid of me. Why, bless you mistress, I've the tenderest heart

alive. I love all the ladies, ma'am,' said Hugh, turning to the

locksmith's wife.

Mrs Varden opined that if he did, he ought to be ashamed of himself;

such sentiments being more consistent (so she argued) with a benighted

Mussulman or wild Islander than with a stanch Protestant. Arguing from

this imperfect state of his morals, Mrs Varden further opined that he

had never studied the Manual. Hugh admitting that he never had, and

moreover that he couldn't read, Mrs Varden declared with much severity,

that he ought to be even more ashamed of himself than before, and

strongly recommended him to save up his pocket-money for the purchase

of one, and further to teach himself the contents with all convenient

diligence. She was still pursuing this train of discourse, when Hugh,

somewhat unceremoniously and irreverently, followed his young master

out, and left her to edify the rest of the company. This she proceeded

to do, and finding that Mr Willet's eyes were fixed upon her with an

appearance of deep attention, gradually addressed the whole of her

discourse to him, whom she entertained with a moral and theological

lecture of considerable length, in the conviction that great workings

were taking place in his spirit. The simple truth was, however, that Mr

Willet, although his eyes were wide open and he saw a woman before

him whose head by long and steady looking at seemed to grow bigger

and bigger until it filled the whole bar, was to all other intents and

purposes fast asleep; and so sat leaning back in his chair with his

hands in his pockets until his son's return caused him to wake up with

a deep sigh, and a faint impression that he had been dreaming about

pickled pork and greens--a vision of his slumbers which was no doubt

referable to the circumstance of Mrs Varden's having frequently

pronounced the word 'Grace' with much emphasis; which word, entering

the portals of Mr Willet's brain as they stood ajar, and coupling itself

with the words 'before meat,' which were there ranging about, did in

time suggest a particular kind of meat together with that description of

vegetable which is usually its companion.

The search was wholly unsuccessful. Joe had groped along the path a

dozen times, and among the grass, and in the dry ditch, and in the

hedge, but all in vain. Dolly, who was quite inconsolable for her loss,

wrote a note to Miss Haredale giving her the same account of it that she

had given at the Maypole, which Joe undertook to deliver as soon as the

family were stirring next day. That done, they sat down to tea in the

bar, where there was an uncommon display of buttered toast, and--in

order that they might not grow faint for want of sustenance, and

might have a decent halting-place or halfway house between dinner and

supper--a few savoury trifles in the shape of great rashers of broiled

ham, which being well cured, done to a turn, and smoking hot, sent forth

a tempting and delicious fragrance.

Mrs Varden was seldom very Protestant at meals, unless it happened that

they were underdone, or overdone, or indeed that anything occurred to

put her out of humour. Her spirits rose considerably on beholding these

goodly preparations, and from the nothingness of good works, she passed

to the somethingness of ham and toast with great cheerfulness. Nay,

under the influence of these wholesome stimulants, she sharply reproved

her daughter for being low and despondent (which she considered an

unacceptable frame of mind), and remarked, as she held her own plate for

a fresh supply, that it would be well for Dolly, who pined over the loss

of a toy and a sheet of paper, if she would reflect upon the voluntary

sacrifices of the missionaries in foreign parts who lived chiefly on

salads.

The proceedings of such a day occasion various fluctuations in the human

thermometer, and especially in instruments so sensitively and delicately

constructed as Mrs Varden. Thus, at dinner Mrs V. stood at summer heat;

genial, smiling, and delightful. After dinner, in the sunshine of the

wine, she went up at least half-a-dozen degrees, and was perfectly

enchanting. As its effect subsided, she fell rapidly, went to sleep for

an hour or so at temperate, and woke at something below freezing. Now

she was at summer heat again, in the shade; and when tea was over, and

old John, producing a bottle of cordial from one of the oaken cases,

insisted on her sipping two glasses thereof in slow succession, she

stood steadily at ninety for one hour and a quarter. Profiting by

experience, the locksmith took advantage of this genial weather to smoke

his pipe in the porch, and in consequence of this prudent management, he

was fully prepared, when the glass went down again, to start homewards

directly.

The horse was accordingly put in, and the chaise brought round to the

door. Joe, who would on no account be dissuaded from escorting them

until they had passed the most dreary and solitary part of the road,

led out the grey mare at the same time; and having helped Dolly into her

seat (more happiness!) sprung gaily into the saddle. Then, after many

good nights, and admonitions to wrap up, and glancing of lights, and

handing in of cloaks and shawls, the chaise rolled away, and Joe trotted

beside it--on Dolly's side, no doubt, and pretty close to the wheel too.

Chapter 22

It was a fine bright night, and for all her lowness of spirits Dolly

kept looking up at the stars in a manner so bewitching (and SHE knew

it!) that Joe was clean out of his senses, and plainly showed that if

ever a man were--not to say over head and ears, but over the Monument

and the top of Saint Paul's in love, that man was himself. The road was

a very good one; not at all a jolting road, or an uneven one; and yet

Dolly held the side of the chaise with one little hand, all the way. If

there had been an executioner behind him with an uplifted axe ready

to chop off his head if he touched that hand, Joe couldn't have helped

doing it. From putting his own hand upon it as if by chance, and taking

it away again after a minute or so, he got to riding along without

taking it off at all; as if he, the escort, were bound to do that as an

important part of his duty, and had come out for the purpose. The most

curious circumstance about this little incident was, that Dolly didn't

seem to know of it. She looked so innocent and unconscious when she

turned her eyes on Joe, that it was quite provoking.

She talked though; talked about her fright, and about Joe's coming up to

rescue her, and about her gratitude, and about her fear that she might

not have thanked him enough, and about their always being friends from

that time forth--and about all that sort of thing. And when Joe said,

not friends he hoped, Dolly was quite surprised, and said not enemies

she hoped; and when Joe said, couldn't they be something much better

than either, Dolly all of a sudden found out a star which was brighter

than all the other stars, and begged to call his attention to the same,

and was ten thousand times more innocent and unconscious than ever.

In this manner they travelled along, talking very little above a

whisper, and wishing the road could be stretched out to some dozen times

its natural length--at least that was Joe's desire--when, as they were

getting clear of the forest and emerging on the more frequented road,

they heard behind them the sound of a horse's feet at a round trot,

which growing rapidly louder as it drew nearer, elicited a scream from

Mrs Varden, and the cry 'a friend!' from the rider, who now came panting

up, and checked his horse beside them.

'This man again!' cried Dolly, shuddering.

'Hugh!' said Joe. 'What errand are you upon?'

'I come to ride back with you,' he answered, glancing covertly at the

locksmith's daughter. 'HE sent me.

'My father!' said poor Joe; adding under his breath, with a very

unfilial apostrophe, 'Will he never think me man enough to take care of

myself!'

'Aye!' returned Hugh to the first part of the inquiry. 'The roads are

not safe just now, he says, and you'd better have a companion.'

'Ride on then,' said Joe. 'I'm not going to turn yet.'

Hugh complied, and they went on again. It was his whim or humour to

ride immediately before the chaise, and from this position he constantly

turned his head, and looked back. Dolly felt that he looked at her, but

she averted her eyes and feared to raise them once, so great was the

dread with which he had inspired her.

This interruption, and the consequent wakefulness of Mrs Varden, who had

been nodding in her sleep up to this point, except for a minute or

two at a time, when she roused herself to scold the locksmith for

audaciously taking hold of her to prevent her nodding herself out of

the chaise, put a restraint upon the whispered conversation, and made

it difficult of resumption. Indeed, before they had gone another mile,

Gabriel stopped at his wife's desire, and that good lady protested she

would not hear of Joe's going a step further on any account whatever. It

was in vain for Joe to protest on the other hand that he was by no means

tired, and would turn back presently, and would see them safely past

such a point, and so forth. Mrs Varden was obdurate, and being so was

not to be overcome by mortal agency.

'Good night--if I must say it,' said Joe, sorrowfully.

'Good night,' said Dolly. She would have added, 'Take care of that man,

and pray don't trust him,' but he had turned his horse's head, and was

standing close to them. She had therefore nothing for it but to suffer

Joe to give her hand a gentle squeeze, and when the chaise had gone on

for some distance, to look back and wave it, as he still lingered on

the spot where they had parted, with the tall dark figure of Hugh beside

him.

What she thought about, going home; and whether the coach-maker held as

favourable a place in her meditations as he had occupied in the morning,

is unknown. They reached home at last--at last, for it was a long way,

made none the shorter by Mrs Varden's grumbling. Miggs hearing the sound

of wheels was at the door immediately.

'Here they are, Simmun! Here they are!' cried Miggs, clapping her

hands, and issuing forth to help her mistress to alight. 'Bring a

chair, Simmun. Now, an't you the better for it, mim? Don't you feel more

yourself than you would have done if you'd have stopped at home? Oh,

gracious! how cold you are! Goodness me, sir, she's a perfect heap of

ice.'

'I can't help it, my good girl. You had better take her in to the fire,'

said the locksmith.

'Master sounds unfeeling, mim,' said Miggs, in a tone of commiseration,

'but such is not his intentions, I'm sure. After what he has seen of you

this day, I never will believe but that he has a deal more affection

in his heart than to speak unkind. Come in and sit yourself down by the

fire; there's a good dear--do.'

Mrs Varden complied. The locksmith followed with his hands in his

pockets, and Mr Tappertit trundled off with the chaise to a neighbouring

stable.

'Martha, my dear,' said the locksmith, when they reached the parlour,

'if you'll look to Dolly yourself or let somebody else do it, perhaps it

will be only kind and reasonable. She has been frightened, you know, and

is not at all well to-night.'

In fact, Dolly had thrown herself upon the sofa, quite regardless of

all the little finery of which she had been so proud in the morning, and

with her face buried in her hands was crying very much.

At first sight of this phenomenon (for Dolly was by no means accustomed

to displays of this sort, rather learning from her mother's example to

avoid them as much as possible) Mrs Varden expressed her belief that

never was any woman so beset as she; that her life was a continued scene

of trial; that whenever she was disposed to be well and cheerful, so

sure were the people around her to throw, by some means or other, a damp

upon her spirits; and that, as she had enjoyed herself that day, and

Heaven knew it was very seldom she did enjoy herself so she was now to

pay the penalty. To all such propositions Miggs assented freely. Poor

Dolly, however, grew none the better for these restoratives, but rather

worse, indeed; and seeing that she was really ill, both Mrs Varden and

Miggs were moved to compassion, and tended her in earnest.

But even then, their very kindness shaped itself into their usual course

of policy, and though Dolly was in a swoon, it was rendered clear to

the meanest capacity, that Mrs Varden was the sufferer. Thus when

Dolly began to get a little better, and passed into that stage in which

matrons hold that remonstrance and argument may be successfully applied,

her mother represented to her, with tears in her eyes, that if she had

been flurried and worried that day, she must remember it was the common

lot of humanity, and in especial of womankind, who through the whole

of their existence must expect no less, and were bound to make up their

minds to meek endurance and patient resignation. Mrs Varden entreated

her to remember that one of these days she would, in all probability,

have to do violence to her feelings so far as to be married; and that

marriage, as she might see every day of her life (and truly she did) was

a state requiring great fortitude and forbearance. She represented to

her in lively colours, that if she (Mrs V.) had not, in steering her

course through this vale of tears, been supported by a strong principle

of duty which alone upheld and prevented her from drooping, she must

have been in her grave many years ago; in which case she desired to know

what would have become of that errant spirit (meaning the locksmith), of

whose eye she was the very apple, and in whose path she was, as it were,

a shining light and guiding star?

Miss Miggs also put in her word to the same effect. She said that indeed

and indeed Miss Dolly might take pattern by her blessed mother, who,

she always had said, and always would say, though she were to be hanged,

drawn, and quartered for it next minute, was the mildest, amiablest,

forgivingest-spirited, longest-sufferingest female as ever she could

have believed; the mere narration of whose excellencies had worked such

a wholesome change in the mind of her own sister-in-law, that, whereas,

before, she and her husband lived like cat and dog, and were in the

habit of exchanging brass candlesticks, pot-lids, flat-irons, and other

such strong resentments, they were now the happiest and affectionatest

couple upon earth; as could be proved any day on application at Golden

Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, second bell-handle on the right-hand

doorpost. After glancing at herself as a comparatively worthless vessel,

but still as one of some desert, she besought her to bear in mind that

her aforesaid dear and only mother was of a weakly constitution and

excitable temperament, who had constantly to sustain afflictions in

domestic life, compared with which thieves and robbers were as nothing,

and yet never sunk down or gave way to despair or wrath, but, in

prize-fighting phraseology, always came up to time with a cheerful

countenance, and went in to win as if nothing had happened. When Miggs

finished her solo, her mistress struck in again, and the two together

performed a duet to the same purpose; the burden being, that Mrs Varden

was persecuted perfection, and Mr Varden, as the representative of

mankind in that apartment, a creature of vicious and brutal habits,

utterly insensible to the blessings he enjoyed. Of so refined a

character, indeed, was their talent of assault under the mask of

sympathy, that when Dolly, recovering, embraced her father tenderly,

as in vindication of his goodness, Mrs Varden expressed her solemn hope

that this would be a lesson to him for the remainder of his life,

and that he would do some little justice to a woman's nature ever

afterwards--in which aspiration Miss Miggs, by divers sniffs and

coughs, more significant than the longest oration, expressed her entire

concurrence.

But the great joy of Miggs's heart was, that she not only picked up

a full account of what had happened, but had the exquisite delight of

conveying it to Mr Tappertit for his jealousy and torture. For that

gentleman, on account of Dolly's indisposition, had been requested to

take his supper in the workshop, and it was conveyed thither by Miss

Miggs's own fair hands.

'Oh Simmun!' said the young lady, 'such goings on to-day! Oh, gracious

me, Simmun!'

Mr Tappertit, who was not in the best of humours, and who disliked Miss

Miggs more when she laid her hand on her heart and panted for breath

than at any other time, as her deficiency of outline was most apparent

under such circumstances, eyed her over in his loftiest style, and

deigned to express no curiosity whatever.

'I never heard the like, nor nobody else,' pursued Miggs. 'The idea of

interfering with HER. What people can see in her to make it worth their

while to do so, that's the joke--he he he!'

Finding there was a lady in the case, Mr Tappertit haughtily requested

his fair friend to be more explicit, and demanded to know what she meant

by 'her.'

'Why, that Dolly,' said Miggs, with an extremely sharp emphasis on the

name. 'But, oh upon my word and honour, young Joseph Willet is a brave

one; and he do deserve her, that he do.'

'Woman!' said Mr Tappertit, jumping off the counter on which he was

seated; 'beware!'

'My stars, Simmun!' cried Miggs, in affected astonishment. 'You frighten

me to death! What's the matter?'

'There are strings,' said Mr Tappertit, flourishing his bread-and-cheese

knife in the air, 'in the human heart that had better not be wibrated.

That's what's the matter.'

'Oh, very well--if you're in a huff,' cried Miggs, turning away.

'Huff or no huff,' said Mr Tappertit, detaining her by the wrist. 'What

do you mean, Jezebel? What were you going to say? Answer me!'

Notwithstanding this uncivil exhortation, Miggs gladly did as she was

required; and told him how that their young mistress, being alone in

the meadows after dark, had been attacked by three or four tall men, who

would have certainly borne her away and perhaps murdered her, but for

the timely arrival of Joseph Willet, who with his own single hand put

them all to flight, and rescued her; to the lasting admiration of his

fellow-creatures generally, and to the eternal love and gratitude of

Dolly Varden.

'Very good,' said Mr Tappertit, fetching a long breath when the tale was

told, and rubbing his hair up till it stood stiff and straight on end

all over his head. 'His days are numbered.'

'Oh, Simmun!'

'I tell you,' said the 'prentice, 'his days are numbered. Leave me. Get

along with you.'

Miggs departed at his bidding, but less because of his bidding than

because she desired to chuckle in secret. When she had given vent to

her satisfaction, she returned to the parlour; where the locksmith,

stimulated by quietness and Toby, had become talkative, and was disposed

to take a cheerful review of the occurrences of the day. But Mrs

Varden, whose practical religion (as is not uncommon) was usually of the

retrospective order, cut him short by declaiming on the sinfulness of

such junketings, and holding that it was high time to go to bed. To bed

therefore she withdrew, with an aspect as grim and gloomy as that of the

Maypole's own state couch; and to bed the rest of the establishment soon

afterwards repaired.

Chapter 23

Twilight had given place to night some hours, and it was high noon

in those quarters of the town in which 'the world' condescended to

dwell--the world being then, as now, of very limited dimensions and

easily lodged--when Mr Chester reclined upon a sofa in his dressing-room

in the Temple, entertaining himself with a book.

He was dressing, as it seemed, by easy stages, and having performed half

the journey was taking a long rest. Completely attired as to his legs

and feet in the trimmest fashion of the day, he had yet the remainder of

his toilet to perform. The coat was stretched, like a refined scarecrow,

on its separate horse; the waistcoat was displayed to the best

advantage; the various ornamental articles of dress were severally set

out in most alluring order; and yet he lay dangling his legs between the

sofa and the ground, as intent upon his book as if there were nothing

but bed before him.

'Upon my honour,' he said, at length raising his eyes to the ceiling

with the air of a man who was reflecting seriously on what he had

read; 'upon my honour, the most masterly composition, the most delicate

thoughts, the finest code of morality, and the most gentlemanly

sentiments in the universe! Ah Ned, Ned, if you would but form your mind

by such precepts, we should have but one common feeling on every subject

that could possibly arise between us!'

This apostrophe was addressed, like the rest of his remarks, to empty

air: for Edward was not present, and the father was quite alone.

'My Lord Chesterfield,' he said, pressing his hand tenderly upon the

book as he laid it down, 'if I could but have profited by your genius

soon enough to have formed my son on the model you have left to all

wise fathers, both he and I would have been rich men. Shakespeare was

undoubtedly very fine in his way; Milton good, though prosy; Lord Bacon

deep, and decidedly knowing; but the writer who should be his country's

pride, is my Lord Chesterfield.'

He became thoughtful again, and the toothpick was in requisition.

'I thought I was tolerably accomplished as a man of the world,' he

continued, 'I flattered myself that I was pretty well versed in all

those little arts and graces which distinguish men of the world from

boors and peasants, and separate their character from those intensely

vulgar sentiments which are called the national character. Apart from

any natural prepossession in my own favour, I believed I was. Still, in

every page of this enlightened writer, I find some captivating hypocrisy

which has never occurred to me before, or some superlative piece of

selfishness to which I was utterly a stranger. I should quite blush for

myself before this stupendous creature, if remembering his precepts, one

might blush at anything. An amazing man! a nobleman indeed! any King or

Queen may make a Lord, but only the Devil himself--and the Graces--can

make a Chesterfield.'

Men who are thoroughly false and hollow, seldom try to hide those vices

from themselves; and yet in the very act of avowing them, they lay claim

to the virtues they feign most to despise. 'For,' say they, 'this is

honesty, this is truth. All mankind are like us, but they have not the

candour to avow it.' The more they affect to deny the existence of any

sincerity in the world, the more they would be thought to possess it in

its boldest shape; and this is an unconscious compliment to Truth on the

part of these philosophers, which will turn the laugh against them to

the Day of Judgment.

Mr Chester, having extolled his favourite author, as above recited,

took up the book again in the excess of his admiration and was composing

himself for a further perusal of its sublime morality, when he was

disturbed by a noise at the outer door; occasioned as it seemed by the

endeavours of his servant to obstruct the entrance of some unwelcome

visitor.

'A late hour for an importunate creditor,' he said, raising his eyebrows

with as indolent an expression of wonder as if the noise were in the

street, and one with which he had not the smallest possible concern.

'Much after their accustomed time. The usual pretence I suppose. No

doubt a heavy payment to make up tomorrow. Poor fellow, he loses time,

and time is money as the good proverb says--I never found it out though.

Well. What now? You know I am not at home.'

'A man, sir,' replied the servant, who was to the full as cool and

negligent in his way as his master, 'has brought home the riding-whip

you lost the other day. I told him you were out, but he said he was to

wait while I brought it in, and wouldn't go till I did.'

'He was quite right,' returned his master, 'and you're a blockhead,

possessing no judgment or discretion whatever. Tell him to come in, and

see that he rubs his shoes for exactly five minutes first.'

The man laid the whip on a chair, and withdrew. The master, who had only

heard his foot upon the ground and had not taken the trouble to turn

round and look at him, shut his book, and pursued the train of ideas his

entrance had disturbed.

'If time were money,' he said, handling his snuff-box, 'I would compound

with my creditors, and give them--let me see--how much a day? There's

my nap after dinner--an hour--they're extremely welcome to that, and to

make the most of it. In the morning, between my breakfast and the

paper, I could spare them another hour; in the evening before dinner

say another. Three hours a day. They might pay themselves in calls, with

interest, in twelve months. I think I shall propose it to them. Ah, my

centaur, are you there?'

'Here I am,' replied Hugh, striding in, followed by a dog, as rough and

sullen as himself; 'and trouble enough I've had to get here. What do you

ask me to come for, and keep me out when I DO come?'

'My good fellow,' returned the other, raising his head a little from the

cushion and carelessly surveying him from top to toe, 'I am delighted to

see you, and to have, in your being here, the very best proof that you

are not kept out. How are you?'

'I'm well enough,' said Hugh impatiently.

'You look a perfect marvel of health. Sit down.'

'I'd rather stand,' said Hugh.

'Please yourself my good fellow,' returned Mr Chester rising, slowly

pulling off the loose robe he wore, and sitting down before the

dressing-glass. 'Please yourself by all means.'

Having said this in the politest and blandest tone possible, he went on

dressing, and took no further notice of his guest, who stood in the same

spot as uncertain what to do next, eyeing him sulkily from time to time.

'Are you going to speak to me, master?' he said, after a long silence.

'My worthy creature,' returned Mr Chester, 'you are a little ruffled and

out of humour. I'll wait till you're quite yourself again. I am in no

hurry.'

This behaviour had its intended effect. It humbled and abashed the man,

and made him still more irresolute and uncertain. Hard words he could

have returned, violence he would have repaid with interest; but this

cool, complacent, contemptuous, self-possessed reception, caused him to

feel his inferiority more completely than the most elaborate arguments.

Everything contributed to this effect. His own rough speech, contrasted

with the soft persuasive accents of the other; his rude bearing, and

Mr Chester's polished manner; the disorder and negligence of his

ragged dress, and the elegant attire he saw before him; with all the

unaccustomed luxuries and comforts of the room, and the silence that

gave him leisure to observe these things, and feel how ill at ease they

made him; all these influences, which have too often some effect on

tutored minds and become of almost resistless power when brought to bear

on such a mind as his, quelled Hugh completely. He moved by little and

little nearer to Mr Chester's chair, and glancing over his shoulder

at the reflection of his face in the glass, as if seeking for some

encouragement in its expression, said at length, with a rough attempt at

conciliation,

'ARE you going to speak to me, master, or am I to go away?'

'Speak you,' said Mr Chester, 'speak you, good fellow. I have spoken,

have I not? I am waiting for you.'

'Why, look'ee, sir,' returned Hugh with increased embarrassment, 'am I

the man that you privately left your whip with before you rode away from

the Maypole, and told to bring it back whenever he might want to see you

on a certain subject?'

'No doubt the same, or you have a twin brother,' said Mr Chester,

glancing at the reflection of his anxious face; 'which is not probable,

I should say.'

'Then I have come, sir,' said Hugh, 'and I have brought it back, and

something else along with it. A letter, sir, it is, that I took from

the person who had charge of it.' As he spoke, he laid upon the

dressing-table, Dolly's lost epistle. The very letter that had cost her

so much trouble.

'Did you obtain this by force, my good fellow?' said Mr Chester, casting

his eye upon it without the least perceptible surprise or pleasure.

'Not quite,' said Hugh. 'Partly.'

'Who was the messenger from whom you took it?'

'A woman. One Varden's daughter.'

'Oh indeed!' said Mr Chester gaily. 'What else did you take from her?'

'What else?'

'Yes,' said the other, in a drawling manner, for he was fixing a very

small patch of sticking plaster on a very small pimple near the corner

of his mouth. 'What else?'

'Well a kiss,' replied Hugh, after some hesitation.

'And what else?'

'Nothing.'

'I think,' said Mr Chester, in the same easy tone, and smiling twice or

thrice to try if the patch adhered--'I think there was something else.

I have heard a trifle of jewellery spoken of--a mere trifle--a thing

of such little value, indeed, that you may have forgotten it. Do you

remember anything of the kind--such as a bracelet now, for instance?'

Hugh with a muttered oath thrust his hand into his breast, and drawing

the bracelet forth, wrapped in a scrap of hay, was about to lay it on

the table likewise, when his patron stopped his hand and bade him put it

up again.

'You took that for yourself my excellent friend,' he said, 'and may keep

it. I am neither a thief nor a receiver. Don't show it to me. You had

better hide it again, and lose no time. Don't let me see where you put

it either,' he added, turning away his head.

'You're not a receiver!' said Hugh bluntly, despite the increasing awe

in which he held him. 'What do you call THAT, master?' striking the

letter with his heavy hand.

'I call that quite another thing,' said Mr Chester coolly. 'I shall

prove it presently, as you will see. You are thirsty, I suppose?'

Hugh drew his sleeve across his lips, and gruffly answered yes.

'Step to that closet and bring me a bottle you will see there, and a

glass.'

He obeyed. His patron followed him with his eyes, and when his back was

turned, smiled as he had never done when he stood beside the mirror.

On his return he filled the glass, and bade him drink. That dram

despatched, he poured him out another, and another.

'How many can you bear?' he said, filling the glass again.

'As many as you like to give me. Pour on. Fill high. A bumper with a

bead in the middle! Give me enough of this,' he added, as he tossed it

down his hairy throat, 'and I'll do murder if you ask me!'

'As I don't mean to ask you, and you might possibly do it without

being invited if you went on much further,' said Mr Chester with great

composure, we will stop, if agreeable to you, my good friend, at the

next glass. You were drinking before you came here.'

'I always am when I can get it,' cried Hugh boisterously, waving the

empty glass above his head, and throwing himself into a rude dancing

attitude. 'I always am. Why not? Ha ha ha! What's so good to me as this?

What ever has been? What else has kept away the cold on bitter nights,

and driven hunger off in starving times? What else has given me the

strength and courage of a man, when men would have left me to die, a

puny child? I should never have had a man's heart but for this. I

should have died in a ditch. Where's he who when I was a weak and sickly

wretch, with trembling legs and fading sight, bade me cheer up, as this

did? I never knew him; not I. I drink to the drink, master. Ha ha ha!'

'You are an exceedingly cheerful young man,' said Mr Chester, putting

on his cravat with great deliberation, and slightly moving his head

from side to side to settle his chin in its proper place. 'Quite a boon

companion.'

'Do you see this hand, master,' said Hugh, 'and this arm?' baring the

brawny limb to the elbow. 'It was once mere skin and bone, and would

have been dust in some poor churchyard by this time, but for the drink.'

'You may cover it,' said Mr Chester, 'it's sufficiently real in your

sleeve.'

'I should never have been spirited up to take a kiss from the proud

little beauty, master, but for the drink,' cried Hugh. 'Ha ha ha! It was

a good one. As sweet as honeysuckle, I warrant you. I thank the drink

for it. I'll drink to the drink again, master. Fill me one more. Come.

One more!'

'You are such a promising fellow,' said his patron, putting on his

waistcoat with great nicety, and taking no heed of this request, 'that

I must caution you against having too many impulses from the drink, and

getting hung before your time. What's your age?'

'I don't know.'

'At any rate,' said Mr Chester, 'you are young enough to escape what

I may call a natural death for some years to come. How can you trust

yourself in my hands on so short an acquaintance, with a halter round

your neck? What a confiding nature yours must be!'

Hugh fell back a pace or two and surveyed him with a look of mingled

terror, indignation, and surprise. Regarding himself in the glass with

the same complacency as before, and speaking as smoothly as if he were

discussing some pleasant chit-chat of the town, his patron went on:

'Robbery on the king's highway, my young friend, is a very dangerous and

ticklish occupation. It is pleasant, I have no doubt, while it lasts;

but like many other pleasures in this transitory world, it seldom lasts

long. And really if in the ingenuousness of youth, you open your heart

so readily on the subject, I am afraid your career will be an extremely

short one.'

'How's this?' said Hugh. 'What do you talk of master? Who was it set me

on?'

'Who?' said Mr Chester, wheeling sharply round, and looking full at him

for the first time. 'I didn't hear you. Who was it?'

Hugh faltered, and muttered something which was not audible.

'Who was it? I am curious to know,' said Mr Chester, with surpassing

affability. 'Some rustic beauty perhaps? But be cautious, my good

friend. They are not always to be trusted. Do take my advice now, and be

careful of yourself.' With these words he turned to the glass again, and

went on with his toilet.

Hugh would have answered him that he, the questioner himself had set him

on, but the words stuck in his throat. The consummate art with which his

patron had led him to this point, and managed the whole conversation,

perfectly baffled him. He did not doubt that if he had made the retort

which was on his lips when Mr Chester turned round and questioned him

so keenly, he would straightway have given him into custody and had him

dragged before a justice with the stolen property upon him; in which

case it was as certain he would have been hung as it was that he had

been born. The ascendency which it was the purpose of the man of the

world to establish over this savage instrument, was gained from that

time. Hugh's submission was complete. He dreaded him beyond description;

and felt that accident and artifice had spun a web about him, which at a

touch from such a master-hand as his, would bind him to the gallows.

With these thoughts passing through his mind, and yet wondering at the

very same time how he who came there rioting in the confidence of this

man (as he thought), should be so soon and so thoroughly subdued, Hugh

stood cowering before him, regarding him uneasily from time to time,

while he finished dressing. When he had done so, he took up the

letter, broke the seal, and throwing himself back in his chair, read it

leisurely through.

'Very neatly worded upon my life! Quite a woman's letter, full of what

people call tenderness, and disinterestedness, and heart, and all that

sort of thing!'

As he spoke, he twisted it up, and glancing lazily round at Hugh as

though he would say 'You see this?' held it in the flame of the candle.

When it was in a full blaze, he tossed it into the grate, and there it

smouldered away.

'It was directed to my son,' he said, turning to Hugh, 'and you did

quite right to bring it here. I opened it on my own responsibility, and

you see what I have done with it. Take this, for your trouble.'

Hugh stepped forward to receive the piece of money he held out to him.

As he put it in his hand, he added:

'If you should happen to find anything else of this sort, or to pick

up any kind of information you may think I would like to have, bring it

here, will you, my good fellow?'

This was said with a smile which implied--or Hugh thought it did--'fail

to do so at your peril!' He answered that he would.

'And don't,' said his patron, with an air of the very kindest patronage,

'don't be at all downcast or uneasy respecting that little rashness we

have been speaking of. Your neck is as safe in my hands, my good fellow,

as though a baby's fingers clasped it, I assure you.--Take another

glass. You are quieter now.'

Hugh accepted it from his hand, and looking stealthily at his smiling

face, drank the contents in silence.

'Don't you--ha, ha!--don't you drink to the drink any more?' said Mr

Chester, in his most winning manner.

'To you, sir,' was the sullen answer, with something approaching to a

bow. 'I drink to you.'

'Thank you. God bless you. By the bye, what is your name, my good soul?

You are called Hugh, I know, of course--your other name?'

'I have no other name.'

'A very strange fellow! Do you mean that you never knew one, or that you

don't choose to tell it? Which?'

'I'd tell it if I could,' said Hugh, quickly. 'I can't. I have been

always called Hugh; nothing more. I never knew, nor saw, nor thought

about a father; and I was a boy of six--that's not very old--when they

hung my mother up at Tyburn for a couple of thousand men to stare at.

They might have let her live. She was poor enough.'

'How very sad!' exclaimed his patron, with a condescending smile. 'I

have no doubt she was an exceedingly fine woman.'

'You see that dog of mine?' said Hugh, abruptly.

'Faithful, I dare say?' rejoined his patron, looking at him through his

glass; 'and immensely clever? Virtuous and gifted animals, whether man

or beast, always are so very hideous.'

'Such a dog as that, and one of the same breed, was the only living

thing except me that howled that day,' said Hugh. 'Out of the two

thousand odd--there was a larger crowd for its being a woman--the dog

and I alone had any pity. If he'd have been a man, he'd have been

glad to be quit of her, for she had been forced to keep him lean and

half-starved; but being a dog, and not having a man's sense, he was

sorry.'

'It was dull of the brute, certainly,' said Mr Chester, 'and very like a

brute.'

Hugh made no rejoinder, but whistling to his dog, who sprung up at the

sound and came jumping and sporting about him, bade his sympathising

friend good night.

'Good night; he returned. 'Remember; you're safe with me--quite safe. So

long as you deserve it, my good fellow, as I hope you always will, you

have a friend in me, on whose silence you may rely. Now do be careful of

yourself, pray do, and consider what jeopardy you might have stood in.

Good night! bless you!'

Hugh truckled before the hidden meaning of these words as much as such

a being could, and crept out of the door so submissively and

subserviently--with an air, in short, so different from that with which

he had entered--that his patron on being left alone, smiled more than

ever.

'And yet,' he said, as he took a pinch of snuff, 'I do not like their

having hanged his mother. The fellow has a fine eye, and I am sure she

was handsome. But very probably she was coarse--red-nosed perhaps, and

had clumsy feet. Aye, it was all for the best, no doubt.'

With this comforting reflection, he put on his coat, took a farewell

glance at the glass, and summoned his man, who promptly attended,

followed by a chair and its two bearers.

'Foh!' said Mr Chester. 'The very atmosphere that centaur has breathed,

seems tainted with the cart and ladder. Here, Peak. Bring some scent and

sprinkle the floor; and take away the chair he sat upon, and air it; and

dash a little of that mixture upon me. I am stifled!'

The man obeyed; and the room and its master being both purified, nothing

remained for Mr Chester but to demand his hat, to fold it jauntily under

his arm, to take his seat in the chair and be carried off; humming a

fashionable tune.

Chapter 24

How the accomplished gentleman spent the evening in the midst of a

dazzling and brilliant circle; how he enchanted all those with whom he

mingled by the grace of his deportment, the politeness of his manner,

the vivacity of his conversation, and the sweetness of his voice; how

it was observed in every corner, that Chester was a man of that happy

disposition that nothing ruffled him, that he was one on whom the

world's cares and errors sat lightly as his dress, and in whose smiling

face a calm and tranquil mind was constantly reflected; how honest men,

who by instinct knew him better, bowed down before him nevertheless,

deferred to his every word, and courted his favourable notice; how

people, who really had good in them, went with the stream, and fawned

and flattered, and approved, and despised themselves while they did

so, and yet had not the courage to resist; how, in short, he was one of

those who are received and cherished in society (as the phrase is) by

scores who individually would shrink from and be repelled by the

object of their lavish regard; are things of course, which will suggest

themselves. Matter so commonplace needs but a passing glance, and there

an end.

The despisers of mankind--apart from the mere fools and mimics, of that

creed--are of two sorts. They who believe their merit neglected and

unappreciated, make up one class; they who receive adulation and

flattery, knowing their own worthlessness, compose the other. Be sure

that the coldest-hearted misanthropes are ever of this last order.

Mr Chester sat up in bed next morning, sipping his coffee, and

remembering with a kind of contemptuous satisfaction how he had shone

last night, and how he had been caressed and courted, when his servant

brought in a very small scrap of dirty paper, tightly sealed in two

places, on the inside whereof was inscribed in pretty large text these

words: 'A friend. Desiring of a conference. Immediate. Private. Burn it

when you've read it.'

'Where in the name of the Gunpowder Plot did you pick up this?' said his

master.

It was given him by a person then waiting at the door, the man replied.

'With a cloak and dagger?' said Mr Chester.

With nothing more threatening about him, it appeared, than a leather

apron and a dirty face. 'Let him come in.' In he came--Mr Tappertit;

with his hair still on end, and a great lock in his hand, which he put

down on the floor in the middle of the chamber as if he were about to go

through some performances in which it was a necessary agent.

'Sir,' said Mr Tappertit with a low bow, 'I thank you for this

condescension, and am glad to see you. Pardon the menial office in which

I am engaged, sir, and extend your sympathies to one, who, humble as his

appearance is, has inn'ard workings far above his station.'

Mr Chester held the bed-curtain farther back, and looked at him with a

vague impression that he was some maniac, who had not only broken open

the door of his place of confinement, but had brought away the lock. Mr

Tappertit bowed again, and displayed his legs to the best advantage.

'You have heard, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, laying his hand upon his

breast, 'of G. Varden Locksmith and bell-hanger and repairs neatly

executed in town and country, Clerkenwell, London?'

'What then?' asked Mr Chester.

'I'm his 'prentice, sir.'

'What THEN?'

'Ahem!' said Mr Tappertit. 'Would you permit me to shut the door, sir,

and will you further, sir, give me your honour bright, that what passes

between us is in the strictest confidence?'

Mr Chester laid himself calmly down in bed again, and turning a

perfectly undisturbed face towards the strange apparition, which had

by this time closed the door, begged him to speak out, and to be as

rational as he could, without putting himself to any very great personal

inconvenience.

'In the first place, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, producing a small

pocket-handkerchief and shaking it out of the folds, 'as I have not

a card about me (for the envy of masters debases us below that level)

allow me to offer the best substitute that circumstances will admit of.

If you will take that in your own hand, sir, and cast your eye on the

right-hand corner,' said Mr Tappertit, offering it with a graceful air,

'you will meet with my credentials.'

'Thank you,' answered Mr Chester, politely accepting it, and turning to

some blood-red characters at one end. '"Four. Simon Tappertit. One." Is

that the--'

'Without the numbers, sir, that is my name,' replied the 'prentice.

'They are merely intended as directions to the washerwoman, and have no

connection with myself or family. YOUR name, sir,' said Mr Tappertit,

looking very hard at his nightcap, 'is Chester, I suppose? You needn't

pull it off, sir, thank you. I observe E. C. from here. We will take the

rest for granted.'

'Pray, Mr Tappertit,' said Mr Chester, 'has that complicated piece of

ironmongery which you have done me the favour to bring with you, any

immediate connection with the business we are to discuss?'

'It has not, sir,' rejoined the 'prentice. 'It's going to be fitted on a

ware'us-door in Thames Street.'

'Perhaps, as that is the case,' said Mr Chester, 'and as it has a

stronger flavour of oil than I usually refresh my bedroom with, you will

oblige me so far as to put it outside the door?'

'By all means, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, suiting the action to the word.

'You'll excuse my mentioning it, I hope?'

'Don't apologise, sir, I beg. And now, if you please, to business.'

During the whole of this dialogue, Mr Chester had suffered nothing but

his smile of unvarying serenity and politeness to appear upon his face.

Sim Tappertit, who had far too good an opinion of himself to suspect

that anybody could be playing upon him, thought within himself that

this was something like the respect to which he was entitled, and drew

a comparison from this courteous demeanour of a stranger, by no means

favourable to the worthy locksmith.

'From what passes in our house,' said Mr Tappertit, 'I am aware, sir,

that your son keeps company with a young lady against your inclinations.

Sir, your son has not used me well.'

'Mr Tappertit,' said the other, 'you grieve me beyond description.'

'Thank you, sir,' replied the 'prentice. 'I'm glad to hear you say so.

He's very proud, sir, is your son; very haughty.'

'I am afraid he IS haughty,' said Mr Chester. 'Do you know I was really

afraid of that before; and you confirm me?'

'To recount the menial offices I've had to do for your son, sir,' said

Mr Tappertit; 'the chairs I've had to hand him, the coaches I've had to

call for him, the numerous degrading duties, wholly unconnected with

my indenters, that I've had to do for him, would fill a family Bible.

Besides which, sir, he is but a young man himself and I do not consider

"thank'ee Sim," a proper form of address on those occasions.'

'Mr Tappertit, your wisdom is beyond your years. Pray go on.'

'I thank you for your good opinion, sir,' said Sim, much gratified,

'and will endeavour so to do. Now sir, on this account (and perhaps for

another reason or two which I needn't go into) I am on your side. And

what I tell you is this--that as long as our people go backwards and

forwards, to and fro, up and down, to that there jolly old Maypole,

lettering, and messaging, and fetching and carrying, you couldn't help

your son keeping company with that young lady by deputy,--not if he was

minded night and day by all the Horse Guards, and every man of 'em in

the very fullest uniform.'

Mr Tappertit stopped to take breath after this, and then started fresh

again.

'Now, sir, I am a coming to the point. You will inquire of me, "how is

this to be prevented?" I'll tell you how. If an honest, civil, smiling

gentleman like you--'

'Mr Tappertit--really--'

'No, no, I'm serious,' rejoined the 'prentice, 'I am, upon my soul.

If an honest, civil, smiling gentleman like you, was to talk but ten

minutes to our old woman--that's Mrs Varden--and flatter her up a bit,

you'd gain her over for ever. Then there's this point got--that her

daughter Dolly,'--here a flush came over Mr Tappertit's face--'wouldn't

be allowed to be a go-between from that time forward; and till that

point's got, there's nothing ever will prevent her. Mind that.'

'Mr Tappertit, your knowledge of human nature--'

'Wait a minute,' said Sim, folding his arms with a dreadful calmness.

'Now I come to THE point. Sir, there is a villain at that Maypole, a

monster in human shape, a vagabond of the deepest dye, that unless you

get rid of and have kidnapped and carried off at the very least--nothing

less will do--will marry your son to that young woman, as certainly and

as surely as if he was the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. He will,

sir, for the hatred and malice that he bears to you; let alone the

pleasure of doing a bad action, which to him is its own reward. If you

knew how this chap, this Joseph Willet--that's his name--comes backwards

and forwards to our house, libelling, and denouncing, and threatening

you, and how I shudder when I hear him, you'd hate him worse than I

do,--worse than I do, sir,' said Mr Tappertit wildly, putting his hair

up straighter, and making a crunching noise with his teeth; 'if sich a

thing is possible.'

'A little private vengeance in this, Mr Tappertit?'

'Private vengeance, sir, or public sentiment, or both combined--destroy

him,' said Mr Tappertit. 'Miggs says so too. Miggs and me both say so.

We can't bear the plotting and undermining that takes place. Our souls

recoil from it. Barnaby Rudge and Mrs Rudge are in it likewise; but the

villain, Joseph Willet, is the ringleader. Their plottings and schemes

are known to me and Miggs. If you want information of 'em, apply to us.

Put Joseph Willet down, sir. Destroy him. Crush him. And be happy.'

With these words, Mr Tappertit, who seemed to expect no reply, and to

hold it as a necessary consequence of his eloquence that his hearer

should be utterly stunned, dumbfoundered, and overwhelmed, folded his

arms so that the palm of each hand rested on the opposite shoulder, and

disappeared after the manner of those mysterious warners of whom he had

read in cheap story-books.

'That fellow,' said Mr Chester, relaxing his face when he was fairly

gone, 'is good practice. I HAVE some command of my features, beyond all

doubt. He fully confirms what I suspected, though; and blunt tools are

sometimes found of use, where sharper instruments would fail. I fear

I may be obliged to make great havoc among these worthy people. A

troublesome necessity! I quite feel for them.'

With that he fell into a quiet slumber:--subsided into such a gentle,

pleasant sleep, that it was quite infantine.

Chapter 25

Leaving the favoured, and well-received, and flattered of the world;

him of the world most worldly, who never compromised himself by an

ungentlemanly action, and never was guilty of a manly one; to lie

smilingly asleep--for even sleep, working but little change in his

dissembling face, became with him a piece of cold, conventional

hypocrisy--we follow in the steps of two slow travellers on foot, making

towards Chigwell.

Barnaby and his mother. Grip in their company, of course.

The widow, to whom each painful mile seemed longer than the last, toiled

wearily along; while Barnaby, yielding to every inconstant impulse,

fluttered here and there, now leaving her far behind, now lingering far

behind himself, now darting into some by-lane or path and leaving her

to pursue her way alone, until he stealthily emerged again and came upon

her with a wild shout of merriment, as his wayward and capricious nature

prompted. Now he would call to her from the topmost branch of some high

tree by the roadside; now using his tall staff as a leaping-pole, come

flying over ditch or hedge or five-barred gate; now run with surprising

swiftness for a mile or more on the straight road, and halting, sport

upon a patch of grass with Grip till she came up. These were his

delights; and when his patient mother heard his merry voice, or looked

into his flushed and healthy face, she would not have abated them by one

sad word or murmur, though each had been to her a source of suffering in

the same degree as it was to him of pleasure.

It is something to look upon enjoyment, so that it be free and wild and

in the face of nature, though it is but the enjoyment of an idiot. It is

something to know that Heaven has left the capacity of gladness in such

a creature's breast; it is something to be assured that, however lightly

men may crush that faculty in their fellows, the Great Creator of

mankind imparts it even to his despised and slighted work. Who would not

rather see a poor idiot happy in the sunlight, than a wise man pining in

a darkened jail!

Ye men of gloom and austerity, who paint the face of Infinite

Benevolence with an eternal frown; read in the Everlasting Book, wide

open to your view, the lesson it would teach. Its pictures are not in

black and sombre hues, but bright and glowing tints; its music--save

when ye drown it--is not in sighs and groans, but songs and cheerful

sounds. Listen to the million voices in the summer air, and find one

dismal as your own. Remember, if ye can, the sense of hope and pleasure

which every glad return of day awakens in the breast of all your kind

who have not changed their nature; and learn some wisdom even from the

witless, when their hearts are lifted up they know not why, by all the

mirth and happiness it brings.

The widow's breast was full of care, was laden heavily with secret dread

and sorrow; but her boy's gaiety of heart gladdened her, and beguiled

the long journey. Sometimes he would bid her lean upon his arm, and

would keep beside her steadily for a short distance; but it was more his

nature to be rambling to and fro, and she better liked to see him free

and happy, even than to have him near her, because she loved him better

than herself.

She had quitted the place to which they were travelling, directly after

the event which had changed her whole existence; and for two-and-twenty

years had never had courage to revisit it. It was her native village.

How many recollections crowded on her mind when it appeared in sight!

Two-and-twenty years. Her boy's whole life and history. The last time

she looked back upon those roofs among the trees, she carried him in her

arms, an infant. How often since that time had she sat beside him night

and day, watching for the dawn of mind that never came; how had she

feared, and doubted, and yet hoped, long after conviction forced itself

upon her! The little stratagems she had devised to try him, the little

tokens he had given in his childish way--not of dulness but of something

infinitely worse, so ghastly and unchildlike in its cunning--came back

as vividly as if but yesterday had intervened. The room in which they

used to be; the spot in which his cradle stood; he, old and elfin-like

in face, but ever dear to her, gazing at her with a wild and vacant

eye, and crooning some uncouth song as she sat by and rocked him; every

circumstance of his infancy came thronging back, and the most trivial,

perhaps, the most distinctly.

His older childhood, too; the strange imaginings he had; his terror of

certain senseless things--familiar objects he endowed with life; the

slow and gradual breaking out of that one horror, in which, before his

birth, his darkened intellect began; how, in the midst of all, she had

found some hope and comfort in his being unlike another child, and had

gone on almost believing in the slow development of his mind until he

grew a man, and then his childhood was complete and lasting; one after

another, all these old thoughts sprung up within her, strong after their

long slumber and bitterer than ever.

She took his arm and they hurried through the village street. It was

the same as it was wont to be in old times, yet different too, and wore

another air. The change was in herself, not it; but she never thought of

that, and wondered at its alteration, and where it lay, and what it was.

The people all knew Barnaby, and the children of the place came flocking

round him--as she remembered to have done with their fathers and mothers

round some silly beggarman, when a child herself. None of them knew her;

they passed each well-remembered house, and yard, and homestead; and

striking into the fields, were soon alone again.

The Warren was the end of their journey. Mr Haredale was walking in the

garden, and seeing them as they passed the iron gate, unlocked it, and

bade them enter that way.

'At length you have mustered heart to visit the old place,' he said to

the widow. 'I am glad you have.'

'For the first time, and the last, sir,' she replied.

'The first for many years, but not the last?'

'The very last.'

'You mean,' said Mr Haredale, regarding her with some surprise, 'that

having made this effort, you are resolved not to persevere and are

determined to relapse? This is unworthy of you. I have often told you,

you should return here. You would be happier here than elsewhere, I

know. As to Barnaby, it's quite his home.'

'And Grip's,' said Barnaby, holding the basket open. The raven hopped

gravely out, and perching on his shoulder and addressing himself to Mr

Haredale, cried--as a hint, perhaps, that some temperate refreshment

would be acceptable--'Polly put the ket-tle on, we'll all have tea!'

'Hear me, Mary,' said Mr Haredale kindly, as he motioned her to walk

with him towards the house. 'Your life has been an example of patience

and fortitude, except in this one particular which has often given me

great pain. It is enough to know that you were cruelly involved in the

calamity which deprived me of an only brother, and Emma of her father,

without being obliged to suppose (as I sometimes am) that you associate

us with the author of our joint misfortunes.'

'Associate you with him, sir!' she cried.

'Indeed,' said Mr Haredale, 'I think you do. I almost believe that

because your husband was bound by so many ties to our relation, and died

in his service and defence, you have come in some sort to connect us

with his murder.'

'Alas!' she answered. 'You little know my heart, sir. You little know

the truth!'

'It is natural you should do so; it is very probable you may, without

being conscious of it,' said Mr Haredale, speaking more to himself than

her. 'We are a fallen house. Money, dispensed with the most lavish

hand, would be a poor recompense for sufferings like yours; and thinly

scattered by hands so pinched and tied as ours, it becomes a miserable

mockery. I feel it so, God knows,' he added, hastily. 'Why should I

wonder if she does!'

'You do me wrong, dear sir, indeed,' she rejoined with great

earnestness; 'and yet when you come to hear what I desire your leave to

say--'

'I shall find my doubts confirmed?' he said, observing that she faltered

and became confused. 'Well!'

He quickened his pace for a few steps, but fell back again to her side,

and said:

'And have you come all this way at last, solely to speak to me?'

She answered, 'Yes.'

'A curse,' he muttered, 'upon the wretched state of us proud beggars,

from whom the poor and rich are equally at a distance; the one being

forced to treat us with a show of cold respect; the other condescending

to us in their every deed and word, and keeping more aloof, the nearer

they approach us.--Why, if it were pain to you (as it must have been)

to break for this slight purpose the chain of habit forged through

two-and-twenty years, could you not let me know your wish, and beg me to

come to you?'

'There was not time, sir,' she rejoined. 'I took my resolution but

last night, and taking it, felt that I must not lose a day--a day! an

hour--in having speech with you.'

They had by this time reached the house. Mr Haredale paused for a

moment, and looked at her as if surprised by the energy of her manner.

Observing, however, that she took no heed of him, but glanced up,

shuddering, at the old walls with which such horrors were connected in

her mind, he led her by a private stair into his library, where Emma was

seated in a window, reading.

The young lady, seeing who approached, hastily rose and laid aside her

book, and with many kind words, and not without tears, gave her a warm

and earnest welcome. But the widow shrunk from her embrace as though she

feared her, and sunk down trembling on a chair.

'It is the return to this place after so long an absence,' said Emma

gently. 'Pray ring, dear uncle--or stay--Barnaby will run himself and

ask for wine--'

'Not for the world,' she cried. 'It would have another taste--I could

not touch it. I want but a minute's rest. Nothing but that.'

Miss Haredale stood beside her chair, regarding her with silent pity.

She remained for a little time quite still; then rose and turned to Mr

Haredale, who had sat down in his easy chair, and was contemplating her

with fixed attention.

The tale connected with the mansion borne in mind, it seemed, as has

been already said, the chosen theatre for such a deed as it had known.

The room in which this group were now assembled--hard by the very

chamber where the act was done--dull, dark, and sombre; heavy with

worm-eaten books; deadened and shut in by faded hangings, muffling every

sound; shadowed mournfully by trees whose rustling boughs gave ever and

anon a spectral knocking at the glass; wore, beyond all others in

the house, a ghostly, gloomy air. Nor were the group assembled there,

unfitting tenants of the spot. The widow, with her marked and startling

face and downcast eyes; Mr Haredale stern and despondent ever; his niece

beside him, like, yet most unlike, the picture of her father, which

gazed reproachfully down upon them from the blackened wall; Barnaby,

with his vacant look and restless eye; were all in keeping with the

place, and actors in the legend. Nay, the very raven, who had hopped

upon the table and with the air of some old necromancer appeared to be

profoundly studying a great folio volume that lay open on a desk, was

strictly in unison with the rest, and looked like the embodied spirit of

evil biding his time of mischief.

'I scarcely know,' said the widow, breaking silence, 'how to begin. You

will think my mind disordered.'

'The whole tenor of your quiet and reproachless life since you were last

here,' returned Mr Haredale, mildly, 'shall bear witness for you. Why do

you fear to awaken such a suspicion? You do not speak to strangers. You

have not to claim our interest or consideration for the first time. Be

more yourself. Take heart. Any advice or assistance that I can give you,

you know is yours of right, and freely yours.'

'What if I came, sir,' she rejoined, 'I who have but one other friend on

earth, to reject your aid from this moment, and to say that henceforth

I launch myself upon the world, alone and unassisted, to sink or swim as

Heaven may decree!'

'You would have, if you came to me for such a purpose,' said Mr Haredale

calmly, 'some reason to assign for conduct so extraordinary, which--if

one may entertain the possibility of anything so wild and strange--would

have its weight, of course.'

'That, sir,' she answered, 'is the misery of my distress. I can give

no reason whatever. My own bare word is all that I can offer. It is

my duty, my imperative and bounden duty. If I did not discharge it,

I should be a base and guilty wretch. Having said that, my lips are

sealed, and I can say no more.'

As though she felt relieved at having said so much, and had nerved

herself to the remainder of her task, she spoke from this time with a

firmer voice and heightened courage.

'Heaven is my witness, as my own heart is--and yours, dear young lady,

will speak for me, I know--that I have lived, since that time we all

have bitter reason to remember, in unchanging devotion, and gratitude to

this family. Heaven is my witness that go where I may, I shall preserve

those feelings unimpaired. And it is my witness, too, that they alone

impel me to the course I must take, and from which nothing now shall

turn me, as I hope for mercy.'

'These are strange riddles,' said Mr Haredale.

'In this world, sir,' she replied, 'they may, perhaps, never be

explained. In another, the Truth will be discovered in its own good

time. And may that time,' she added in a low voice, 'be far distant!'

'Let me be sure,' said Mr Haredale, 'that I understand you, for I am

doubtful of my own senses. Do you mean that you are resolved voluntarily

to deprive yourself of those means of support you have received from us

so long--that you are determined to resign the annuity we settled on you

twenty years ago--to leave house, and home, and goods, and begin life

anew--and this, for some secret reason or monstrous fancy which is

incapable of explanation, which only now exists, and has been dormant

all this time? In the name of God, under what delusion are you

labouring?'

'As I am deeply thankful,' she made answer, 'for the kindness of those,

alive and dead, who have owned this house; and as I would not have its

roof fall down and crush me, or its very walls drip blood, my name being

spoken in their hearing; I never will again subsist upon their bounty,

or let it help me to subsistence. You do not know,' she added, suddenly,

'to what uses it may be applied; into what hands it may pass. I do, and

I renounce it.'

'Surely,' said Mr Haredale, 'its uses rest with you.'

'They did. They rest with me no longer. It may be--it IS--devoted to

purposes that mock the dead in their graves. It never can prosper with

me. It will bring some other heavy judgement on the head of my dear son,

whose innocence will suffer for his mother's guilt.'

'What words are these!' cried Mr Haredale, regarding her with wonder.

'Among what associates have you fallen? Into what guilt have you ever

been betrayed?'

'I am guilty, and yet innocent; wrong, yet right; good in intention,

though constrained to shield and aid the bad. Ask me no more questions,

sir; but believe that I am rather to be pitied than condemned. I must

leave my house to-morrow, for while I stay there, it is haunted. My

future dwelling, if I am to live in peace, must be a secret. If my poor

boy should ever stray this way, do not tempt him to disclose it or have

him watched when he returns; for if we are hunted, we must fly again.

And now this load is off my mind, I beseech you--and you, dear Miss

Haredale, too--to trust me if you can, and think of me kindly as you

have been used to do. If I die and cannot tell my secret even then (for

that may come to pass), it will sit the lighter on my breast in that

hour for this day's work; and on that day, and every day until it comes,

I will pray for and thank you both, and trouble you no more.

With that, she would have left them, but they detained her, and with

many soothing words and kind entreaties, besought her to consider what

she did, and above all to repose more freely upon them, and say what

weighed so sorely on her mind. Finding her deaf to their persuasions, Mr

Haredale suggested, as a last resource, that she should confide in Emma,

of whom, as a young person and one of her own sex, she might stand in

less dread than of himself. From this proposal, however, she recoiled

with the same indescribable repugnance she had manifested when they met.

The utmost that could be wrung from her was, a promise that she would

receive Mr Haredale at her own house next evening, and in the mean time

reconsider her determination and their dissuasions--though any change on

her part, as she told them, was quite hopeless. This condition made at

last, they reluctantly suffered her to depart, since she would neither

eat nor drink within the house; and she, and Barnaby, and Grip,

accordingly went out as they had come, by the private stair and

garden-gate; seeing and being seen of no one by the way.

It was remarkable in the raven that during the whole interview he

had kept his eye on his book with exactly the air of a very sly human

rascal, who, under the mask of pretending to read hard, was listening to

everything. He still appeared to have the conversation very strongly in

his mind, for although, when they were alone again, he issued orders for

the instant preparation of innumerable kettles for purposes of tea, he

was thoughtful, and rather seemed to do so from an abstract sense of

duty, than with any regard to making himself agreeable, or being what is

commonly called good company.

They were to return by the coach. As there was an interval of full two

hours before it started, and they needed rest and some refreshment,

Barnaby begged hard for a visit to the Maypole. But his mother, who had

no wish to be recognised by any of those who had known her long ago, and

who feared besides that Mr Haredale might, on second thoughts, despatch

some messenger to that place of entertainment in quest of her, proposed

to wait in the churchyard instead. As it was easy for Barnaby to buy

and carry thither such humble viands as they required, he cheerfully

assented, and in the churchyard they sat down to take their frugal

dinner.

Here again, the raven was in a highly reflective state; walking up and

down when he had dined, with an air of elderly complacency which was

strongly suggestive of his having his hands under his coat-tails; and

appearing to read the tombstones with a very critical taste. Sometimes,

after a long inspection of an epitaph, he would strop his beak upon the

grave to which it referred, and cry in his hoarse tones, 'I'm a devil,

I'm a devil, I'm a devil!' but whether he addressed his observations to

any supposed person below, or merely threw them off as a general remark,

is matter of uncertainty.

It was a quiet pretty spot, but a sad one for Barnaby's mother; for Mr

Reuben Haredale lay there, and near the vault in which his ashes rested,

was a stone to the memory of her own husband, with a brief inscription

recording how and when he had lost his life. She sat here, thoughtful

and apart, until their time was out, and the distant horn told that the

coach was coming.

Barnaby, who had been sleeping on the grass, sprung up quickly at the

sound; and Grip, who appeared to understand it equally well, walked

into his basket straightway, entreating society in general (as though

he intended a kind of satire upon them in connection with churchyards)

never to say die on any terms. They were soon on the coach-top and

rolling along the road.

It went round by the Maypole, and stopped at the door. Joe was from

home, and Hugh came sluggishly out to hand up the parcel that it called

for. There was no fear of old John coming out. They could see him from

the coach-roof fast asleep in his cosy bar. It was a part of John's

character. He made a point of going to sleep at the coach's time. He

despised gadding about; he looked upon coaches as things that ought

to be indicted; as disturbers of the peace of mankind; as restless,

bustling, busy, horn-blowing contrivances, quite beneath the dignity of

men, and only suited to giddy girls that did nothing but chatter and go

a-shopping. 'We know nothing about coaches here, sir,' John would say,

if any unlucky stranger made inquiry touching the offensive vehicles;

'we don't book for 'em; we'd rather not; they're more trouble than

they're worth, with their noise and rattle. If you like to wait for 'em

you can; but we don't know anything about 'em; they may call and they

may not--there's a carrier--he was looked upon as quite good enough for

us, when I was a boy.'

She dropped her veil as Hugh climbed up, and while he hung behind, and

talked to Barnaby in whispers. But neither he nor any other person

spoke to her, or noticed her, or had any curiosity about her; and so, an

alien, she visited and left the village where she had been born, and had

lived a merry child, a comely girl, a happy wife--where she had known

all her enjoyment of life, and had entered on its hardest sorrows.

Chapter 26

'And you're not surprised to hear this, Varden?' said Mr Haredale.

'Well! You and she have always been the best friends, and you should

understand her if anybody does.'

'I ask your pardon, sir,' rejoined the locksmith. 'I didn't say I

understood her. I wouldn't have the presumption to say that of any

woman. It's not so easily done. But I am not so much surprised, sir, as

you expected me to be, certainly.'

'May I ask why not, my good friend?'

'I have seen, sir,' returned the locksmith with evident reluctance,

'I have seen in connection with her, something that has filled me with

distrust and uneasiness. She has made bad friends, how, or when, I don't

know; but that her house is a refuge for one robber and cut-throat at

least, I am certain. There, sir! Now it's out.'

'Varden!'

'My own eyes, sir, are my witnesses, and for her sake I would be

willingly half-blind, if I could but have the pleasure of mistrusting

'em. I have kept the secret till now, and it will go no further than

yourself, I know; but I tell you that with my own eyes--broad awake--I

saw, in the passage of her house one evening after dark, the highwayman

who robbed and wounded Mr Edward Chester, and on the same night

threatened me.'

'And you made no effort to detain him?' said Mr Haredale quickly.

'Sir,' returned the locksmith, 'she herself prevented me--held me, with

all her strength, and hung about me until he had got clear off.' And

having gone so far, he related circumstantially all that had passed upon

the night in question.

This dialogue was held in a low tone in the locksmith's little parlour,

into which honest Gabriel had shown his visitor on his arrival. Mr

Haredale had called upon him to entreat his company to the widow's, that

he might have the assistance of his persuasion and influence; and out of

this circumstance the conversation had arisen.

'I forbore,' said Gabriel, 'from repeating one word of this to anybody,

as it could do her no good and might do her great harm. I thought and

hoped, to say the truth, that she would come to me, and talk to me about

it, and tell me how it was; but though I have purposely put myself

in her way more than once or twice, she has never touched upon the

subject--except by a look. And indeed,' said the good-natured locksmith,

'there was a good deal in the look, more than could have been put into a

great many words. It said among other matters "Don't ask me anything"

so imploringly, that I didn't ask her anything. You'll think me an old

fool, I know, sir. If it's any relief to call me one, pray do.'

'I am greatly disturbed by what you tell me,' said Mr Haredale, after a

silence. 'What meaning do you attach to it?'

The locksmith shook his head, and looked doubtfully out of window at the

failing light.

'She cannot have married again,' said Mr Haredale.

'Not without our knowledge surely, sir.'

'She may have done so, in the fear that it would lead, if known, to some

objection or estrangement. Suppose she married incautiously--it is not

improbable, for her existence has been a lonely and monotonous one for

many years--and the man turned out a ruffian, she would be anxious to

screen him, and yet would revolt from his crimes. This might be. It

bears strongly on the whole drift of her discourse yesterday, and would

quite explain her conduct. Do you suppose Barnaby is privy to these

circumstances?'

'Quite impossible to say, sir,' returned the locksmith, shaking his head

again: 'and next to impossible to find out from him. If what you suppose

is really the case, I tremble for the lad--a notable person, sir, to put

to bad uses--'

'It is not possible, Varden,' said Mr Haredale, in a still lower tone of

voice than he had spoken yet, 'that we have been blinded and deceived by

this woman from the beginning? It is not possible that this connection

was formed in her husband's lifetime, and led to his and my brother's--'

'Good God, sir,' cried Gabriel, interrupting him, 'don't entertain such

dark thoughts for a moment. Five-and-twenty years ago, where was there a

girl like her? A gay, handsome, laughing, bright-eyed damsel! Think what

she was, sir. It makes my heart ache now, even now, though I'm an old

man, with a woman for a daughter, to think what she was and what she is.

We all change, but that's with Time; Time does his work honestly, and

I don't mind him. A fig for Time, sir. Use him well, and he's a hearty

fellow, and scorns to have you at a disadvantage. But care and suffering

(and those have changed her) are devils, sir--secret, stealthy,

undermining devils--who tread down the brightest flowers in Eden, and do

more havoc in a month than Time does in a year. Picture to yourself for

one minute what Mary was before they went to work with her fresh

heart and face--do her that justice--and say whether such a thing is

possible.'

'You're a good fellow, Varden,' said Mr Haredale, 'and are quite right.

I have brooded on that subject so long, that every breath of suspicion

carries me back to it. You are quite right.'

'It isn't, sir,' cried the locksmith with brightened eyes, and sturdy,

honest voice; 'it isn't because I courted her before Rudge, and failed,

that I say she was too good for him. She would have been as much too

good for me. But she WAS too good for him; he wasn't free and frank

enough for her. I don't reproach his memory with it, poor fellow; I only

want to put her before you as she really was. For myself, I'll keep her

old picture in my mind; and thinking of that, and what has altered her,

I'll stand her friend, and try to win her back to peace. And damme,

sir,' cried Gabriel, 'with your pardon for the word, I'd do the same if

she had married fifty highwaymen in a twelvemonth; and think it in the

Protestant Manual too, though Martha said it wasn't, tooth and nail,

till doomsday!'

If the dark little parlour had been filled with a dense fog, which,

clearing away in an instant, left it all radiance and brightness, it

could not have been more suddenly cheered than by this outbreak on the

part of the hearty locksmith. In a voice nearly as full and round as his

own, Mr Haredale cried 'Well said!' and bade him come away without more

parley. The locksmith complied right willingly; and both getting into a

hackney coach which was waiting at the door, drove off straightway.

They alighted at the street corner, and dismissing their conveyance,

walked to the house. To their first knock at the door there was no

response. A second met with the like result. But in answer to the third,

which was of a more vigorous kind, the parlour window-sash was gently

raised, and a musical voice cried:

'Haredale, my dear fellow, I am extremely glad to see you. How very much

you have improved in your appearance since our last meeting! I never saw

you looking better. HOW do you do?'

Mr Haredale turned his eyes towards the casement whence the voice

proceeded, though there was no need to do so, to recognise the speaker,

and Mr Chester waved his hand, and smiled a courteous welcome.

'The door will be opened immediately,' he said. 'There is nobody but

a very dilapidated female to perform such offices. You will excuse her

infirmities? If she were in a more elevated station of society, she

would be gouty. Being but a hewer of wood and drawer of water, she

is rheumatic. My dear Haredale, these are natural class distinctions,

depend upon it.'

Mr Haredale, whose face resumed its lowering and distrustful look the

moment he heard the voice, inclined his head stiffly, and turned his

back upon the speaker.

'Not opened yet,' said Mr Chester. 'Dear me! I hope the aged soul has

not caught her foot in some unlucky cobweb by the way. She is there at

last! Come in, I beg!'

Mr Haredale entered, followed by the locksmith. Turning with a look of

great astonishment to the old woman who had opened the door, he inquired

for Mrs Rudge--for Barnaby. They were both gone, she replied, wagging

her ancient head, for good. There was a gentleman in the parlour, who

perhaps could tell them more. That was all SHE knew.

'Pray, sir,' said Mr Haredale, presenting himself before this new

tenant, 'where is the person whom I came here to see?'

'My dear friend,' he returned, 'I have not the least idea.'

'Your trifling is ill-timed,' retorted the other in a suppressed tone

and voice, 'and its subject ill-chosen. Reserve it for those who

are your friends, and do not expend it on me. I lay no claim to the

distinction, and have the self-denial to reject it.'

'My dear, good sir,' said Mr Chester, 'you are heated with walking. Sit

down, I beg. Our friend is--'

'Is but a plain honest man,' returned Mr Haredale, 'and quite unworthy

of your notice.'

'Gabriel Varden by name, sir,' said the locksmith bluntly.

'A worthy English yeoman!' said Mr Chester. 'A most worthy yeoman, of

whom I have frequently heard my son Ned--darling fellow--speak, and have

often wished to see. Varden, my good friend, I am glad to know you. You

wonder now,' he said, turning languidly to Mr Haredale, 'to see me here.

Now, I am sure you do.'

Mr Haredale glanced at him--not fondly or admiringly--smiled, and held

his peace.

'The mystery is solved in a moment,' said Mr Chester; 'in a moment. Will

you step aside with me one instant. You remember our little compact in

reference to Ned, and your dear niece, Haredale? You remember the list

of assistants in their innocent intrigue? You remember these two people

being among them? My dear fellow, congratulate yourself, and me. I have

bought them off.'

'You have done what?' said Mr Haredale.

'Bought them off,' returned his smiling friend. 'I have found it

necessary to take some active steps towards setting this boy and girl

attachment quite at rest, and have begun by removing these two agents.

You are surprised? Who CAN withstand the influence of a little money!

They wanted it, and have been bought off. We have nothing more to fear

from them. They are gone.'

'Gone!' echoed Mr Haredale. 'Where?'

'My dear fellow--and you must permit me to say again, that you never

looked so young; so positively boyish as you do to-night--the Lord knows

where; I believe Columbus himself wouldn't find them. Between you and

me they have their hidden reasons, but upon that point I have pledged

myself to secrecy. She appointed to see you here to-night, I know, but

found it inconvenient, and couldn't wait. Here is the key of the door.

I am afraid you'll find it inconveniently large; but as the tenement is

yours, your good-nature will excuse that, Haredale, I am certain!'

Chapter 27

Mr Haredale stood in the widow's parlour with the door-key in his hand,

gazing by turns at Mr Chester and at Gabriel Varden, and occasionally

glancing downward at the key as in the hope that of its own accord

it would unlock the mystery; until Mr Chester, putting on his hat and

gloves, and sweetly inquiring whether they were walking in the same

direction, recalled him to himself.

'No,' he said. 'Our roads diverge--widely, as you know. For the present,

I shall remain here.'

'You will be hipped, Haredale; you will be miserable, melancholy,

utterly wretched,' returned the other. 'It's a place of the very last

description for a man of your temper. I know it will make you very

miserable.'

'Let it,' said Mr Haredale, sitting down; 'and thrive upon the thought.

Good night!'

Feigning to be wholly unconscious of the abrupt wave of the hand which

rendered this farewell tantamount to a dismissal, Mr Chester retorted

with a bland and heartfelt benediction, and inquired of Gabriel in what

direction HE was going.

'Yours, sir, would be too much honour for the like of me,' replied the

locksmith, hesitating.

'I wish you to remain here a little while, Varden,' said Mr Haredale,

without looking towards them. 'I have a word or two to say to you.'

'I will not intrude upon your conference another moment,' said Mr

Chester with inconceivable politeness. 'May it be satisfactory to you

both! God bless you!' So saying, and bestowing upon the locksmith a most

refulgent smile, he left them.

'A deplorably constituted creature, that rugged person,' he said, as

he walked along the street; 'he is an atrocity that carries its own

punishment along with it--a bear that gnaws himself. And here is one

of the inestimable advantages of having a perfect command over one's

inclinations. I have been tempted in these two short interviews, to draw

upon that fellow, fifty times. Five men in six would have yielded to the

impulse. By suppressing mine, I wound him deeper and more keenly than if

I were the best swordsman in all Europe, and he the worst. You are the

wise man's very last resource,' he said, tapping the hilt of his weapon;

'we can but appeal to you when all else is said and done. To come to you

before, and thereby spare our adversaries so much, is a barbarian mode

of warfare, quite unworthy of any man with the remotest pretensions to

delicacy of feeling, or refinement.'

He smiled so very pleasantly as he communed with himself after this

manner, that a beggar was emboldened to follow for alms, and to dog

his footsteps for some distance. He was gratified by the circumstance,

feeling it complimentary to his power of feature, and as a reward

suffered the man to follow him until he called a chair, when he

graciously dismissed him with a fervent blessing.

'Which is as easy as cursing,' he wisely added, as he took his seat,

'and more becoming to the face.--To Clerkenwell, my good creatures, if

you please!' The chairmen were rendered quite vivacious by having such a

courteous burden, and to Clerkenwell they went at a fair round trot.

Alighting at a certain point he had indicated to them upon the road, and

paying them something less than they expected from a fare of such gentle

speech, he turned into the street in which the locksmith dwelt, and

presently stood beneath the shadow of the Golden Key. Mr Tappertit, who

was hard at work by lamplight, in a corner of the workshop, remained

unconscious of his presence until a hand upon his shoulder made him

start and turn his head.

'Industry,' said Mr Chester, 'is the soul of business, and the keystone

of prosperity. Mr Tappertit, I shall expect you to invite me to dinner

when you are Lord Mayor of London.'

'Sir,' returned the 'prentice, laying down his hammer, and rubbing

his nose on the back of a very sooty hand, 'I scorn the Lord Mayor and

everything that belongs to him. We must have another state of society,

sir, before you catch me being Lord Mayor. How de do, sir?'

'The better, Mr Tappertit, for looking into your ingenuous face once

more. I hope you are well.'

'I am as well, sir,' said Sim, standing up to get nearer to his ear, and

whispering hoarsely, 'as any man can be under the aggrawations to which

I am exposed. My life's a burden to me. If it wasn't for wengeance, I'd

play at pitch and toss with it on the losing hazard.'

'Is Mrs Varden at home?' said Mr Chester.

'Sir,' returned Sim, eyeing him over with a look of concentrated

expression,--'she is. Did you wish to see her?'

Mr Chester nodded.

'Then come this way, sir,' said Sim, wiping his face upon his apron.

'Follow me, sir.--Would you permit me to whisper in your ear, one half a

second?'

'By all means.'

Mr Tappertit raised himself on tiptoe, applied his lips to Mr Chester's

ear, drew back his head without saying anything, looked hard at

him, applied them to his ear again, again drew back, and finally

whispered--'The name is Joseph Willet. Hush! I say no more.'

Having said that much, he beckoned the visitor with a mysterious aspect

to follow him to the parlour-door, where he announced him in the voice

of a gentleman-usher. 'Mr Chester.'

'And not Mr Ed'dard, mind,' said Sim, looking into the door again, and

adding this by way of postscript in his own person; 'it's his father.'

'But do not let his father,' said Mr Chester, advancing hat in hand, as

he observed the effect of this last explanatory announcement, 'do not

let his father be any check or restraint on your domestic occupations,

Miss Varden.'

'Oh! Now! There! An't I always a-saying it!' exclaimed Miggs, clapping

her hands. 'If he an't been and took Missis for her own daughter. Well,

she DO look like it, that she do. Only think of that, mim!'

'Is it possible,' said Mr Chester in his softest tones, 'that this is

Mrs Varden! I am amazed. That is not your daughter, Mrs Varden? No, no.

Your sister.'

'My daughter, indeed, sir,' returned Mrs V., blushing with great

juvenility.

'Ah, Mrs Varden!' cried the visitor. 'Ah, ma'am--humanity is indeed a

happy lot, when we can repeat ourselves in others, and still be young

as they. You must allow me to salute you--the custom of the country, my

dear madam--your daughter too.'

Dolly showed some reluctance to perform this ceremony, but was sharply

reproved by Mrs Varden, who insisted on her undergoing it that minute.

For pride, she said with great severity, was one of the seven deadly

sins, and humility and lowliness of heart were virtues. Wherefore she

desired that Dolly would be kissed immediately, on pain of her just

displeasure; at the same time giving her to understand that whatever

she saw her mother do, she might safely do herself, without being at the

trouble of any reasoning or reflection on the subject--which, indeed,

was offensive and undutiful, and in direct contravention of the church

catechism.

Thus admonished, Dolly complied, though by no means willingly; for there

was a broad, bold look of admiration in Mr Chester's face, refined and

polished though it sought to be, which distressed her very much. As she

stood with downcast eyes, not liking to look up and meet his, he gazed

upon her with an approving air, and then turned to her mother.

'My friend Gabriel (whose acquaintance I only made this very evening)

should be a happy man, Mrs Varden.'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs V., shaking her head.

'Ah!' echoed Miggs.

'Is that the case?' said Mr Chester, compassionately. 'Dear me!'

'Master has no intentions, sir,' murmured Miggs as she sidled up to him,

'but to be as grateful as his natur will let him, for everythink he owns

which it is in his powers to appreciate. But we never, sir'--said Miggs,

looking sideways at Mrs Varden, and interlarding her discourse with a

sigh--'we never know the full value of SOME wines and fig-trees till we

lose 'em. So much the worse, sir, for them as has the slighting of 'em

on their consciences when they're gone to be in full blow elsewhere.'

And Miss Miggs cast up her eyes to signify where that might be.

As Mrs Varden distinctly heard, and was intended to hear, all that Miggs

said, and as these words appeared to convey in metaphorical terms a

presage or foreboding that she would at some early period droop beneath

her trials and take an easy flight towards the stars, she immediately

began to languish, and taking a volume of the Manual from a neighbouring

table, leant her arm upon it as though she were Hope and that her

Anchor. Mr Chester perceiving this, and seeing how the volume was

lettered on the back, took it gently from her hand, and turned the

fluttering leaves.

'My favourite book, dear madam. How often, how very often in his early

life--before he can remember'--(this clause was strictly true) 'have I

deduced little easy moral lessons from its pages, for my dear son Ned!

You know Ned?'

Mrs Varden had that honour, and a fine affable young gentleman he was.

'You're a mother, Mrs Varden,' said Mr Chester, taking a pinch of snuff,

'and you know what I, as a father, feel, when he is praised. He gives me

some uneasiness--much uneasiness--he's of a roving nature, ma'am--from

flower to flower--from sweet to sweet--but his is the butterfly time of

life, and we must not be hard upon such trifling.'

He glanced at Dolly. She was attending evidently to what he said. Just

what he desired!

'The only thing I object to in this little trait of Ned's, is,' said Mr

Chester, '--and the mention of his name reminds me, by the way, that I

am about to beg the favour of a minute's talk with you alone--the only

thing I object to in it, is, that it DOES partake of insincerity. Now,

however I may attempt to disguise the fact from myself in my affection

for Ned, still I always revert to this--that if we are not sincere, we

are nothing. Nothing upon earth. Let us be sincere, my dear madam--'

'--and Protestant,' murmured Mrs Varden.

'--and Protestant above all things. Let us be sincere and Protestant,

strictly moral, strictly just (though always with a leaning towards

mercy), strictly honest, and strictly true, and we gain--it is a slight

point, certainly, but still it is something tangible; we throw up a

groundwork and foundation, so to speak, of goodness, on which we may

afterwards erect some worthy superstructure.'

Now, to be sure, Mrs Varden thought, here is a perfect character. Here

is a meek, righteous, thoroughgoing Christian, who, having mastered all

these qualities, so difficult of attainment; who, having dropped a pinch

of salt on the tails of all the cardinal virtues, and caught them every

one; makes light of their possession, and pants for more morality. For

the good woman never doubted (as many good men and women never do), that

this slighting kind of profession, this setting so little store by great

matters, this seeming to say, 'I am not proud, I am what you hear, but I

consider myself no better than other people; let us change the subject,

pray'--was perfectly genuine and true. He so contrived it, and said

it in that way that it appeared to have been forced from him, and its

effect was marvellous.

Aware of the impression he had made--few men were quicker than he at

such discoveries--Mr Chester followed up the blow by propounding certain

virtuous maxims, somewhat vague and general in their nature, doubtless,

and occasionally partaking of the character of truisms, worn a little

out at elbow, but delivered in so charming a voice and with such

uncommon serenity and peace of mind, that they answered as well as the

best. Nor is this to be wondered at; for as hollow vessels produce a far

more musical sound in falling than those which are substantial, so it

will oftentimes be found that sentiments which have nothing in them make

the loudest ringing in the world, and are the most relished.

Mr Chester, with the volume gently extended in one hand, and with

the other planted lightly on his breast, talked to them in the most

delicious manner possible; and quite enchanted all his hearers,

notwithstanding their conflicting interests and thoughts. Even Dolly,

who, between his keen regards and her eyeing over by Mr Tappertit, was

put quite out of countenance, could not help owning within herself that

he was the sweetest-spoken gentleman she had ever seen. Even Miss Miggs,

who was divided between admiration of Mr Chester and a mortal jealousy

of her young mistress, had sufficient leisure to be propitiated. Even

Mr Tappertit, though occupied as we have seen in gazing at his heart's

delight, could not wholly divert his thoughts from the voice of the

other charmer. Mrs Varden, to her own private thinking, had never been

so improved in all her life; and when Mr Chester, rising and craving

permission to speak with her apart, took her by the hand and led her at

arm's length upstairs to the best sitting-room, she almost deemed him

something more than human.

'Dear madam,' he said, pressing her hand delicately to his lips; 'be

seated.'

Mrs Varden called up quite a courtly air, and became seated.

'You guess my object?' said Mr Chester, drawing a chair towards her.

'You divine my purpose? I am an affectionate parent, my dear Mrs

Varden.'

'That I am sure you are, sir,' said Mrs V.

'Thank you,' returned Mr Chester, tapping his snuff-box lid. 'Heavy

moral responsibilities rest with parents, Mrs Varden.'

Mrs Varden slightly raised her hands, shook her head, and looked at the

ground as though she saw straight through the globe, out at the other

end, and into the immensity of space beyond.

'I may confide in you,' said Mr Chester, 'without reserve. I love

my son, ma'am, dearly; and loving him as I do, I would save him from

working certain misery. You know of his attachment to Miss Haredale.

You have abetted him in it, and very kind of you it was to do so. I am

deeply obliged to you--most deeply obliged to you--for your interest in

his behalf; but my dear ma'am, it is a mistaken one, I do assure you.'

Mrs Varden stammered that she was sorry--'

'Sorry, my dear ma'am,' he interposed. 'Never be sorry for what is so

very amiable, so very good in intention, so perfectly like yourself. But

there are grave and weighty reasons, pressing family considerations, and

apart even from these, points of religious difference, which interpose

themselves, and render their union impossible; utterly im-possible.

I should have mentioned these circumstances to your husband; but he

has--you will excuse my saying this so freely--he has NOT your quickness

of apprehension or depth of moral sense. What an extremely airy house

this is, and how beautifully kept! For one like myself--a widower so

long--these tokens of female care and superintendence have inexpressible

charms.'

Mrs Varden began to think (she scarcely knew why) that the young Mr

Chester must be in the wrong and the old Mr Chester must be in the

right.

'My son Ned,' resumed her tempter with his most winning air, 'has had, I

am told, your lovely daughter's aid, and your open-hearted husband's.'

'--Much more than mine, sir,' said Mrs Varden; 'a great deal more. I

have often had my doubts. It's a--'

'A bad example,' suggested Mr Chester. 'It is. No doubt it is. Your

daughter is at that age when to set before her an encouragement for

young persons to rebel against their parents on this most important

point, is particularly injudicious. You are quite right. I ought to have

thought of that myself, but it escaped me, I confess--so far superior

are your sex to ours, dear madam, in point of penetration and sagacity.'

Mrs Varden looked as wise as if she had really said something to deserve

this compliment--firmly believed she had, in short--and her faith in her

own shrewdness increased considerably.

'My dear ma'am,' said Mr Chester, 'you embolden me to be plain with

you. My son and I are at variance on this point. The young lady and her

natural guardian differ upon it, also. And the closing point is, that my

son is bound by his duty to me, by his honour, by every solemn tie and

obligation, to marry some one else.'

'Engaged to marry another lady!' quoth Mrs Varden, holding up her hands.

'My dear madam, brought up, educated, and trained, expressly for that

purpose. Expressly for that purpose.--Miss Haredale, I am told, is a

very charming creature.'

'I am her foster-mother, and should know--the best young lady in the

world,' said Mrs Varden.

'I have not the smallest doubt of it. I am sure she is. And you, who

have stood in that tender relation towards her, are bound to consult her

happiness. Now, can I--as I have said to Haredale, who quite agrees--can

I possibly stand by, and suffer her to throw herself away (although she

IS of a Catholic family), upon a young fellow who, as yet, has no heart

at all? It is no imputation upon him to say he has not, because young

men who have plunged deeply into the frivolities and conventionalities

of society, very seldom have. Their hearts never grow, my dear ma'am,

till after thirty. I don't believe, no, I do NOT believe, that I had any

heart myself when I was Ned's age.'

'Oh sir,' said Mrs Varden, 'I think you must have had. It's impossible

that you, who have so much now, can ever have been without any.'

'I hope,' he answered, shrugging his shoulders meekly, 'I have a little;

I hope, a very little--Heaven knows! But to return to Ned; I have no

doubt you thought, and therefore interfered benevolently in his behalf,

that I objected to Miss Haredale. How very natural! My dear madam, I

object to him--to him--emphatically to Ned himself.'

Mrs Varden was perfectly aghast at the disclosure.

'He has, if he honourably fulfils this solemn obligation of which I have

told you--and he must be honourable, dear Mrs Varden, or he is no son

of mine--a fortune within his reach. He is of most expensive, ruinously

expensive habits; and if, in a moment of caprice and wilfulness, he

were to marry this young lady, and so deprive himself of the means

of gratifying the tastes to which he has been so long accustomed, he

would--my dear madam, he would break the gentle creature's heart. Mrs

Varden, my good lady, my dear soul, I put it to you--is such a sacrifice

to be endured? Is the female heart a thing to be trifled with in this

way? Ask your own, my dear madam. Ask your own, I beseech you.'

'Truly,' thought Mrs Varden, 'this gentleman is a saint. But,' she added

aloud, and not unnaturally, 'if you take Miss Emma's lover away, sir,

what becomes of the poor thing's heart then?'

'The very point,' said Mr Chester, not at all abashed, 'to which I

wished to lead you. A marriage with my son, whom I should be compelled

to disown, would be followed by years of misery; they would be

separated, my dear madam, in a twelvemonth. To break off this

attachment, which is more fancied than real, as you and I know very

well, will cost the dear girl but a few tears, and she is happy again.

Take the case of your own daughter, the young lady downstairs, who is

your breathing image'--Mrs Varden coughed and simpered--'there is a

young man (I am sorry to say, a dissolute fellow, of very

indifferent character) of whom I have heard Ned speak--Bullet was

it--Pullet--Mullet--'

'There is a young man of the name of Joseph Willet, sir,' said Mrs

Varden, folding her hands loftily.

'That's he,' cried Mr Chester. 'Suppose this Joseph Willet now, were to

aspire to the affections of your charming daughter, and were to engage

them.'

'It would be like his impudence,' interposed Mrs Varden, bridling, 'to

dare to think of such a thing!'

'My dear madam, that's the whole case. I know it would be like his

impudence. It is like Ned's impudence to do as he has done; but you

would not on that account, or because of a few tears from your beautiful

daughter, refrain from checking their inclinations in their birth. I

meant to have reasoned thus with your husband when I saw him at Mrs

Rudge's this evening--'

'My husband,' said Mrs Varden, interposing with emotion, 'would be a

great deal better at home than going to Mrs Rudge's so often. I don't

know what he does there. I don't see what occasion he has to busy

himself in her affairs at all, sir.'

'If I don't appear to express my concurrence in those last sentiments of

yours,' returned Mr Chester, 'quite so strongly as you might desire,

it is because his being there, my dear madam, and not proving

conversational, led me hither, and procured me the happiness of

this interview with one, in whom the whole management, conduct, and

prosperity of her family are centred, I perceive.'

With that he took Mrs Varden's hand again, and having pressed it to his

lips with the highflown gallantry of the day--a little burlesqued

to render it the more striking in the good lady's unaccustomed

eyes--proceeded in the same strain of mingled sophistry, cajolery,

and flattery, to entreat that her utmost influence might be exerted to

restrain her husband and daughter from any further promotion of Edward's

suit to Miss Haredale, and from aiding or abetting either party in any

way. Mrs Varden was but a woman, and had her share of vanity, obstinacy,

and love of power. She entered into a secret treaty of alliance,

offensive and defensive, with her insinuating visitor; and really did

believe, as many others would have done who saw and heard him, that in

so doing she furthered the ends of truth, justice, and morality, in a

very uncommon degree.

Overjoyed by the success of his negotiation, and mightily amused within

himself, Mr Chester conducted her downstairs in the same state as

before; and having repeated the previous ceremony of salutation, which

also as before comprehended Dolly, took his leave; first completing the

conquest of Miss Miggs's heart, by inquiring if 'this young lady' would

light him to the door.

'Oh, mim,' said Miggs, returning with the candle. 'Oh gracious me, mim,

there's a gentleman! Was there ever such an angel to talk as he is--and

such a sweet-looking man! So upright and noble, that he seems to despise

the very ground he walks on; and yet so mild and condescending, that

he seems to say "but I will take notice on it too." And to think of

his taking you for Miss Dolly, and Miss Dolly for your sister--Oh, my

goodness me, if I was master wouldn't I be jealous of him!'

Mrs Varden reproved her handmaid for this vain-speaking; but very gently

and mildly--quite smilingly indeed--remarking that she was a foolish,

giddy, light-headed girl, whose spirits carried her beyond all bounds,

and who didn't mean half she said, or she would be quite angry with her.

'For my part,' said Dolly, in a thoughtful manner, 'I half believe Mr

Chester is something like Miggs in that respect. For all his politeness

and pleasant speaking, I am pretty sure he was making game of us, more

than once.'

'If you venture to say such a thing again, and to speak ill of people

behind their backs in my presence, miss,' said Mrs Varden, 'I shall

insist upon your taking a candle and going to bed directly. How dare

you, Dolly? I'm astonished at you. The rudeness of your whole behaviour

this evening has been disgraceful. Did anybody ever hear,' cried the

enraged matron, bursting into tears, 'of a daughter telling her own

mother she has been made game of!'

What a very uncertain temper Mrs Varden's was!

Chapter 28

Repairing to a noted coffee-house in Covent Garden when he left the

locksmith's, Mr Chester sat long over a late dinner, entertaining

himself exceedingly with the whimsical recollection of his recent

proceedings, and congratulating himself very much on his great

cleverness. Influenced by these thoughts, his face wore an expression

so benign and tranquil, that the waiter in immediate attendance upon him

felt he could almost have died in his defence, and settled in his own

mind (until the receipt of the bill, and a very small fee for very great

trouble disabused it of the idea) that such an apostolic customer was

worth half-a-dozen of the ordinary run of visitors, at least.

A visit to the gaming-table--not as a heated, anxious venturer, but

one whom it was quite a treat to see staking his two or three pieces in

deference to the follies of society, and smiling with equal benevolence

on winners and losers--made it late before he reached home. It was his

custom to bid his servant go to bed at his own time unless he had orders

to the contrary, and to leave a candle on the common stair. There was a

lamp on the landing by which he could always light it when he came home

late, and having a key of the door about him he could enter and go to

bed at his pleasure.

He opened the glass of the dull lamp, whose wick, burnt up and swollen

like a drunkard's nose, came flying off in little carbuncles at the

candle's touch, and scattering hot sparks about, rendered it matter

of some difficulty to kindle the lazy taper; when a noise, as of a man

snoring deeply some steps higher up, caused him to pause and listen.

It was the heavy breathing of a sleeper, close at hand. Some fellow

had lain down on the open staircase, and was slumbering soundly.

Having lighted the candle at length and opened his own door, he softly

ascended, holding the taper high above his head, and peering cautiously

about; curious to see what kind of man had chosen so comfortless a

shelter for his lodging.

With his head upon the landing and his great limbs flung over

half-a-dozen stairs, as carelessly as though he were a dead man

whom drunken bearers had thrown down by chance, there lay Hugh, face

uppermost, his long hair drooping like some wild weed upon his wooden

pillow, and his huge chest heaving with the sounds which so unwontedly

disturbed the place and hour.

He who came upon him so unexpectedly was about to break his rest by

thrusting him with his foot, when, glancing at his upturned face, he

arrested himself in the very action, and stooping down and shading the

candle with his hand, examined his features closely. Close as his first

inspection was, it did not suffice, for he passed the light, still

carefully shaded as before, across and across his face, and yet observed

him with a searching eye.

While he was thus engaged, the sleeper, without any starting or turning

round, awoke. There was a kind of fascination in meeting his steady gaze

so suddenly, which took from the other the presence of mind to withdraw

his eyes, and forced him, as it were, to meet his look. So they remained

staring at each other, until Mr Chester at last broke silence, and asked

him in a low voice, why he lay sleeping there.

'I thought,' said Hugh, struggling into a sitting posture and gazing at

him intently, still, 'that you were a part of my dream. It was a curious

one. I hope it may never come true, master.'

'What makes you shiver?'

'The--the cold, I suppose,' he growled, as he shook himself and rose. 'I

hardly know where I am yet.'

'Do you know me?' said Mr Chester.

'Ay, I know you,' he answered. 'I was dreaming of you--we're not where I

thought we were. That's a comfort.'

He looked round him as he spoke, and in particular looked above his

head, as though he half expected to be standing under some object

which had had existence in his dream. Then he rubbed his eyes and shook

himself again, and followed his conductor into his own rooms.

Mr Chester lighted the candles which stood upon his dressing-table, and

wheeling an easy-chair towards the fire, which was yet burning, stirred

up a cheerful blaze, sat down before it, and bade his uncouth visitor

'Come here,' and draw his boots off.

'You have been drinking again, my fine fellow,' he said, as Hugh went

down on one knee, and did as he was told.

'As I'm alive, master, I've walked the twelve long miles, and waited

here I don't know how long, and had no drink between my lips since

dinner-time at noon.'

'And can you do nothing better, my pleasant friend, than fall asleep,

and shake the very building with your snores?' said Mr Chester. 'Can't

you dream in your straw at home, dull dog as you are, that you need come

here to do it?--Reach me those slippers, and tread softly.'

Hugh obeyed in silence.

'And harkee, my dear young gentleman,' said Mr Chester, as he put them

on, 'the next time you dream, don't let it be of me, but of some dog or

horse with whom you are better acquainted. Fill the glass once--you'll

find it and the bottle in the same place--and empty it to keep yourself

awake.'

Hugh obeyed again even more zealously--and having done so, presented

himself before his patron.

'Now,' said Mr Chester, 'what do you want with me?'

'There was news to-day,' returned Hugh. 'Your son was at our house--came

down on horseback. He tried to see the young woman, but couldn't get

sight of her. He left some letter or some message which our Joe had

charge of, but he and the old one quarrelled about it when your son had

gone, and the old one wouldn't let it be delivered. He says (that's the

old one does) that none of his people shall interfere and get him into

trouble. He's a landlord, he says, and lives on everybody's custom.'

'He's a jewel,' smiled Mr Chester, 'and the better for being a dull

one.--Well?'

'Varden's daughter--that's the girl I kissed--'

'--and stole the bracelet from upon the king's highway,' said Mr

Chester, composedly. 'Yes; what of her?'

'She wrote a note at our house to the young woman, saying she lost the

letter I brought to you, and you burnt. Our Joe was to carry it, but

the old one kept him at home all next day, on purpose that he shouldn't.

Next morning he gave it to me to take; and here it is.'

'You didn't deliver it then, my good friend?' said Mr Chester, twirling

Dolly's note between his finger and thumb, and feigning to be surprised.

'I supposed you'd want to have it,' retorted Hugh. 'Burn one, burn all,

I thought.'

'My devil-may-care acquaintance,' said Mr Chester--'really if you do not

draw some nicer distinctions, your career will be cut short with most

surprising suddenness. Don't you know that the letter you brought to

me, was directed to my son who resides in this very place? And can you

descry no difference between his letters and those addressed to other

people?'

'If you don't want it,' said Hugh, disconcerted by this reproof, for he

had expected high praise, 'give it me back, and I'll deliver it. I don't

know how to please you, master.'

'I shall deliver it,' returned his patron, putting it away after a

moment's consideration, 'myself. Does the young lady walk out, on fine

mornings?'

'Mostly--about noon is her usual time.'

'Alone?'

'Yes, alone.'

'Where?'

'In the grounds before the house.--Them that the footpath crosses.'

'If the weather should be fine, I may throw myself in her way to-morrow,

perhaps,' said Mr Chester, as coolly as if she were one of his ordinary

acquaintance. 'Mr Hugh, if I should ride up to the Maypole door, you

will do me the favour only to have seen me once. You must suppress your

gratitude, and endeavour to forget my forbearance in the matter of the

bracelet. It is natural it should break out, and it does you honour; but

when other folks are by, you must, for your own sake and safety, be as

like your usual self as though you owed me no obligation whatever, and

had never stood within these walls. You comprehend me?'

Hugh understood him perfectly. After a pause he muttered that he hoped

his patron would involve him in no trouble about this last letter;

for he had kept it back solely with the view of pleasing him. He was

continuing in this strain, when Mr Chester with a most beneficent and

patronising air cut him short by saying:

'My good fellow, you have my promise, my word, my sealed bond (for a

verbal pledge with me is quite as good), that I will always protect you

so long as you deserve it. Now, do set your mind at rest. Keep it at

ease, I beg of you. When a man puts himself in my power so thoroughly as

you have done, I really feel as though he had a kind of claim upon me. I

am more disposed to mercy and forbearance under such circumstances

than I can tell you, Hugh. Do look upon me as your protector, and rest

assured, I entreat you, that on the subject of that indiscretion, you

may preserve, as long as you and I are friends, the lightest heart that

ever beat within a human breast. Fill that glass once more to cheer you

on your road homewards--I am really quite ashamed to think how far you

have to go--and then God bless you for the night.'

'They think,' said Hugh, when he had tossed the liquor down, 'that I am

sleeping soundly in the stable. Ha ha ha! The stable door is shut, but

the steed's gone, master.'

'You are a most convivial fellow,' returned his friend, 'and I love your

humour of all things. Good night! Take the greatest possible care of

yourself, for my sake!'

It was remarkable that during the whole interview, each had endeavoured

to catch stolen glances of the other's face, and had never looked full

at it. They interchanged one brief and hasty glance as Hugh went out,

averted their eyes directly, and so separated. Hugh closed the double

doors behind him, carefully and without noise; and Mr Chester remained

in his easy-chair, with his gaze intently fixed upon the fire.

'Well!' he said, after meditating for a long time--and said with a deep

sigh and an uneasy shifting of his attitude, as though he dismissed some

other subject from his thoughts, and returned to that which had held

possession of them all the day--the plot thickens; I have thrown the

shell; it will explode, I think, in eight-and-forty hours, and should

scatter these good folks amazingly. We shall see!'

He went to bed and fell asleep, but had not slept long when he started

up and thought that Hugh was at the outer door, calling in a strange

voice, very different from his own, to be admitted. The delusion was so

strong upon him, and was so full of that vague terror of the night

in which such visions have their being, that he rose, and taking his

sheathed sword in his hand, opened the door, and looked out upon the

staircase, and towards the spot where Hugh had lain asleep; and even

spoke to him by name. But all was dark and quiet, and creeping back

to bed again, he fell, after an hour's uneasy watching, into a second

sleep, and woke no more till morning.

Chapter 29

The thoughts of worldly men are for ever regulated by a moral law of

gravitation, which, like the physical one, holds them down to earth. The

bright glory of day, and the silent wonders of a starlit night, appeal

to their minds in vain. There are no signs in the sun, or in the moon,

or in the stars, for their reading. They are like some wise men, who,

learning to know each planet by its Latin name, have quite forgotten

such small heavenly constellations as Charity, Forbearance, Universal

Love, and Mercy, although they shine by night and day so brightly that

the blind may see them; and who, looking upward at the spangled sky,

see nothing there but the reflection of their own great wisdom and

book-learning.

It is curious to imagine these people of the world, busy in thought,

turning their eyes towards the countless spheres that shine above us,

and making them reflect the only images their minds contain. The man who

lives but in the breath of princes, has nothing his sight but stars for

courtiers' breasts. The envious man beholds his neighbours' honours

even in the sky; to the money-hoarder, and the mass of worldly folk, the

whole great universe above glitters with sterling coin--fresh from the

mint--stamped with the sovereign's head--coming always between them and

heaven, turn where they may. So do the shadows of our own desires stand

between us and our better angels, and thus their brightness is eclipsed.

Everything was fresh and gay, as though the world were but that morning

made, when Mr Chester rode at a tranquil pace along the Forest road.

Though early in the season, it was warm and genial weather; the trees

were budding into leaf, the hedges and the grass were green, the air was

musical with songs of birds, and high above them all the lark poured

out her richest melody. In shady spots, the morning dew sparkled on

each young leaf and blade of grass; and where the sun was shining, some

diamond drops yet glistened brightly, as in unwillingness to leave so

fair a world, and have such brief existence. Even the light wind, whose

rustling was as gentle to the ear as softly-falling water, had its hope

and promise; and, leaving a pleasant fragrance in its track as it went

fluttering by, whispered of its intercourse with Summer, and of his

happy coming.

The solitary rider went glancing on among the trees, from sunlight

into shade and back again, at the same even pace--looking about him,

certainly, from time to time, but with no greater thought of the day

or the scene through which he moved, than that he was fortunate (being

choicely dressed) to have such favourable weather. He smiled very

complacently at such times, but rather as if he were satisfied with

himself than with anything else: and so went riding on, upon his

chestnut cob, as pleasant to look upon as his own horse, and probably

far less sensitive to the many cheerful influences by which he was

surrounded.

In the course of time, the Maypole's massive chimneys rose upon his

view: but he quickened not his pace one jot, and with the same cool

gravity rode up to the tavern porch. John Willet, who was toasting

his red face before a great fire in the bar, and who, with surpassing

foresight and quickness of apprehension, had been thinking, as he looked

at the blue sky, that if that state of things lasted much longer, it

might ultimately become necessary to leave off fires and throw the

windows open, issued forth to hold his stirrup; calling lustily for

Hugh.

'Oh, you're here, are you, sir?' said John, rather surprised by the

quickness with which he appeared. 'Take this here valuable animal into

the stable, and have more than particular care of him if you want to

keep your place. A mortal lazy fellow, sir; he needs a deal of looking

after.'

'But you have a son,' returned Mr Chester, giving his bridle to Hugh as

he dismounted, and acknowledging his salute by a careless motion of his

hand towards his hat. 'Why don't you make HIM useful?'

'Why, the truth is, sir,' replied John with great importance, 'that my

son--what, you're a-listening are you, villain?'

'Who's listening?' returned Hugh angrily. 'A treat, indeed, to hear YOU

speak! Would you have me take him in till he's cool?'

'Walk him up and down further off then, sir,' cried old John, 'and when

you see me and a noble gentleman entertaining ourselves with talk, keep

your distance. If you don't know your distance, sir,' added Mr Willet,

after an enormously long pause, during which he fixed his great dull

eyes on Hugh, and waited with exemplary patience for any little property

in the way of ideas that might come to him, 'we'll find a way to teach

you, pretty soon.'

Hugh shrugged his shoulders scornfully, and in his reckless swaggering

way, crossed to the other side of the little green, and there, with

the bridle slung loosely over his shoulder, led the horse to and fro,

glancing at his master every now and then from under his bushy eyebrows,

with as sinister an aspect as one would desire to see.

Mr Chester, who, without appearing to do so, had eyed him attentively

during this brief dispute, stepped into the porch, and turning abruptly

to Mr Willet, said,

'You keep strange servants, John.'

'Strange enough to look at, sir, certainly,' answered the host; 'but out

of doors; for horses, dogs, and the likes of that; there an't a better

man in England than is that Maypole Hugh yonder. He an't fit for

indoors,' added Mr Willet, with the confidential air of a man who felt

his own superior nature. 'I do that; but if that chap had only a little

imagination, sir--'

'He's an active fellow now, I dare swear,' said Mr Chester, in a musing

tone, which seemed to suggest that he would have said the same had there

been nobody to hear him.

'Active, sir!' retorted John, with quite an expression in his face;

'that chap! Hallo there! You, sir! Bring that horse here, and go and

hang my wig on the weathercock, to show this gentleman whether you're

one of the lively sort or not.'

Hugh made no answer, but throwing the bridle to his master, and

snatching his wig from his head, in a manner so unceremonious and hasty

that the action discomposed Mr Willet not a little, though performed at

his own special desire, climbed nimbly to the very summit of the maypole

before the house, and hanging the wig upon the weathercock, sent it

twirling round like a roasting jack. Having achieved this performance,

he cast it on the ground, and sliding down the pole with inconceivable

rapidity, alighted on his feet almost as soon as it had touched the

earth.

'There, sir,' said John, relapsing into his usual stolid state, 'you

won't see that at many houses, besides the Maypole, where there's good

accommodation for man and beast--nor that neither, though that with him

is nothing.'

This last remark bore reference to his vaulting on horseback, as upon Mr

Chester's first visit, and quickly disappearing by the stable gate.

'That with him is nothing,' repeated Mr Willet, brushing his wig with

his wrist, and inwardly resolving to distribute a small charge for dust

and damage to that article of dress, through the various items of his

guest's bill; 'he'll get out of a'most any winder in the house. There

never was such a chap for flinging himself about and never hurting his

bones. It's my opinion, sir, that it's pretty nearly allowing to his

not having any imagination; and that if imagination could be (which it

can't) knocked into him, he'd never be able to do it any more. But we

was a-talking, sir, about my son.'

'True, Willet, true,' said his visitor, turning again towards the

landlord with his accustomed serenity of face. 'My good friend, what

about him?'

It has been reported that Mr Willet, previously to making answer,

winked. But as he was never known to be guilty of such lightness of

conduct either before or afterwards, this may be looked upon as

a malicious invention of his enemies--founded, perhaps, upon the

undisputed circumstance of his taking his guest by the third breast

button of his coat, counting downwards from the chin, and pouring his

reply into his ear:

'Sir,' whispered John, with dignity, 'I know my duty. We want no

love-making here, sir, unbeknown to parents. I respect a certain young

gentleman, taking him in the light of a young gentleman; I respect a

certain young lady, taking her in the light of a young lady; but of the

two as a couple, I have no knowledge, sir, none whatever. My son, sir,

is upon his patrole.'

'I thought I saw him looking through the corner window but this moment,'

said Mr Chester, who naturally thought that being on patrole, implied

walking about somewhere.

'No doubt you did, sir,' returned John. 'He is upon his patrole of

honour, sir, not to leave the premises. Me and some friends of mine that

use the Maypole of an evening, sir, considered what was best to be done

with him, to prevent his doing anything unpleasant in opposing your

desires; and we've put him on his patrole. And what's more, sir, he

won't be off his patrole for a pretty long time to come, I can tell you

that.'

When he had communicated this bright idea, which had its origin in the

perusal by the village cronies of a newspaper, containing, among other

matters, an account of how some officer pending the sentence of some

court-martial had been enlarged on parole, Mr Willet drew back from his

guest's ear, and without any visible alteration of feature, chuckled

thrice audibly. This nearest approach to a laugh in which he ever

indulged (and that but seldom and only on extreme occasions), never even

curled his lip or effected the smallest change in--no, not so much as a

slight wagging of--his great, fat, double chin, which at these times, as

at all others, remained a perfect desert in the broad map of his face;

one changeless, dull, tremendous blank.

Lest it should be matter of surprise to any, that Mr Willet adopted this

bold course in opposition to one whom he had often entertained, and who

had always paid his way at the Maypole gallantly, it may be remarked

that it was his very penetration and sagacity in this respect, which

occasioned him to indulge in those unusual demonstrations of jocularity,

just now recorded. For Mr Willet, after carefully balancing father and

son in his mental scales, had arrived at the distinct conclusion that

the old gentleman was a better sort of a customer than the young one.

Throwing his landlord into the same scale, which was already turned by

this consideration, and heaping upon him, again, his strong desires

to run counter to the unfortunate Joe, and his opposition as a general

principle to all matters of love and matrimony, it went down to the very

ground straightway, and sent the light cause of the younger gentleman

flying upwards to the ceiling. Mr Chester was not the kind of man to be

by any means dim-sighted to Mr Willet's motives, but he thanked him as

graciously as if he had been one of the most disinterested martyrs that

ever shone on earth; and leaving him, with many complimentary reliances

on his great taste and judgment, to prepare whatever dinner he might

deem most fitting the occasion, bent his steps towards the Warren.

Dressed with more than his usual elegance; assuming a gracefulness of

manner, which, though it was the result of long study, sat easily upon

him and became him well; composing his features into their most serene

and prepossessing expression; and setting in short that guard upon

himself, at every point, which denoted that he attached no slight

importance to the impression he was about to make; he entered the bounds

of Miss Haredale's usual walk. He had not gone far, or looked about him

long, when he descried coming towards him, a female figure. A glimpse

of the form and dress as she crossed a little wooden bridge which lay

between them, satisfied him that he had found her whom he desired to

see. He threw himself in her way, and a very few paces brought them

close together.

He raised his hat from his head, and yielding the path, suffered her to

pass him. Then, as if the idea had but that moment occurred to him, he

turned hastily back and said in an agitated voice:

'I beg pardon--do I address Miss Haredale?'

She stopped in some confusion at being so unexpectedly accosted by a

stranger; and answered 'Yes.'

'Something told me,' he said, LOOKING a compliment to her beauty, 'that

it could be no other. Miss Haredale, I bear a name which is not unknown

to you--which it is a pride, and yet a pain to me to know, sounds

pleasantly in your ears. I am a man advanced in life, as you see. I am

the father of him whom you honour and distinguish above all other

men. May I for weighty reasons which fill me with distress, beg but a

minute's conversation with you here?'

Who that was inexperienced in deceit, and had a frank and youthful

heart, could doubt the speaker's truth--could doubt it too, when the

voice that spoke, was like the faint echo of one she knew so well, and

so much loved to hear? She inclined her head, and stopping, cast her

eyes upon the ground.

'A little more apart--among these trees. It is an old man's hand, Miss

Haredale; an honest one, believe me.'

She put hers in it as he said these words, and suffered him to lead her

to a neighbouring seat.

'You alarm me, sir,' she said in a low voice. 'You are not the bearer of

any ill news, I hope?'

'Of none that you anticipate,' he answered, sitting down beside her.

'Edward is well--quite well. It is of him I wish to speak, certainly;

but I have no misfortune to communicate.'

She bowed her head again, and made as though she would have begged him

to proceed; but said nothing.

'I am sensible that I speak to you at a disadvantage, dear Miss

Haredale. Believe me that I am not so forgetful of the feelings of my

younger days as not to know that you are little disposed to view me

with favour. You have heard me described as cold-hearted, calculating,

selfish--'

'I have never, sir,'--she interposed with an altered manner and a firmer

voice; 'I have never heard you spoken of in harsh or disrespectful

terms. You do a great wrong to Edward's nature if you believe him

capable of any mean or base proceeding.'

'Pardon me, my sweet young lady, but your uncle--'

'Nor is it my uncle's nature either,' she replied, with a heightened

colour in her cheek. 'It is not his nature to stab in the dark, nor is

it mine to love such deeds.'

She rose as she spoke, and would have left him; but he detained her with

a gentle hand, and besought her in such persuasive accents to hear him

but another minute, that she was easily prevailed upon to comply, and so

sat down again.

'And it is,' said Mr Chester, looking upward, and apostrophising the

air; 'it is this frank, ingenuous, noble nature, Ned, that you can wound

so lightly. Shame--shame upon you, boy!'

She turned towards him quickly, and with a scornful look and flashing

eyes. There were tears in Mr Chester's eyes, but he dashed them

hurriedly away, as though unwilling that his weakness should be known,

and regarded her with mingled admiration and compassion.

'I never until now,' he said, 'believed, that the frivolous actions of a

young man could move me like these of my own son. I never knew till now,

the worth of a woman's heart, which boys so lightly win, and lightly

fling away. Trust me, dear young lady, that I never until now did

know your worth; and though an abhorrence of deceit and falsehood has

impelled me to seek you out, and would have done so had you been the

poorest and least gifted of your sex, I should have lacked the fortitude

to sustain this interview could I have pictured you to my imagination as

you really are.'

Oh! If Mrs Varden could have seen the virtuous gentleman as he said

these words, with indignation sparkling from his eyes--if she could have

heard his broken, quavering voice--if she could have beheld him as he

stood bareheaded in the sunlight, and with unwonted energy poured forth

his eloquence!

With a haughty face, but pale and trembling too, Emma regarded him in

silence. She neither spoke nor moved, but gazed upon him as though she

would look into his heart.

'I throw off,' said Mr Chester, 'the restraint which natural affection

would impose on some men, and reject all bonds but those of truth and

duty. Miss Haredale, you are deceived; you are deceived by your unworthy

lover, and my unworthy son.'

Still she looked at him steadily, and still said not one word.

'I have ever opposed his professions of love for you; you will do me

the justice, dear Miss Haredale, to remember that. Your uncle and myself

were enemies in early life, and if I had sought retaliation, I might

have found it here. But as we grow older, we grow wiser--bitter, I would

fain hope--and from the first, I have opposed him in this attempt. I

foresaw the end, and would have spared you, if I could.'

'Speak plainly, sir,' she faltered. 'You deceive me, or are deceived

yourself. I do not believe you--I cannot--I should not.'

'First,' said Mr Chester, soothingly, 'for there may be in your mind

some latent angry feeling to which I would not appeal, pray take this

letter. It reached my hands by chance, and by mistake, and should have

accounted to you (as I am told) for my son's not answering some other

note of yours. God forbid, Miss Haredale,' said the good gentleman, with

great emotion, 'that there should be in your gentle breast one causeless

ground of quarrel with him. You should know, and you will see, that he

was in no fault here.'

There appeared something so very candid, so scrupulously honourable,

so very truthful and just in this course something which rendered the

upright person who resorted to it, so worthy of belief--that Emma's

heart, for the first time, sunk within her. She turned away and burst

into tears.

'I would,' said Mr Chester, leaning over her, and speaking in mild and

quite venerable accents; 'I would, dear girl, it were my task to banish,

not increase, those tokens of your grief. My son, my erring son,--I will

not call him deliberately criminal in this, for men so young, who have

been inconstant twice or thrice before, act without reflection, almost

without a knowledge of the wrong they do,--will break his plighted faith

to you; has broken it even now. Shall I stop here, and having given you

this warning, leave it to be fulfilled; or shall I go on?'

'You will go on, sir,' she answered, 'and speak more plainly yet, in

justice both to him and me.'

'My dear girl,' said Mr Chester, bending over her more affectionately

still; 'whom I would call my daughter, but the Fates forbid, Edward

seeks to break with you upon a false and most unwarrantable pretence. I

have it on his own showing; in his own hand. Forgive me, if I have had

a watch upon his conduct; I am his father; I had a regard for your peace

and his honour, and no better resource was left me. There lies on his

desk at this present moment, ready for transmission to you, a letter,

in which he tells you that our poverty--our poverty; his and mine, Miss

Haredale--forbids him to pursue his claim upon your hand; in which he

offers, voluntarily proposes, to free you from your pledge; and talks

magnanimously (men do so, very commonly, in such cases) of being in

time more worthy of your regard--and so forth. A letter, to be plain, in

which he not only jilts you--pardon the word; I would summon to your

aid your pride and dignity--not only jilts you, I fear, in favour of the

object whose slighting treatment first inspired his brief passion for

yourself and gave it birth in wounded vanity, but affects to make a

merit and a virtue of the act.'

She glanced proudly at him once more, as by an involuntary impulse, and

with a swelling breast rejoined, 'If what you say be true, he takes much

needless trouble, sir, to compass his design. He's very tender of my

peace of mind. I quite thank him.'

'The truth of what I tell you, dear young lady,' he replied, 'you will

test by the receipt or non-receipt of the letter of which I speak.

Haredale, my dear fellow, I am delighted to see you, although we meet

under singular circumstances, and upon a melancholy occasion. I hope you

are very well.'

At these words the young lady raised her eyes, which were filled with

tears; and seeing that her uncle indeed stood before them, and being

quite unequal to the trial of hearing or of speaking one word more,

hurriedly withdrew, and left them. They stood looking at each other, and

at her retreating figure, and for a long time neither of them spoke.

'What does this mean? Explain it,' said Mr Haredale at length. 'Why are

you here, and why with her?'

'My dear friend,' rejoined the other, resuming his accustomed manner

with infinite readiness, and throwing himself upon the bench with a

weary air, 'you told me not very long ago, at that delightful old

tavern of which you are the esteemed proprietor (and a most charming

establishment it is for persons of rural pursuits and in robust health,

who are not liable to take cold), that I had the head and heart of an

evil spirit in all matters of deception. I thought at the time; I

really did think; you flattered me. But now I begin to wonder at your

discernment, and vanity apart, do honestly believe you spoke the truth.

Did you ever counterfeit extreme ingenuousness and honest indignation?

My dear fellow, you have no conception, if you never did, how faint the

effort makes one.'

Mr Haredale surveyed him with a look of cold contempt. 'You may evade an

explanation, I know,' he said, folding his arms. 'But I must have it. I

can wait.'

'Not at all. Not at all, my good fellow. You shall not wait a moment,'

returned his friend, as he lazily crossed his legs. 'The simplest thing

in the world. It lies in a nutshell. Ned has written her a letter--a

boyish, honest, sentimental composition, which remains as yet in

his desk, because he hasn't had the heart to send it. I have taken a

liberty, for which my parental affection and anxiety are a sufficient

excuse, and possessed myself of the contents. I have described them

to your niece (a most enchanting person, Haredale; quite an angelic

creature), with a little colouring and description adapted to our

purpose. It's done. You may be quite easy. It's all over. Deprived of

their adherents and mediators; her pride and jealousy roused to the

utmost; with nobody to undeceive her, and you to confirm me; you will

find that their intercourse will close with her answer. If she receives

Ned's letter by to-morrow noon, you may date their parting from

to-morrow night. No thanks, I beg; you owe me none. I have acted for

myself; and if I have forwarded our compact with all the ardour even you

could have desired, I have done so selfishly, indeed.'

'I curse the compact, as you call it, with my whole heart and soul,'

returned the other. 'It was made in an evil hour. I have bound myself

to a lie; I have leagued myself with you; and though I did so with a

righteous motive, and though it cost me such an effort as haply few men

know, I hate and despise myself for the deed.'

'You are very warm,' said Mr Chester with a languid smile.

'I AM warm. I am maddened by your coldness. 'Death, Chester, if your

blood ran warmer in your veins, and there were no restraints upon me,

such as those that hold and drag me back--well; it is done; you tell me

so, and on such a point I may believe you. When I am most remorseful

for this treachery, I will think of you and your marriage, and try to

justify myself in such remembrances, for having torn asunder Emma and

your son, at any cost. Our bond is cancelled now, and we may part.'

Mr Chester kissed his hand gracefully; and with the same tranquil face

he had preserved throughout--even when he had seen his companion

so tortured and transported by his passion that his whole frame was

shaken--lay in his lounging posture on the seat and watched him as he

walked away.

'My scapegoat and my drudge at school,' he said, raising his head

to look after him; 'my friend of later days, who could not keep his

mistress when he had won her, and threw me in her way to carry off the

prize; I triumph in the present and the past. Bark on, ill-favoured,

ill-conditioned cur; fortune has ever been with me--I like to hear you.'

The spot where they had met, was in an avenue of trees. Mr Haredale not

passing out on either hand, had walked straight on. He chanced to turn

his head when at some considerable distance, and seeing that his late

companion had by that time risen and was looking after him, stood still

as though he half expected him to follow and waited for his coming up.

'It MAY come to that one day, but not yet,' said Mr Chester, waving his

hand, as though they were the best of friends, and turning away. 'Not

yet, Haredale. Life is pleasant enough to me; dull and full of heaviness

to you. No. To cross swords with such a man--to indulge his humour

unless upon extremity--would be weak indeed.'

For all that, he drew his sword as he walked along, and in an

absent humour ran his eye from hilt to point full twenty times. But

thoughtfulness begets wrinkles; remembering this, he soon put it up,

smoothed his contracted brow, hummed a gay tune with greater gaiety of

manner, and was his unruffled self again.

Chapter 30

A homely proverb recognises the existence of a troublesome class of

persons who, having an inch conceded them, will take an ell. Not to

quote the illustrious examples of those heroic scourges of mankind,

whose amiable path in life has been from birth to death through blood,

and fire, and ruin, and who would seem to have existed for no better

purpose than to teach mankind that as the absence of pain is pleasure,

so the earth, purged of their presence, may be deemed a blessed

place--not to quote such mighty instances, it will be sufficient to

refer to old John Willet.

Old John having long encroached a good standard inch, full measure, on

the liberty of Joe, and having snipped off a Flemish ell in the matter

of the parole, grew so despotic and so great, that his thirst for

conquest knew no bounds. The more young Joe submitted, the more absolute

old John became. The ell soon faded into nothing. Yards, furlongs, miles

arose; and on went old John in the pleasantest manner possible, trimming

off an exuberance in this place, shearing away some liberty of speech

or action in that, and conducting himself in his small way with as much

high mightiness and majesty, as the most glorious tyrant that ever had

his statue reared in the public ways, of ancient or of modern times.

As great men are urged on to the abuse of power (when they need urging,

which is not often), by their flatterers and dependents, so old John was

impelled to these exercises of authority by the applause and admiration

of his Maypole cronies, who, in the intervals of their nightly pipes and

pots, would shake their heads and say that Mr Willet was a father of the

good old English sort; that there were no new-fangled notions or modern

ways in him; that he put them in mind of what their fathers were when

they were boys; that there was no mistake about him; that it would be

well for the country if there were more like him, and more was the pity

that there were not; with many other original remarks of that nature.

Then they would condescendingly give Joe to understand that it was

all for his good, and he would be thankful for it one day; and in

particular, Mr Cobb would acquaint him, that when he was his age, his

father thought no more of giving him a parental kick, or a box on the

ears, or a cuff on the head, or some little admonition of that sort,

than he did of any other ordinary duty of life; and he would further

remark, with looks of great significance, that but for this judicious

bringing up, he might have never been the man he was at that present

speaking; which was probable enough, as he was, beyond all question,

the dullest dog of the party. In short, between old John and old

John's friends, there never was an unfortunate young fellow so bullied,

badgered, worried, fretted, and brow-beaten; so constantly beset, or

made so tired of his life, as poor Joe Willet.

This had come to be the recognised and established state of things; but

as John was very anxious to flourish his supremacy before the eyes of Mr

Chester, he did that day exceed himself, and did so goad and chafe his

son and heir, that but for Joe's having made a solemn vow to keep

his hands in his pockets when they were not otherwise engaged, it is

impossible to say what he might have done with them. But the longest day

has an end, and at length Mr Chester came downstairs to mount his horse,

which was ready at the door.

As old John was not in the way at the moment, Joe, who was sitting in

the bar ruminating on his dismal fate and the manifold perfections of

Dolly Varden, ran out to hold the guest's stirrup and assist him to

mount. Mr Chester was scarcely in the saddle, and Joe was in the very

act of making him a graceful bow, when old John came diving out of the

porch, and collared him.

'None of that, sir,' said John, 'none of that, sir. No breaking of

patroles. How dare you come out of the door, sir, without leave? You're

trying to get away, sir, are you, and to make a traitor of yourself

again? What do you mean, sir?'

'Let me go, father,' said Joe, imploringly, as he marked the smile upon

their visitor's face, and observed the pleasure his disgrace afforded

him. 'This is too bad. Who wants to get away?'

'Who wants to get away!' cried John, shaking him. 'Why you do, sir,

you do. You're the boy, sir,' added John, collaring with one band, and

aiding the effect of a farewell bow to the visitor with the other,

'that wants to sneak into houses, and stir up differences between noble

gentlemen and their sons, are you, eh? Hold your tongue, sir.'

Joe made no effort to reply. It was the crowning circumstance of his

degradation. He extricated himself from his father's grasp, darted an

angry look at the departing guest, and returned into the house.

'But for her,' thought Joe, as he threw his arms upon a table in the

common room, and laid his head upon them, 'but for Dolly, who I couldn't

bear should think me the rascal they would make me out to be if I ran

away, this house and I should part to-night.'

It being evening by this time, Solomon Daisy, Tom Cobb, and Long Parkes,

were all in the common room too, and had from the window been witnesses

of what had just occurred. Mr Willet joining them soon afterwards,

received the compliments of the company with great composure, and

lighting his pipe, sat down among them.

'We'll see, gentlemen,' said John, after a long pause, 'who's the master

of this house, and who isn't. We'll see whether boys are to govern men,

or men are to govern boys.'

'And quite right too,' assented Solomon Daisy with some approving nods;

'quite right, Johnny. Very good, Johnny. Well said, Mr Willet. Brayvo,

sir.'

John slowly brought his eyes to bear upon him, looked at him for a long

time, and finally made answer, to the unspeakable consternation of his

hearers, 'When I want encouragement from you, sir, I'll ask you for

it. You let me alone, sir. I can get on without you, I hope. Don't you

tackle me, sir, if you please.'

'Don't take it ill, Johnny; I didn't mean any harm,' pleaded the little

man.

'Very good, sir,' said John, more than usually obstinate after his late

success. 'Never mind, sir. I can stand pretty firm of myself, sir, I

believe, without being shored up by you.' And having given utterance to

this retort, Mr Willet fixed his eyes upon the boiler, and fell into a

kind of tobacco-trance.

The spirits of the company being somewhat damped by this embarrassing

line of conduct on the part of their host, nothing more was said for a

long time; but at length Mr Cobb took upon himself to remark, as he rose

to knock the ashes out of his pipe, that he hoped Joe would thenceforth

learn to obey his father in all things; that he had found, that day, he

was not one of the sort of men who were to be trifled with; and that

he would recommend him, poetically speaking, to mind his eye for the

future.

'I'd recommend you, in return,' said Joe, looking up with a flushed

face, 'not to talk to me.'

'Hold your tongue, sir,' cried Mr Willet, suddenly rousing himself, and

turning round.

'I won't, father,' cried Joe, smiting the table with his fist, so that

the jugs and glasses rung again; 'these things are hard enough to bear

from you; from anybody else I never will endure them any more. Therefore

I say, Mr Cobb, don't talk to me.'

'Why, who are you,' said Mr Cobb, sneeringly, 'that you're not to be

talked to, eh, Joe?'

To which Joe returned no answer, but with a very ominous shake of the

head, resumed his old position, which he would have peacefully preserved

until the house shut up at night, but that Mr Cobb, stimulated by the

wonder of the company at the young man's presumption, retorted with

sundry taunts, which proved too much for flesh and blood to bear.

Crowding into one moment the vexation and the wrath of years, Joe

started up, overturned the table, fell upon his long enemy, pummelled

him with all his might and main, and finished by driving him with

surprising swiftness against a heap of spittoons in one corner; plunging

into which, head foremost, with a tremendous crash, he lay at full

length among the ruins, stunned and motionless. Then, without waiting to

receive the compliments of the bystanders on the victory he had won, he

retreated to his own bedchamber, and considering himself in a state

of siege, piled all the portable furniture against the door by way of

barricade.

'I have done it now,' said Joe, as he sat down upon his bedstead and

wiped his heated face. 'I knew it would come at last. The Maypole and

I must part company. I'm a roving vagabond--she hates me for

evermore--it's all over!'

Chapter 31

Pondering on his unhappy lot, Joe sat and listened for a long time,

expecting every moment to hear their creaking footsteps on the stairs,

or to be greeted by his worthy father with a summons to capitulate

unconditionally, and deliver himself up straightway. But neither voice

nor footstep came; and though some distant echoes, as of closing doors

and people hurrying in and out of rooms, resounding from time to time

through the great passages, and penetrating to his remote seclusion,

gave note of unusual commotion downstairs, no nearer sound disturbed his

place of retreat, which seemed the quieter for these far-off noises, and

was as dull and full of gloom as any hermit's cell.

It came on darker and darker. The old-fashioned furniture of the

chamber, which was a kind of hospital for all the invalided movables in

the house, grew indistinct and shadowy in its many shapes; chairs and

tables, which by day were as honest cripples as need be, assumed a

doubtful and mysterious character; and one old leprous screen of faded

India leather and gold binding, which had kept out many a cold breath of

air in days of yore and shut in many a jolly face, frowned on him with

a spectral aspect, and stood at full height in its allotted corner, like

some gaunt ghost who waited to be questioned. A portrait opposite the

window--a queer, old grey-eyed general, in an oval frame--seemed to

wink and doze as the light decayed, and at length, when the last faint

glimmering speck of day went out, to shut its eyes in good earnest, and

fall sound asleep. There was such a hush and mystery about everything,

that Joe could not help following its example; and so went off into

a slumber likewise, and dreamed of Dolly, till the clock of Chigwell

church struck two.

Still nobody came. The distant noises in the house had ceased, and

out of doors all was quiet; save for the occasional barking of some

deep-mouthed dog, and the shaking of the branches by the night wind.

He gazed mournfully out of window at each well-known object as it lay

sleeping in the dim light of the moon; and creeping back to his former

seat, thought about the late uproar, until, with long thinking of, it

seemed to have occurred a month ago. Thus, between dozing, and thinking,

and walking to the window and looking out, the night wore away; the grim

old screen, and the kindred chairs and tables, began slowly to reveal

themselves in their accustomed forms; the grey-eyed general seemed to

wink and yawn and rouse himself; and at last he was broad awake again,

and very uncomfortable and cold and haggard he looked, in the dull grey

light of morning.

The sun had begun to peep above the forest trees, and already flung

across the curling mist bright bars of gold, when Joe dropped from his

window on the ground below, a little bundle and his trusty stick, and

prepared to descend himself.

It was not a very difficult task; for there were so many projections and

gable ends in the way, that they formed a series of clumsy steps, with

no greater obstacle than a jump of some few feet at last. Joe, with his

stick and bundle on his shoulder, quickly stood on the firm earth, and

looked up at the old Maypole, it might be for the last time.

He didn't apostrophise it, for he was no great scholar. He didn't curse

it, for he had little ill-will to give to anything on earth. He felt

more affectionate and kind to it than ever he had done in all his life

before, so said with all his heart, 'God bless you!' as a parting wish,

and turned away.

He walked along at a brisk pace, big with great thoughts of going for

a soldier and dying in some foreign country where it was very hot and

sandy, and leaving God knows what unheard-of wealth in prize-money to

Dolly, who would be very much affected when she came to know of it;

and full of such youthful visions, which were sometimes sanguine and

sometimes melancholy, but always had her for their main point and

centre, pushed on vigorously until the noise of London sounded in his

ears, and the Black Lion hove in sight.

It was only eight o'clock then, and very much astonished the Black Lion

was, to see him come walking in with dust upon his feet at that early

hour, with no grey mare to bear him company. But as he ordered breakfast

to be got ready with all speed, and on its being set before him gave

indisputable tokens of a hearty appetite, the Lion received him, as

usual, with a hospitable welcome; and treated him with those marks

of distinction, which, as a regular customer, and one within the

freemasonry of the trade, he had a right to claim.

This Lion or landlord,--for he was called both man and beast, by reason

of his having instructed the artist who painted his sign, to convey

into the features of the lordly brute whose effigy it bore, as near a

counterpart of his own face as his skill could compass and devise,--was

a gentleman almost as quick of apprehension, and of almost as subtle a

wit, as the mighty John himself. But the difference between them lay in

this: that whereas Mr Willet's extreme sagacity and acuteness were

the efforts of unassisted nature, the Lion stood indebted, in no small

amount, to beer; of which he swigged such copious draughts, that most of

his faculties were utterly drowned and washed away, except the one

great faculty of sleep, which he retained in surprising perfection.

The creaking Lion over the house-door was, therefore, to say the

truth, rather a drowsy, tame, and feeble lion; and as these social

representatives of a savage class are usually of a conventional

character (being depicted, for the most part, in impossible attitudes

and of unearthly colours), he was frequently supposed by the more

ignorant and uninformed among the neighbours, to be the veritable

portrait of the host as he appeared on the occasion of some great

funeral ceremony or public mourning.

'What noisy fellow is that in the next room?' said Joe, when he had

disposed of his breakfast, and had washed and brushed himself.

'A recruiting serjeant,' replied the Lion.

Joe started involuntarily. Here was the very thing he had been dreaming

of, all the way along.

'And I wish,' said the Lion, 'he was anywhere else but here. The party

make noise enough, but don't call for much. There's great cry there, Mr

Willet, but very little wool. Your father wouldn't like 'em, I know.'

Perhaps not much under any circumstances. Perhaps if he could have known

what was passing at that moment in Joe's mind, he would have liked them

still less.

'Is he recruiting for a--for a fine regiment?' said Joe, glancing at a

little round mirror that hung in the bar.

'I believe he is,' replied the host. 'It's much the same thing, whatever

regiment he's recruiting for. I'm told there an't a deal of difference

between a fine man and another one, when they're shot through and

through.'

'They're not all shot,' said Joe.

'No,' the Lion answered, 'not all. Those that are--supposing it's done

easy--are the best off in my opinion.'

'Ah!' retorted Joe, 'but you don't care for glory.'

'For what?' said the Lion.

'Glory.'

'No,' returned the Lion, with supreme indifference. 'I don't. You're

right in that, Mr Willet. When Glory comes here, and calls for anything

to drink and changes a guinea to pay for it, I'll give it him for

nothing. It's my belief, sir, that the Glory's arms wouldn't do a very

strong business.'

These remarks were not at all comforting. Joe walked out, stopped at

the door of the next room, and listened. The serjeant was describing

a military life. It was all drinking, he said, except that there were

frequent intervals of eating and love-making. A battle was the finest

thing in the world--when your side won it--and Englishmen always did

that. 'Supposing you should be killed, sir?' said a timid voice in one

corner. 'Well, sir, supposing you should be,' said the serjeant, 'what

then? Your country loves you, sir; his Majesty King George the Third

loves you; your memory is honoured, revered, respected; everybody's fond

of you, and grateful to you; your name's wrote down at full length in a

book in the War Office. Damme, gentlemen, we must all die some time, or

another, eh?'

The voice coughed, and said no more.

Joe walked into the room. A group of half-a-dozen fellows had gathered

together in the taproom, and were listening with greedy ears. One of

them, a carter in a smockfrock, seemed wavering and disposed to enlist.

The rest, who were by no means disposed, strongly urged him to do so

(according to the custom of mankind), backed the serjeant's arguments,

and grinned among themselves. 'I say nothing, boys,' said the serjeant,

who sat a little apart, drinking his liquor. 'For lads of spirit'--here

he cast an eye on Joe--'this is the time. I don't want to inveigle you.

The king's not come to that, I hope. Brisk young blood is what we

want; not milk and water. We won't take five men out of six. We want

top-sawyers, we do. I'm not a-going to tell tales out of school, but,

damme, if every gentleman's son that carries arms in our corps, through

being under a cloud and having little differences with his relations,

was counted up'--here his eye fell on Joe again, and so good-naturedly,

that Joe beckoned him out. He came directly.

'You're a gentleman, by G--!' was his first remark, as he slapped him

on the back. 'You're a gentleman in disguise. So am I. Let's swear a

friendship.'

Joe didn't exactly do that, but he shook hands with him, and thanked him

for his good opinion.

'You want to serve,' said his new friend. 'You shall. You were made for

it. You're one of us by nature. What'll you take to drink?'

'Nothing just now,' replied Joe, smiling faintly. 'I haven't quite made

up my mind.'

'A mettlesome fellow like you, and not made up his mind!' cried the

serjeant. 'Here--let me give the bell a pull, and you'll make up your

mind in half a minute, I know.'

'You're right so far'--answered Joe, 'for if you pull the bell here,

where I'm known, there'll be an end of my soldiering inclinations in no

time. Look in my face. You see me, do you?'

'I do,' replied the serjeant with an oath, 'and a finer young fellow or

one better qualified to serve his king and country, I never set my--' he

used an adjective in this place--'eyes on.

'Thank you,' said Joe, 'I didn't ask you for want of a compliment, but

thank you all the same. Do I look like a sneaking fellow or a liar?'

The serjeant rejoined with many choice asseverations that he didn't; and

that if his (the serjeant's) own father were to say he did, he would

run the old gentleman through the body cheerfully, and consider it a

meritorious action.

Joe expressed his obligations, and continued, 'You can trust me then,

and credit what I say. I believe I shall enlist in your regiment

to-night. The reason I don't do so now is, because I don't want until

to-night, to do what I can't recall. Where shall I find you, this

evening?'

His friend replied with some unwillingness, and after much ineffectual

entreaty having for its object the immediate settlement of the business,

that his quarters would be at the Crooked Billet in Tower Street; where

he would be found waking until midnight, and sleeping until breakfast

time to-morrow.

'And if I do come--which it's a million to one, I shall--when will you

take me out of London?' demanded Joe.

'To-morrow morning, at half after eight o'clock,' replied the serjeant.

'You'll go abroad--a country where it's all sunshine and plunder--the

finest climate in the world.'

'To go abroad,' said Joe, shaking hands with him, 'is the very thing I

want. You may expect me.'

'You're the kind of lad for us,' cried the serjeant, holding Joe's hand

in his, in the excess of his admiration. 'You're the boy to push your

fortune. I don't say it because I bear you any envy, or would take away

from the credit of the rise you'll make, but if I had been bred and

taught like you, I'd have been a colonel by this time.'

'Tush, man!' said Joe, 'I'm not so young as that. Needs must when the

devil drives; and the devil that drives me is an empty pocket and an

unhappy home. For the present, good-bye.'

'For king and country!' cried the serjeant, flourishing his cap.

'For bread and meat!' cried Joe, snapping his fingers. And so they

parted.

He had very little money in his pocket; so little indeed, that after

paying for his breakfast (which he was too honest and perhaps too proud

to score up to his father's charge) he had but a penny left. He had

courage, notwithstanding, to resist all the affectionate importunities

of the serjeant, who waylaid him at the door with many protestations of

eternal friendship, and did in particular request that he would do him

the favour to accept of only one shilling as a temporary accommodation.

Rejecting his offers both of cash and credit, Joe walked away with

stick and bundle as before, bent upon getting through the day as he best

could, and going down to the locksmith's in the dusk of the evening;

for it should go hard, he had resolved, but he would have a parting word

with charming Dolly Varden.

He went out by Islington and so on to Highgate, and sat on many stones

and gates, but there were no voices in the bells to bid him turn. Since

the time of noble Whittington, fair flower of merchants, bells have come

to have less sympathy with humankind. They only ring for money and on

state occasions. Wanderers have increased in number; ships leave the

Thames for distant regions, carrying from stem to stern no other cargo;

the bells are silent; they ring out no entreaties or regrets; they are

used to it and have grown worldly.

Joe bought a roll, and reduced his purse to the condition (with a

difference) of that celebrated purse of Fortunatus, which, whatever were

its favoured owner's necessities, had one unvarying amount in it. In

these real times, when all the Fairies are dead and buried, there are

still a great many purses which possess that quality. The sum-total they

contain is expressed in arithmetic by a circle, and whether it be added

to or multiplied by its own amount, the result of the problem is more

easily stated than any known in figures.

Evening drew on at last. With the desolate and solitary feeling of one

who had no home or shelter, and was alone utterly in the world for the

first time, he bent his steps towards the locksmith's house. He had

delayed till now, knowing that Mrs Varden sometimes went out alone,

or with Miggs for her sole attendant, to lectures in the evening; and

devoutly hoping that this might be one of her nights of moral culture.

He had walked up and down before the house, on the opposite side of the

way, two or three times, when as he returned to it again, he caught a

glimpse of a fluttering skirt at the door. It was Dolly's--to whom else

could it belong? no dress but hers had such a flow as that. He plucked

up his spirits, and followed it into the workshop of the Golden Key.

His darkening the door caused her to look round. Oh that face! 'If it

hadn't been for that,' thought Joe, 'I should never have walked into

poor Tom Cobb. She's twenty times handsomer than ever. She might marry a

Lord!'

He didn't say this. He only thought it--perhaps looked it also. Dolly

was glad to see him, and was SO sorry her father and mother were away

from home. Joe begged she wouldn't mention it on any account.

Dolly hesitated to lead the way into the parlour, for there it was

nearly dark; at the same time she hesitated to stand talking in the

workshop, which was yet light and open to the street. They had got by

some means, too, before the little forge; and Joe having her hand in his

(which he had no right to have, for Dolly only gave it him to shake), it

was so like standing before some homely altar being married, that it was

the most embarrassing state of things in the world.

'I have come,' said Joe, 'to say good-bye--to say good-bye for I don't

know how many years; perhaps for ever. I am going abroad.'

Now this was exactly what he should not have said. Here he was, talking

like a gentleman at large who was free to come and go and roam about the

world at pleasure, when that gallant coachmaker had vowed but the night

before that Miss Varden held him bound in adamantine chains; and had

positively stated in so many words that she was killing him by inches,

and that in a fortnight more or thereabouts he expected to make a decent

end and leave the business to his mother.

Dolly released her hand and said 'Indeed!' She remarked in the same

breath that it was a fine night, and in short, betrayed no more emotion

than the forge itself.

'I couldn't go,' said Joe, 'without coming to see you. I hadn't the

heart to.'

Dolly was more sorry than she could tell, that he should have taken so

much trouble. It was such a long way, and he must have such a deal to

do. And how WAS Mr Willet--that dear old gentleman--

'Is this all you say!' cried Joe.

All! Good gracious, what did the man expect! She was obliged to take her

apron in her hand and run her eyes along the hem from corner to corner,

to keep herself from laughing in his face;--not because his gaze

confused her--not at all.

Joe had small experience in love affairs, and had no notion how

different young ladies are at different times; he had expected to

take Dolly up again at the very point where he had left her after that

delicious evening ride, and was no more prepared for such an alteration

than to see the sun and moon change places. He had buoyed himself up all

day with an indistinct idea that she would certainly say 'Don't go,' or

'Don't leave us,' or 'Why do you go?' or 'Why do you leave us?' or would

give him some little encouragement of that sort; he had even entertained

the possibility of her bursting into tears, of her throwing herself into

his arms, of her falling down in a fainting fit without previous word

or sign; but any approach to such a line of conduct as this, had been so

far from his thoughts that he could only look at her in silent wonder.

Dolly in the meanwhile, turned to the corners of her apron, and measured

the sides, and smoothed out the wrinkles, and was as silent as he. At

last after a long pause, Joe said good-bye. 'Good-bye'--said Dolly--with

as pleasant a smile as if he were going into the next street, and were

coming back to supper; 'good-bye.'

'Come,' said Joe, putting out both hands, 'Dolly, dear Dolly, don't let

us part like this. I love you dearly, with all my heart and soul; with

as much truth and earnestness as ever man loved woman in this world, I

do believe. I am a poor fellow, as you know--poorer now than ever, for

I have fled from home, not being able to bear it any longer, and must

fight my own way without help. You are beautiful, admired, are loved by

everybody, are well off and happy; and may you ever be so! Heaven forbid

I should ever make you otherwise; but give me a word of comfort. Say

something kind to me. I have no right to expect it of you, I know, but

I ask it because I love you, and shall treasure the slightest word from

you all through my life. Dolly, dearest, have you nothing to say to me?'

No. Nothing. Dolly was a coquette by nature, and a spoilt child. She had

no notion of being carried by storm in this way. The coachmaker would

have been dissolved in tears, and would have knelt down, and called

himself names, and clasped his hands, and beat his breast, and tugged

wildly at his cravat, and done all kinds of poetry. Joe had no business

to be going abroad. He had no right to be able to do it. If he was in

adamantine chains, he couldn't.

'I have said good-bye,' said Dolly, 'twice. Take your arm away directly,

Mr Joseph, or I'll call Miggs.'

'I'll not reproach you,' answered Joe, 'it's my fault, no doubt. I have

thought sometimes that you didn't quite despise me, but I was a fool to

think so. Every one must, who has seen the life I have led--you most of

all. God bless you!'

He was gone, actually gone. Dolly waited a little while, thinking he

would return, peeped out at the door, looked up the street and down as

well as the increasing darkness would allow, came in again, waited a

little longer, went upstairs humming a tune, bolted herself in, laid

her head down on her bed, and cried as if her heart would break. And yet

such natures are made up of so many contradictions, that if Joe Willet

had come back that night, next day, next week, next month, the odds are

a hundred to one she would have treated him in the very same manner, and

have wept for it afterwards with the very same distress.

She had no sooner left the workshop than there cautiously peered out

from behind the chimney of the forge, a face which had already emerged

from the same concealment twice or thrice, unseen, and which, after

satisfying itself that it was now alone, was followed by a leg, a

shoulder, and so on by degrees, until the form of Mr Tappertit stood

confessed, with a brown-paper cap stuck negligently on one side of its

head, and its arms very much a-kimbo.

'Have my ears deceived me,' said the 'prentice, 'or do I dream! am I to

thank thee, Fortun', or to cus thee--which?'

He gravely descended from his elevation, took down his piece of

looking-glass, planted it against the wall upon the usual bench, twisted

his head round, and looked closely at his legs.

'If they're a dream,' said Sim, 'let sculptures have such wisions, and

chisel 'em out when they wake. This is reality. Sleep has no such limbs

as them. Tremble, Willet, and despair. She's mine! She's mine!'

With these triumphant expressions, he seized a hammer and dealt a heavy

blow at a vice, which in his mind's eye represented the sconce or head

of Joseph Willet. That done, he burst into a peal of laughter which

startled Miss Miggs even in her distant kitchen, and dipping his head

into a bowl of water, had recourse to a jack-towel inside the closet

door, which served the double purpose of smothering his feelings and

drying his face.

Joe, disconsolate and down-hearted, but full of courage too, on leaving

the locksmith's house made the best of his way to the Crooked Billet,

and there inquired for his friend the serjeant, who, expecting no man

less, received him with open arms. In the course of five minutes after

his arrival at that house of entertainment, he was enrolled among the

gallant defenders of his native land; and within half an hour, was

regaled with a steaming supper of boiled tripe and onions, prepared,

as his friend assured him more than once, at the express command of his

most Sacred Majesty the King. To this meal, which tasted very savoury

after his long fasting, he did ample justice; and when he had followed

it up, or down, with a variety of loyal and patriotic toasts, he was

conducted to a straw mattress in a loft over the stable, and locked in

there for the night.

The next morning, he found that the obliging care of his martial friend

had decorated his hat with sundry particoloured streamers, which made

a very lively appearance; and in company with that officer, and three

other military gentlemen newly enrolled, who were under a cloud so dense

that it only left three shoes, a boot, and a coat and a half visible

among them, repaired to the riverside. Here they were joined by a

corporal and four more heroes, of whom two were drunk and daring, and

two sober and penitent, but each of whom, like Joe, had his dusty stick

and bundle. The party embarked in a passage-boat bound for Gravesend,

whence they were to proceed on foot to Chatham; the wind was in their

favour, and they soon left London behind them, a mere dark mist--a giant

phantom in the air.

Chapter 32

Misfortunes, saith the adage, never come singly. There is little doubt

that troubles are exceedingly gregarious in their nature, and flying

in flocks, are apt to perch capriciously; crowding on the heads of some

poor wights until there is not an inch of room left on their unlucky

crowns, and taking no more notice of others who offer as good

resting-places for the soles of their feet, than if they had no

existence. It may have happened that a flight of troubles brooding over

London, and looking out for Joseph Willet, whom they couldn't find,

darted down haphazard on the first young man that caught their fancy,

and settled on him instead. However this may be, certain it is that on

the very day of Joe's departure they swarmed about the ears of Edward

Chester, and did so buzz and flap their wings, and persecute him, that

he was most profoundly wretched.

It was evening, and just eight o'clock, when he and his father, having

wine and dessert set before them, were left to themselves for the first

time that day. They had dined together, but a third person had been

present during the meal, and until they met at table they had not seen

each other since the previous night.

Edward was reserved and silent. Mr Chester was more than usually gay;

but not caring, as it seemed, to open a conversation with one whose

humour was so different, he vented the lightness of his spirit in smiles

and sparkling looks, and made no effort to awaken his attention. So they

remained for some time: the father lying on a sofa with his accustomed

air of graceful negligence; the son seated opposite to him with downcast

eyes, busied, it was plain, with painful and uneasy thoughts.

'My dear Edward,' said Mr Chester at length, with a most engaging laugh,

'do not extend your drowsy influence to the decanter. Suffer THAT to

circulate, let your spirits be never so stagnant.'

Edward begged his pardon, passed it, and relapsed into his former state.

'You do wrong not to fill your glass,' said Mr Chester, holding up his

own before the light. 'Wine in moderation--not in excess, for that makes

men ugly--has a thousand pleasant influences. It brightens the eye,

improves the voice, imparts a new vivacity to one's thoughts and

conversation: you should try it, Ned.'

'Ah father!' cried his son, 'if--'

'My good fellow,' interposed the parent hastily, as he set down his

glass, and raised his eyebrows with a startled and horrified expression,

'for Heaven's sake don't call me by that obsolete and ancient name. Have

some regard for delicacy. Am I grey, or wrinkled, do I go on crutches,

have I lost my teeth, that you adopt such a mode of address? Good God,

how very coarse!'

'I was about to speak to you from my heart, sir,' returned Edward, 'in

the confidence which should subsist between us; and you check me in the

outset.'

'Now DO, Ned, DO not,' said Mr Chester, raising his delicate hand

imploringly, 'talk in that monstrous manner. About to speak from

your heart. Don't you know that the heart is an ingenious part of

our formation--the centre of the blood-vessels and all that sort of

thing--which has no more to do with what you say or think, than your

knees have? How can you be so very vulgar and absurd? These anatomical

allusions should be left to gentlemen of the medical profession. They

are really not agreeable in society. You quite surprise me, Ned.'

'Well! there are no such things to wound, or heal, or have regard for. I

know your creed, sir, and will say no more,' returned his son.

'There again,' said Mr Chester, sipping his wine, 'you are wrong. I

distinctly say there are such things. We know there are. The hearts of

animals--of bullocks, sheep, and so forth--are cooked and devoured, as

I am told, by the lower classes, with a vast deal of relish. Men are

sometimes stabbed to the heart, shot to the heart; but as to speaking

from the heart, or to the heart, or being warm-hearted, or cold-hearted,

or broken-hearted, or being all heart, or having no heart--pah! these

things are nonsense, Ned.'

'No doubt, sir,' returned his son, seeing that he paused for him to

speak. 'No doubt.'

'There's Haredale's niece, your late flame,' said Mr Chester, as a

careless illustration of his meaning. 'No doubt in your mind she was all

heart once. Now she has none at all. Yet she is the same person, Ned,

exactly.'

'She is a changed person, sir,' cried Edward, reddening; 'and changed by

vile means, I believe.'

'You have had a cool dismissal, have you?' said his father. 'Poor Ned!

I told you last night what would happen.--May I ask you for the

nutcrackers?'

'She has been tampered with, and most treacherously deceived,' cried

Edward, rising from his seat. 'I never will believe that the knowledge

of my real position, given her by myself, has worked this change. I know

she is beset and tortured. But though our contract is at an end, and

broken past all redemption; though I charge upon her want of firmness

and want of truth, both to herself and me; I do not now, and never will

believe, that any sordid motive, or her own unbiassed will, has led her

to this course--never!'

'You make me blush,' returned his father gaily, 'for the folly of your

nature, in which--but we never know ourselves--I devoutly hope there is

no reflection of my own. With regard to the young lady herself, she has

done what is very natural and proper, my dear fellow; what you yourself

proposed, as I learn from Haredale; and what I predicted--with no great

exercise of sagacity--she would do. She supposed you to be rich, or

at least quite rich enough; and found you poor. Marriage is a civil

contract; people marry to better their worldly condition and improve

appearances; it is an affair of house and furniture, of liveries,

servants, equipage, and so forth. The lady being poor and you poor

also, there is an end of the matter. You cannot enter upon these

considerations, and have no manner of business with the ceremony. I

drink her health in this glass, and respect and honour her for her

extreme good sense. It is a lesson to you. Fill yours, Ned.'

'It is a lesson,' returned his son, 'by which I hope I may never profit,

and if years and experience impress it on--'

'Don't say on the heart,' interposed his father.

'On men whom the world and its hypocrisy have spoiled,' said Edward

warmly, 'Heaven keep me from its knowledge.'

'Come, sir,' returned his father, raising himself a little on the sofa,

and looking straight towards him; 'we have had enough of this. Remember,

if you please, your interest, your duty, your moral obligations, your

filial affections, and all that sort of thing, which it is so very

delightful and charming to reflect upon; or you will repent it.'

'I shall never repent the preservation of my self-respect, sir,' said

Edward. 'Forgive me if I say that I will not sacrifice it at your

bidding, and that I will not pursue the track which you would have me

take, and to which the secret share you have had in this late separation

tends.'

His father rose a little higher still, and looking at him as though

curious to know if he were quite resolved and earnest, dropped gently

down again, and said in the calmest voice--eating his nuts meanwhile,

'Edward, my father had a son, who being a fool like you, and, like you,

entertaining low and disobedient sentiments, he disinherited and cursed

one morning after breakfast. The circumstance occurs to me with a

singular clearness of recollection this evening. I remember eating

muffins at the time, with marmalade. He led a miserable life (the son,

I mean) and died early; it was a happy release on all accounts; he

degraded the family very much. It is a sad circumstance, Edward, when a

father finds it necessary to resort to such strong measures.

'It is,' replied Edward, 'and it is sad when a son, proffering him his

love and duty in their best and truest sense, finds himself repelled

at every turn, and forced to disobey. Dear father,' he added, more

earnestly though in a gentler tone, 'I have reflected many times on what

occurred between us when we first discussed this subject. Let there be

a confidence between us; not in terms, but truth. Hear what I have to

say.'

'As I anticipate what it is, and cannot fail to do so, Edward,' returned

his father coldly, 'I decline. I couldn't possibly. I am sure it would

put me out of temper, which is a state of mind I can't endure. If

you intend to mar my plans for your establishment in life, and the

preservation of that gentility and becoming pride, which our family

have so long sustained--if, in short, you are resolved to take your own

course, you must take it, and my curse with it. I am very sorry, but

there's really no alternative.'

'The curse may pass your lips,' said Edward, 'but it will be but empty

breath. I do not believe that any man on earth has greater power to call

one down upon his fellow--least of all, upon his own child--than he has

to make one drop of rain or flake of snow fall from the clouds above us

at his impious bidding. Beware, sir, what you do.'

'You are so very irreligious, so exceedingly undutiful, so horribly

profane,' rejoined his father, turning his face lazily towards him, and

cracking another nut, 'that I positively must interrupt you here. It is

quite impossible we can continue to go on, upon such terms as these. If

you will do me the favour to ring the bell, the servant will show you

to the door. Return to this roof no more, I beg you. Go, sir, since

you have no moral sense remaining; and go to the Devil, at my express

desire. Good day.'

Edward left the room without another word or look, and turned his back

upon the house for ever.

The father's face was slightly flushed and heated, but his manner was

quite unchanged, as he rang the bell again, and addressed the servant on

his entrance.

'Peak--if that gentleman who has just gone out--'

'I beg your pardon, sir, Mr Edward?'

'Were there more than one, dolt, that you ask the question?--If that

gentleman should send here for his wardrobe, let him have it, do you

hear? If he should call himself at any time, I'm not at home. You'll

tell him so, and shut the door.'

So, it soon got whispered about, that Mr Chester was very unfortunate

in his son, who had occasioned him great grief and sorrow. And the

good people who heard this and told it again, marvelled the more at his

equanimity and even temper, and said what an amiable nature that man

must have, who, having undergone so much, could be so placid and so

calm. And when Edward's name was spoken, Society shook its head, and

laid its finger on its lip, and sighed, and looked very grave; and those

who had sons about his age, waxed wrathful and indignant, and hoped, for

Virtue's sake, that he was dead. And the world went on turning round, as

usual, for five years, concerning which this Narrative is silent.

Chapter 33

One wintry evening, early in the year of our Lord one thousand seven

hundred and eighty, a keen north wind arose as it grew dark, and night

came on with black and dismal looks. A bitter storm of sleet, sharp,

dense, and icy-cold, swept the wet streets, and rattled on the trembling

windows. Signboards, shaken past endurance in their creaking frames,

fell crashing on the pavement; old tottering chimneys reeled and

staggered in the blast; and many a steeple rocked again that night, as

though the earth were troubled.

It was not a time for those who could by any means get light and warmth,

to brave the fury of the weather. In coffee-houses of the better sort,

guests crowded round the fire, forgot to be political, and told each

other with a secret gladness that the blast grew fiercer every minute.

Each humble tavern by the water-side, had its group of uncouth figures

round the hearth, who talked of vessels foundering at sea, and all hands

lost; related many a dismal tale of shipwreck and drowned men, and

hoped that some they knew were safe, and shook their heads in doubt.

In private dwellings, children clustered near the blaze; listening with

timid pleasure to tales of ghosts and goblins, and tall figures clad

in white standing by bed-sides, and people who had gone to sleep in old

churches and being overlooked had found themselves alone there at the

dead hour of the night: until they shuddered at the thought of the dark

rooms upstairs, yet loved to hear the wind moan too, and hoped it would

continue bravely. From time to time these happy indoor people stopped to

listen, or one held up his finger and cried 'Hark!' and then, above the

rumbling in the chimney, and the fast pattering on the glass, was heard

a wailing, rushing sound, which shook the walls as though a giant's hand

were on them; then a hoarse roar as if the sea had risen; then such a

whirl and tumult that the air seemed mad; and then, with a lengthened

howl, the waves of wind swept on, and left a moment's interval of rest.

Cheerily, though there were none abroad to see it, shone the Maypole

light that evening. Blessings on the red--deep, ruby, glowing red--old

curtain of the window; blending into one rich stream of brightness, fire

and candle, meat, drink, and company, and gleaming like a jovial

eye upon the bleak waste out of doors! Within, what carpet like its

crunching sand, what music merry as its crackling logs, what perfume

like its kitchen's dainty breath, what weather genial as its hearty

warmth! Blessings on the old house, how sturdily it stood! How did the

vexed wind chafe and roar about its stalwart roof; how did it pant

and strive with its wide chimneys, which still poured forth from their

hospitable throats, great clouds of smoke, and puffed defiance in its

face; how, above all, did it drive and rattle at the casement, emulous

to extinguish that cheerful glow, which would not be put down and seemed

the brighter for the conflict!

The profusion too, the rich and lavish bounty, of that goodly tavern! It

was not enough that one fire roared and sparkled on its spacious hearth;

in the tiles which paved and compassed it, five hundred flickering fires

burnt brightly also. It was not enough that one red curtain shut the

wild night out, and shed its cheerful influence on the room. In every

saucepan lid, and candlestick, and vessel of copper, brass, or tin

that hung upon the walls, were countless ruddy hangings, flashing and

gleaming with every motion of the blaze, and offering, let the eye

wander where it might, interminable vistas of the same rich colour. The

old oak wainscoting, the beams, the chairs, the seats, reflected it in

a deep, dull glimmer. There were fires and red curtains in the very eyes

of the drinkers, in their buttons, in their liquor, in the pipes they

smoked.

Mr Willet sat in what had been his accustomed place five years before,

with his eyes on the eternal boiler; and had sat there since the clock

struck eight, giving no other signs of life than breathing with a loud

and constant snore (though he was wide awake), and from time to time

putting his glass to his lips, or knocking the ashes out of his pipe,

and filling it anew. It was now half-past ten. Mr Cobb and long Phil

Parkes were his companions, as of old, and for two mortal hours and a

half, none of the company had pronounced one word.

Whether people, by dint of sitting together in the same place and the

same relative positions, and doing exactly the same things for a great

many years, acquire a sixth sense, or some unknown power of influencing

each other which serves them in its stead, is a question for philosophy

to settle. But certain it is that old John Willet, Mr Parkes, and Mr

Cobb, were one and all firmly of opinion that they were very jolly

companions--rather choice spirits than otherwise; that they looked at

each other every now and then as if there were a perpetual interchange

of ideas going on among them; that no man considered himself or his

neighbour by any means silent; and that each of them nodded occasionally

when he caught the eye of another, as if he would say, 'You have

expressed yourself extremely well, sir, in relation to that sentiment,

and I quite agree with you.'

The room was so very warm, the tobacco so very good, and the fire so

very soothing, that Mr Willet by degrees began to doze; but as he had

perfectly acquired, by dint of long habit, the art of smoking in his

sleep, and as his breathing was pretty much the same, awake or asleep,

saving that in the latter case he sometimes experienced a slight

difficulty in respiration (such as a carpenter meets with when he is

planing and comes to a knot), neither of his companions was aware of the

circumstance, until he met with one of these impediments and was obliged

to try again.

'Johnny's dropped off,' said Mr Parkes in a whisper.

'Fast as a top,' said Mr Cobb.

Neither of them said any more until Mr Willet came to another knot--one

of surpassing obduracy--which bade fair to throw him into convulsions,

but which he got over at last without waking, by an effort quite

superhuman.

'He sleeps uncommon hard,' said Mr Cobb.

Mr Parkes, who was possibly a hard-sleeper himself, replied with some

disdain, 'Not a bit on it;' and directed his eyes towards a handbill

pasted over the chimney-piece, which was decorated at the top with a

woodcut representing a youth of tender years running away very fast,

with a bundle over his shoulder at the end of a stick, and--to carry

out the idea--a finger-post and a milestone beside him. Mr Cobb likewise

turned his eyes in the same direction, and surveyed the placard as if

that were the first time he had ever beheld it. Now, this was a document

which Mr Willet had himself indited on the disappearance of his son

Joseph, acquainting the nobility and gentry and the public in general

with the circumstances of his having left his home; describing his dress

and appearance; and offering a reward of five pounds to any person or

persons who would pack him up and return him safely to the Maypole at

Chigwell, or lodge him in any of his Majesty's jails until such time as

his father should come and claim him. In this advertisement Mr Willet

had obstinately persisted, despite the advice and entreaties of his

friends, in describing his son as a 'young boy;' and furthermore as

being from eighteen inches to a couple of feet shorter than he really

was; two circumstances which perhaps accounted, in some degree, for its

never having been productive of any other effect than the transmission

to Chigwell at various times and at a vast expense, of some

five-and-forty runaways varying from six years old to twelve.

Mr Cobb and Mr Parkes looked mysteriously at this composition, at each

other, and at old John. From the time he had pasted it up with his own

hands, Mr Willet had never by word or sign alluded to the subject, or

encouraged any one else to do so. Nobody had the least notion what his

thoughts or opinions were, connected with it; whether he remembered it

or forgot it; whether he had any idea that such an event had ever taken

place. Therefore, even while he slept, no one ventured to refer to it in

his presence; and for such sufficient reasons, these his chosen friends

were silent now.

Mr Willet had got by this time into such a complication of knots,

that it was perfectly clear he must wake or die. He chose the former

alternative, and opened his eyes.

'If he don't come in five minutes,' said John, 'I shall have supper

without him.'

The antecedent of this pronoun had been mentioned for the last time

at eight o'clock. Messrs Parkes and Cobb being used to this style of

conversation, replied without difficulty that to be sure Solomon was

very late, and they wondered what had happened to detain him.

'He an't blown away, I suppose,' said Parkes. 'It's enough to carry a

man of his figure off his legs, and easy too. Do you hear it? It blows

great guns, indeed. There'll be many a crash in the Forest to-night, I

reckon, and many a broken branch upon the ground to-morrow.'

'It won't break anything in the Maypole, I take it, sir,' returned old

John. 'Let it try. I give it leave--what's that?'

'The wind,' cried Parkes. 'It's howling like a Christian, and has been

all night long.'

'Did you ever, sir,' asked John, after a minute's contemplation, 'hear

the wind say "Maypole"?'

'Why, what man ever did?' said Parkes.

'Nor "ahoy," perhaps?' added John.

'No. Nor that neither.'

'Very good, sir,' said Mr Willet, perfectly unmoved; 'then if that

was the wind just now, and you'll wait a little time without speaking,

you'll hear it say both words very plain.'

Mr Willet was right. After listening for a few moments, they could

clearly hear, above the roar and tumult out of doors, this shout

repeated; and that with a shrillness and energy, which denoted that it

came from some person in great distress or terror. They looked at each

other, turned pale, and held their breath. No man stirred.

It was in this emergency that Mr Willet displayed something of that

strength of mind and plenitude of mental resource, which rendered him

the admiration of all his friends and neighbours. After looking at

Messrs Parkes and Cobb for some time in silence, he clapped his two

hands to his cheeks, and sent forth a roar which made the glasses dance

and rafters ring--a long-sustained, discordant bellow, that rolled

onward with the wind, and startling every echo, made the night a hundred

times more boisterous--a deep, loud, dismal bray, that sounded like a

human gong. Then, with every vein in his head and face swollen with the

great exertion, and his countenance suffused with a lively purple, he

drew a little nearer to the fire, and turning his back upon it, said

with dignity:

'If that's any comfort to anybody, they're welcome to it. If it an't,

I'm sorry for 'em. If either of you two gentlemen likes to go out and

see what's the matter, you can. I'm not curious, myself.'

While he spoke the cry drew nearer and nearer, footsteps passed the

window, the latch of the door was raised, it opened, was violently shut

again, and Solomon Daisy, with a lighted lantern in his hand, and the

rain streaming from his disordered dress, dashed into the room.

A more complete picture of terror than the little man presented, it

would be difficult to imagine. The perspiration stood in beads upon his

face, his knees knocked together, his every limb trembled, the power

of articulation was quite gone; and there he stood, panting for breath,

gazing on them with such livid ashy looks, that they were infected with

his fear, though ignorant of its occasion, and, reflecting his dismayed

and horror-stricken visage, stared back again without venturing to

question him; until old John Willet, in a fit of temporary insanity,

made a dive at his cravat, and, seizing him by that portion of his

dress, shook him to and fro until his very teeth appeared to rattle in

his head.

'Tell us what's the matter, sir,' said John, 'or I'll kill you. Tell us

what's the matter, sir, or in another second I'll have your head under

the biler. How dare you look like that? Is anybody a-following of you?

What do you mean? Say something, or I'll be the death of you, I will.'

Mr Willet, in his frenzy, was so near keeping his word to the very

letter (Solomon Daisy's eyes already beginning to roll in an alarming

manner, and certain guttural sounds, as of a choking man, to issue from

his throat), that the two bystanders, recovering in some degree,

plucked him off his victim by main force, and placed the little clerk

of Chigwell in a chair. Directing a fearful gaze all round the room, he

implored them in a faint voice to give him some drink; and above all to

lock the house-door and close and bar the shutters of the room, without

a moment's loss of time. The latter request did not tend to reassure

his hearers, or to fill them with the most comfortable sensations; they

complied with it, however, with the greatest expedition; and having

handed him a bumper of brandy-and-water, nearly boiling hot, waited to

hear what he might have to tell them.

'Oh, Johnny,' said Solomon, shaking him by the hand. 'Oh, Parkes. Oh,

Tommy Cobb. Why did I leave this house to-night! On the nineteenth of

March--of all nights in the year, on the nineteenth of March!'

They all drew closer to the fire. Parkes, who was nearest to the door,

started and looked over his shoulder. Mr Willet, with great indignation,

inquired what the devil he meant by that--and then said, 'God forgive

me,' and glanced over his own shoulder, and came a little nearer.

'When I left here to-night,' said Solomon Daisy, 'I little thought what

day of the month it was. I have never gone alone into the church after

dark on this day, for seven-and-twenty years. I have heard it said

that as we keep our birthdays when we are alive, so the ghosts of

dead people, who are not easy in their graves, keep the day they died

upon.--How the wind roars!'

Nobody spoke. All eyes were fastened on Solomon.

'I might have known,' he said, 'what night it was, by the foul weather.

There's no such night in the whole year round as this is, always. I

never sleep quietly in my bed on the nineteenth of March.'

'Go on,' said Tom Cobb, in a low voice. 'Nor I neither.'

Solomon Daisy raised his glass to his lips; put it down upon the floor

with such a trembling hand that the spoon tinkled in it like a little

bell; and continued thus:

'Have I ever said that we are always brought back to this subject in

some strange way, when the nineteenth of this month comes round? Do

you suppose it was by accident, I forgot to wind up the church-clock? I

never forgot it at any other time, though it's such a clumsy thing that

it has to be wound up every day. Why should it escape my memory on this

day of all others?

'I made as much haste down there as I could when I went from here, but

I had to go home first for the keys; and the wind and rain being dead

against me all the way, it was pretty well as much as I could do at

times to keep my legs. I got there at last, opened the church-door, and

went in. I had not met a soul all the way, and you may judge whether it

was dull or not. Neither of you would bear me company. If you could have

known what was to come, you'd have been in the right.

'The wind was so strong, that it was as much as I could do to shut the

church-door by putting my whole weight against it; and even as it was,

it burst wide open twice, with such strength that any of you would have

sworn, if you had been leaning against it, as I was, that somebody was

pushing on the other side. However, I got the key turned, went into the

belfry, and wound up the clock--which was very near run down, and would

have stood stock-still in half an hour.

'As I took up my lantern again to leave the church, it came upon me all

at once that this was the nineteenth of March. It came upon me with a

kind of shock, as if a hand had struck the thought upon my forehead;

at the very same moment, I heard a voice outside the tower--rising from

among the graves.'

Here old John precipitately interrupted the speaker, and begged that if

Mr Parkes (who was seated opposite to him and was staring directly over

his head) saw anything, he would have the goodness to mention it. Mr

Parkes apologised, and remarked that he was only listening; to which Mr

Willet angrily retorted, that his listening with that kind of expression

in his face was not agreeable, and that if he couldn't look like other

people, he had better put his pocket-handkerchief over his head.

Mr Parkes with great submission pledged himself to do so, if again

required, and John Willet turning to Solomon desired him to proceed.

After waiting until a violent gust of wind and rain, which seemed to

shake even that sturdy house to its foundation, had passed away, the

little man complied:

'Never tell me that it was my fancy, or that it was any other sound

which I mistook for that I tell you of. I heard the wind whistle through

the arches of the church. I heard the steeple strain and creak. I heard

the rain as it came driving against the walls. I felt the bells shake. I

saw the ropes sway to and fro. And I heard that voice.'

'What did it say?' asked Tom Cobb.

'I don't know what; I don't know that it spoke. It gave a kind of cry,

as any one of us might do, if something dreadful followed us in a dream,

and came upon us unawares; and then it died off: seeming to pass quite

round the church.'

'I don't see much in that,' said John, drawing a long breath, and

looking round him like a man who felt relieved.

'Perhaps not,' returned his friend, 'but that's not all.'

'What more do you mean to say, sir, is to come?' asked John, pausing in

the act of wiping his face upon his apron. 'What are you a-going to tell

us of next?'

'What I saw.'

'Saw!' echoed all three, bending forward.

'When I opened the church-door to come out,' said the little man, with

an expression of face which bore ample testimony to the sincerity of

his conviction, 'when I opened the church-door to come out, which I did

suddenly, for I wanted to get it shut again before another gust of wind

came up, there crossed me--so close, that by stretching out my finger

I could have touched it--something in the likeness of a man. It was

bare-headed to the storm. It turned its face without stopping, and fixed

its eyes on mine. It was a ghost--a spirit.'

'Whose?' they all three cried together.

In the excess of his emotion (for he fell back trembling in his chair,

and waved his hand as if entreating them to question him no further),

his answer was lost on all but old John Willet, who happened to be

seated close beside him.

'Who!' cried Parkes and Tom Cobb, looking eagerly by turns at Solomon

Daisy and at Mr Willet. 'Who was it?'

'Gentlemen,' said Mr Willet after a long pause, 'you needn't ask. The

likeness of a murdered man. This is the nineteenth of March.'

A profound silence ensued.

'If you'll take my advice,' said John, 'we had better, one and all, keep

this a secret. Such tales would not be liked at the Warren. Let us keep

it to ourselves for the present time at all events, or we may get into

trouble, and Solomon may lose his place. Whether it was really as he

says, or whether it wasn't, is no matter. Right or wrong, nobody would

believe him. As to the probabilities, I don't myself think,' said Mr

Willet, eyeing the corners of the room in a manner which showed that,

like some other philosophers, he was not quite easy in his theory,

'that a ghost as had been a man of sense in his lifetime, would be out

a-walking in such weather--I only know that I wouldn't, if I was one.'

But this heretical doctrine was strongly opposed by the other three,

who quoted a great many precedents to show that bad weather was the very

time for such appearances; and Mr Parkes (who had had a ghost in his

family, by the mother's side) argued the matter with so much ingenuity

and force of illustration, that John was only saved from having to

retract his opinion by the opportune appearance of supper, to which they

applied themselves with a dreadful relish. Even Solomon Daisy himself,

by dint of the elevating influences of fire, lights, brandy, and good

company, so far recovered as to handle his knife and fork in a highly

creditable manner, and to display a capacity both of eating and

drinking, such as banished all fear of his having sustained any lasting

injury from his fright.

Supper done, they crowded round the fire again, and, as is common on

such occasions, propounded all manner of leading questions calculated

to surround the story with new horrors and surprises. But Solomon Daisy,

notwithstanding these temptations, adhered so steadily to his original

account, and repeated it so often, with such slight variations, and with

such solemn asseverations of its truth and reality, that his hearers

were (with good reason) more astonished than at first. As he took John

Willet's view of the matter in regard to the propriety of not bruiting

the tale abroad, unless the spirit should appear to him again, in which

case it would be necessary to take immediate counsel with the clergyman,

it was solemnly resolved that it should be hushed up and kept quiet.

And as most men like to have a secret to tell which may exalt their own

importance, they arrived at this conclusion with perfect unanimity.

As it was by this time growing late, and was long past their usual hour

of separating, the cronies parted for the night. Solomon Daisy, with a

fresh candle in his lantern, repaired homewards under the escort of long

Phil Parkes and Mr Cobb, who were rather more nervous than himself. Mr

Willet, after seeing them to the door, returned to collect his thoughts

with the assistance of the boiler, and to listen to the storm of wind

and rain, which had not yet abated one jot of its fury.

Chapter 34

Before old John had looked at the boiler quite twenty minutes, he got

his ideas into a focus, and brought them to bear upon Solomon Daisy's

story. The more he thought of it, the more impressed he became with

a sense of his own wisdom, and a desire that Mr Haredale should be

impressed with it likewise. At length, to the end that he might sustain

a principal and important character in the affair; and might have the

start of Solomon and his two friends, through whose means he knew the

adventure, with a variety of exaggerations, would be known to at least

a score of people, and most likely to Mr Haredale himself, by

breakfast-time to-morrow; he determined to repair to the Warren before

going to bed.

'He's my landlord,' thought John, as he took a candle in his hand, and

setting it down in a corner out of the wind's way, opened a casement in

the rear of the house, looking towards the stables. 'We haven't met of

late years so often as we used to do--changes are taking place in the

family--it's desirable that I should stand as well with them, in point

of dignity, as possible--the whispering about of this here tale will

anger him--it's good to have confidences with a gentleman of his natur',

and set one's-self right besides. Halloa there! Hugh--Hugh. Hal-loa!'

When he had repeated this shout a dozen times, and startled every pigeon

from its slumbers, a door in one of the ruinous old buildings opened,

and a rough voice demanded what was amiss now, that a man couldn't even

have his sleep in quiet.

'What! Haven't you sleep enough, growler, that you're not to be knocked

up for once?' said John.

'No,' replied the voice, as the speaker yawned and shook himself. 'Not

half enough.'

'I don't know how you CAN sleep, with the wind a bellowsing and roaring

about you, making the tiles fly like a pack of cards,' said John; 'but

no matter for that. Wrap yourself up in something or another, and come

here, for you must go as far as the Warren with me. And look sharp about

it.'

Hugh, with much low growling and muttering, went back into his lair;

and presently reappeared, carrying a lantern and a cudgel, and enveloped

from head to foot in an old, frowzy, slouching horse-cloth. Mr Willet

received this figure at the back-door, and ushered him into the bar,

while he wrapped himself in sundry greatcoats and capes, and so tied and

knotted his face in shawls and handkerchiefs, that how he breathed was a

mystery.

'You don't take a man out of doors at near midnight in such weather,

without putting some heart into him, do you, master?' said Hugh.

'Yes I do, sir,' returned Mr Willet. 'I put the heart (as you call it)

into him when he has brought me safe home again, and his standing steady

on his legs an't of so much consequence. So hold that light up, if you

please, and go on a step or two before, to show the way.'

Hugh obeyed with a very indifferent grace, and a longing glance at the

bottles. Old John, laying strict injunctions on his cook to keep the

doors locked in his absence, and to open to nobody but himself on pain

of dismissal, followed him into the blustering darkness out of doors.

The way was wet and dismal, and the night so black, that if Mr Willet

had been his own pilot, he would have walked into a deep horsepond

within a few hundred yards of his own house, and would certainly have

terminated his career in that ignoble sphere of action. But Hugh, who

had a sight as keen as any hawk's, and, apart from that endowment, could

have found his way blindfold to any place within a dozen miles, dragged

old John along, quite deaf to his remonstrances, and took his own course

without the slightest reference to, or notice of, his master. So they

made head against the wind as they best could; Hugh crushing the wet

grass beneath his heavy tread, and stalking on after his ordinary savage

fashion; John Willet following at arm's length, picking his steps, and

looking about him, now for bogs and ditches, and now for such stray

ghosts as might be wandering abroad, with looks of as much dismay and

uneasiness as his immovable face was capable of expressing.

At length they stood upon the broad gravel-walk before the Warren-house.

The building was profoundly dark, and none were moving near it save

themselves. From one solitary turret-chamber, however, there shone a

ray of light; and towards this speck of comfort in the cold, cheerless,

silent scene, Mr Willet bade his pilot lead him.

'The old room,' said John, looking timidly upward; 'Mr Reuben's own

apartment, God be with us! I wonder his brother likes to sit there, so

late at night--on this night too.'

'Why, where else should he sit?' asked Hugh, holding the lantern to his

breast, to keep the candle from the wind, while he trimmed it with his

fingers. 'It's snug enough, an't it?'

'Snug!' said John indignantly. 'You have a comfortable idea of snugness,

you have, sir. Do you know what was done in that room, you ruffian?'

'Why, what is it the worse for that!' cried Hugh, looking into John's

fat face. 'Does it keep out the rain, and snow, and wind, the less for

that? Is it less warm or dry, because a man was killed there? Ha, ha,

ha! Never believe it, master. One man's no such matter as that comes

to.'

Mr Willet fixed his dull eyes on his follower, and began--by a species

of inspiration--to think it just barely possible that he was something

of a dangerous character, and that it might be advisable to get rid

of him one of these days. He was too prudent to say anything, with the

journey home before him; and therefore turned to the iron gate before

which this brief dialogue had passed, and pulled the handle of the bell

that hung beside it. The turret in which the light appeared being at

one corner of the building, and only divided from the path by one of

the garden-walks, upon which this gate opened, Mr Haredale threw up the

window directly, and demanded who was there.

'Begging pardon, sir,' said John, 'I knew you sat up late, and made bold

to come round, having a word to say to you.'

'Willet--is it not?'

'Of the Maypole--at your service, sir.'

Mr Haredale closed the window, and withdrew. He presently appeared at

a door in the bottom of the turret, and coming across the garden-walk,

unlocked the gate and let them in.

'You are a late visitor, Willet. What is the matter?'

'Nothing to speak of, sir,' said John; 'an idle tale, I thought you

ought to know of; nothing more.'

'Let your man go forward with the lantern, and give me your hand. The

stairs are crooked and narrow. Gently with your light, friend. You swing

it like a censer.'

Hugh, who had already reached the turret, held it more steadily, and

ascended first, turning round from time to time to shed his light

downward on the steps. Mr Haredale following next, eyed his lowering

face with no great favour; and Hugh, looking down on him, returned his

glances with interest, as they climbed the winding stairs.

It terminated in a little ante-room adjoining that from which they had

seen the light. Mr Haredale entered first, and led the way through it

into the latter chamber, where he seated himself at a writing-table from

which he had risen when they had rung the bell.

'Come in,' he said, beckoning to old John, who remained bowing at the

door. 'Not you, friend,' he added hastily to Hugh, who entered also.

'Willet, why do you bring that fellow here?'

'Why, sir,' returned John, elevating his eyebrows, and lowering his

voice to the tone in which the question had been asked him, 'he's a good

guard, you see.'

'Don't be too sure of that,' said Mr Haredale, looking towards him as he

spoke. 'I doubt it. He has an evil eye.'

'There's no imagination in his eye,' returned Mr Willet, glancing over

his shoulder at the organ in question, 'certainly.'

'There is no good there, be assured,' said Mr Haredale. 'Wait in that

little room, friend, and close the door between us.'

Hugh shrugged his shoulders, and with a disdainful look, which showed,

either that he had overheard, or that he guessed the purport of their

whispering, did as he was told. When he was shut out, Mr Haredale turned

to John, and bade him go on with what he had to say, but not to speak

too loud, for there were quick ears yonder.

Thus cautioned, Mr Willet, in an oily whisper, recited all that he

had heard and said that night; laying particular stress upon his own

sagacity, upon his great regard for the family, and upon his solicitude

for their peace of mind and happiness. The story moved his auditor much

more than he had expected. Mr Haredale often changed his attitude, rose

and paced the room, returned again, desired him to repeat, as nearly as

he could, the very words that Solomon had used, and gave so many other

signs of being disturbed and ill at ease, that even Mr Willet was

surprised.

'You did quite right,' he said, at the end of a long conversation, 'to

bid them keep this story secret. It is a foolish fancy on the part of

this weak-brained man, bred in his fears and superstition. But Miss

Haredale, though she would know it to be so, would be disturbed by it

if it reached her ears; it is too nearly connected with a subject very

painful to us all, to be heard with indifference. You were most prudent,

and have laid me under a great obligation. I thank you very much.'

This was equal to John's most sanguine expectations; but he would have

preferred Mr Haredale's looking at him when he spoke, as if he really

did thank him, to his walking up and down, speaking by fits and starts,

often stopping with his eyes fixed on the ground, moving hurriedly on

again, like one distracted, and seeming almost unconscious of what he

said or did.

This, however, was his manner; and it was so embarrassing to John that

he sat quite passive for a long time, not knowing what to do. At length

he rose. Mr Haredale stared at him for a moment as though he had quite

forgotten his being present, then shook hands with him, and opened the

door. Hugh, who was, or feigned to be, fast asleep on the ante-chamber

floor, sprang up on their entrance, and throwing his cloak about him,

grasped his stick and lantern, and prepared to descend the stairs.

'Stay,' said Mr Haredale. 'Will this man drink?'

'Drink! He'd drink the Thames up, if it was strong enough, sir, replied

John Willet. 'He'll have something when he gets home. He's better

without it, now, sir.'

'Nay. Half the distance is done,' said Hugh. 'What a hard master you

are! I shall go home the better for one glassful, halfway. Come!'

As John made no reply, Mr Haredale brought out a glass of liquor, and

gave it to Hugh, who, as he took it in his hand, threw part of it upon

the floor.

'What do you mean by splashing your drink about a gentleman's house,

sir?' said John.

'I'm drinking a toast,' Hugh rejoined, holding the glass above his head,

and fixing his eyes on Mr Haredale's face; 'a toast to this house and

its master.' With that he muttered something to himself, and drank the

rest, and setting down the glass, preceded them without another word.

John was a good deal scandalised by this observance, but seeing that

Mr Haredale took little heed of what Hugh said or did, and that his

thoughts were otherwise employed, he offered no apology, and went in

silence down the stairs, across the walk, and through the garden-gate.

They stopped upon the outer side for Hugh to hold the light while Mr

Haredale locked it on the inner; and then John saw with wonder (as he

often afterwards related), that he was very pale, and that his face

had changed so much and grown so haggard since their entrance, that he

almost seemed another man.

They were in the open road again, and John Willet was walking on behind

his escort, as he had come, thinking very steadily of what he had just

now seen, when Hugh drew him suddenly aside, and almost at the same

instant three horsemen swept past--the nearest brushed his shoulder even

then--who, checking their steeds as suddenly as they could, stood still,

and waited for their coming up.

Chapter 35

When John Willet saw that the horsemen wheeled smartly round, and drew

up three abreast in the narrow road, waiting for him and his man to join

them, it occurred to him with unusual precipitation that they must be

highwaymen; and had Hugh been armed with a blunderbuss, in place of his

stout cudgel, he would certainly have ordered him to fire it off at a

venture, and would, while the word of command was obeyed, have consulted

his own personal safety in immediate flight. Under the circumstances of

disadvantage, however, in which he and his guard were placed, he deemed

it prudent to adopt a different style of generalship, and therefore

whispered his attendant to address them in the most peaceable and

courteous terms. By way of acting up to the spirit and letter of this

instruction, Hugh stepped forward, and flourishing his staff before the

very eyes of the rider nearest to him, demanded roughly what he and his

fellows meant by so nearly galloping over them, and why they scoured the

king's highway at that late hour of night.

The man whom he addressed was beginning an angry reply in the same

strain, when he was checked by the horseman in the centre, who,

interposing with an air of authority, inquired in a somewhat loud but

not harsh or unpleasant voice:

'Pray, is this the London road?'

'If you follow it right, it is,' replied Hugh roughly.

'Nay, brother,' said the same person, 'you're but a churlish Englishman,

if Englishman you be--which I should much doubt but for your tongue.

Your companion, I am sure, will answer me more civilly. How say you,

friend?'

'I say it IS the London road, sir,' answered John. 'And I wish,' he

added in a subdued voice, as he turned to Hugh, 'that you was in any

other road, you vagabond. Are you tired of your life, sir, that you go

a-trying to provoke three great neck-or-nothing chaps, that could keep

on running over us, back'ards and for'ards, till we was dead, and then

take our bodies up behind 'em, and drown us ten miles off?'

'How far is it to London?' inquired the same speaker.

'Why, from here, sir,' answered John, persuasively, 'it's thirteen very

easy mile.'

The adjective was thrown in, as an inducement to the travellers to

ride away with all speed; but instead of having the desired effect, it

elicited from the same person, the remark, 'Thirteen miles! That's a

long distance!' which was followed by a short pause of indecision.

'Pray,' said the gentleman, 'are there any inns hereabouts?' At the word

'inns,' John plucked up his spirit in a surprising manner; his fears

rolled off like smoke; all the landlord stirred within him.

'There are no inns,' rejoined Mr Willet, with a strong emphasis on the

plural number; 'but there's a Inn--one Inn--the Maypole Inn. That's a

Inn indeed. You won't see the like of that Inn often.'

'You keep it, perhaps?' said the horseman, smiling.

'I do, sir,' replied John, greatly wondering how he had found this out.

'And how far is the Maypole from here?'

'About a mile'--John was going to add that it was the easiest mile in

all the world, when the third rider, who had hitherto kept a little in

the rear, suddenly interposed:

'And have you one excellent bed, landlord? Hem! A bed that you can

recommend--a bed that you are sure is well aired--a bed that has been

slept in by some perfectly respectable and unexceptionable person?'

'We don't take in no tagrag and bobtail at our house, sir,' answered

John. 'And as to the bed itself--'

'Say, as to three beds,' interposed the gentleman who had spoken before;

'for we shall want three if we stay, though my friend only speaks of

one.'

'No, no, my lord; you are too good, you are too kind; but your life is

of far too much importance to the nation in these portentous times, to

be placed upon a level with one so useless and so poor as mine. A great

cause, my lord, a mighty cause, depends on you. You are its leader and

its champion, its advanced guard and its van. It is the cause of our

altars and our homes, our country and our faith. Let ME sleep on a

chair--the carpet--anywhere. No one will repine if I take cold or fever.

Let John Grueby pass the night beneath the open sky--no one will

repine for HIM. But forty thousand men of this our island in the wave

(exclusive of women and children) rivet their eyes and thoughts on Lord

George Gordon; and every day, from the rising up of the sun to the going

down of the same, pray for his health and vigour. My lord,' said the

speaker, rising in his stirrups, 'it is a glorious cause, and must not

be forgotten. My lord, it is a mighty cause, and must not be endangered.

My lord, it is a holy cause, and must not be deserted.'

'It IS a holy cause,' exclaimed his lordship, lifting up his hat with

great solemnity. 'Amen.'

'John Grueby,' said the long-winded gentleman, in a tone of mild

reproof, 'his lordship said Amen.'

'I heard my lord, sir,' said the man, sitting like a statue on his

horse.

'And do not YOU say Amen, likewise?'

To which John Grueby made no reply at all, but sat looking straight

before him.

'You surprise me, Grueby,' said the gentleman. 'At a crisis like the

present, when Queen Elizabeth, that maiden monarch, weeps within

her tomb, and Bloody Mary, with a brow of gloom and shadow, stalks

triumphant--'

'Oh, sir,' cied the man, gruffly, 'where's the use of talking of Bloody

Mary, under such circumstances as the present, when my lord's wet

through, and tired with hard riding? Let's either go on to London, sir,

or put up at once; or that unfort'nate Bloody Mary will have more to

answer for--and she's done a deal more harm in her grave than she ever

did in her lifetime, I believe.'

By this time Mr Willet, who had never beard so many words spoken

together at one time, or delivered with such volubility and emphasis as

by the long-winded gentleman; and whose brain, being wholly unable to

sustain or compass them, had quite given itself up for lost; recovered

so far as to observe that there was ample accommodation at the Maypole

for all the party: good beds; neat wines; excellent entertainment

for man and beast; private rooms for large and small parties; dinners

dressed upon the shortest notice; choice stabling, and a lock-up

coach-house; and, in short, to run over such recommendatory scraps of

language as were painted up on various portions of the building, and

which in the course of some forty years he had learnt to repeat with

tolerable correctness. He was considering whether it was at all possible

to insert any novel sentences to the same purpose, when the gentleman

who had spoken first, turning to him of the long wind, exclaimed, 'What

say you, Gashford? Shall we tarry at this house he speaks of, or press

forward? You shall decide.'

'I would submit, my lord, then,' returned the person he appealed to,

in a silky tone, 'that your health and spirits--so important, under

Providence, to our great cause, our pure and truthful cause'--here his

lordship pulled off his hat again, though it was raining hard--'require

refreshment and repose.'

'Go on before, landlord, and show the way,' said Lord George Gordon; 'we

will follow at a footpace.'

'If you'll give me leave, my lord,' said John Grueby, in a low voice,

'I'll change my proper place, and ride before you. The looks of the

landlord's friend are not over honest, and it may be as well to be

cautious with him.'

'John Grueby is quite right,' interposed Mr Gashford, falling back

hastily. 'My lord, a life so precious as yours must not be put in peril.

Go forward, John, by all means. If you have any reason to suspect the

fellow, blow his brains out.'

John made no answer, but looking straight before him, as his custom

seemed to be when the secretary spoke, bade Hugh push on, and followed

close behind him. Then came his lordship, with Mr Willet at his bridle

rein; and, last of all, his lordship's secretary--for that, it seemed,

was Gashford's office.

Hugh strode briskly on, often looking back at the servant, whose horse

was close upon his heels, and glancing with a leer at his bolster

case of pistols, by which he seemed to set great store. He was a

square-built, strong-made, bull-necked fellow, of the true English

breed; and as Hugh measured him with his eye, he measured Hugh,

regarding him meanwhile with a look of bluff disdain. He was much older

than the Maypole man, being to all appearance five-and-forty; but was

one of those self-possessed, hard-headed, imperturbable fellows, who, if

they are ever beaten at fisticuffs, or other kind of warfare, never know

it, and go on coolly till they win.

'If I led you wrong now,' said Hugh, tauntingly, 'you'd--ha ha

ha!--you'd shoot me through the head, I suppose.'

John Grueby took no more notice of this remark than if he had been deaf

and Hugh dumb; but kept riding on quite comfortably, with his eyes fixed

on the horizon.

'Did you ever try a fall with a man when you were young, master?' said

Hugh. 'Can you make any play at single-stick?'

John Grueby looked at him sideways with the same contented air, but

deigned not a word in answer.

'--Like this?' said Hugh, giving his cudgel one of those skilful

flourishes, in which the rustic of that time delighted. 'Whoop!'

'--Or that,' returned John Grueby, beating down his guard with his whip,

and striking him on the head with its butt end. 'Yes, I played a little

once. You wear your hair too long; I should have cracked your crown if

it had been a little shorter.'

It was a pretty smart, loud-sounding rap, as it was, and evidently

astonished Hugh; who, for the moment, seemed disposed to drag his new

acquaintance from his saddle. But his face betokening neither malice,

triumph, rage, nor any lingering idea that he had given him offence;

his eyes gazing steadily in the old direction, and his manner being as

careless and composed as if he had merely brushed away a fly; Hugh was

so puzzled, and so disposed to look upon him as a customer of almost

supernatural toughness, that he merely laughed, and cried 'Well done!'

then, sheering off a little, led the way in silence.

Before the lapse of many minutes the party halted at the Maypole door.

Lord George and his secretary quickly dismounting, gave their horses to

their servant, who, under the guidance of Hugh, repaired to the stables.

Right glad to escape from the inclemency of the night, they followed

Mr Willet into the common room, and stood warming themselves and drying

their clothes before the cheerful fire, while he busied himself with

such orders and preparations as his guest's high quality required.

As he bustled in and out of the room, intent on these arrangements, he

had an opportunity of observing the two travellers, of whom, as yet, he

knew nothing but the voice. The lord, the great personage who did the

Maypole so much honour, was about the middle height, of a slender make,

and sallow complexion, with an aquiline nose, and long hair of a reddish

brown, combed perfectly straight and smooth about his ears, and slightly

powdered, but without the faintest vestige of a curl. He was attired,

under his greatcoat, in a full suit of black, quite free from any

ornament, and of the most precise and sober cut. The gravity of his

dress, together with a certain lankness of cheek and stiffness of

deportment, added nearly ten years to his age, but his figure was that

of one not yet past thirty. As he stood musing in the red glow of

the fire, it was striking to observe his very bright large eye, which

betrayed a restlessness of thought and purpose, singularly at variance

with the studied composure and sobriety of his mien, and with his

quaint and sad apparel. It had nothing harsh or cruel in its expression;

neither had his face, which was thin and mild, and wore an air of

melancholy; but it was suggestive of an indefinable uneasiness; which

infected those who looked upon him, and filled them with a kind of pity

for the man: though why it did so, they would have had some trouble to

explain.

Gashford, the secretary, was taller, angularly made, high-shouldered,

bony, and ungraceful. His dress, in imitation of his superior, was

demure and staid in the extreme; his manner, formal and constrained.

This gentleman had an overhanging brow, great hands and feet and ears,

and a pair of eyes that seemed to have made an unnatural retreat into

his head, and to have dug themselves a cave to hide in. His manner was

smooth and humble, but very sly and slinking. He wore the aspect of a

man who was always lying in wait for something that WOULDN'T come to

pass; but he looked patient--very patient--and fawned like a spaniel

dog. Even now, while he warmed and rubbed his hands before the blaze,

he had the air of one who only presumed to enjoy it in his degree as a

commoner; and though he knew his lord was not regarding him, he looked

into his face from time to time, and with a meek and deferential manner,

smiled as if for practice.

Such were the guests whom old John Willet, with a fixed and leaden

eye, surveyed a hundred times, and to whom he now advanced with a state

candlestick in each hand, beseeching them to follow him into a worthier

chamber. 'For my lord,' said John--it is odd enough, but certain people

seem to have as great a pleasure in pronouncing titles as their owners

have in wearing them--'this room, my lord, isn't at all the sort of

place for your lordship, and I have to beg your lordship's pardon for

keeping you here, my lord, one minute.'

With this address, John ushered them upstairs into the state apartment,

which, like many other things of state, was cold and comfortless. Their

own footsteps, reverberating through the spacious room, struck upon

their hearing with a hollow sound; and its damp and chilly atmosphere

was rendered doubly cheerless by contrast with the homely warmth they

had deserted.

It was of no use, however, to propose a return to the place they had

quitted, for the preparations went on so briskly that there was no time

to stop them. John, with the tall candlesticks in his hands, bowed them

up to the fireplace; Hugh, striding in with a lighted brand and pile

of firewood, cast it down upon the hearth, and set it in a blaze; John

Grueby (who had a great blue cockade in his hat, which he appeared

to despise mightily) brought in the portmanteau he had carried on his

horse, and placed it on the floor; and presently all three were busily

engaged in drawing out the screen, laying the cloth, inspecting the

beds, lighting fires in the bedrooms, expediting the supper, and making

everything as cosy and as snug as might be, on so short a notice. In

less than an hour's time, supper had been served, and ate, and cleared

away; and Lord George and his secretary, with slippered feet, and legs

stretched out before the fire, sat over some hot mulled wine together.

'So ends, my lord,' said Gashford, filling his glass with great

complacency, 'the blessed work of a most blessed day.'

'And of a blessed yesterday,' said his lordship, raising his head.

'Ah!'--and here the secretary clasped his hands--'a blessed yesterday

indeed! The Protestants of Suffolk are godly men and true. Though others

of our countrymen have lost their way in darkness, even as we, my lord,

did lose our road to-night, theirs is the light and glory.'

'Did I move them, Gashford?' said Lord George.

'Move them, my lord! Move them! They cried to be led on against the

Papists, they vowed a dreadful vengeance on their heads, they roared

like men possessed--'

'But not by devils,' said his lord.

'By devils! my lord! By angels.'

'Yes--oh surely--by angels, no doubt,' said Lord George, thrusting his

hands into his pockets, taking them out again to bite his nails, and

looking uncomfortably at the fire. 'Of course by angels--eh Gashford?'

'You do not doubt it, my lord?' said the secretary.

'No--No,' returned his lord. 'No. Why should I? I suppose it would be

decidedly irreligious to doubt it--wouldn't it, Gashford? Though there

certainly were,' he added, without waiting for an answer, 'some plaguy

ill-looking characters among them.'

'When you warmed,' said the secretary, looking sharply at the other's

downcast eyes, which brightened slowly as he spoke; 'when you warmed

into that noble outbreak; when you told them that you were never of

the lukewarm or the timid tribe, and bade them take heed that they were

prepared to follow one who would lead them on, though to the very death;

when you spoke of a hundred and twenty thousand men across the Scottish

border who would take their own redress at any time, if it were not

conceded; when you cried "Perish the Pope and all his base adherents;

the penal laws against them shall never be repealed while Englishmen

have hearts and hands"--and waved your own and touched your sword; and

when they cried "No Popery!" and you cried "No; not even if we wade in

blood," and they threw up their hats and cried "Hurrah! not even if we

wade in blood; No Popery! Lord George! Down with the Papists--Vengeance

on their heads:" when this was said and done, and a word from you, my

lord, could raise or still the tumult--ah! then I felt what greatness

was indeed, and thought, When was there ever power like this of Lord

George Gordon's!'

'It's a great power. You're right. It is a great power!' he cried with

sparkling eyes. 'But--dear Gashford--did I really say all that?'

'And how much more!' cried the secretary, looking upwards. 'Ah! how much

more!'

'And I told them what you say, about the one hundred and forty thousand

men in Scotland, did I!' he asked with evident delight. 'That was bold.'

'Our cause is boldness. Truth is always bold.'

'Certainly. So is religion. She's bold, Gashford?'

'The true religion is, my lord.'

'And that's ours,' he rejoined, moving uneasily in his seat, and biting

his nails as though he would pare them to the quick. 'There can be no

doubt of ours being the true one. You feel as certain of that as I do,

Gashford, don't you?'

'Does my lord ask ME,' whined Gashford, drawing his chair nearer with

an injured air, and laying his broad flat hand upon the table; 'ME,'

he repeated, bending the dark hollows of his eyes upon him with an

unwholesome smile, 'who, stricken by the magic of his eloquence in

Scotland but a year ago, abjured the errors of the Romish church, and

clung to him as one whose timely hand had plucked me from a pit?'

'True. No--No. I--I didn't mean it,' replied the other, shaking him by

the hand, rising from his seat, and pacing restlessly about the room.

'It's a proud thing to lead the people, Gashford,' he added as he made a

sudden halt.

'By force of reason too,' returned the pliant secretary.

'Ay, to be sure. They may cough and jeer, and groan in Parliament, and

call me fool and madman, but which of them can raise this human sea and

make it swell and roar at pleasure? Not one.'

'Not one,' repeated Gashford.

'Which of them can say for his honesty, what I can say for mine; which

of them has refused a minister's bribe of one thousand pounds a year, to

resign his seat in favour of another? Not one.'

'Not one,' repeated Gashford again--taking the lion's share of the

mulled wine between whiles.

'And as we are honest, true, and in a sacred cause, Gashford,' said Lord

George with a heightened colour and in a louder voice, as he laid his

fevered hand upon his shoulder, 'and are the only men who regard the

mass of people out of doors, or are regarded by them, we will uphold

them to the last; and will raise a cry against these un-English Papists

which shall re-echo through the country, and roll with a noise like

thunder. I will be worthy of the motto on my coat of arms, "Called and

chosen and faithful."

'Called,' said the secretary, 'by Heaven.'

'I am.'

'Chosen by the people.'

'Yes.'

'Faithful to both.'

'To the block!'

It would be difficult to convey an adequate idea of the excited manner

in which he gave these answers to the secretary's promptings; of the

rapidity of his utterance, or the violence of his tone and gesture; in

which, struggling through his Puritan's demeanour, was something wild

and ungovernable which broke through all restraint. For some minutes he

walked rapidly up and down the room, then stopping suddenly, exclaimed,

'Gashford--YOU moved them yesterday too. Oh yes! You did.'

'I shone with a reflected light, my lord,' replied the humble secretary,

laying his hand upon his heart. 'I did my best.'

'You did well,' said his master, 'and are a great and worthy instrument.

If you will ring for John Grueby to carry the portmanteau into my room,

and will wait here while I undress, we will dispose of business as

usual, if you're not too tired.'

'Too tired, my lord!--But this is his consideration! Christian from head

to foot.' With which soliloquy, the secretary tilted the jug, and looked

very hard into the mulled wine, to see how much remained.

John Willet and John Grueby appeared together. The one bearing the great

candlesticks, and the other the portmanteau, showed the deluded lord

into his chamber; and left the secretary alone, to yawn and shake

himself, and finally to fall asleep before the fire.

'Now, Mr Gashford sir,' said John Grueby in his ear, after what appeared

to him a moment of unconsciousness; 'my lord's abed.'

'Oh. Very good, John,' was his mild reply. 'Thank you, John. Nobody need

sit up. I know my room.'

'I hope you're not a-going to trouble your head to-night, or my lord's

head neither, with anything more about Bloody Mary,' said John. 'I wish

the blessed old creetur had never been born.'

'I said you might go to bed, John,' returned the secretary. 'You didn't

hear me, I think.'

'Between Bloody Marys, and blue cockades, and glorious Queen Besses,

and no Poperys, and Protestant associations, and making of speeches,'

pursued John Grueby, looking, as usual, a long way off, and taking no

notice of this hint, 'my lord's half off his head. When we go out o'

doors, such a set of ragamuffins comes a-shouting after us, "Gordon

forever!" that I'm ashamed of myself and don't know where to look. When

we're indoors, they come a-roaring and screaming about the house like so

many devils; and my lord instead of ordering them to be drove away, goes

out into the balcony and demeans himself by making speeches to 'em, and

calls 'em "Men of England," and "Fellow-countrymen," as if he was fond

of 'em and thanked 'em for coming. I can't make it out, but they're all

mixed up somehow or another with that unfort'nate Bloody Mary, and call

her name out till they're hoarse. They're all Protestants too--every man

and boy among 'em: and Protestants are very fond of spoons, I find, and

silver-plate in general, whenever area-gates is left open accidentally.

I wish that was the worst of it, and that no more harm might be to come;

but if you don't stop these ugly customers in time, Mr Gashford (and I

know you; you're the man that blows the fire), you'll find 'em grow a

little bit too strong for you. One of these evenings, when the weather

gets warmer and Protestants are thirsty, they'll be pulling London

down,--and I never heard that Bloody Mary went as far as THAT.'

Gashford had vanished long ago, and these remarks had been bestowed on

empty air. Not at all discomposed by the discovery, John Grueby fixed

his hat on, wrongside foremost that he might be unconscious of the

shadow of the obnoxious cockade, and withdrew to bed; shaking his head

in a very gloomy and prophetic manner until he reached his chamber.

Chapter 36

Gashford, with a smiling face, but still with looks of profound

deference and humility, betook himself towards his master's room,

smoothing his hair down as he went, and humming a psalm tune. As he

approached Lord George's door, he cleared his throat and hummed more

vigorously.

There was a remarkable contrast between this man's occupation at the

moment, and the expression of his countenance, which was singularly

repulsive and malicious. His beetling brow almost obscured his eyes;

his lip was curled contemptuously; his very shoulders seemed to sneer in

stealthy whisperings with his great flapped ears.

'Hush!' he muttered softly, as he peeped in at the chamber-door. 'He

seems to be asleep. Pray Heaven he is! Too much watching, too much care,

too much thought--ah! Lord preserve him for a martyr! He is a saint, if

ever saint drew breath on this bad earth.'

Placing his light upon a table, he walked on tiptoe to the fire, and

sitting in a chair before it with his back towards the bed, went on

communing with himself like one who thought aloud:

'The saviour of his country and his country's religion, the friend of

his poor countrymen, the enemy of the proud and harsh; beloved of the

rejected and oppressed, adored by forty thousand bold and loyal English

hearts--what happy slumbers his should be!' And here he sighed, and

warmed his hands, and shook his head as men do when their hearts are

full, and heaved another sigh, and warmed his hands again.

'Why, Gashford?' said Lord George, who was lying broad awake, upon his

side, and had been staring at him from his entrance.

'My--my lord,' said Gashford, starting and looking round as though in

great surprise. 'I have disturbed you!'

'I have not been sleeping.'

'Not sleeping!' he repeated, with assumed confusion. 'What can I say

for having in your presence given utterance to thoughts--but they were

sincere--they were sincere!' exclaimed the secretary, drawing his sleeve

in a hasty way across his eyes; 'and why should I regret your having

heard them?'

'Gashford,' said the poor lord, stretching out his hand with manifest

emotion. 'Do not regret it. You love me well, I know--too well. I don't

deserve such homage.'

Gashford made no reply, but grasped the hand and pressed it to his lips.

Then rising, and taking from the trunk a little desk, he placed it on

a table near the fire, unlocked it with a key he carried in his pocket,

sat down before it, took out a pen, and, before dipping it in the

inkstand, sucked it--to compose the fashion of his mouth perhaps, on

which a smile was hovering yet.

'How do our numbers stand since last enrolling-night?' inquired Lord

George. 'Are we really forty thousand strong, or do we still speak in

round numbers when we take the Association at that amount?'

'Our total now exceeds that number by a score and three,' Gashford

replied, casting his eyes upon his papers.

'The funds?'

'Not VERY improving; but there is some manna in the wilderness, my lord.

Hem! On Friday night the widows' mites dropped in. "Forty scavengers,

three and fourpence. An aged pew-opener of St Martin's parish, sixpence.

A bell-ringer of the established church, sixpence. A Protestant infant,

newly born, one halfpenny. The United Link Boys, three shillings--one

bad. The anti-popish prisoners in Newgate, five and fourpence. A friend

in Bedlam, half-a-crown. Dennis the hangman, one shilling."'

'That Dennis,' said his lordship, 'is an earnest man. I marked him in

the crowd in Welbeck Street, last Friday.'

'A good man,' rejoined the secretary, 'a staunch, sincere, and truly

zealous man.'

'He should be encouraged,' said Lord George. 'Make a note of Dennis.

I'll talk with him.'

Gashford obeyed, and went on reading from his list:

'"The Friends of Reason, half-a-guinea. The Friends of Liberty,

half-a-guinea. The Friends of Peace, half-a-guinea. The Friends of

Charity, half-a-guinea. The Friends of Mercy, half-a-guinea. The

Associated Rememberers of Bloody Mary, half-a-guinea. The United

Bulldogs, half-a-guinea."'

'The United Bulldogs,' said Lord George, biting his nails most horribly,

'are a new society, are they not?'

'Formerly the 'Prentice Knights, my lord. The indentures of the old

members expiring by degrees, they changed their name, it seems, though

they still have 'prentices among them, as well as workmen.'

'What is their president's name?' inquired Lord George.

'President,' said Gashford, reading, 'Mr Simon Tappertit.'

'I remember him. The little man, who sometimes brings an elderly sister

to our meetings, and sometimes another female too, who is conscientious,

I have no doubt, but not well-favoured?'

'The very same, my lord.'

'Tappertit is an earnest man,' said Lord George, thoughtfully. 'Eh,

Gashford?'

'One of the foremost among them all, my lord. He snuffs the battle from

afar, like the war-horse. He throws his hat up in the street as if he

were inspired, and makes most stirring speeches from the shoulders of

his friends.'

'Make a note of Tappertit,' said Lord George Gordon. 'We may advance him

to a place of trust.'

'That,' rejoined the secretary, doing as he was told, 'is all--except

Mrs Varden's box (fourteenth time of opening), seven shillings and

sixpence in silver and copper, and half-a-guinea in gold; and Miggs

(being the saving of a quarter's wages), one-and-threepence.'

'Miggs,' said Lord George. 'Is that a man?'

'The name is entered on the list as a woman,' replied the secretary. 'I

think she is the tall spare female of whom you spoke just now, my

lord, as not being well-favoured, who sometimes comes to hear the

speeches--along with Tappertit and Mrs Varden.'

'Mrs Varden is the elderly lady then, is she?'

The secretary nodded, and rubbed the bridge of his nose with the feather

of his pen.

'She is a zealous sister,' said Lord George. 'Her collection goes on

prosperously, and is pursued with fervour. Has her husband joined?'

'A malignant,' returned the secretary, folding up his papers. 'Unworthy

such a wife. He remains in outer darkness and steadily refuses.'

'The consequences be upon his own head!--Gashford!'

'My lord!'

'You don't think,' he turned restlessly in his bed as he spoke, 'these

people will desert me, when the hour arrives? I have spoken boldly for

them, ventured much, suppressed nothing. They'll not fall off, will

they?'

'No fear of that, my lord,' said Gashford, with a meaning look, which

was rather the involuntary expression of his own thoughts than intended

as any confirmation of his words, for the other's face was turned away.

'Be sure there is no fear of that.'

'Nor,' he said with a more restless motion than before, 'of their--but

they CAN sustain no harm from leaguing for this purpose. Right is on

our side, though Might may be against us. You feel as sure of that as

I--honestly, you do?'

The secretary was beginning with 'You do not doubt,' when the other

interrupted him, and impatiently rejoined:

'Doubt. No. Who says I doubt? If I doubted, should I cast away

relatives, friends, everything, for this unhappy country's sake; this

unhappy country,' he cried, springing up in bed, after repeating the

phrase 'unhappy country's sake' to himself, at least a dozen times,

'forsaken of God and man, delivered over to a dangerous confederacy of

Popish powers; the prey of corruption, idolatry, and despotism! Who says

I doubt? Am I called, and chosen, and faithful? Tell me. Am I, or am I

not?'

'To God, the country, and yourself,' cried Gashford.

'I am. I will be. I say again, I will be: to the block. Who says as

much! Do you? Does any man alive?'

The secretary drooped his head with an expression of perfect

acquiescence in anything that had been said or might be; and Lord George

gradually sinking down upon his pillow, fell asleep.

Although there was something very ludicrous in his vehement manner,

taken in conjunction with his meagre aspect and ungraceful presence, it

would scarcely have provoked a smile in any man of kindly feeling; or

even if it had, he would have felt sorry and almost angry with himself

next moment, for yielding to the impulse. This lord was sincere in his

violence and in his wavering. A nature prone to false enthusiasm, and

the vanity of being a leader, were the worst qualities apparent in his

composition. All the rest was weakness--sheer weakness; and it is

the unhappy lot of thoroughly weak men, that their very sympathies,

affections, confidences--all the qualities which in better constituted

minds are virtues--dwindle into foibles, or turn into downright vices.

Gashford, with many a sly look towards the bed, sat chuckling at his

master's folly, until his deep and heavy breathing warned him that he

might retire. Locking his desk, and replacing it within the trunk (but

not before he had taken from a secret lining two printed handbills), he

cautiously withdrew; looking back, as he went, at the pale face of

the slumbering man, above whose head the dusty plumes that crowned the

Maypole couch, waved drearily and sadly as though it were a bier.

Stopping on the staircase to listen that all was quiet, and to take off

his shoes lest his footsteps should alarm any light sleeper who might

be near at hand, he descended to the ground floor, and thrust one of his

bills beneath the great door of the house. That done, he crept softly

back to his own chamber, and from the window let another fall--carefully

wrapt round a stone to save it from the wind--into the yard below.

They were addressed on the back 'To every Protestant into whose hands

this shall come,' and bore within what follows:

'Men and Brethren. Whoever shall find this letter, will take it as a

warning to join, without delay, the friends of Lord George Gordon. There

are great events at hand; and the times are dangerous and troubled. Read

this carefully, keep it clean, and drop it somewhere else. For King and

Country. Union.'

'More seed, more seed,' said Gashford as he closed the window. 'When

will the harvest come!'

Chapter 37

To surround anything, however monstrous or ridiculous, with an air of

mystery, is to invest it with a secret charm, and power of attraction

which to the crowd is irresistible. False priests, false prophets, false

doctors, false patriots, false prodigies of every kind, veiling their

proceedings in mystery, have always addressed themselves at an immense

advantage to the popular credulity, and have been, perhaps, more

indebted to that resource in gaining and keeping for a time the upper

hand of Truth and Common Sense, than to any half-dozen items in the

whole catalogue of imposture. Curiosity is, and has been from the

creation of the world, a master-passion. To awaken it, to gratify it

by slight degrees, and yet leave something always in suspense, is to

establish the surest hold that can be had, in wrong, on the unthinking

portion of mankind.

If a man had stood on London Bridge, calling till he was hoarse, upon

the passers-by, to join with Lord George Gordon, although for an object

which no man understood, and which in that very incident had a charm of

its own,--the probability is, that he might have influenced a score of

people in a month. If all zealous Protestants had been publicly urged

to join an association for the avowed purpose of singing a hymn or two

occasionally, and hearing some indifferent speeches made, and ultimately

of petitioning Parliament not to pass an act for abolishing the

penal laws against Roman Catholic priests, the penalty of perpetual

imprisonment denounced against those who educated children in that

persuasion, and the disqualification of all members of the Romish church

to inherit real property in the United Kingdom by right of purchase or

descent,--matters so far removed from the business and bosoms of the

mass, might perhaps have called together a hundred people. But when

vague rumours got abroad, that in this Protestant association a secret

power was mustering against the government for undefined and mighty

purposes; when the air was filled with whispers of a confederacy

among the Popish powers to degrade and enslave England, establish an

inquisition in London, and turn the pens of Smithfield market into

stakes and cauldrons; when terrors and alarms which no man understood

were perpetually broached, both in and out of Parliament, by one

enthusiast who did not understand himself, and bygone bugbears which had

lain quietly in their graves for centuries, were raised again to haunt

the ignorant and credulous; when all this was done, as it were, in the

dark, and secret invitations to join the Great Protestant Association in

defence of religion, life, and liberty, were dropped in the public ways,

thrust under the house-doors, tossed in at windows, and pressed into

the hands of those who trod the streets by night; when they glared

from every wall, and shone on every post and pillar, so that stocks and

stones appeared infected with the common fear, urging all men to join

together blindfold in resistance of they knew not what, they knew not

why;--then the mania spread indeed, and the body, still increasing every

day, grew forty thousand strong.

So said, at least, in this month of March, 1780, Lord George Gordon, the

Association's president. Whether it was the fact or otherwise, few men

knew or cared to ascertain. It had never made any public demonstration;

had scarcely ever been heard of, save through him; had never been seen;

and was supposed by many to be the mere creature of his disordered

brain. He was accustomed to talk largely about numbers of

men--stimulated, as it was inferred, by certain successful disturbances,

arising out of the same subject, which had occurred in Scotland in the

previous year; was looked upon as a cracked-brained member of the lower

house, who attacked all parties and sided with none, and was very little

regarded. It was known that there was discontent abroad--there always

is; he had been accustomed to address the people by placard, speech,

and pamphlet, upon other questions; nothing had come, in England, of his

past exertions, and nothing was apprehended from his present. Just as

he has come upon the reader, he had come, from time to time, upon the

public, and been forgotten in a day; as suddenly as he appears in these

pages, after a blank of five long years, did he and his proceedings

begin to force themselves, about this period, upon the notice of

thousands of people, who had mingled in active life during the whole

interval, and who, without being deaf or blind to passing events, had

scarcely ever thought of him before.

'My lord,' said Gashford in his ear, as he drew the curtains of his bed

betimes; 'my lord!'

'Yes--who's that? What is it?'

'The clock has struck nine,' returned the secretary, with meekly folded

hands. 'You have slept well? I hope you have slept well? If my prayers

are heard, you are refreshed indeed.'

'To say the truth, I have slept so soundly,' said Lord George, rubbing

his eyes and looking round the room, 'that I don't remember quite--what

place is this?'

'My lord!' cried Gashford, with a smile.

'Oh!' returned his superior. 'Yes. You're not a Jew then?'

'A Jew!' exclaimed the pious secretary, recoiling.

'I dreamed that we were Jews, Gashford. You and I--both of us--Jews with

long beards.'

'Heaven forbid, my lord! We might as well be Papists.'

'I suppose we might,' returned the other, very quickly. 'Eh? You really

think so, Gashford?'

'Surely I do,' the secretary cried, with looks of great surprise.

'Humph!' he muttered. 'Yes, that seems reasonable.'

'I hope my lord--' the secretary began.

'Hope!' he echoed, interrupting him. 'Why do you say, you hope? There's

no harm in thinking of such things.'

'Not in dreams,' returned the Secretary.

'In dreams! No, nor waking either.'

--'"Called, and chosen, and faithful,"' said Gashford, taking up

Lord George's watch which lay upon a chair, and seeming to read the

inscription on the seal, abstractedly.

It was the slightest action possible, not obtruded on his notice, and

apparently the result of a moment's absence of mind, not worth remark.

But as the words were uttered, Lord George, who had been going on

impetuously, stopped short, reddened, and was silent. Apparently quite

unconscious of this change in his demeanour, the wily Secretary stepped

a little apart, under pretence of pulling up the window-blind, and

returning when the other had had time to recover, said:

'The holy cause goes bravely on, my lord. I was not idle, even last

night. I dropped two of the handbills before I went to bed, and both are

gone this morning. Nobody in the house has mentioned the circumstance

of finding them, though I have been downstairs full half-an-hour. One or

two recruits will be their first fruit, I predict; and who shall say how

many more, with Heaven's blessing on your inspired exertions!'

'It was a famous device in the beginning,' replied Lord George; 'an

excellent device, and did good service in Scotland. It was quite worthy

of you. You remind me not to be a sluggard, Gashford, when the vineyard

is menaced with destruction, and may be trodden down by Papist feet. Let

the horses be saddled in half-an-hour. We must be up and doing!'

He said this with a heightened colour, and in a tone of such enthusiasm,

that the secretary deemed all further prompting needless, and withdrew.

--'Dreamed he was a Jew,' he said thoughtfully, as he closed the bedroom

door. 'He may come to that before he dies. It's like enough. Well! After

a time, and provided I lost nothing by it, I don't see why that religion

shouldn't suit me as well as any other. There are rich men among the

Jews; shaving is very troublesome;--yes, it would suit me well enough.

For the present, though, we must be Christian to the core. Our prophetic

motto will suit all creeds in their turn, that's a comfort.' Reflecting

on this source of consolation, he reached the sitting-room, and rang the

bell for breakfast.

Lord George was quickly dressed (for his plain toilet was easily made),

and as he was no less frugal in his repasts than in his Puritan attire,

his share of the meal was soon dispatched. The secretary, however, more

devoted to the good things of this world, or more intent on sustaining

his strength and spirits for the sake of the Protestant cause, ate

and drank to the last minute, and required indeed some three or four

reminders from John Grueby, before he could resolve to tear himself away

from Mr Willet's plentiful providing.

At length he came downstairs, wiping his greasy mouth, and having paid

John Willet's bill, climbed into his saddle. Lord George, who had been

walking up and down before the house talking to himself with earnest

gestures, mounted his horse; and returning old John Willet's stately

bow, as well as the parting salutation of a dozen idlers whom the rumour

of a live lord being about to leave the Maypole had gathered round the

porch, they rode away, with stout John Grueby in the rear.

If Lord George Gordon had appeared in the eyes of Mr Willet, overnight,

a nobleman of somewhat quaint and odd exterior, the impression was

confirmed this morning, and increased a hundredfold. Sitting bolt

upright upon his bony steed, with his long, straight hair, dangling

about his face and fluttering in the wind; his limbs all angular and

rigid, his elbows stuck out on either side ungracefully, and his whole

frame jogged and shaken at every motion of his horse's feet; a more

grotesque or more ungainly figure can hardly be conceived. In lieu of

whip, he carried in his hand a great gold-headed cane, as large as any

footman carries in these days, and his various modes of holding this

unwieldy weapon--now upright before his face like the sabre of a

horse-soldier, now over his shoulder like a musket, now between

his finger and thumb, but always in some uncouth and awkward

fashion--contributed in no small degree to the absurdity of his

appearance. Stiff, lank, and solemn, dressed in an unusual manner,

and ostentatiously exhibiting--whether by design or accident--all his

peculiarities of carriage, gesture, and conduct, all the qualities,

natural and artificial, in which he differed from other men; he might

have moved the sternest looker-on to laughter, and fully provoked the

smiles and whispered jests which greeted his departure from the Maypole

inn.

Quite unconscious, however, of the effect he produced, he trotted on

beside his secretary, talking to himself nearly all the way, until they

came within a mile or two of London, when now and then some passenger

went by who knew him by sight, and pointed him out to some one else, and

perhaps stood looking after him, or cried in jest or earnest as it might

be, 'Hurrah Geordie! No Popery!' At which he would gravely pull off his

hat, and bow. When they reached the town and rode along the streets,

these notices became more frequent; some laughed, some hissed, some

turned their heads and smiled, some wondered who he was, some ran along

the pavement by his side and cheered. When this happened in a crush of

carts and chairs and coaches, he would make a dead stop, and pulling

off his hat, cry, 'Gentlemen, No Popery!' to which the gentlemen would

respond with lusty voices, and with three times three; and then, on he

would go again with a score or so of the raggedest, following at his

horse's heels, and shouting till their throats were parched.

The old ladies too--there were a great many old ladies in the streets,

and these all knew him. Some of them--not those of the highest rank,

but such as sold fruit from baskets and carried burdens--clapped their

shrivelled hands, and raised a weazen, piping, shrill 'Hurrah, my

lord.' Others waved their hands or handkerchiefs, or shook their fans

or parasols, or threw up windows and called in haste to those within,

to come and see. All these marks of popular esteem, he received with

profound gravity and respect; bowing very low, and so frequently that

his hat was more off his head than on; and looking up at the houses as

he passed along, with the air of one who was making a public entry, and

yet was not puffed up or proud.

So they rode (to the deep and unspeakable disgust of John Grueby) the

whole length of Whitechapel, Leadenhall Street, and Cheapside, and into

St Paul's Churchyard. Arriving close to the cathedral, he halted; spoke

to Gashford; and looking upward at its lofty dome, shook his head, as

though he said, 'The Church in Danger!' Then to be sure, the bystanders

stretched their throats indeed; and he went on again with mighty

acclamations from the mob, and lower bows than ever.

So along the Strand, up Swallow Street, into the Oxford Road, and thence

to his house in Welbeck Street, near Cavendish Square, whither he was

attended by a few dozen idlers; of whom he took leave on the steps with

this brief parting, 'Gentlemen, No Popery. Good day. God bless you.'

This being rather a shorter address than they expected, was received

with some displeasure, and cries of 'A speech! a speech!' which might

have been complied with, but that John Grueby, making a mad charge upon

them with all three horses, on his way to the stables, caused them to

disperse into the adjoining fields, where they presently fell to

pitch and toss, chuck-farthing, odd or even, dog-fighting, and other

Protestant recreations.

In the afternoon Lord George came forth again, dressed in a black velvet

coat, and trousers and waistcoat of the Gordon plaid, all of the same

Quaker cut; and in this costume, which made him look a dozen times more

strange and singular than before, went down on foot to Westminster.

Gashford, meanwhile, bestirred himself in business matters; with which

he was still engaged when, shortly after dusk, John Grueby entered and

announced a visitor.

'Let him come in,' said Gashford.

'Here! come in!' growled John to somebody without; 'You're a Protestant,

an't you?'

'I should think so,' replied a deep, gruff voice.

'You've the looks of it,' said John Grueby. 'I'd have known you for one,

anywhere.' With which remark he gave the visitor admission, retired, and

shut the door.

The man who now confronted Gashford, was a squat, thickset personage,

with a low, retreating forehead, a coarse shock head of hair, and eyes

so small and near together, that his broken nose alone seemed to

prevent their meeting and fusing into one of the usual size. A dingy

handkerchief twisted like a cord about his neck, left its great veins

exposed to view, and they were swollen and starting, as though with

gulping down strong passions, malice, and ill-will. His dress was of

threadbare velveteen--a faded, rusty, whitened black, like the ashes

of a pipe or a coal fire after a day's extinction; discoloured with the

soils of many a stale debauch, and reeking yet with pot-house odours. In

lieu of buckles at his knees, he wore unequal loops of packthread; and

in his grimy hands he held a knotted stick, the knob of which was carved

into a rough likeness of his own vile face. Such was the visitor who

doffed his three-cornered hat in Gashford's presence, and waited,

leering, for his notice.

'Ah! Dennis!' cried the secretary. 'Sit down.'

'I see my lord down yonder--' cried the man, with a jerk of his thumb

towards the quarter that he spoke of, 'and he says to me, says my lord,

"If you've nothing to do, Dennis, go up to my house and talk with Muster

Gashford." Of course I'd nothing to do, you know. These an't my working

hours. Ha ha! I was a-taking the air when I see my lord, that's what

I was doing. I takes the air by night, as the howls does, Muster

Gashford.'

And sometimes in the day-time, eh?' said the secretary--'when you go out

in state, you know.'

'Ha ha!' roared the fellow, smiting his leg; 'for a gentleman as 'ull

say a pleasant thing in a pleasant way, give me Muster Gashford agin'

all London and Westminster! My lord an't a bad 'un at that, but he's a

fool to you. Ah to be sure,--when I go out in state.'

'And have your carriage,' said the secretary; 'and your chaplain, eh?

and all the rest of it?'

'You'll be the death of me,' cried Dennis, with another roar, 'you will.

But what's in the wind now, Muster Gashford,' he asked hoarsely, 'Eh?

Are we to be under orders to pull down one of them Popish chapels--or

what?'

'Hush!' said the secretary, suffering the faintest smile to play upon

his face. 'Hush! God bless me, Dennis! We associate, you know, for

strictly peaceable and lawful purposes.'

'I know, bless you,' returned the man, thrusting his tongue into his

cheek; 'I entered a' purpose, didn't I!'

'No doubt,' said Gashford, smiling as before. And when he said so,

Dennis roared again, and smote his leg still harder, and falling into

fits of laughter, wiped his eyes with the corner of his neckerchief, and

cried, 'Muster Gashford agin' all England hollow!'

'Lord George and I were talking of you last night,' said Gashford, after

a pause. 'He says you are a very earnest fellow.'

'So I am,' returned the hangman.

'And that you truly hate the Papists.'

'So I do,' and he confirmed it with a good round oath. 'Lookye here,

Muster Gashford,' said the fellow, laying his hat and stick upon the

floor, and slowly beating the palm of one hand with the fingers of the

other; 'Ob-serve. I'm a constitutional officer that works for my living,

and does my work creditable. Do I, or do I not?'

'Unquestionably.'

'Very good. Stop a minute. My work, is sound, Protestant,

constitutional, English work. Is it, or is it not?'

'No man alive can doubt it.'

'Nor dead neither. Parliament says this here--says Parliament, "If any

man, woman, or child, does anything which goes again a certain number

of our acts"--how many hanging laws may there be at this present time,

Muster Gashford? Fifty?'

'I don't exactly know how many,' replied Gashford, leaning back in his

chair and yawning; 'a great number though.'

'Well, say fifty. Parliament says, "If any man, woman, or child, does

anything again any one of them fifty acts, that man, woman, or child,

shall be worked off by Dennis." George the Third steps in when they

number very strong at the end of a sessions, and says, "These are too

many for Dennis. I'll have half for myself and Dennis shall have half

for himself;" and sometimes he throws me in one over that I don't

expect, as he did three year ago, when I got Mary Jones, a young woman

of nineteen who come up to Tyburn with a infant at her breast, and was

worked off for taking a piece of cloth off the counter of a shop in

Ludgate Hill, and putting it down again when the shopman see her;

and who had never done any harm before, and only tried to do that, in

consequence of her husband having been pressed three weeks previous, and

she being left to beg, with two young children--as was proved upon the

trial. Ha ha!--Well! That being the law and the practice of England, is

the glory of England, an't it, Muster Gashford?'

'Certainly,' said the secretary.

'And in times to come,' pursued the hangman, 'if our grandsons should

think of their grandfathers' times, and find these things altered,

they'll say, "Those were days indeed, and we've been going down hill

ever since." Won't they, Muster Gashford?'

'I have no doubt they will,' said the secretary.

'Well then, look here,' said the hangman. 'If these Papists gets into

power, and begins to boil and roast instead of hang, what becomes of my

work! If they touch my work that's a part of so many laws, what becomes

of the laws in general, what becomes of the religion, what becomes of

the country!--Did you ever go to church, Muster Gashford?'

'Ever!' repeated the secretary with some indignation; 'of course.'

'Well,' said the ruffian, 'I've been once--twice, counting the time I

was christened--and when I heard the Parliament prayed for, and thought

how many new hanging laws they made every sessions, I considered that I

was prayed for. Now mind, Muster Gashford,' said the fellow, taking

up his stick and shaking it with a ferocious air, 'I mustn't have

my Protestant work touched, nor this here Protestant state of things

altered in no degree, if I can help it; I mustn't have no Papists

interfering with me, unless they come to be worked off in course of law;

I mustn't have no biling, no roasting, no frying--nothing but hanging.

My lord may well call me an earnest fellow. In support of the great

Protestant principle of having plenty of that, I'll,' and here he beat

his club upon the ground, 'burn, fight, kill--do anything you bid me, so

that it's bold and devilish--though the end of it was, that I got hung

myself.--There, Muster Gashford!'

He appropriately followed up this frequent prostitution of a noble word

to the vilest purposes, by pouring out in a kind of ecstasy at least

a score of most tremendous oaths; then wiped his heated face upon his

neckerchief, and cried, 'No Popery! I'm a religious man, by G--!'

Gashford had leant back in his chair, regarding him with eyes so sunken,

and so shadowed by his heavy brows, that for aught the hangman saw of

them, he might have been stone blind. He remained smiling in silence for

a short time longer, and then said, slowly and distinctly:

'You are indeed an earnest fellow, Dennis--a most valuable fellow--the

staunchest man I know of in our ranks. But you must calm yourself;

you must be peaceful, lawful, mild as any lamb. I am sure you will be

though.'

'Ay, ay, we shall see, Muster Gashford, we shall see. You won't have to

complain of me,' returned the other, shaking his head.

'I am sure I shall not,' said the secretary in the same mild tone, and

with the same emphasis. 'We shall have, we think, about next month, or

May, when this Papist relief bill comes before the house, to convene our

whole body for the first time. My lord has thoughts of our walking

in procession through the streets--just as an innocent display of

strength--and accompanying our petition down to the door of the House of

Commons.'

'The sooner the better,' said Dennis, with another oath.

'We shall have to draw up in divisions, our numbers being so large; and,

I believe I may venture to say,' resumed Gashford, affecting not to

hear the interruption, 'though I have no direct instructions to that

effect--that Lord George has thought of you as an excellent leader for

one of these parties. I have no doubt you would be an admirable one.'

'Try me,' said the fellow, with an ugly wink.

'You would be cool, I know,' pursued the secretary, still smiling, and

still managing his eyes so that he could watch him closely, and really

not be seen in turn, 'obedient to orders, and perfectly temperate. You

would lead your party into no danger, I am certain.'

'I'd lead them, Muster Gashford,'--the hangman was beginning in a

reckless way, when Gashford started forward, laid his finger on his

lips, and feigned to write, just as the door was opened by John Grueby.

'Oh!' said John, looking in; 'here's another Protestant.'

'Some other room, John,' cried Gashford in his blandest voice. 'I am

engaged just now.'

But John had brought this new visitor to the door, and he walked

in unbidden, as the words were uttered; giving to view the form and

features, rough attire, and reckless air, of Hugh.

Chapter 38

The secretary put his hand before his eyes to shade them from the glare

of the lamp, and for some moments looked at Hugh with a frowning brow,

as if he remembered to have seen him lately, but could not call to mind

where, or on what occasion. His uncertainty was very brief, for before

Hugh had spoken a word, he said, as his countenance cleared up:

'Ay, ay, I recollect. It's quite right, John, you needn't wait. Don't

go, Dennis.'

'Your servant, master,' said Hugh, as Grueby disappeared.

'Yours, friend,' returned the secretary in his smoothest manner. 'What

brings YOU here? We left nothing behind us, I hope?'

Hugh gave a short laugh, and thrusting his hand into his breast,

produced one of the handbills, soiled and dirty from lying out of doors

all night, which he laid upon the secretary's desk after flattening it

upon his knee, and smoothing out the wrinkles with his heavy palm.

'Nothing but that, master. It fell into good hands, you see.'

'What is this!' said Gashford, turning it over with an air of perfectly

natural surprise. 'Where did you get it from, my good fellow; what does

it mean? I don't understand this at all.'

A little disconcerted by this reception, Hugh looked from the secretary

to Dennis, who had risen and was standing at the table too, observing

the stranger by stealth, and seeming to derive the utmost satisfaction

from his manners and appearance. Considering himself silently appealed

to by this action, Mr Dennis shook his head thrice, as if to say of

Gashford, 'No. He don't know anything at all about it. I know he don't.

I'll take my oath he don't;' and hiding his profile from Hugh with one

long end of his frowzy neckerchief, nodded and chuckled behind this

screen in extreme approval of the secretary's proceedings.

'It tells the man that finds it, to come here, don't it?' asked Hugh.

'I'm no scholar, myself, but I showed it to a friend, and he said it

did.'

'It certainly does,' said Gashford, opening his eyes to their utmost

width; 'really this is the most remarkable circumstance I have ever

known. How did you come by this piece of paper, my good friend?'

'Muster Gashford,' wheezed the hangman under his breath, 'agin' all

Newgate!'

Whether Hugh heard him, or saw by his manner that he was being played

upon, or perceived the secretary's drift of himself, he came in his

blunt way to the point at once.

'Here!' he said, stretching out his hand and taking it back; 'never mind

the bill, or what it says, or what it don't say. You don't know anything

about it, master,--no more do I,--no more does he,' glancing at Dennis.

'None of us know what it means, or where it comes from: there's an end

of that. Now I want to make one against the Catholics, I'm a No-Popery

man, and ready to be sworn in. That's what I've come here for.'

'Put him down on the roll, Muster Gashford,' said Dennis approvingly.

'That's the way to go to work--right to the end at once, and no

palaver.'

'What's the use of shooting wide of the mark, eh, old boy!' cried Hugh.

'My sentiments all over!' rejoined the hangman. 'This is the sort of

chap for my division, Muster Gashford. Down with him, sir. Put him on

the roll. I'd stand godfather to him, if he was to be christened in a

bonfire, made of the ruins of the Bank of England.'

With these and other expressions of confidence of the like flattering

kind, Mr Dennis gave him a hearty slap on the back, which Hugh was not

slow to return.

'No Popery, brother!' cried the hangman.

'No Property, brother!' responded Hugh.

'Popery, Popery,' said the secretary with his usual mildness.

'It's all the same!' cried Dennis. 'It's all right. Down with him,

Muster Gashford. Down with everybody, down with everything! Hurrah for

the Protestant religion! That's the time of day, Muster Gashford!'

The secretary regarded them both with a very favourable expression of

countenance, while they gave loose to these and other demonstrations of

their patriotic purpose; and was about to make some remark aloud, when

Dennis, stepping up to him, and shading his mouth with his hand, said,

in a hoarse whisper, as he nudged him with his elbow:

'Don't split upon a constitutional officer's profession, Muster

Gashford. There are popular prejudices, you know, and he mightn't like

it. Wait till he comes to be more intimate with me. He's a fine-built

chap, an't he?'

'A powerful fellow indeed!'

'Did you ever, Muster Gashford,' whispered Dennis, with a horrible

kind of admiration, such as that with which a cannibal might regard his

intimate friend, when hungry,--'did you ever--and here he drew still

closer to his ear, and fenced his mouth with both his open bands--'see

such a throat as his? Do but cast your eye upon it. There's a neck for

stretching, Muster Gashford!'

The secretary assented to this proposition with the best grace he could

assume--it is difficult to feign a true professional relish: which is

eccentric sometimes--and after asking the candidate a few unimportant

questions, proceeded to enrol him a member of the Great Protestant

Association of England. If anything could have exceeded Mr Dennis's joy

on the happy conclusion of this ceremony, it would have been the rapture

with which he received the announcement that the new member could

neither read nor write: those two arts being (as Mr Dennis swore) the

greatest possible curse a civilised community could know, and militating

more against the professional emoluments and usefulness of the great

constitutional office he had the honour to hold, than any adverse

circumstances that could present themselves to his imagination.

The enrolment being completed, and Hugh having been informed by

Gashford, in his peculiar manner, of the peaceful and strictly lawful

objects contemplated by the body to which he now belonged--during which

recital Mr Dennis nudged him very much with his elbow, and made divers

remarkable faces--the secretary gave them both to understand that he

desired to be alone. Therefore they took their leaves without delay, and

came out of the house together.

'Are you walking, brother?' said Dennis.

'Ay!' returned Hugh. 'Where you will.'

'That's social,' said his new friend. 'Which way shall we take? Shall we

go and have a look at doors that we shall make a pretty good clattering

at, before long--eh, brother?'

Hugh answering in the affirmative, they went slowly down to Westminster,

where both houses of Parliament were then sitting. Mingling in the crowd

of carriages, horses, servants, chairmen, link-boys, porters, and idlers

of all kinds, they lounged about; while Hugh's new friend pointed out to

him significantly the weak parts of the building, how easy it was to get

into the lobby, and so to the very door of the House of Commons; and how

plainly, when they marched down there in grand array, their roars and

shouts would be heard by the members inside; with a great deal more to

the same purpose, all of which Hugh received with manifest delight.

He told him, too, who some of the Lords and Commons were, by name,

as they came in and out; whether they were friendly to the Papists or

otherwise; and bade him take notice of their liveries and equipages,

that he might be sure of them, in case of need. Sometimes he drew

him close to the windows of a passing carriage, that he might see its

master's face by the light of the lamps; and, both in respect of people

and localities, he showed so much acquaintance with everything around,

that it was plain he had often studied there before; as indeed, when

they grew a little more confidential, he confessed he had.

Perhaps the most striking part of all this was, the number of

people--never in groups of more than two or three together--who seemed

to be skulking about the crowd for the same purpose. To the greater part

of these, a slight nod or a look from Hugh's companion was sufficient

greeting; but, now and then, some man would come and stand beside him

in the throng, and, without turning his head or appearing to communicate

with him, would say a word or two in a low voice, which he would answer

in the same cautious manner. Then they would part, like strangers. Some

of these men often reappeared again unexpectedly in the crowd close to

Hugh, and, as they passed by, pressed his hand, or looked him sternly in

the face; but they never spoke to him, nor he to them; no, not a word.

It was remarkable, too, that whenever they happened to stand where there

was any press of people, and Hugh chanced to be looking downward, he

was sure to see an arm stretched out--under his own perhaps, or perhaps

across him--which thrust some paper into the hand or pocket of a

bystander, and was so suddenly withdrawn that it was impossible to tell

from whom it came; nor could he see in any face, on glancing quickly

round, the least confusion or surprise. They often trod upon a paper

like the one he carried in his breast, but his companion whispered him

not to touch it or to take it up,--not even to look towards it,--so

there they let them lie, and passed on.

When they had paraded the street and all the avenues of the building in

this manner for near two hours, they turned away, and his friend asked

him what he thought of what he had seen, and whether he was prepared

for a good hot piece of work if it should come to that. The hotter the

better,' said Hugh, 'I'm prepared for anything.'--'So am I,' said his

friend, 'and so are many of us; and they shook hands upon it with a

great oath, and with many terrible imprecations on the Papists.

As they were thirsty by this time, Dennis proposed that they should

repair together to The Boot, where there was good company and strong

liquor. Hugh yielding a ready assent, they bent their steps that way

with no loss of time.

This Boot was a lone house of public entertainment, situated in the

fields at the back of the Foundling Hospital; a very solitary spot at

that period, and quite deserted after dark. The tavern stood at some

distance from any high road, and was approachable only by a dark and

narrow lane; so that Hugh was much surprised to find several people

drinking there, and great merriment going on. He was still more

surprised to find among them almost every face that had caught his

attention in the crowd; but his companion having whispered him outside

the door, that it was not considered good manners at The Boot to appear

at all curious about the company, he kept his own counsel, and made no

show of recognition.

Before putting his lips to the liquor which was brought for them, Dennis

drank in a loud voice the health of Lord George Gordon, President of the

Great Protestant Association; which toast Hugh pledged likewise, with

corresponding enthusiasm. A fiddler who was present, and who appeared

to act as the appointed minstrel of the company, forthwith struck up a

Scotch reel; and that in tones so invigorating, that Hugh and his friend

(who had both been drinking before) rose from their seats as by previous

concert, and, to the great admiration of the assembled guests, performed

an extemporaneous No-Popery Dance.

Chapter 39

The applause which the performance of Hugh and his new friend elicited

from the company at The Boot, had not yet subsided, and the two dancers

were still panting from their exertions, which had been of a rather

extreme and violent character, when the party was reinforced by the

arrival of some more guests, who, being a detachment of United Bulldogs,

were received with very flattering marks of distinction and respect.

The leader of this small party--for, including himself, they were but

three in number--was our old acquaintance, Mr Tappertit, who seemed,

physically speaking, to have grown smaller with years (particularly as

to his legs, which were stupendously little), but who, in a moral point

of view, in personal dignity and self-esteem, had swelled into a giant.

Nor was it by any means difficult for the most unobservant person to

detect this state of feeling in the quondam 'prentice, for it not only

proclaimed itself impressively and beyond mistake in his majestic

walk and kindling eye, but found a striking means of revelation in his

turned-up nose, which scouted all things of earth with deep disdain, and

sought communion with its kindred skies.

Mr Tappertit, as chief or captain of the Bulldogs, was attended by his

two lieutenants; one, the tall comrade of his younger life; the other, a

'Prentice Knight in days of yore--Mark Gilbert, bound in the olden time

to Thomas Curzon of the Golden Fleece. These gentlemen, like himself,

were now emancipated from their 'prentice thraldom, and served as

journeymen; but they were, in humble emulation of his great example,

bold and daring spirits, and aspired to a distinguished state in great

political events. Hence their connection with the Protestant Association

of England, sanctioned by the name of Lord George Gordon; and hence

their present visit to The Boot.

'Gentlemen!' said Mr Tappertit, taking off his hat as a great general

might in addressing his troops. 'Well met. My lord does me and you the

honour to send his compliments per self.'

'You've seen my lord too, have you?' said Dennis. 'I see him this

afternoon.'

'My duty called me to the Lobby when our shop shut up; and I saw him

there, sir,' Mr Tappertit replied, as he and his lieutenants took their

seats. 'How do YOU do?'

'Lively, master, lively,' said the fellow. 'Here's a new brother,

regularly put down in black and white by Muster Gashford; a credit to

the cause; one of the stick-at-nothing sort; one arter my own heart.

D'ye see him? Has he got the looks of a man that'll do, do you think?'

he cried, as he slapped Hugh on the back.

'Looks or no looks,' said Hugh, with a drunken flourish of his arm, 'I'm

the man you want. I hate the Papists, every one of 'em. They hate me and

I hate them. They do me all the harm they can, and I'll do them all the

harm I can. Hurrah!'

'Was there ever,' said Dennis, looking round the room, when the echo

of his boisterous voice bad died away; 'was there ever such a game boy!

Why, I mean to say, brothers, that if Muster Gashford had gone a hundred

mile and got together fifty men of the common run, they wouldn't have

been worth this one.'

The greater part of the company implicitly subscribed to this

opinion, and testified their faith in Hugh by nods and looks of great

significance. Mr Tappertit sat and contemplated him for a long time in

silence, as if he suspended his judgment; then drew a little nearer to

him, and eyed him over more carefully; then went close up to him, and

took him apart into a dark corner.

'I say,' he began, with a thoughtful brow, 'haven't I seen you before?'

'It's like you may,' said Hugh, in his careless way. 'I don't know;

shouldn't wonder.'

'No, but it's very easily settled,' returned Sim. 'Look at me. Did you

ever see ME before? You wouldn't be likely to forget it, you know, if

you ever did. Look at me. Don't be afraid; I won't do you any harm. Take

a good look--steady now.'

The encouraging way in which Mr Tappertit made this request, and

coupled it with an assurance that he needn't be frightened, amused Hugh

mightily--so much indeed, that he saw nothing at all of the small man

before him, through closing his eyes in a fit of hearty laughter, which

shook his great broad sides until they ached again.

'Come!' said Mr Tappertit, growing a little impatient under this

disrespectful treatment. 'Do you know me, feller?'

'Not I,' cried Hugh. 'Ha ha ha! Not I! But I should like to.'

'And yet I'd have wagered a seven-shilling piece,' said Mr Tappertit,

folding his arms, and confronting him with his legs wide apart and

firmly planted on the ground, 'that you once were hostler at the

Maypole.'

Hugh opened his eyes on hearing this, and looked at him in great

surprise.

'--And so you were, too,' said Mr Tappertit, pushing him away with a

condescending playfulness. 'When did MY eyes ever deceive--unless it was

a young woman! Don't you know me now?'

'Why it an't--' Hugh faltered.

'An't it?' said Mr Tappertit. 'Are you sure of that? You remember G.

Varden, don't you?'

Certainly Hugh did, and he remembered D. Varden too; but that he didn't

tell him.

'You remember coming down there, before I was out of my time, to ask

after a vagabond that had bolted off, and left his disconsolate father a

prey to the bitterest emotions, and all the rest of it--don't you?' said

Mr Tappertit.

'Of course I do!' cried Hugh. 'And I saw you there.'

'Saw me there!' said Mr Tappertit. 'Yes, I should think you did see

me there. The place would be troubled to go on without me. Don't you

remember my thinking you liked the vagabond, and on that account going

to quarrel with you; and then finding you detested him worse than

poison, going to drink with you? Don't you remember that?'

'To be sure!' cried Hugh.

'Well! and are you in the same mind now?' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes!' roared Hugh.

'You speak like a man,' said Mr Tappertit, 'and I'll shake hands with

you.' With these conciliatory expressions he suited the action to the

word; and Hugh meeting his advances readily, they performed the ceremony

with a show of great heartiness.

'I find,' said Mr Tappertit, looking round on the assembled guests,

'that brother What's-his-name and I are old acquaintance.--You never

heard anything more of that rascal, I suppose, eh?'

'Not a syllable,' replied Hugh. 'I never want to. I don't believe I ever

shall. He's dead long ago, I hope.'

'It's to be hoped, for the sake of mankind in general and the happiness

of society, that he is,' said Mr Tappertit, rubbing his palm upon his

legs, and looking at it between whiles. 'Is your other hand at all

cleaner? Much the same. Well, I'll owe you another shake. We'll suppose

it done, if you've no objection.'

Hugh laughed again, and with such thorough abandonment to his mad

humour, that his limbs seemed dislocated, and his whole frame in danger

of tumbling to pieces; but Mr Tappertit, so far from receiving this

extreme merriment with any irritation, was pleased to regard it with the

utmost favour, and even to join in it, so far as one of his gravity and

station could, with any regard to that decency and decorum which men in

high places are expected to maintain.

Mr Tappertit did not stop here, as many public characters might have

done, but calling up his brace of lieutenants, introduced Hugh to them

with high commendation; declaring him to be a man who, at such times as

those in which they lived, could not be too much cherished. Further, he

did him the honour to remark, that he would be an acquisition of which

even the United Bulldogs might be proud; and finding, upon sounding him,

that he was quite ready and willing to enter the society (for he was

not at all particular, and would have leagued himself that night with

anything, or anybody, for any purpose whatsoever), caused the necessary

preliminaries to be gone into upon the spot. This tribute to his great

merit delighted no man more than Mr Dennis, as he himself proclaimed

with several rare and surprising oaths; and indeed it gave unmingled

satisfaction to the whole assembly.

'Make anything you like of me!' cried Hugh, flourishing the can he had

emptied more than once. 'Put me on any duty you please. I'm your man.

I'll do it. Here's my captain--here's my leader. Ha ha ha! Let him

give me the word of command, and I'll fight the whole Parliament House

single-handed, or set a lighted torch to the King's Throne itself!' With

that, he smote Mr Tappertit on the back, with such violence that his

little body seemed to shrink into a mere nothing; and roared again until

the very foundlings near at hand were startled in their beds.

In fact, a sense of something whimsical in their companionship seemed to

have taken entire possession of his rude brain. The bare fact of being

patronised by a great man whom he could have crushed with one hand,

appeared in his eyes so eccentric and humorous, that a kind of ferocious

merriment gained the mastery over him, and quite subdued his brutal

nature. He roared and roared again; toasted Mr Tappertit a hundred

times; declared himself a Bulldog to the core; and vowed to be faithful

to him to the last drop of blood in his veins.

All these compliments Mr Tappertit received as matters of

course--flattering enough in their way, but entirely attributable to his

vast superiority. His dignified self-possession only delighted Hugh the

more; and in a word, this giant and dwarf struck up a friendship which

bade fair to be of long continuance, as the one held it to be his right

to command, and the other considered it an exquisite pleasantry to

obey. Nor was Hugh by any means a passive follower, who scrupled to act

without precise and definite orders; for when Mr Tappertit mounted on an

empty cask which stood by way of rostrum in the room, and volunteered a

speech upon the alarming crisis then at hand, he placed himself beside

the orator, and though he grinned from ear to ear at every word he said,

threw out such expressive hints to scoffers in the management of his

cudgel, that those who were at first the most disposed to interrupt,

became remarkably attentive, and were the loudest in their approbation.

It was not all noise and jest, however, at The Boot, nor were the whole

party listeners to the speech. There were some men at the other end of

the room (which was a long, low-roofed chamber) in earnest conversation

all the time; and when any of this group went out, fresh people were

sure to come in soon afterwards and sit down in their places, as though

the others had relieved them on some watch or duty; which it was pretty

clear they did, for these changes took place by the clock, at intervals

of half an hour. These persons whispered very much among themselves,

and kept aloof, and often looked round, as jealous of their speech being

overheard; some two or three among them entered in books what seemed

to be reports from the others; when they were not thus employed one of

them would turn to the newspapers which were strewn upon the table,

and from the St James's Chronicle, the Herald, Chronicle, or Public

Advertiser, would read to the rest in a low voice some passage having

reference to the topic in which they were all so deeply interested. But

the great attraction was a pamphlet called The Thunderer, which espoused

their own opinions, and was supposed at that time to emanate directly

from the Association. This was always in request; and whether read

aloud, to an eager knot of listeners, or by some solitary man, was

certain to be followed by stormy talking and excited looks.

In the midst of all his merriment, and admiration of his captain, Hugh

was made sensible by these and other tokens, of the presence of an air

of mystery, akin to that which had so much impressed him out of doors.

It was impossible to discard a sense that something serious was going

on, and that under the noisy revel of the public-house, there lurked

unseen and dangerous matter. Little affected by this, however, he was

perfectly satisfied with his quarters and would have remained there till

morning, but that his conductor rose soon after midnight, to go home; Mr

Tappertit following his example, left him no excuse to stay. So they all

three left the house together: roaring a No-Popery song until the fields

resounded with the dismal noise.

Cheer up, captain!' cried Hugh, when they had roared themselves out of

breath. 'Another stave!'

Mr Tappertit, nothing loath, began again; and so the three went

staggering on, arm-in-arm, shouting like madmen, and defying the watch

with great valour. Indeed this did not require any unusual bravery or

boldness, as the watchmen of that time, being selected for the office

on account of excessive age and extraordinary infirmity, had a custom

of shutting themselves up tight in their boxes on the first symptoms

of disturbance, and remaining there until they disappeared. In these

proceedings, Mr Dennis, who had a gruff voice and lungs of considerable

power, distinguished himself very much, and acquired great credit with

his two companions.

'What a queer fellow you are!' said Mr Tappertit. 'You're so precious

sly and close. Why don't you ever tell what trade you're of?'

'Answer the captain instantly,' cried Hugh, beating his hat down on his

head; 'why don't you ever tell what trade you're of?'

'I'm of as gen-teel a calling, brother, as any man in England--as light

a business as any gentleman could desire.'

'Was you 'prenticed to it?' asked Mr Tappertit.

'No. Natural genius,' said Mr Dennis. 'No 'prenticing. It come

by natur'. Muster Gashford knows my calling. Look at that hand of

mine--many and many a job that hand has done, with a neatness and

dexterity, never known afore. When I look at that hand,' said Mr

Dennis, shaking it in the air, 'and remember the helegant bits of work

it has turned off, I feel quite molloncholy to think it should ever grow

old and feeble. But sich is life!'

He heaved a deep sigh as he indulged in these reflections, and putting

his fingers with an absent air on Hugh's throat, and particularly under

his left ear, as if he were studying the anatomical development of that

part of his frame, shook his head in a despondent manner and actually

shed tears.

'You're a kind of artist, I suppose--eh!' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes,' rejoined Dennis; 'yes--I may call myself a artist--a fancy

workman--art improves natur'--that's my motto.'

'And what do you call this?' said Mr Tappertit taking his stick out of

his hand.

'That's my portrait atop,' Dennis replied; 'd'ye think it's like?'

'Why--it's a little too handsome,' said Mr Tappertit. 'Who did it? You?'

'I!' repeated Dennis, gazing fondly on his image. 'I wish I had the

talent. That was carved by a friend of mine, as is now no more. The very

day afore he died, he cut that with his pocket-knife from memory! "I'll

die game," says my friend, "and my last moments shall be dewoted to

making Dennis's picter." That's it.'

'That was a queer fancy, wasn't it?' said Mr Tappertit.

'It WAS a queer fancy,' rejoined the other, breathing on his fictitious

nose, and polishing it with the cuff of his coat, 'but he was a queer

subject altogether--a kind of gipsy--one of the finest, stand-up men,

you ever see. Ah! He told me some things that would startle you a bit,

did that friend of mine, on the morning when he died.'

'You were with him at the time, were you?' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes,' he answered with a curious look, 'I was there. Oh! yes certainly,

I was there. He wouldn't have gone off half as comfortable without me. I

had been with three or four of his family under the same circumstances.

They were all fine fellows.'

'They must have been fond of you,' remarked Mr Tappertit, looking at him

sideways.

'I don't know that they was exactly fond of me,' said Dennis, with a

little hesitation, 'but they all had me near 'em when they departed. I

come in for their wardrobes too. This very handkecher that you see round

my neck, belonged to him that I've been speaking of--him as did that

likeness.'

Mr Tappertit glanced at the article referred to, and appeared to think

that the deceased's ideas of dress were of a peculiar and by no means an

expensive kind. He made no remark upon the point, however, and suffered

his mysterious companion to proceed without interruption.

'These smalls,' said Dennis, rubbing his legs; 'these very smalls--they

belonged to a friend of mine that's left off sich incumbrances for ever:

this coat too--I've often walked behind this coat, in the street, and

wondered whether it would ever come to me: this pair of shoes have

danced a hornpipe for another man, afore my eyes, full half-a-dozen

times at least: and as to my hat,' he said, taking it off, and whirling

it round upon his fist--'Lord! I've seen this hat go up Holborn on the

box of a hackney-coach--ah, many and many a day!'

'You don't mean to say their old wearers are ALL dead, I hope?' said Mr

Tappertit, falling a little distance from him as he spoke.

'Every one of 'em,' replied Dennis. 'Every man Jack!'

There was something so very ghastly in this circumstance, and it

appeared to account, in such a very strange and dismal manner, for his

faded dress--which, in this new aspect, seemed discoloured by the earth

from graves--that Mr Tappertit abruptly found he was going another way,

and, stopping short, bade him good night with the utmost heartiness. As

they happened to be near the Old Bailey, and Mr Dennis knew there were

turnkeys in the lodge with whom he could pass the night, and discuss

professional subjects of common interest among them before a rousing

fire, and over a social glass, he separated from his companions without

any great regret, and warmly shaking hands with Hugh, and making an

early appointment for their meeting at The Boot, left them to pursue

their road.

'That's a strange sort of man,' said Mr Tappertit, watching the

hackney-coachman's hat as it went bobbing down the street. 'I don't know

what to make of him. Why can't he have his smalls made to order, or wear

live clothes at any rate?'

'He's a lucky man, captain,' cried Hugh. 'I should like to have such

friends as his.'

'I hope he don't get 'em to make their wills, and then knock 'em on the

head,' said Mr Tappertit, musing. 'But come. The United B.'s expect me.

On!--What's the matter?'

'I quite forgot,' said Hugh, who had started at the striking of a

neighbouring clock. 'I have somebody to see to-night--I must turn back

directly. The drinking and singing put it out of my head. It's well I

remembered it!'

Mr Tappertit looked at him as though he were about to give utterance to

some very majestic sentiments in reference to this act of desertion, but

as it was clear, from Hugh's hasty manner, that the engagement was one

of a pressing nature, he graciously forbore, and gave him his permission

to depart immediately, which Hugh acknowledged with a roar of laughter.

'Good night, captain!' he cried. 'I am yours to the death, remember!'

'Farewell!' said Mr Tappertit, waving his hand. 'Be bold and vigilant!'

'No Popery, captain!' roared Hugh.

'England in blood first!' cried his desperate leader. Whereat Hugh

cheered and laughed, and ran off like a greyhound.

'That man will prove a credit to my corps,' said Simon, turning

thoughtfully upon his heel. 'And let me see. In an altered state of

society--which must ensue if we break out and are victorious--when the

locksmith's child is mine, Miggs must be got rid of somehow, or she'll

poison the tea-kettle one evening when I'm out. He might marry Miggs, if

he was drunk enough. It shall be done. I'll make a note of it.'

Chapter 40

Little thinking of the plan for his happy settlement in life which had

suggested itself to the teeming brain of his provident commander, Hugh

made no pause until Saint Dunstan's giants struck the hour above him,

when he worked the handle of a pump which stood hard by, with great

vigour, and thrusting his head under the spout, let the water gush upon

him until a little stream ran down from every uncombed hair, and he was

wet to the waist. Considerably refreshed by this ablution, both in mind

and body, and almost sobered for the time, he dried himself as he best

could; then crossed the road, and plied the knocker of the Middle Temple

gate.

The night-porter looked through a small grating in the portal with a

surly eye, and cried 'Halloa!' which greeting Hugh returned in kind, and

bade him open quickly.

'We don't sell beer here,' cried the man; 'what else do you want?'

'To come in,' Hugh replied, with a kick at the door.

'Where to go?'

'Paper Buildings.'

'Whose chambers?'

'Sir John Chester's.' Each of which answers, he emphasised with another

kick.

After a little growling on the other side, the gate was opened, and he

passed in: undergoing a close inspection from the porter as he did so.

'YOU wanting Sir John, at this time of night!' said the man.

'Ay!' said Hugh. 'I! What of that?'

'Why, I must go with you and see that you do, for I don't believe it.'

'Come along then.'

Eyeing him with suspicious looks, the man, with key and lantern, walked

on at his side, and attended him to Sir John Chester's door, at which

Hugh gave one knock, that echoed through the dark staircase like a

ghostly summons, and made the dull light tremble in the drowsy lamp.

'Do you think he wants me now?' said Hugh.

Before the man had time to answer, a footstep was heard within, a light

appeared, and Sir John, in his dressing-gown and slippers, opened the

door.

'I ask your pardon, Sir John,' said the porter, pulling off his hat.

'Here's a young man says he wants to speak to you. It's late for

strangers. I thought it best to see that all was right.'

'Aha!' cried Sir John, raising his eyebrows. 'It's you, messenger, is

it? Go in. Quite right, friend. I commend your prudence highly. Thank

you. God bless you. Good night.'

To be commended, thanked, God-blessed, and bade good night by one who

carried 'Sir' before his name, and wrote himself M.P. to boot, was

something for a porter. He withdrew with much humility and reverence.

Sir John followed his late visitor into the dressing-room, and sitting

in his easy-chair before the fire, and moving it so that he could see

him as he stood, hat in hand, beside the door, looked at him from head

to foot.

The old face, calm and pleasant as ever; the complexion, quite juvenile

in its bloom and clearness; the same smile; the wonted precision and

elegance of dress; the white, well-ordered teeth; the delicate hands;

the composed and quiet manner; everything as it used to be: no mark of

age or passion, envy, hate, or discontent: all unruffled and serene, and

quite delightful to behold.

He wrote himself M.P.--but how? Why, thus. It was a proud family--more

proud, indeed, than wealthy. He had stood in danger of arrest; of

bailiffs, and a jail--a vulgar jail, to which the common people with

small incomes went. Gentlemen of ancient houses have no privilege of

exemption from such cruel laws--unless they are of one great house, and

then they have. A proud man of his stock and kindred had the means of

sending him there. He offered--not indeed to pay his debts, but to let

him sit for a close borough until his own son came of age, which, if he

lived, would come to pass in twenty years. It was quite as good as an

Insolvent Act, and infinitely more genteel. So Sir John Chester was a

member of Parliament.

But how Sir John? Nothing so simple, or so easy. One touch with a sword

of state, and the transformation was effected. John Chester, Esquire,

M.P., attended court--went up with an address--headed a deputation.

Such elegance of manner, so many graces of deportment, such powers of

conversation, could never pass unnoticed. Mr was too common for

such merit. A man so gentlemanly should have been--but Fortune is

capricious--born a Duke: just as some dukes should have been born

labourers. He caught the fancy of the king, knelt down a grub, and rose

a butterfly. John Chester, Esquire, was knighted and became Sir John.

'I thought when you left me this evening, my esteemed acquaintance,'

said Sir John after a pretty long silence, 'that you intended to return

with all despatch?'

'So I did, master.'

'And so you have?' he retorted, glancing at his watch. 'Is that what you

would say?'

Instead of replying, Hugh changed the leg on which he leant, shuffled

his cap from one hand to the other, looked at the ground, the wall, the

ceiling, and finally at Sir John himself; before whose pleasant face he

lowered his eyes again, and fixed them on the floor.

'And how have you been employing yourself in the meanwhile?' quoth Sir

John, lazily crossing his legs. 'Where have you been? what harm have you

been doing?'

'No harm at all, master,' growled Hugh, with humility. 'I have only done

as you ordered.'

'As I WHAT?' returned Sir John.

'Well then,' said Hugh uneasily, 'as you advised, or said I ought, or

said I might, or said that you would do, if you was me. Don't be so hard

upon me, master.'

Something like an expression of triumph in the perfect control he had

established over this rough instrument appeared in the knight's face for

an instant; but it vanished directly, as he said--paring his nails while

speaking:

'When you say I ordered you, my good fellow, you imply that I directed

you to do something for me--something I wanted done--something for my

own ends and purposes--you see? Now I am sure I needn't enlarge upon the

extreme absurdity of such an idea, however unintentional; so please--'

and here he turned his eyes upon him--'to be more guarded. Will you?'

'I meant to give you no offence,' said Hugh. 'I don't know what to say.

You catch me up so very short.'

'You will be caught up much shorter, my good friend--infinitely

shorter--one of these days, depend upon it,' replied his patron calmly.

'By-the-bye, instead of wondering why you have been so long, my wonder

should be why you came at all. Why did you?'

'You know, master,' said Hugh, 'that I couldn't read the bill I found,

and that supposing it to be something particular from the way it was

wrapped up, I brought it here.'

'And could you ask no one else to read it, Bruin?' said Sir John.

'No one that I could trust with secrets, master. Since Barnaby Rudge

was lost sight of for good and all--and that's five years ago--I haven't

talked with any one but you.'

'You have done me honour, I am sure.'

'I have come to and fro, master, all through that time, when there was

anything to tell, because I knew that you'd be angry with me if I stayed

away,' said Hugh, blurting the words out, after an embarrassed silence;

'and because I wished to please you if I could, and not to have you go

against me. There. That's the true reason why I came to-night. You know

that, master, I am sure.'

'You are a specious fellow,' returned Sir John, fixing his eyes upon

him, 'and carry two faces under your hood, as well as the best. Didn't

you give me in this room, this evening, any other reason; no dislike

of anybody who has slighted you lately, on all occasions, abused you,

treated you with rudeness; acted towards you, more as if you were a

mongrel dog than a man like himself?'

'To be sure I did!' cried Hugh, his passion rising, as the other meant

it should; 'and I say it all over now, again. I'd do anything to have

some revenge on him--anything. And when you told me that he and all

the Catholics would suffer from those who joined together under that

handbill, I said I'd make one of 'em, if their master was the devil

himself. I AM one of 'em. See whether I am as good as my word and turn

out to be among the foremost, or no. I mayn't have much head, master,

but I've head enough to remember those that use me ill. You shall see,

and so shall he, and so shall hundreds more, how my spirit backs me

when the time comes. My bark is nothing to my bite. Some that I know had

better have a wild lion among 'em than me, when I am fairly loose--they

had!'

The knight looked at him with a smile of far deeper meaning than

ordinary; and pointing to the old cupboard, followed him with his eyes

while he filled and drank a glass of liquor; and smiled when his back

was turned, with deeper meaning yet.

'You are in a blustering mood, my friend,' he said, when Hugh confronted

him again.

'Not I, master!' cried Hugh. 'I don't say half I mean. I can't. I

haven't got the gift. There are talkers enough among us; I'll be one of

the doers.'

'Oh! you have joined those fellows then?' said Sir John, with an air of

most profound indifference.

'Yes. I went up to the house you told me of; and got put down upon the

muster. There was another man there, named Dennis--'

'Dennis, eh!' cried Sir John, laughing. 'Ay, ay! a pleasant fellow, I

believe?'

'A roaring dog, master--one after my own heart--hot upon the matter

too--red hot.'

'So I have heard,' replied Sir John, carelessly. 'You don't happen to

know his trade, do you?'

'He wouldn't say,' cried Hugh. 'He keeps it secret.'

'Ha ha!' laughed Sir John. 'A strange fancy--a weakness with some

persons--you'll know it one day, I dare swear.'

'We're intimate already,' said Hugh.

'Quite natural! And have been drinking together, eh?' pursued Sir John.

'Did you say what place you went to in company, when you left Lord

George's?'

Hugh had not said or thought of saying, but he told him; and this

inquiry being followed by a long train of questions, he related all that

had passed both in and out of doors, the kind of people he had seen,

their numbers, state of feeling, mode of conversation, apparent

expectations and intentions. His questioning was so artfully contrived,

that he seemed even in his own eyes to volunteer all this information

rather than to have it wrested from him; and he was brought to this

state of feeling so naturally, that when Mr Chester yawned at length and

declared himself quite wearied out, he made a rough kind of excuse for

having talked so much.

'There--get you gone,' said Sir John, holding the door open in his hand.

'You have made a pretty evening's work. I told you not to do this. You

may get into trouble. You'll have an opportunity of revenging yourself

on your proud friend Haredale, though, and for that, you'd hazard

anything, I suppose?'

'I would,' retorted Hugh, stopping in his passage out and looking

back; 'but what do I risk! What do I stand a chance of losing, master?

Friends, home? A fig for 'em all; I have none; they are nothing to me.

Give me a good scuffle; let me pay off old scores in a bold riot where

there are men to stand by me; and then use me as you like--it don't

matter much to me what the end is!'

'What have you done with that paper?' said Sir John.

'I have it here, master.'

'Drop it again as you go along; it's as well not to keep such things

about you.'

Hugh nodded, and touching his cap with an air of as much respect as he

could summon up, departed.

Sir John, fastening the doors behind him, went back to his

dressing-room, and sat down once again before the fire, at which he

gazed for a long time, in earnest meditation.

'This happens fortunately,' he said, breaking into a smile, 'and

promises well. Let me see. My relative and I, who are the most

Protestant fellows in the world, give our worst wishes to the Roman

Catholic cause; and to Saville, who introduces their bill, I have a

personal objection besides; but as each of us has himself for the first

article in his creed, we cannot commit ourselves by joining with a very

extravagant madman, such as this Gordon most undoubtedly is. Now really,

to foment his disturbances in secret, through the medium of such a very

apt instrument as my savage friend here, may further our real ends;

and to express at all becoming seasons, in moderate and polite terms,

a disapprobation of his proceedings, though we agree with him in

principle, will certainly be to gain a character for honesty and

uprightness of purpose, which cannot fail to do us infinite service, and

to raise us into some importance. Good! So much for public grounds. As

to private considerations, I confess that if these vagabonds WOULD make

some riotous demonstration (which does not appear impossible), and WOULD

inflict some little chastisement on Haredale as a not inactive man among

his sect, it would be extremely agreeable to my feelings, and would

amuse me beyond measure. Good again! Perhaps better!'

When he came to this point, he took a pinch of snuff; then beginning

slowly to undress, he resumed his meditations, by saying with a smile:

'I fear, I DO fear exceedingly, that my friend is following fast in the

footsteps of his mother. His intimacy with Mr Dennis is very ominous.

But I have no doubt he must have come to that end any way. If I lend

him a helping hand, the only difference is, that he may, upon the whole,

possibly drink a few gallons, or puncheons, or hogsheads, less in this

life than he otherwise would. It's no business of mine. It's a matter of

very small importance!'

So he took another pinch of snuff, and went to bed.

Chapter 41

From the workshop of the Golden Key, there issued forth a tinkling

sound, so merry and good-humoured, that it suggested the idea of some

one working blithely, and made quite pleasant music. No man who hammered

on at a dull monotonous duty, could have brought such cheerful notes

from steel and iron; none but a chirping, healthy, honest-hearted

fellow, who made the best of everything, and felt kindly towards

everybody, could have done it for an instant. He might have been a

coppersmith, and still been musical. If he had sat in a jolting waggon,

full of rods of iron, it seemed as if he would have brought some harmony

out of it.

Tink, tink, tink--clear as a silver bell, and audible at every pause of

the streets' harsher noises, as though it said, 'I don't care; nothing

puts me out; I am resolved to be happy.' Women scolded, children

squalled, heavy carts went rumbling by, horrible cries proceeded from

the lungs of hawkers; still it struck in again, no higher, no lower,

no louder, no softer; not thrusting itself on people's notice a bit the

more for having been outdone by louder sounds--tink, tink, tink, tink,

tink.

It was a perfect embodiment of the still small voice, free from

all cold, hoarseness, huskiness, or unhealthiness of any kind;

foot-passengers slackened their pace, and were disposed to linger near

it; neighbours who had got up splenetic that morning, felt good-humour

stealing on them as they heard it, and by degrees became quite

sprightly; mothers danced their babies to its ringing; still the same

magical tink, tink, tink, came gaily from the workshop of the Golden

Key.

Who but the locksmith could have made such music! A gleam of sun shining

through the unsashed window, and chequering the dark workshop with a

broad patch of light, fell full upon him, as though attracted by his

sunny heart. There he stood working at his anvil, his face all radiant

with exercise and gladness, his sleeves turned up, his wig pushed off

his shining forehead--the easiest, freest, happiest man in all the

world. Beside him sat a sleek cat, purring and winking in the light, and

falling every now and then into an idle doze, as from excess of comfort.

Toby looked on from a tall bench hard by; one beaming smile, from his

broad nut-brown face down to the slack-baked buckles in his shoes. The

very locks that hung around had something jovial in their rust, and

seemed like gouty gentlemen of hearty natures, disposed to joke on their

infirmities. There was nothing surly or severe in the whole scene.

It seemed impossible that any one of the innumerable keys could fit a

churlish strong-box or a prison-door. Cellars of beer and wine, rooms

where there were fires, books, gossip, and cheering laughter--these

were their proper sphere of action. Places of distrust and cruelty, and

restraint, they would have left quadruple-locked for ever.

Tink, tink, tink. The locksmith paused at last, and wiped his brow. The

silence roused the cat, who, jumping softly down, crept to the door,

and watched with tiger eyes a bird-cage in an opposite window. Gabriel

lifted Toby to his mouth, and took a hearty draught.

Then, as he stood upright, with his head flung back, and his portly

chest thrown out, you would have seen that Gabriel's lower man was

clothed in military gear. Glancing at the wall beyond, there might

have been espied, hanging on their several pegs, a cap and feather,

broadsword, sash, and coat of scarlet; which any man learned in such

matters would have known from their make and pattern to be the uniform

of a serjeant in the Royal East London Volunteers.

As the locksmith put his mug down, empty, on the bench whence it had

smiled on him before, he glanced at these articles with a laughing eye,

and looking at them with his head a little on one side, as though he

would get them all into a focus, said, leaning on his hammer:

'Time was, now, I remember, when I was like to run mad with the desire

to wear a coat of that colour. If any one (except my father) had called

me a fool for my pains, how I should have fired and fumed! But what a

fool I must have been, sure-ly!'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Varden, who had entered unobserved. 'A fool indeed. A

man at your time of life, Varden, should know better now.'

'Why, what a ridiculous woman you are, Martha,' said the locksmith,

turning round with a smile.

'Certainly,' replied Mrs V. with great demureness. 'Of course I am. I

know that, Varden. Thank you.'

'I mean--' began the locksmith.

'Yes,' said his wife, 'I know what you mean. You speak quite plain

enough to be understood, Varden. It's very kind of you to adapt yourself

to my capacity, I am sure.'

'Tut, tut, Martha,' rejoined the locksmith; 'don't take offence at

nothing. I mean, how strange it is of you to run down volunteering, when

it's done to defend you and all the other women, and our own fireside

and everybody else's, in case of need.'

'It's unchristian,' cried Mrs Varden, shaking her head.

'Unchristian!' said the locksmith. 'Why, what the devil--'

Mrs Varden looked at the ceiling, as in expectation that the consequence

of this profanity would be the immediate descent of the four-post

bedstead on the second floor, together with the best sitting-room on the

first; but no visible judgment occurring, she heaved a deep sigh, and

begged her husband, in a tone of resignation, to go on, and by all means

to blaspheme as much as possible, because he knew she liked it.

The locksmith did for a moment seem disposed to gratify her, but he gave

a great gulp, and mildly rejoined:

'I was going to say, what on earth do you call it unchristian for?

Which would be most unchristian, Martha--to sit quietly down and let our

houses be sacked by a foreign army, or to turn out like men and drive

'em off? Shouldn't I be a nice sort of a Christian, if I crept into

a corner of my own chimney and looked on while a parcel of whiskered

savages bore off Dolly--or you?'

When he said 'or you,' Mrs Varden, despite herself, relaxed into a

smile. There was something complimentary in the idea. 'In such a state

of things as that, indeed--' she simpered.

'As that!' repeated the locksmith. 'Well, that would be the state of

things directly. Even Miggs would go. Some black tambourine-player,

with a great turban on, would be bearing HER off, and, unless the

tambourine-player was proof against kicking and scratching, it's

my belief he'd have the worst of it. Ha ha ha! I'd forgive the

tambourine-player. I wouldn't have him interfered with on any account,

poor fellow.' And here the locksmith laughed again so heartily, that

tears came into his eyes--much to Mrs Varden's indignation, who thought

the capture of so sound a Protestant and estimable a private character

as Miggs by a pagan negro, a circumstance too shocking and awful for

contemplation.

The picture Gabriel had drawn, indeed, threatened serious consequences,

and would indubitably have led to them, but luckily at that moment a

light footstep crossed the threshold, and Dolly, running in, threw her

arms round her old father's neck and hugged him tight.

'Here she is at last!' cried Gabriel. 'And how well you look, Doll, and

how late you are, my darling!'

How well she looked? Well? Why, if he had exhausted every laudatory

adjective in the dictionary, it wouldn't have been praise enough. When

and where was there ever such a plump, roguish, comely, bright-eyed,

enticing, bewitching, captivating, maddening little puss in all this

world, as Dolly! What was the Dolly of five years ago, to the Dolly of

that day! How many coachmakers, saddlers, cabinet-makers, and professors

of other useful arts, had deserted their fathers, mothers, sisters,

brothers, and, most of all, their cousins, for the love of her! How many

unknown gentlemen--supposed to be of mighty fortunes, if not titles--had

waited round the corner after dark, and tempted Miggs the incorruptible,

with golden guineas, to deliver offers of marriage folded up in

love-letters! How many disconsolate fathers and substantial tradesmen

had waited on the locksmith for the same purpose, with dismal tales of

how their sons had lost their appetites, and taken to shut themselves up

in dark bedrooms, and wandering in desolate suburbs with pale faces,

and all because of Dolly Varden's loveliness and cruelty! How many

young men, in all previous times of unprecedented steadiness, had turned

suddenly wild and wicked for the same reason, and, in an ecstasy of

unrequited love, taken to wrench off door-knockers, and invert the boxes

of rheumatic watchmen! How had she recruited the king's service, both

by sea and land, through rendering desperate his loving subjects between

the ages of eighteen and twenty-five! How many young ladies had publicly

professed, with tears in their eyes, that for their tastes she was much

too short, too tall, too bold, too cold, too stout, too thin, too fair,

too dark--too everything but handsome! How many old ladies, taking

counsel together, had thanked Heaven their daughters were not like her,

and had hoped she might come to no harm, and had thought she would come

to no good, and had wondered what people saw in her, and had arrived at

the conclusion that she was 'going off' in her looks, or had never

come on in them, and that she was a thorough imposition and a popular

mistake!

And yet here was this same Dolly Varden, so whimsical and hard to please

that she was Dolly Varden still, all smiles and dimples and pleasant

looks, and caring no more for the fifty or sixty young fellows who at

that very moment were breaking their hearts to marry her, than if so

many oysters had been crossed in love and opened afterwards.

Dolly hugged her father as has been already stated, and having hugged

her mother also, accompanied both into the little parlour where the

cloth was already laid for dinner, and where Miss Miggs--a trifle more

rigid and bony than of yore--received her with a sort of hysterical

gasp, intended for a smile. Into the hands of that young virgin, she

delivered her bonnet and walking dress (all of a dreadful, artful,

and designing kind), and then said with a laugh, which rivalled the

locksmith's music, 'How glad I always am to be at home again!'

'And how glad we always are, Doll,' said her father, putting back the

dark hair from her sparkling eyes, 'to have you at home. Give me a

kiss.'

If there had been anybody of the male kind there to see her do it--but

there was not--it was a mercy.

'I don't like your being at the Warren,' said the locksmith, 'I can't

bear to have you out of my sight. And what is the news over yonder,

Doll?'

'What news there is, I think you know already,' replied his daughter. 'I

am sure you do though.'

'Ay?' cried the locksmith. 'What's that?'

'Come, come,' said Dolly, 'you know very well. I want you to tell me why

Mr Haredale--oh, how gruff he is again, to be sure!--has been away from

home for some days past, and why he is travelling about (we know he IS

travelling, because of his letters) without telling his own niece why or

wherefore.'

'Miss Emma doesn't want to know, I'll swear,' returned the locksmith.

'I don't know that,' said Dolly; 'but I do, at any rate. Do tell me. Why

is he so secret, and what is this ghost story, which nobody is to tell

Miss Emma, and which seems to be mixed up with his going away? Now I see

you know by your colouring so.'

'What the story means, or is, or has to do with it, I know no more than

you, my dear,' returned the locksmith, 'except that it's some foolish

fear of little Solomon's--which has, indeed, no meaning in it, I

suppose. As to Mr Haredale's journey, he goes, as I believe--'

'Yes,' said Dolly.

'As I believe,' resumed the locksmith, pinching her cheek, 'on business,

Doll. What it may be, is quite another matter. Read Blue Beard, and

don't be too curious, pet; it's no business of yours or mine, depend

upon that; and here's dinner, which is much more to the purpose.'

Dolly might have remonstrated against this summary dismissal of the

subject, notwithstanding the appearance of dinner, but at the mention

of Blue Beard Mrs Varden interposed, protesting she could not find it

in her conscience to sit tamely by, and hear her child recommended to

peruse the adventures of a Turk and Mussulman--far less of a fabulous

Turk, which she considered that potentate to be. She held that, in such

stirring and tremendous times as those in which they lived, it would

be much more to the purpose if Dolly became a regular subscriber to the

Thunderer, where she would have an opportunity of reading Lord George

Gordon's speeches word for word, which would be a greater comfort and

solace to her, than a hundred and fifty Blue Beards ever could impart.

She appealed in support of this proposition to Miss Miggs, then in

waiting, who said that indeed the peace of mind she had derived from the

perusal of that paper generally, but especially of one article of the

very last week as ever was, entitled 'Great Britain drenched in gore,'

exceeded all belief; the same composition, she added, had also wrought

such a comforting effect on the mind of a married sister of hers, then

resident at Golden Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, second bell-handle

on the right-hand door-post, that, being in a delicate state of health,

and in fact expecting an addition to her family, she had been seized

with fits directly after its perusal, and had raved of the Inquisition

ever since; to the great improvement of her husband and friends. Miss

Miggs went on to say that she would recommend all those whose hearts

were hardened to hear Lord George themselves, whom she commended first,

in respect of his steady Protestantism, then of his oratory, then of

his eyes, then of his nose, then of his legs, and lastly of his figure

generally, which she looked upon as fit for any statue, prince, or

angel, to which sentiment Mrs Varden fully subscribed.

Mrs Varden having cut in, looked at a box upon the mantelshelf, painted

in imitation of a very red-brick dwelling-house, with a yellow roof;

having at top a real chimney, down which voluntary subscribers dropped

their silver, gold, or pence, into the parlour; and on the door the

counterfeit presentment of a brass plate, whereon was legibly inscribed

'Protestant Association:'--and looking at it, said, that it was to her

a source of poignant misery to think that Varden never had, of all his

substance, dropped anything into that temple, save once in secret--as

she afterwards discovered--two fragments of tobacco-pipe, which she

hoped would not be put down to his last account. That Dolly, she was

grieved to say, was no less backward in her contributions, better

loving, as it seemed, to purchase ribbons and such gauds, than to

encourage the great cause, then in such heavy tribulation; and that she

did entreat her (her father she much feared could not be moved) not to

despise, but imitate, the bright example of Miss Miggs, who flung her

wages, as it were, into the very countenance of the Pope, and bruised

his features with her quarter's money.

'Oh, mim,' said Miggs, 'don't relude to that. I had no intentions, mim,

that nobody should know. Such sacrifices as I can make, are quite a

widder's mite. It's all I have,' cried Miggs with a great burst of

tears--for with her they never came on by degrees--'but it's made up to

me in other ways; it's well made up.'

This was quite true, though not perhaps in the sense that Miggs

intended. As she never failed to keep her self-denial full in Mrs

Varden's view, it drew forth so many gifts of caps and gowns and other

articles of dress, that upon the whole the red-brick house was perhaps

the best investment for her small capital she could possibly have hit

upon; returning her interest, at the rate of seven or eight per cent in

money, and fifty at least in personal repute and credit.

'You needn't cry, Miggs,' said Mrs Varden, herself in tears; 'you

needn't be ashamed of it, though your poor mistress IS on the same

side.'

Miggs howled at this remark, in a peculiarly dismal way, and said she

knowed that master hated her. That it was a dreadful thing to live in

families and have dislikes, and not give satisfactions. That to make

divisions was a thing she could not abear to think of, neither could her

feelings let her do it. That if it was master's wishes as she and him

should part, it was best they should part, and she hoped he might be

the happier for it, and always wished him well, and that he might find

somebody as would meet his dispositions. It would be a hard trial, she

said, to part from such a missis, but she could meet any suffering when

her conscience told her she was in the rights, and therefore she was

willing even to go that lengths. She did not think, she added, that she

could long survive the separations, but, as she was hated and looked

upon unpleasant, perhaps her dying as soon as possible would be the best

endings for all parties. With this affecting conclusion, Miss Miggs shed

more tears, and sobbed abundantly.

'Can you bear this, Varden?' said his wife in a solemn voice, laying

down her knife and fork.

'Why, not very well, my dear,' rejoined the locksmith, 'but I try to

keep my temper.'

'Don't let there be words on my account, mim,' sobbed Miggs. 'It's much

the best that we should part. I wouldn't stay--oh, gracious me!--and

make dissensions, not for a annual gold mine, and found in tea and

sugar.'

Lest the reader should be at any loss to discover the cause of Miss

Miggs's deep emotion, it may be whispered apart that, happening to

be listening, as her custom sometimes was, when Gabriel and his wife

conversed together, she had heard the locksmith's joke relative to the

foreign black who played the tambourine, and bursting with the spiteful

feelings which the taunt awoke in her fair breast, exploded in the

manner we have witnessed. Matters having now arrived at a crisis, the

locksmith, as usual, and for the sake of peace and quietness, gave in.

'What are you crying for, girl?' he said. 'What's the matter with you?

What are you talking about hatred for? I don't hate you; I don't hate

anybody. Dry your eyes and make yourself agreeable, in Heaven's name,

and let us all be happy while we can.'

The allied powers deeming it good generalship to consider this a

sufficient apology on the part of the enemy, and confession of having

been in the wrong, did dry their eyes and take it in good part. Miss

Miggs observed that she bore no malice, no not to her greatest foe, whom

she rather loved the more indeed, the greater persecution she sustained.

Mrs Varden approved of this meek and forgiving spirit in high terms,

and incidentally declared as a closing article of agreement, that Dolly

should accompany her to the Clerkenwell branch of the association, that

very night. This was an extraordinary instance of her great prudence and

policy; having had this end in view from the first, and entertaining

a secret misgiving that the locksmith (who was bold when Dolly was in

question) would object, she had backed Miss Miggs up to this point, in

order that she might have him at a disadvantage. The manoeuvre succeeded

so well that Gabriel only made a wry face, and with the warning he had

just had, fresh in his mind, did not dare to say one word.

The difference ended, therefore, in Miggs being presented with a gown

by Mrs Varden and half-a-crown by Dolly, as if she had eminently

distinguished herself in the paths of morality and goodness. Mrs V.,

according to custom, expressed her hope that Varden would take a lesson

from what had passed and learn more generous conduct for the time to

come; and the dinner being now cold and nobody's appetite very much

improved by what had passed, they went on with it, as Mrs Varden said,

'like Christians.'

As there was to be a grand parade of the Royal East London Volunteers

that afternoon, the locksmith did no more work; but sat down comfortably

with his pipe in his mouth, and his arm round his pretty daughter's

waist, looking lovingly on Mrs V., from time to time, and exhibiting

from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, one smiling surface

of good humour. And to be sure, when it was time to dress him in his

regimentals, and Dolly, hanging about him in all kinds of graceful

winning ways, helped to button and buckle and brush him up and get him

into one of the tightest coats that ever was made by mortal tailor, he

was the proudest father in all England.

'What a handy jade it is!' said the locksmith to Mrs Varden, who stood

by with folded hands--rather proud of her husband too--while Miggs held

his cap and sword at arm's length, as if mistrusting that the latter

might run some one through the body of its own accord; 'but never marry

a soldier, Doll, my dear.'

Dolly didn't ask why not, or say a word, indeed, but stooped her head

down very low to tie his sash.

'I never wear this dress,' said honest Gabriel, 'but I think of poor Joe

Willet. I loved Joe; he was always a favourite of mine. Poor Joe!--Dear

heart, my girl, don't tie me in so tight.'

Dolly laughed--not like herself at all--the strangest little laugh that

could be--and held her head down lower still.

'Poor Joe!' resumed the locksmith, muttering to himself; 'I always wish

he had come to me. I might have made it up between them, if he had. Ah!

old John made a great mistake in his way of acting by that lad--a great

mistake.--Have you nearly tied that sash, my dear?'

What an ill-made sash it was! There it was, loose again and trailing

on the ground. Dolly was obliged to kneel down, and recommence at the

beginning.

'Never mind young Willet, Varden,' said his wife frowning; 'you might

find some one more deserving to talk about, I think.'

Miss Miggs gave a great sniff to the same effect.

'Nay, Martha,' cried the locksmith, 'don't let us bear too hard upon

him. If the lad is dead indeed, we'll deal kindly by his memory.'

'A runaway and a vagabond!' said Mrs Varden.

Miss Miggs expressed her concurrence as before.

'A runaway, my dear, but not a vagabond,' returned the locksmith in

a gentle tone. 'He behaved himself well, did Joe--always--and was a

handsome, manly fellow. Don't call him a vagabond, Martha.'

Mrs Varden coughed--and so did Miggs.

'He tried hard to gain your good opinion, Martha, I can tell you,' said

the locksmith smiling, and stroking his chin. 'Ah! that he did. It seems

but yesterday that he followed me out to the Maypole door one night, and

begged me not to say how like a boy they used him--say here, at home, he

meant, though at the time, I recollect, I didn't understand. "And how's

Miss Dolly, sir?" says Joe,' pursued the locksmith, musing sorrowfully,

'Ah! Poor Joe!'

'Well, I declare,' cried Miggs. 'Oh! Goodness gracious me!'

'What's the matter now?' said Gabriel, turning sharply to her, 'Why, if

here an't Miss Dolly,' said the handmaid, stooping down to look into her

face, 'a-giving way to floods of tears. Oh mim! oh sir. Raly it's give

me such a turn,' cried the susceptible damsel, pressing her hand upon

her side to quell the palpitation of her heart, 'that you might knock me

down with a feather.'

The locksmith, after glancing at Miss Miggs as if he could have wished

to have a feather brought straightway, looked on with a broad stare

while Dolly hurried away, followed by that sympathising young woman:

then turning to his wife, stammered out, 'Is Dolly ill? Have I done

anything? Is it my fault?'

'Your fault!' cried Mrs V. reproachfully. 'There--you had better make

haste out.'

'What have I done?' said poor Gabriel. 'It was agreed that Mr Edward's

name was never to be mentioned, and I have not spoken of him, have I?'

Mrs Varden merely replied that she had no patience with him, and bounced

off after the other two. The unfortunate locksmith wound his sash about

him, girded on his sword, put on his cap, and walked out.

'I am not much of a dab at my exercise,' he said under his breath, 'but

I shall get into fewer scrapes at that work than at this. Every man came

into the world for something; my department seems to be to make every

woman cry without meaning it. It's rather hard!'

But he forgot it before he reached the end of the street, and went on

with a shining face, nodding to the neighbours, and showering about his

friendly greetings like mild spring rain.

Chapter 42

The Royal East London Volunteers made a brilliant sight that day: formed

into lines, squares, circles, triangles, and what not, to the beating

of drums, and the streaming of flags; and performed a vast number of

complex evolutions, in all of which Serjeant Varden bore a conspicuous

share. Having displayed their military prowess to the utmost in these

warlike shows, they marched in glittering order to the Chelsea Bun

House, and regaled in the adjacent taverns until dark. Then at sound

of drum they fell in again, and returned amidst the shouting of His

Majesty's lieges to the place from whence they came.

The homeward march being somewhat tardy,--owing to the un-soldierlike

behaviour of certain corporals, who, being gentlemen of sedentary

pursuits in private life and excitable out of doors, broke several

windows with their bayonets, and rendered it imperative on the

commanding officer to deliver them over to a strong guard, with whom

they fought at intervals as they came along,--it was nine o'clock when

the locksmith reached home. A hackney-coach was waiting near his door;

and as he passed it, Mr Haredale looked from the window and called him

by his name.

'The sight of you is good for sore eyes, sir,' said the locksmith,

stepping up to him. 'I wish you had walked in though, rather than waited

here.'

'There is nobody at home, I find,' Mr Haredale answered; 'besides, I

desired to be as private as I could.'

'Humph!' muttered the locksmith, looking round at his house. 'Gone with

Simon Tappertit to that precious Branch, no doubt.'

Mr Haredale invited him to come into the coach, and, if he were not

tired or anxious to go home, to ride with him a little way that they

might have some talk together. Gabriel cheerfully complied, and the

coachman mounting his box drove off.

'Varden,' said Mr Haredale, after a minute's pause, 'you will be amazed

to hear what errand I am on; it will seem a very strange one.'

'I have no doubt it's a reasonable one, sir, and has a meaning in it,'

replied the locksmith; 'or it would not be yours at all. Have you just

come back to town, sir?'

'But half an hour ago.'

'Bringing no news of Barnaby, or his mother?' said the locksmith

dubiously. 'Ah! you needn't shake your head, sir. It was a wild-goose

chase. I feared that, from the first. You exhausted all reasonable means

of discovery when they went away. To begin again after so long a time

has passed is hopeless, sir--quite hopeless.'

'Why, where are they?' he returned impatiently. 'Where can they be?

Above ground?'

'God knows,' rejoined the locksmith, 'many that I knew above it five

years ago, have their beds under the grass now. And the world is a

wide place. It's a hopeless attempt, sir, believe me. We must leave the

discovery of this mystery, like all others, to time, and accident, and

Heaven's pleasure.'

'Varden, my good fellow,' said Mr Haredale, 'I have a deeper meaning in

my present anxiety to find them out, than you can fathom. It is not a

mere whim; it is not the casual revival of my old wishes and desires;

but an earnest, solemn purpose. My thoughts and dreams all tend to it,

and fix it in my mind. I have no rest by day or night; I have no peace

or quiet; I am haunted.'

His voice was so altered from its usual tones, and his manner bespoke

so much emotion, that Gabriel, in his wonder, could only sit and look

towards him in the darkness, and fancy the expression of his face.

'Do not ask me,' continued Mr Haredale, 'to explain myself. If I were to

do so, you would think me the victim of some hideous fancy. It is enough

that this is so, and that I cannot--no, I can not--lie quietly in my

bed, without doing what will seem to you incomprehensible.'

'Since when, sir,' said the locksmith after a pause, 'has this uneasy

feeling been upon you?'

Mr Haredale hesitated for some moments, and then replied: 'Since the

night of the storm. In short, since the last nineteenth of March.'

As though he feared that Varden might express surprise, or reason with

him, he hastily went on:

'You will think, I know, I labour under some delusion. Perhaps I do. But

it is not a morbid one; it is a wholesome action of the mind, reasoning

on actual occurrences. You know the furniture remains in Mrs Rudge's

house, and that it has been shut up, by my orders, since she went away,

save once a-week or so, when an old neighbour visits it to scare away

the rats. I am on my way there now.'

'For what purpose?' asked the locksmith.

'To pass the night there,' he replied; 'and not to-night alone, but many

nights. This is a secret which I trust to you in case of any unexpected

emergency. You will not come, unless in case of strong necessity, to me;

from dusk to broad day I shall be there. Emma, your daughter, and the

rest, suppose me out of London, as I have been until within this hour.

Do not undeceive them. This is the errand I am bound upon. I know I may

confide it to you, and I rely upon your questioning me no more at this

time.'

With that, as if to change the theme, he led the astounded locksmith

back to the night of the Maypole highwayman, to the robbery of Edward

Chester, to the reappearance of the man at Mrs Rudge's house, and to all

the strange circumstances which afterwards occurred. He even asked him

carelessly about the man's height, his face, his figure, whether he was

like any one he had ever seen--like Hugh, for instance, or any man he

had known at any time--and put many questions of that sort, which the

locksmith, considering them as mere devices to engage his attention and

prevent his expressing the astonishment he felt, answered pretty much at

random.

At length, they arrived at the corner of the street in which the house

stood, where Mr Haredale, alighting, dismissed the coach. 'If you desire

to see me safely lodged,' he said, turning to the locksmith with a

gloomy smile, 'you can.'

Gabriel, to whom all former marvels had been nothing in comparison

with this, followed him along the narrow pavement in silence. When they

reached the door, Mr Haredale softly opened it with a key he had about

him, and closing it when Varden entered, they were left in thorough

darkness.

They groped their way into the ground-floor room. Here Mr Haredale

struck a light, and kindled a pocket taper he had brought with him for

the purpose. It was then, when the flame was full upon him, that the

locksmith saw for the first time how haggard, pale, and changed he

looked; how worn and thin he was; how perfectly his whole appearance

coincided with all that he had said so strangely as they rode along.

It was not an unnatural impulse in Gabriel, after what he had heard, to

note curiously the expression of his eyes. It was perfectly collected

and rational;--so much so, indeed, that he felt ashamed of his momentary

suspicion, and drooped his own when Mr Haredale looked towards him, as

if he feared they would betray his thoughts.

'Will you walk through the house?' said Mr Haredale, with a glance

towards the window, the crazy shutters of which were closed and

fastened. 'Speak low.'

There was a kind of awe about the place, which would have rendered it

difficult to speak in any other manner. Gabriel whispered 'Yes,' and

followed him upstairs.

Everything was just as they had seen it last. There was a sense of

closeness from the exclusion of fresh air, and a gloom and heaviness

around, as though long imprisonment had made the very silence sad. The

homely hangings of the beds and windows had begun to droop; the dust lay

thick upon their dwindling folds; and damps had made their way through

ceiling, wall, and floor. The boards creaked beneath their tread, as if

resenting the unaccustomed intrusion; nimble spiders, paralysed by the

taper's glare, checked the motion of their hundred legs upon the wall,

or dropped like lifeless things upon the ground; the death-watch ticked;

and the scampering feet of rats and mice rattled behind the wainscot.

As they looked about them on the decaying furniture, it was strange to

find how vividly it presented those to whom it had belonged, and

with whom it was once familiar. Grip seemed to perch again upon his

high-backed chair; Barnaby to crouch in his old favourite corner by the

fire; the mother to resume her usual seat, and watch him as of old. Even

when they could separate these objects from the phantoms of the mind

which they invoked, the latter only glided out of sight, but lingered

near them still; for then they seemed to lurk in closets and behind the

doors, ready to start out and suddenly accost them in well-remembered

tones.

They went downstairs, and again into the room they had just now left.

Mr Haredale unbuckled his sword and laid it on the table, with a pair of

pocket pistols; then told the locksmith he would light him to the door.

'But this is a dull place, sir,' said Gabriel lingering; 'may no one

share your watch?'

He shook his head, and so plainly evinced his wish to be alone, that

Gabriel could say no more. In another moment the locksmith was standing

in the street, whence he could see that the light once more travelled

upstairs, and soon returning to the room below, shone brightly through

the chinks of the shutters.

If ever man were sorely puzzled and perplexed, the locksmith was, that

night. Even when snugly seated by his own fireside, with Mrs Varden

opposite in a nightcap and night-jacket, and Dolly beside him (in a

most distracting dishabille) curling her hair, and smiling as if she had

never cried in all her life and never could--even then, with Toby at

his elbow and his pipe in his mouth, and Miggs (but that perhaps was not

much) falling asleep in the background, he could not quite discard his

wonder and uneasiness. So in his dreams--still there was Mr Haredale,

haggard and careworn, listening in the solitary house to every sound

that stirred, with the taper shining through the chinks until the day

should turn it pale and end his lonely watching.

Chapter 43

Next morning brought no satisfaction to the locksmith's thoughts,

nor next day, nor the next, nor many others. Often after nightfall he

entered the street, and turned his eyes towards the well-known house;

and as surely as he did so, there was the solitary light, still gleaming

through the crevices of the window-shutter, while all within was

motionless, noiseless, cheerless, as a grave. Unwilling to hazard Mr

Haredale's favour by disobeying his strict injunction, he never ventured

to knock at the door or to make his presence known in any way. But

whenever strong interest and curiosity attracted him to the spot--which

was not seldom--the light was always there.

If he could have known what passed within, the knowledge would have

yielded him no clue to this mysterious vigil. At twilight, Mr Haredale

shut himself up, and at daybreak he came forth. He never missed a night,

always came and went alone, and never varied his proceedings in the

least degree.

The manner of his watch was this. At dusk, he entered the house in the

same way as when the locksmith bore him company, kindled a light, went

through the rooms, and narrowly examined them. That done, he returned to

the chamber on the ground-floor, and laying his sword and pistols on the

table, sat by it until morning.

He usually had a book with him, and often tried to read, but never fixed

his eyes or thoughts upon it for five minutes together. The slightest

noise without doors, caught his ear; a step upon the pavement seemed to

make his heart leap.

He was not without some refreshment during the long lonely hours;

generally carrying in his pocket a sandwich of bread and meat, and a

small flask of wine. The latter diluted with large quantities of water,

he drank in a heated, feverish way, as though his throat were dried; but

he scarcely ever broke his fast, by so much as a crumb of bread.

If this voluntary sacrifice of sleep and comfort had its origin, as the

locksmith on consideration was disposed to think, in any superstitious

expectation of the fulfilment of a dream or vision connected with the

event on which he had brooded for so many years, and if he waited for

some ghostly visitor who walked abroad when men lay sleeping in their

beds, he showed no trace of fear or wavering. His stern features

expressed inflexible resolution; his brows were puckered, and his lips

compressed, with deep and settled purpose; and when he started at a

noise and listened, it was not with the start of fear but hope, and

catching up his sword as though the hour had come at last, he would

clutch it in his tight-clenched hand, and listen with sparkling eyes and

eager looks, until it died away.

These disappointments were numerous, for they ensued on almost every

sound, but his constancy was not shaken. Still, every night he was at

his post, the same stern, sleepless, sentinel; and still night passed,

and morning dawned, and he must watch again.

This went on for weeks; he had taken a lodging at Vauxhall in which

to pass the day and rest himself; and from this place, when the tide

served, he usually came to London Bridge from Westminster by water, in

order that he might avoid the busy streets.

One evening, shortly before twilight, he came his accustomed road upon

the river's bank, intending to pass through Westminster Hall into Palace

Yard, and there take boat to London Bridge as usual. There was a pretty

large concourse of people assembled round the Houses of Parliament,

looking at the members as they entered and departed, and giving vent to

rather noisy demonstrations of approval or dislike, according to their

known opinions. As he made his way among the throng, he heard once or

twice the No-Popery cry, which was then becoming pretty familiar to the

ears of most men; but holding it in very slight regard, and observing

that the idlers were of the lowest grade, he neither thought nor cared

about it, but made his way along, with perfect indifference.

There were many little knots and groups of persons in Westminster Hall:

some few looking upward at its noble ceiling, and at the rays of evening

light, tinted by the setting sun, which streamed in aslant through

its small windows, and growing dimmer by degrees, were quenched in the

gathering gloom below; some, noisy passengers, mechanics going home from

work, and otherwise, who hurried quickly through, waking the echoes with

their voices, and soon darkening the small door in the distance, as

they passed into the street beyond; some, in busy conference together on

political or private matters, pacing slowly up and down with eyes that

sought the ground, and seeming, by their attitudes, to listen earnestly

from head to foot. Here, a dozen squabbling urchins made a very Babel in

the air; there, a solitary man, half clerk, half mendicant, paced up and

down with hungry dejection in his look and gait; at his elbow passed

an errand-lad, swinging his basket round and round, and with his shrill

whistle riving the very timbers of the roof; while a more observant

schoolboy, half-way through, pocketed his ball, and eyed the distant

beadle as he came looming on. It was that time of evening when, if you

shut your eyes and open them again, the darkness of an hour appears

to have gathered in a second. The smooth-worn pavement, dusty with

footsteps, still called upon the lofty walls to reiterate the shuffle

and the tread of feet unceasingly, save when the closing of some heavy

door resounded through the building like a clap of thunder, and drowned

all other noises in its rolling sound.

Mr Haredale, glancing only at such of these groups as he passed nearest

to, and then in a manner betokening that his thoughts were elsewhere,

had nearly traversed the Hall, when two persons before him caught his

attention. One of these, a gentleman in elegant attire, carried in his

hand a cane, which he twirled in a jaunty manner as he loitered on; the

other, an obsequious, crouching, fawning figure, listened to what

he said--at times throwing in a humble word himself--and, with his

shoulders shrugged up to his ears, rubbed his hands submissively, or

answered at intervals by an inclination of the head, half-way between a

nod of acquiescence, and a bow of most profound respect.

In the abstract there was nothing very remarkable in this pair, for

servility waiting on a handsome suit of clothes and a cane--not to speak

of gold and silver sticks, or wands of office--is common enough. But

there was that about the well-dressed man, yes, and about the other

likewise, which struck Mr Haredale with no pleasant feeling. He

hesitated, stopped, and would have stepped aside and turned out of his

path, but at the moment, the other two faced about quickly, and stumbled

upon him before he could avoid them.

The gentleman with the cane lifted his hat and had begun to tender an

apology, which Mr Haredale had begun as hastily to acknowledge and walk

away, when he stopped short and cried, 'Haredale! Gad bless me, this is

strange indeed!'

'It is,' he returned impatiently; 'yes--a--'

'My dear friend,' cried the other, detaining him, 'why such great speed?

One minute, Haredale, for the sake of old acquaintance.'

'I am in haste,' he said. 'Neither of us has sought this meeting. Let it

be a brief one. Good night!'

'Fie, fie!' replied Sir John (for it was he), 'how very churlish! We

were speaking of you. Your name was on my lips--perhaps you heard me

mention it? No? I am sorry for that. I am really sorry.--You know our

friend here, Haredale? This is really a most remarkable meeting!'

The friend, plainly very ill at ease, had made bold to press Sir John's

arm, and to give him other significant hints that he was desirous of

avoiding this introduction. As it did not suit Sir John's purpose,

however, that it should be evaded, he appeared quite unconscious of

these silent remonstrances, and inclined his hand towards him, as he

spoke, to call attention to him more particularly.

The friend, therefore, had nothing for it, but to muster up the

pleasantest smile he could, and to make a conciliatory bow, as Mr

Haredale turned his eyes upon him. Seeing that he was recognised, he put

out his hand in an awkward and embarrassed manner, which was not mended

by its contemptuous rejection.

'Mr Gashford!' said Haredale, coldly. 'It is as I have heard then. You

have left the darkness for the light, sir, and hate those whose opinions

you formerly held, with all the bitterness of a renegade. You are an

honour, sir, to any cause. I wish the one you espouse at present, much

joy of the acquisition it has made.'

The secretary rubbed his hands and bowed, as though he would disarm

his adversary by humbling himself before him. Sir John Chester again

exclaimed, with an air of great gaiety, 'Now, really, this is a

most remarkable meeting!' and took a pinch of snuff with his usual

self-possession.

'Mr Haredale,' said Gashford, stealthily raising his eyes, and

letting them drop again when they met the other's steady gaze, is too

conscientious, too honourable, too manly, I am sure, to attach unworthy

motives to an honest change of opinions, even though it implies a doubt

of those he holds himself. Mr Haredale is too just, too generous, too

clear-sighted in his moral vision, to--'

'Yes, sir?' he rejoined with a sarcastic smile, finding the secretary

stopped. 'You were saying'--

Gashford meekly shrugged his shoulders, and looking on the ground again,

was silent.

'No, but let us really,' interposed Sir John at this juncture, 'let us

really, for a moment, contemplate the very remarkable character of this

meeting. Haredale, my dear friend, pardon me if I think you are not

sufficiently impressed with its singularity. Here we stand, by no

previous appointment or arrangement, three old schoolfellows, in

Westminster Hall; three old boarders in a remarkably dull and shady

seminary at Saint Omer's, where you, being Catholics and of necessity

educated out of England, were brought up; and where I, being a promising

young Protestant at that time, was sent to learn the French tongue from

a native of Paris!'

'Add to the singularity, Sir John,' said Mr Haredale, 'that some of you

Protestants of promise are at this moment leagued in yonder building, to

prevent our having the surpassing and unheard-of privilege of teaching

our children to read and write--here--in this land, where thousands of

us enter your service every year, and to preserve the freedom of which,

we die in bloody battles abroad, in heaps: and that others of you, to

the number of some thousands as I learn, are led on to look on all men

of my creed as wolves and beasts of prey, by this man Gashford. Add

to it besides the bare fact that this man lives in society, walks the

streets in broad day--I was about to say, holds up his head, but that he

does not--and it will be strange, and very strange, I grant you.'

'Oh! you are hard upon our friend,' replied Sir John, with an engaging

smile. 'You are really very hard upon our friend!'

'Let him go on, Sir John,' said Gashford, fumbling with his gloves. 'Let

him go on. I can make allowances, Sir John. I am honoured with your

good opinion, and I can dispense with Mr Haredale's. Mr Haredale is a

sufferer from the penal laws, and I can't expect his favour.'

'You have so much of my favour, sir,' retorted Mr Haredale, with a

bitter glance at the third party in their conversation, 'that I am

glad to see you in such good company. You are the essence of your great

Association, in yourselves.'

'Now, there you mistake,' said Sir John, in his most benignant way.

'There--which is a most remarkable circumstance for a man of your

punctuality and exactness, Haredale--you fall into error. I don't belong

to the body; I have an immense respect for its members, but I don't

belong to it; although I am, it is certainly true, the conscientious

opponent of your being relieved. I feel it my duty to be so; it is a

most unfortunate necessity; and cost me a bitter struggle.--Will you try

this box? If you don't object to a trifling infusion of a very chaste

scent, you'll find its flavour exquisite.'

'I ask your pardon, Sir John,' said Mr Haredale, declining the proffer

with a motion of his hand, 'for having ranked you among the humble

instruments who are obvious and in all men's sight. I should have done

more justice to your genius. Men of your capacity plot in secrecy and

safety, and leave exposed posts to the duller wits.'

'Don't apologise, for the world,' replied Sir John sweetly; 'old friends

like you and I, may be allowed some freedoms, or the deuce is in it.'

Gashford, who had been very restless all this time, but had not once

looked up, now turned to Sir John, and ventured to mutter something to

the effect that he must go, or my lord would perhaps be waiting.

'Don't distress yourself, good sir,' said Mr Haredale, 'I'll take my

leave, and put you at your ease--' which he was about to do without

ceremony, when he was stayed by a buzz and murmur at the upper end of

the hall, and, looking in that direction, saw Lord George Gordon coming

in, with a crowd of people round him.

There was a lurking look of triumph, though very differently expressed,

in the faces of his two companions, which made it a natural impulse

on Mr Haredale's part not to give way before this leader, but to stand

there while he passed. He drew himself up and, clasping his hands behind

him, looked on with a proud and scornful aspect, while Lord George

slowly advanced (for the press was great about him) towards the spot

where they were standing.

He had left the House of Commons but that moment, and had come straight

down into the Hall, bringing with him, as his custom was, intelligence

of what had been said that night in reference to the Papists, and what

petitions had been presented in their favour, and who had supported

them, and when the bill was to be brought in, and when it would be

advisable to present their own Great Protestant petition. All this he

told the persons about him in a loud voice, and with great abundance

of ungainly gesture. Those who were nearest him made comments to each

other, and vented threats and murmurings; those who were outside the

crowd cried, 'Silence,' and Stand back,' or closed in upon the rest,

endeavouring to make a forcible exchange of places: and so they came

driving on in a very disorderly and irregular way, as it is the manner

of a crowd to do.

When they were very near to where the secretary, Sir John, and Mr

Haredale stood, Lord George turned round and, making a few remarks of

a sufficiently violent and incoherent kind, concluded with the usual

sentiment, and called for three cheers to back it. While these were in

the act of being given with great energy, he extricated himself from

the press, and stepped up to Gashford's side. Both he and Sir John being

well known to the populace, they fell back a little, and left the four

standing together.

'Mr Haredale, Lord George,' said Sir John Chester, seeing that the

nobleman regarded him with an inquisitive look. 'A Catholic gentleman

unfortunately--most unhappily a Catholic--but an esteemed acquaintance

of mine, and once of Mr Gashford's. My dear Haredale, this is Lord

George Gordon.'

'I should have known that, had I been ignorant of his lordship's

person,' said Mr Haredale. 'I hope there is but one gentleman in England

who, addressing an ignorant and excited throng, would speak of a large

body of his fellow-subjects in such injurious language as I heard this

moment. For shame, my lord, for shame!'

'I cannot talk to you, sir,' replied Lord George in a loud voice, and

waving his hand in a disturbed and agitated manner; 'we have nothing in

common.'

'We have much in common--many things--all that the Almighty gave us,'

said Mr Haredale; 'and common charity, not to say common sense and

common decency, should teach you to refrain from these proceedings. If

every one of those men had arms in their hands at this moment, as they

have them in their heads, I would not leave this place without telling

you that you disgrace your station.'

'I don't hear you, sir,' he replied in the same manner as before; 'I

can't hear you. It is indifferent to me what you say. Don't retort,

Gashford,' for the secretary had made a show of wishing to do so; 'I can

hold no communion with the worshippers of idols.'

As he said this, he glanced at Sir John, who lifted his hands and

eyebrows, as if deploring the intemperate conduct of Mr Haredale, and

smiled in admiration of the crowd and of their leader.

'HE retort!' cried Haredale. 'Look you here, my lord. Do you know this

man?'

Lord George replied by laying his hand upon the shoulder of his cringing

secretary, and viewing him with a smile of confidence.

'This man,' said Mr Haredale, eyeing him from top to toe, 'who in his

boyhood was a thief, and has been from that time to this, a servile,

false, and truckling knave: this man, who has crawled and crept through

life, wounding the hands he licked, and biting those he fawned upon:

this sycophant, who never knew what honour, truth, or courage meant; who

robbed his benefactor's daughter of her virtue, and married her to break

her heart, and did it, with stripes and cruelty: this creature, who has

whined at kitchen windows for the broken food, and begged for halfpence

at our chapel doors: this apostle of the faith, whose tender conscience

cannot bear the altars where his vicious life was publicly denounced--Do

you know this man?'

'Oh, really--you are very, very hard upon our friend!' exclaimed Sir

John.

'Let Mr Haredale go on,' said Gashford, upon whose unwholesome face the

perspiration had broken out during this speech, in blotches of wet; 'I

don't mind him, Sir John; it's quite as indifferent to me what he says,

as it is to my lord. If he reviles my lord, as you have heard, Sir John,

how can I hope to escape?'

'Is it not enough, my lord,' Mr Haredale continued, 'that I, as good a

gentleman as you, must hold my property, such as it is, by a trick at

which the state connives because of these hard laws; and that we may not

teach our youth in schools the common principles of right and wrong; but

must we be denounced and ridden by such men as this! Here is a man to

head your No-Popery cry! For shame. For shame!'

The infatuated nobleman had glanced more than once at Sir John Chester,

as if to inquire whether there was any truth in these statements

concerning Gashford, and Sir John had as often plainly answered by a

shrug or look, 'Oh dear me! no.' He now said, in the same loud key, and

in the same strange manner as before:

'I have nothing to say, sir, in reply, and no desire to hear anything

more. I beg you won't obtrude your conversation, or these personal

attacks, upon me. I shall not be deterred from doing my duty to my

country and my countrymen, by any such attempts, whether they proceed

from emissaries of the Pope or not, I assure you. Come, Gashford!'

They had walked on a few paces while speaking, and were now at the

Hall-door, through which they passed together. Mr Haredale, without any

leave-taking, turned away to the river stairs, which were close at hand,

and hailed the only boatman who remained there.

But the throng of people--the foremost of whom had heard every word

that Lord George Gordon said, and among all of whom the rumour had been

rapidly dispersed that the stranger was a Papist who was bearding him

for his advocacy of the popular cause--came pouring out pell-mell, and,

forcing the nobleman, his secretary, and Sir John Chester on before

them, so that they appeared to be at their head, crowded to the top of

the stairs where Mr Haredale waited until the boat was ready, and there

stood still, leaving him on a little clear space by himself.

They were not silent, however, though inactive. At first some indistinct

mutterings arose among them, which were followed by a hiss or two, and

these swelled by degrees into a perfect storm. Then one voice said,

'Down with the Papists!' and there was a pretty general cheer, but

nothing more. After a lull of a few moments, one man cried out, 'Stone

him;' another, 'Duck him;' another, in a stentorian voice, 'No Popery!'

This favourite cry the rest re-echoed, and the mob, which might have

been two hundred strong, joined in a general shout.

Mr Haredale had stood calmly on the brink of the steps, until they made

this demonstration, when he looked round contemptuously, and walked at

a slow pace down the stairs. He was pretty near the boat, when Gashford,

as if without intention, turned about, and directly afterwards a great

stone was thrown by some hand, in the crowd, which struck him on the

head, and made him stagger like a drunken man.

The blood sprung freely from the wound, and trickled down his coat. He

turned directly, and rushing up the steps with a boldness and passion

which made them all fall back, demanded:

'Who did that? Show me the man who hit me.'

Not a soul moved; except some in the rear who slunk off, and, escaping

to the other side of the way, looked on like indifferent spectators.

'Who did that?' he repeated. 'Show me the man who did it. Dog, was it

you? It was your deed, if not your hand--I know you.'

He threw himself on Gashford as he said the words, and hurled him to the

ground. There was a sudden motion in the crowd, and some laid hands upon

him, but his sword was out, and they fell off again.

'My lord--Sir John,'--he cried, 'draw, one of you--you are responsible

for this outrage, and I look to you. Draw, if you are gentlemen.' With

that he struck Sir John upon the breast with the flat of his weapon,

and with a burning face and flashing eyes stood upon his guard; alone,

before them all.

For an instant, for the briefest space of time the mind can readily

conceive, there was a change in Sir John's smooth face, such as no man

ever saw there. The next moment, he stepped forward, and laid one hand

on Mr Haredale's arm, while with the other he endeavoured to appease the

crowd.

'My dear friend, my good Haredale, you are blinded with passion--it's

very natural, extremely natural--but you don't know friends from foes.'

'I know them all, sir, I can distinguish well--' he retorted, almost mad

with rage. 'Sir John, Lord George--do you hear me? Are you cowards?'

'Never mind, sir,' said a man, forcing his way between and pushing him

towards the stairs with friendly violence, 'never mind asking that. For

God's sake, get away. What CAN you do against this number? And there are

as many more in the next street, who'll be round directly,'--indeed they

began to pour in as he said the words--'you'd be giddy from that cut, in

the first heat of a scuffle. Now do retire, sir, or take my word for it

you'll be worse used than you would be if every man in the crowd was a

woman, and that woman Bloody Mary. Come, sir, make haste--as quick as

you can.'

Mr Haredale, who began to turn faint and sick, felt how sensible

this advice was, and descended the steps with his unknown friend's

assistance. John Grueby (for John it was) helped him into the boat, and

giving her a shove off, which sent her thirty feet into the tide, bade

the waterman pull away like a Briton; and walked up again as composedly

as if he had just landed.

There was at first a slight disposition on the part of the mob to resent

this interference; but John looking particularly strong and cool, and

wearing besides Lord George's livery, they thought better of it, and

contented themselves with sending a shower of small missiles after the

boat, which plashed harmlessly in the water; for she had by this time

cleared the bridge, and was darting swiftly down the centre of the

stream.

From this amusement, they proceeded to giving Protestant knocks at the

doors of private houses, breaking a few lamps, and assaulting some stray

constables. But, it being whispered that a detachment of Life Guards had

been sent for, they took to their heels with great expedition, and left

the street quite clear.

Chapter 44

When the concourse separated, and, dividing into chance clusters, drew

off in various directions, there still remained upon the scene of the

late disturbance, one man. This man was Gashford, who, bruised by his

late fall, and hurt in a much greater degree by the indignity he had

undergone, and the exposure of which he had been the victim, limped up

and down, breathing curses and threats of vengeance.

It was not the secretary's nature to waste his wrath in words. While he

vented the froth of his malevolence in those effusions, he kept a steady

eye on two men, who, having disappeared with the rest when the alarm was

spread, had since returned, and were now visible in the moonlight, at no

great distance, as they walked to and fro, and talked together.

He made no move towards them, but waited patiently on the dark side of

the street, until they were tired of strolling backwards and forwards

and walked away in company. Then he followed, but at some distance:

keeping them in view, without appearing to have that object, or being

seen by them.

They went up Parliament Street, past Saint Martin's church, and away by

Saint Giles's to Tottenham Court Road, at the back of which, upon

the western side, was then a place called the Green Lanes. This was a

retired spot, not of the choicest kind, leading into the fields. Great

heaps of ashes; stagnant pools, overgrown with rank grass and duckweed;

broken turnstiles; and the upright posts of palings long since carried

off for firewood, which menaced all heedless walkers with their jagged

and rusty nails; were the leading features of the landscape: while here

and there a donkey, or a ragged horse, tethered to a stake, and cropping

off a wretched meal from the coarse stunted turf, were quite in keeping

with the scene, and would have suggested (if the houses had not done so,

sufficiently, of themselves) how very poor the people were who lived in

the crazy huts adjacent, and how foolhardy it might prove for one who

carried money, or wore decent clothes, to walk that way alone, unless by

daylight.

Poverty has its whims and shows of taste, as wealth has. Some of these

cabins were turreted, some had false windows painted on their rotten

walls; one had a mimic clock, upon a crazy tower of four feet high,

which screened the chimney; each in its little patch of ground had a

rude seat or arbour. The population dealt in bones, in rags, in broken

glass, in old wheels, in birds, and dogs. These, in their several ways

of stowage, filled the gardens; and shedding a perfume, not of the most

delicious nature, in the air, filled it besides with yelps, and screams,

and howling.

Into this retreat, the secretary followed the two men whom he had held

in sight; and here he saw them safely lodged, in one of the meanest

houses, which was but a room, and that of small dimensions. He waited

without, until the sound of their voices, joined in a discordant song,

assured him they were making merry; and then approaching the door, by

means of a tottering plank which crossed the ditch in front, knocked at

it with his hand.

'Muster Gashfordl' said the man who opened it, taking his pipe from

his mouth, in evident surprise. 'Why, who'd have thought of this here

honour! Walk in, Muster Gashford--walk in, sir.'

Gashford required no second invitation, and entered with a gracious air.

There was a fire in the rusty grate (for though the spring was pretty

far advanced, the nights were cold), and on a stool beside it Hugh sat

smoking. Dennis placed a chair, his only one, for the secretary, in

front of the hearth; and took his seat again upon the stool he had left

when he rose to give the visitor admission.

'What's in the wind now, Muster Gashford?' he said, as he resumed his

pipe, and looked at him askew. 'Any orders from head-quarters? Are we

going to begin? What is it, Muster Gashford?'

'Oh, nothing, nothing,' rejoined the secretary, with a friendly nod to

Hugh. 'We have broken the ice, though. We had a little spurt to-day--eh,

Dennis?'

'A very little one,' growled the hangman. 'Not half enough for me.'

'Nor me neither!' cried Hugh. 'Give us something to do with life in

it--with life in it, master. Ha, ha!'

'Why, you wouldn't,' said the secretary, with his worst expression of

face, and in his mildest tones, 'have anything to do, with--with death

in it?'

'I don't know that,' replied Hugh. 'I'm open to orders. I don't care;

not I.'

'Nor I!' vociferated Dennis.

'Brave fellows!' said the secretary, in as pastor-like a voice as if he

were commending them for some uncommon act of valour and generosity. 'By

the bye'--and here he stopped and warmed his hands: then suddenly looked

up--'who threw that stone to-day?'

Mr Dennis coughed and shook his head, as who should say, 'A mystery

indeed!' Hugh sat and smoked in silence.

'It was well done!' said the secretary, warming his hands again. 'I

should like to know that man.'

'Would you?' said Dennis, after looking at his face to assure himself

that he was serious. 'Would you like to know that man, Muster Gashford?'

'I should indeed,' replied the secretary.

'Why then, Lord love you,' said the hangman, in his hoarest chuckle,

as he pointed with his pipe to Hugh, 'there he sits. That's the man. My

stars and halters, Muster Gashford,' he added in a whisper, as he

drew his stool close to him and jogged him with his elbow, 'what a

interesting blade he is! He wants as much holding in as a thorough-bred

bulldog. If it hadn't been for me to-day, he'd have had that 'ere Roman

down, and made a riot of it, in another minute.'

'And why not?' cried Hugh in a surly voice, as he overheard this last

remark. 'Where's the good of putting things off? Strike while the iron's

hot; that's what I say.'

'Ah!' retorted Dennis, shaking his head, with a kind of pity for his

friend's ingenuous youth; 'but suppose the iron an't hot, brother! You

must get people's blood up afore you strike, and have 'em in the humour.

There wasn't quite enough to provoke 'em to-day, I tell you. If you'd

had your way, you'd have spoilt the fun to come, and ruined us.'

'Dennis is quite right,' said Gashford, smoothly. 'He is perfectly

correct. Dennis has great knowledge of the world.'

'I ought to have, Muster Gashford, seeing what a many people I've helped

out of it, eh?' grinned the hangman, whispering the words behind his

hand.

The secretary laughed at this jest as much as Dennis could desire, and

when he had done, said, turning to Hugh:

'Dennis's policy was mine, as you may have observed. You saw, for

instance, how I fell when I was set upon. I made no resistance. I did

nothing to provoke an outbreak. Oh dear no!'

'No, by the Lord Harry!' cried Dennis with a noisy laugh, 'you went down

very quiet, Muster Gashford--and very flat besides. I thinks to myself

at the time "it's all up with Muster Gashford!" I never see a man lay

flatter nor more still--with the life in him--than you did to-day. He's

a rough 'un to play with, is that 'ere Papist, and that's the fact.'

The secretary's face, as Dennis roared with laughter, and turned his

wrinkled eyes on Hugh who did the like, might have furnished a study for

the devil's picture. He sat quite silent until they were serious again,

and then said, looking round:

'We are very pleasant here; so very pleasant, Dennis, that but for my

lord's particular desire that I should sup with him, and the time being

very near at hand, I should be inclined to stay, until it would be

hardly safe to go homeward. I come upon a little business--yes, I do--as

you supposed. It's very flattering to you; being this. If we ever

should be obliged--and we can't tell, you know--this is a very uncertain

world'--

'I believe you, Muster Gashford,' interposed the hangman with a grave

nod. 'The uncertainties as I've seen in reference to this here state of

existence, the unexpected contingencies as have come about!--Oh my eye!'

Feeling the subject much too vast for expression, he puffed at his pipe

again, and looked the rest.

'I say,' resumed the secretary, in a slow, impressive way; 'we can't

tell what may come to pass; and if we should be obliged, against our

wills, to have recourse to violence, my lord (who has suffered terribly

to-day, as far as words can go) consigns to you two--bearing in mind my

recommendation of you both, as good staunch men, beyond all doubt and

suspicion--the pleasant task of punishing this Haredale. You may do as

you please with him, or his, provided that you show no mercy, and no

quarter, and leave no two beams of his house standing where the builder

placed them. You may sack it, burn it, do with it as you like, but

it must come down; it must be razed to the ground; and he, and all

belonging to him, left as shelterless as new-born infants whom their

mothers have exposed. Do you understand me?' said Gashford, pausing, and

pressing his hands together gently.

'Understand you, master!' cried Hugh. 'You speak plain now. Why, this is

hearty!'

'I knew you would like it,' said Gashford, shaking him by the hand; 'I

thought you would. Good night! Don't rise, Dennis: I would rather find

my way alone. I may have to make other visits here, and it's pleasant

to come and go without disturbing you. I can find my way perfectly well.

Good night!'

He was gone, and had shut the door behind him. They looked at each

other, and nodded approvingly: Dennis stirred up the fire.

'This looks a little more like business!' he said.

'Ay, indeed!' cried Hugh; 'this suits me!'

'I've heerd it said of Muster Gashford,' said the hangman, 'that he'd

a surprising memory and wonderful firmness--that he never forgot, and

never forgave.--Let's drink his health!'

Hugh readily complied--pouring no liquor on the floor when he drank this

toast--and they pledged the secretary as a man after their own hearts,

in a bumper.

Chapter 45

While the worst passions of the worst men were thus working in the dark,

and the mantle of religion, assumed to cover the ugliest deformities,

threatened to become the shroud of all that was good and peaceful in

society, a circumstance occurred which once more altered the position of

two persons from whom this history has long been separated, and to whom

it must now return.

In a small English country town, the inhabitants of which supported

themselves by the labour of their hands in plaiting and preparing straw

for those who made bonnets and other articles of dress and ornament from

that material,--concealed under an assumed name, and living in a quiet

poverty which knew no change, no pleasures, and few cares but that

of struggling on from day to day in one great toil for bread,--dwelt

Barnaby and his mother. Their poor cottage had known no stranger's foot

since they sought the shelter of its roof five years before; nor had

they in all that time held any commerce or communication with the old

world from which they had fled. To labour in peace, and devote her

labour and her life to her poor son, was all the widow sought. If

happiness can be said at any time to be the lot of one on whom a secret

sorrow preys, she was happy now. Tranquillity, resignation, and her

strong love of him who needed it so much, formed the small circle of her

quiet joys; and while that remained unbroken, she was contented.

For Barnaby himself, the time which had flown by, had passed him like

the wind. The daily suns of years had shed no brighter gleam of reason

on his mind; no dawn had broken on his long, dark night. He would sit

sometimes--often for days together on a low seat by the fire or by the

cottage door, busy at work (for he had learnt the art his mother plied),

and listening, God help him, to the tales she would repeat, as a lure

to keep him in her sight. He had no recollection of these little

narratives; the tale of yesterday was new to him upon the morrow; but

he liked them at the moment; and when the humour held him, would remain

patiently within doors, hearing her stories like a little child, and

working cheerfully from sunrise until it was too dark to see.

At other times,--and then their scanty earnings were barely sufficient

to furnish them with food, though of the coarsest sort,--he would wander

abroad from dawn of day until the twilight deepened into night. Few

in that place, even of the children, could be idle, and he had no

companions of his own kind. Indeed there were not many who could have

kept up with him in his rambles, had there been a legion. But there were

a score of vagabond dogs belonging to the neighbours, who served his

purpose quite as well. With two or three of these, or sometimes with a

full half-dozen barking at his heels, he would sally forth on some

long expedition that consumed the day; and though, on their return at

nightfall, the dogs would come home limping and sore-footed, and almost

spent with their fatigue, Barnaby was up and off again at sunrise with

some new attendants of the same class, with whom he would return in like

manner. On all these travels, Grip, in his little basket at his master's

back, was a constant member of the party, and when they set off in fine

weather and in high spirits, no dog barked louder than the raven.

Their pleasures on these excursions were simple enough. A crust of bread

and scrap of meat, with water from the brook or spring, sufficed for

their repast. Barnaby's enjoyments were, to walk, and run, and leap,

till he was tired; then to lie down in the long grass, or by the growing

corn, or in the shade of some tall tree, looking upward at the light

clouds as they floated over the blue surface of the sky, and

listening to the lark as she poured out her brilliant song. There were

wild-flowers to pluck--the bright red poppy, the gentle harebell, the

cowslip, and the rose. There were birds to watch; fish; ants; worms;

hares or rabbits, as they darted across the distant pathway in the wood

and so were gone: millions of living things to have an interest in, and

lie in wait for, and clap hands and shout in memory of, when they had

disappeared. In default of these, or when they wearied, there was the

merry sunlight to hunt out, as it crept in aslant through leaves and

boughs of trees, and hid far down--deep, deep, in hollow places--like

a silver pool, where nodding branches seemed to bathe and sport; sweet

scents of summer air breathing over fields of beans or clover; the

perfume of wet leaves or moss; the life of waving trees, and shadows

always changing. When these or any of them tired, or in excess of

pleasing tempted him to shut his eyes, there was slumber in the midst

of all these soft delights, with the gentle wind murmuring like music in

his ears, and everything around melting into one delicious dream.

Their hut--for it was little more--stood on the outskirts of the town,

at a short distance from the high road, but in a secluded place, where

few chance passengers strayed at any season of the year. It had a plot

of garden-ground attached, which Barnaby, in fits and starts of working,

trimmed, and kept in order. Within doors and without, his mother

laboured for their common good; and hail, rain, snow, or sunshine, found

no difference in her.

Though so far removed from the scenes of her past life, and with so

little thought or hope of ever visiting them again, she seemed to have

a strange desire to know what happened in the busy world. Any old

newspaper, or scrap of intelligence from London, she caught at with

avidity. The excitement it produced was not of a pleasurable kind, for

her manner at such times expressed the keenest anxiety and dread; but it

never faded in the least degree. Then, and in stormy winter nights, when

the wind blew loud and strong, the old expression came into her face,

and she would be seized with a fit of trembling, like one who had an

ague. But Barnaby noted little of this; and putting a great constraint

upon herself, she usually recovered her accustomed manner before the

change had caught his observation.

Grip was by no means an idle or unprofitable member of the humble

household. Partly by dint of Barnaby's tuition, and partly by pursuing a

species of self-instruction common to his tribe, and exerting his powers

of observation to the utmost, he had acquired a degree of sagacity

which rendered him famous for miles round. His conversational powers and

surprising performances were the universal theme: and as many

persons came to see the wonderful raven, and none left his exertions

unrewarded--when he condescended to exhibit, which was not always,

for genius is capricious--his earnings formed an important item in the

common stock. Indeed, the bird himself appeared to know his value well;

for though he was perfectly free and unrestrained in the presence of

Barnaby and his mother, he maintained in public an amazing gravity,

and never stooped to any other gratuitous performances than biting

the ankles of vagabond boys (an exercise in which he much delighted),

killing a fowl or two occasionally, and swallowing the dinners of

various neighbouring dogs, of whom the boldest held him in great awe and

dread.

Time had glided on in this way, and nothing had happened to disturb or

change their mode of life, when, one summer's night in June, they were

in their little garden, resting from the labours of the day. The widow's

work was yet upon her knee, and strewn upon the ground about her; and

Barnaby stood leaning on his spade, gazing at the brightness in the

west, and singing softly to himself.

'A brave evening, mother! If we had, chinking in our pockets, but a few

specks of that gold which is piled up yonder in the sky, we should be

rich for life.'

'We are better as we are,' returned the widow with a quiet smile. 'Let

us be contented, and we do not want and need not care to have it, though

it lay shining at our feet.'

'Ay!' said Barnaby, resting with crossed arms on his spade, and looking

wistfully at the sunset, that's well enough, mother; but gold's a good

thing to have. I wish that I knew where to find it. Grip and I could do

much with gold, be sure of that.'

'What would you do?' she asked.

'What! A world of things. We'd dress finely--you and I, I mean; not

Grip--keep horses, dogs, wear bright colours and feathers, do no more

work, live delicately and at our ease. Oh, we'd find uses for it,

mother, and uses that would do us good. I would I knew where gold was

buried. How hard I'd work to dig it up!'

'You do not know,' said his mother, rising from her seat and laying her

hand upon his shoulder, 'what men have done to win it, and how they have

found, too late, that it glitters brightest at a distance, and turns

quite dim and dull when handled.'

'Ay, ay; so you say; so you think,' he answered, still looking eagerly

in the same direction. 'For all that, mother, I should like to try.'

'Do you not see,' she said, 'how red it is? Nothing bears so many stains

of blood, as gold. Avoid it. None have such cause to hate its name as

we have. Do not so much as think of it, dear love. It has brought such

misery and suffering on your head and mine as few have known, and God

grant few may have to undergo. I would rather we were dead and laid down

in our graves, than you should ever come to love it.'

For a moment Barnaby withdrew his eyes and looked at her with wonder.

Then, glancing from the redness in the sky to the mark upon his wrist

as if he would compare the two, he seemed about to question her with

earnestness, when a new object caught his wandering attention, and made

him quite forgetful of his purpose.

This was a man with dusty feet and garments, who stood, bare-headed,

behind the hedge that divided their patch of garden from the pathway,

and leant meekly forward as if he sought to mingle with their

conversation, and waited for his time to speak. His face was turned

towards the brightness, too, but the light that fell upon it showed that

he was blind, and saw it not.

'A blessing on those voices!' said the wayfarer. 'I feel the beauty of

the night more keenly, when I hear them. They are like eyes to me. Will

they speak again, and cheer the heart of a poor traveller?'

'Have you no guide?' asked the widow, after a moment's pause.

'None but that,' he answered, pointing with his staff towards the sun;

'and sometimes a milder one at night, but she is idle now.'

'Have you travelled far?'

'A weary way and long,' rejoined the traveller as he shook his head. 'A

weary, weary, way. I struck my stick just now upon the bucket of your

well--be pleased to let me have a draught of water, lady.'

'Why do you call me lady?' she returned. 'I am as poor as you.'

'Your speech is soft and gentle, and I judge by that,' replied the man.

'The coarsest stuffs and finest silks, are--apart from the sense of

touch--alike to me. I cannot judge you by your dress.'

'Come round this way,' said Barnaby, who had passed out at the

garden-gate and now stood close beside him. 'Put your hand in mine.

You're blind and always in the dark, eh? Are you frightened in the dark?

Do you see great crowds of faces, now? Do they grin and chatter?'

'Alas!' returned the other, 'I see nothing. Waking or sleeping,

nothing.'

Barnaby looked curiously at his eyes, and touching them with his

fingers, as an inquisitive child might, led him towards the house.

'You have come a long distance, 'said the widow, meeting him at the

door. 'How have you found your way so far?'

'Use and necessity are good teachers, as I have heard--the best of any,'

said the blind man, sitting down upon the chair to which Barnaby had

led him, and putting his hat and stick upon the red-tiled floor. 'May

neither you nor your son ever learn under them. They are rough masters.'

'You have wandered from the road, too,' said the widow, in a tone of

pity.

'Maybe, maybe,' returned the blind man with a sigh, and yet with

something of a smile upon his face, 'that's likely. Handposts and

milestones are dumb, indeed, to me. Thank you the more for this rest,

and this refreshing drink!'

As he spoke, he raised the mug of water to his mouth. It was clear, and

cold, and sparkling, but not to his taste nevertheless, or his thirst

was not very great, for he only wetted his lips and put it down again.

He wore, hanging with a long strap round his neck, a kind of scrip or

wallet, in which to carry food. The widow set some bread and cheese

before him, but he thanked her, and said that through the kindness of

the charitable he had broken his fast once since morning, and was not

hungry. When he had made her this reply, he opened his wallet, and took

out a few pence, which was all it appeared to contain.

'Might I make bold to ask,' he said, turning towards where Barnaby stood

looking on, 'that one who has the gift of sight, would lay this out for

me in bread to keep me on my way? Heaven's blessing on the young feet

that will bestir themselves in aid of one so helpless as a sightless

man!'

Barnaby looked at his mother, who nodded assent; in another moment he

was gone upon his charitable errand. The blind man sat listening with an

attentive face, until long after the sound of his retreating footsteps

was inaudible to the widow, and then said, suddenly, and in a very

altered tone:

'There are various degrees and kinds of blindness, widow. There is the

connubial blindness, ma'am, which perhaps you may have observed in

the course of your own experience, and which is a kind of wilful and

self-bandaging blindness. There is the blindness of party, ma'am, and

public men, which is the blindness of a mad bull in the midst of a

regiment of soldiers clothed in red. There is the blind confidence of

youth, which is the blindness of young kittens, whose eyes have not yet

opened on the world; and there is that physical blindness, ma'am, of

which I am, contrairy to my own desire, a most illustrious example.

Added to these, ma'am, is that blindness of the intellect, of which we

have a specimen in your interesting son, and which, having sometimes

glimmerings and dawnings of the light, is scarcely to be trusted as a

total darkness. Therefore, ma'am, I have taken the liberty to get him

out of the way for a short time, while you and I confer together, and

this precaution arising out of the delicacy of my sentiments towards

yourself, you will excuse me, ma'am, I know.'

Having delivered himself of this speech with many flourishes of manner,

he drew from beneath his coat a flat stone bottle, and holding the cork

between his teeth, qualified his mug of water with a plentiful infusion

of the liquor it contained. He politely drained the bumper to her

health, and the ladies, and setting it down empty, smacked his lips with

infinite relish.

'I am a citizen of the world, ma'am,' said the blind man, corking his

bottle, 'and if I seem to conduct myself with freedom, it is therefore.

You wonder who I am, ma'am, and what has brought me here. Such

experience of human nature as I have, leads me to that conclusion,

without the aid of eyes by which to read the movements of your soul

as depicted in your feminine features. I will satisfy your curiosity

immediately, ma'am; immediately.' With that he slapped his bottle on its

broad back, and having put it under his garment as before, crossed his

legs and folded his hands, and settled himself in his chair, previous to

proceeding any further.

The change in his manner was so unexpected, the craft and wickedness

of his deportment were so much aggravated by his condition--for we are

accustomed to see in those who have lost a human sense, something in its

place almost divine--and this alteration bred so many fears in her whom

he addressed, that she could not pronounce one word. After waiting, as

it seemed, for some remark or answer, and waiting in vain, the visitor

resumed:

'Madam, my name is Stagg. A friend of mine who has desired the honour of

meeting with you any time these five years past, has commissioned me to

call upon you. I should be glad to whisper that gentleman's name in your

ear.--Zounds, ma'am, are you deaf? Do you hear me say that I should be

glad to whisper my friend's name in your ear?'

'You need not repeat it,' said the widow, with a stifled groan; 'I see

too well from whom you come.'

'But as a man of honour, ma'am,' said the blind man, striking himself on

the breast, 'whose credentials must not be disputed, I take leave to say

that I WILL mention that gentleman's name. Ay, ay,' he added, seeming

to catch with his quick ear the very motion of her hand, 'but not aloud.

With your leave, ma'am, I desire the favour of a whisper.'

She moved towards him, and stooped down. He muttered a word in her

ear; and, wringing her hands, she paced up and down the room like one

distracted. The blind man, with perfect composure, produced his bottle

again, mixed another glassful; put it up as before; and, drinking from

time to time, followed her with his face in silence.

'You are slow in conversation, widow,' he said after a time, pausing in

his draught. 'We shall have to talk before your son.'

'What would you have me do?' she answered. 'What do you want?'

'We are poor, widow, we are poor,' he retorted, stretching out his right

hand, and rubbing his thumb upon its palm.

'Poor!' she cried. 'And what am I?'

'Comparisons are odious,' said the blind man. 'I don't know, I don't

care. I say that we are poor. My friend's circumstances are indifferent,

and so are mine. We must have our rights, widow, or we must be bought

off. But you know that, as well as I, so where is the use of talking?'

She still walked wildly to and fro. At length, stopping abruptly before

him, she said:

'Is he near here?'

'He is. Close at hand.'

'Then I am lost!'

'Not lost, widow,' said the blind man, calmly; 'only found. Shall I call

him?'

'Not for the world,' she answered, with a shudder.

'Very good,' he replied, crossing his legs again, for he had made as

though he would rise and walk to the door. 'As you please, widow. His

presence is not necessary that I know of. But both he and I must live;

to live, we must eat and drink; to eat and drink, we must have money:--I

say no more.'

'Do you know how pinched and destitute I am?' she retorted. 'I do not

think you do, or can. If you had eyes, and could look around you on this

poor place, you would have pity on me. Oh! let your heart be softened by

your own affliction, friend, and have some sympathy with mine.'

The blind man snapped his fingers as he answered:

'--Beside the question, ma'am, beside the question. I have the softest

heart in the world, but I can't live upon it. Many a gentleman lives

well upon a soft head, who would find a heart of the same quality a very

great drawback. Listen to me. This is a matter of business, with which

sympathies and sentiments have nothing to do. As a mutual friend, I wish

to arrange it in a satisfactory manner, if possible; and thus the

case stands.--If you are very poor now, it's your own choice. You have

friends who, in case of need, are always ready to help you. My friend is

in a more destitute and desolate situation than most men, and, you and

he being linked together in a common cause, he naturally looks to you to

assist him. He has boarded and lodged with me a long time (for as I

said just now, I am very soft-hearted), and I quite approve of his

entertaining this opinion. You have always had a roof over your head; he

has always been an outcast. You have your son to comfort and assist you;

he has nobody at all. The advantages must not be all one side. You are

in the same boat, and we must divide the ballast a little more equally.'

She was about to speak, but he checked her, and went on.

'The only way of doing this, is by making up a little purse now and then

for my friend; and that's what I advise. He bears you no malice that I

know of, ma'am: so little, that although you have treated him harshly

more than once, and driven him, I may say, out of doors, he has that

regard for you that I believe even if you disappointed him now, he would

consent to take charge of your son, and to make a man of him.'

He laid a great stress on these latter words, and paused as if to find

out what effect they had produced. She only answered by her tears.

'He is a likely lad,' said the blind man, thoughtfully, 'for many

purposes, and not ill-disposed to try his fortune in a little change

and bustle, if I may judge from what I heard of his talk with you

to-night.--Come. In a word, my friend has pressing necessity for twenty

pounds. You, who can give up an annuity, can get that sum for him. It's

a pity you should be troubled. You seem very comfortable here, and

it's worth that much to remain so. Twenty pounds, widow, is a

moderate demand. You know where to apply for it; a post will bring it

you.--Twenty pounds!'

She was about to answer him again, but again he stopped her.

'Don't say anything hastily; you might be sorry for it. Think of it a

little while. Twenty pounds--of other people's money--how easy! Turn it

over in your mind. I'm in no hurry. Night's coming on, and if I don't

sleep here, I shall not go far. Twenty pounds! Consider of it, ma'am,

for twenty minutes; give each pound a minute; that's a fair allowance.

I'll enjoy the air the while, which is very mild and pleasant in these

parts.'

With these words he groped his way to the door, carrying his chair with

him. Then seating himself, under a spreading honeysuckle, and stretching

his legs across the threshold so that no person could pass in or out

without his knowledge, he took from his pocket a pipe, flint, steel and

tinder-box, and began to smoke. It was a lovely evening, of that gentle

kind, and at that time of year, when the twilight is most beautiful.

Pausing now and then to let his smoke curl slowly off, and to sniff the

grateful fragrance of the flowers, he sat there at his ease--as though

the cottage were his proper dwelling, and he had held undisputed

possession of it all his life--waiting for the widow's answer and for

Barnaby's return.

Chapter 46

When Barnaby returned with the bread, the sight of the pious old pilgrim

smoking his pipe and making himself so thoroughly at home, appeared

to surprise even him; the more so, as that worthy person, instead of

putting up the loaf in his wallet as a scarce and precious article,

tossed it carelessly on the table, and producing his bottle, bade him

sit down and drink.

'For I carry some comfort, you see,' he said. 'Taste that. Is it good?'

The water stood in Barnaby's eyes as he coughed from the strength of the

draught, and answered in the affirmative.

'Drink some more,' said the blind man; 'don't be afraid of it. You don't

taste anything like that, often, eh?'

'Often!' cried Barnaby. 'Never!'

'Too poor?' returned the blind man with a sigh. 'Ay. That's bad. Your

mother, poor soul, would be happier if she was richer, Barnaby.'

'Why, so I tell her--the very thing I told her just before you came

to-night, when all that gold was in the sky,' said Barnaby, drawing his

chair nearer to him, and looking eagerly in his face. 'Tell me. Is there

any way of being rich, that I could find out?'

'Any way! A hundred ways.'

'Ay, ay?' he returned. 'Do you say so? What are they?--Nay, mother, it's

for your sake I ask; not mine;--for yours, indeed. What are they?'

The blind man turned his face, on which there was a smile of triumph, to

where the widow stood in great distress; and answered,

'Why, they are not to be found out by stay-at-homes, my good friend.'

'By stay-at-homes!' cried Barnaby, plucking at his sleeve. 'But I am not

one. Now, there you mistake. I am often out before the sun, and travel

home when he has gone to rest. I am away in the woods before the day

has reached the shady places, and am often there when the bright moon

is peeping through the boughs, and looking down upon the other moon that

lives in the water. As I walk along, I try to find, among the grass and

moss, some of that small money for which she works so hard and used to

shed so many tears. As I lie asleep in the shade, I dream of it--dream

of digging it up in heaps; and spying it out, hidden under bushes; and

seeing it sparkle, as the dew-drops do, among the leaves. But I never

find it. Tell me where it is. I'd go there, if the journey were a whole

year long, because I know she would be happier when I came home and

brought some with me. Speak again. I'll listen to you if you talk all

night.'

The blind man passed his hand lightly over the poor fellow's face, and

finding that his elbows were planted on the table, that his chin rested

on his two hands, that he leaned eagerly forward, and that his whole

manner expressed the utmost interest and anxiety, paused for a minute as

though he desired the widow to observe this fully, and then made answer:

'It's in the world, bold Barnaby, the merry world; not in solitary

places like those you pass your time in, but in crowds, and where

there's noise and rattle.'

'Good! good!' cried Barnaby, rubbing his hands. 'Yes! I love that. Grip

loves it too. It suits us both. That's brave!'

'--The kind of places,' said the blind man, 'that a young fellow likes,

and in which a good son may do more for his mother, and himself to boot,

in a month, than he could here in all his life--that is, if he had a

friend, you know, and some one to advise with.'

'You hear this, mother?' cried Barnaby, turning to her with delight.

'Never tell me we shouldn't heed it, if it lay shining at out feet. Why

do we heed it so much now? Why do you toil from morning until night?'

'Surely,' said the blind man, 'surely. Have you no answer, widow? Is

your mind,' he slowly added, 'not made up yet?'

'Let me speak with you,' she answered, 'apart.'

'Lay your hand upon my sleeve,' said Stagg, arising from the table; 'and

lead me where you will. Courage, bold Barnaby. We'll talk more of this:

I've a fancy for you. Wait there till I come back. Now, widow.'

She led him out at the door, and into the little garden, where they

stopped.

'You are a fit agent,' she said, in a half breathless manner, 'and well

represent the man who sent you here.'

'I'll tell him that you said so,' Stagg retorted. 'He has a regard for

you, and will respect me the more (if possible) for your praise. We must

have our rights, widow.'

'Rights! Do you know,' she said, 'that a word from me--'

'Why do you stop?' returned the blind man calmly, after a long pause.

'Do I know that a word from you would place my friend in the last

position of the dance of life? Yes, I do. What of that? It will never be

spoken, widow.'

'You are sure of that?'

'Quite--so sure, that I don't come here to discuss the question. I say

we must have our rights, or we must be bought off. Keep to that point,

or let me return to my young friend, for I have an interest in the lad,

and desire to put him in the way of making his fortune. Bah! you needn't

speak,' he added hastily; 'I know what you would say: you have hinted

at it once already. Have I no feeling for you, because I am blind? No, I

have not. Why do you expect me, being in darkness, to be better than

men who have their sight--why should you? Is the hand of Heaven more

manifest in my having no eyes, than in your having two? It's the cant

of you folks to be horrified if a blind man robs, or lies, or steals;

oh yes, it's far worse in him, who can barely live on the few halfpence

that are thrown to him in streets, than in you, who can see, and work,

and are not dependent on the mercies of the world. A curse on you! You

who have five senses may be wicked at your pleasure; we who have four,

and want the most important, are to live and be moral on our affliction.

The true charity and justice of rich to poor, all the world over!'

He paused a moment when he had said these words, and caught the sound of

money, jingling in her hand.

'Well?' he cried, quickly resuming his former manner. 'That should lead

to something. The point, widow?'

'First answer me one question,' she replied. 'You say he is close at

hand. Has he left London?'

'Being close at hand, widow, it would seem he has,' returned the blind

man.

'I mean, for good? You know that.'

'Yes, for good. The truth is, widow, that his making a longer stay there

might have had disagreeable consequences. He has come away for that

reason.'

'Listen,' said the widow, telling some money out, upon a bench beside

them. 'Count.'

'Six,' said the blind man, listening attentively. 'Any more?'

'They are the savings,' she answered, 'of five years. Six guineas.'

He put out his hand for one of the coins; felt it carefully, put it

between his teeth, rung it on the bench; and nodded to her to proceed.

'These have been scraped together and laid by, lest sickness or death

should separate my son and me. They have been purchased at the price of

much hunger, hard labour, and want of rest. If you CAN take them--do--on

condition that you leave this place upon the instant, and enter no more

into that room, where he sits now, expecting your return.'

'Six guineas,' said the blind man, shaking his head, 'though of the

fullest weight that were ever coined, fall very far short of twenty

pounds, widow.'

'For such a sum, as you know, I must write to a distant part of the

country. To do that, and receive an answer, I must have time.'

'Two days?' said Stagg.

'More.'

'Four days?'

'A week. Return on this day week, at the same hour, but not to the

house. Wait at the corner of the lane.'

'Of course,' said the blind man, with a crafty look, 'I shall find you

there?'

'Where else can I take refuge? Is it not enough that you have made

a beggar of me, and that I have sacrificed my whole store, so hardly

earned, to preserve this home?'

'Humph!' said the blind man, after some consideration. 'Set me with my

face towards the point you speak of, and in the middle of the road. Is

this the spot?'

'It is.'

'On this day week at sunset. And think of him within doors.--For the

present, good night.'

She made him no answer, nor did he stop for any. He went slowly away,

turning his head from time to time, and stopping to listen, as if he

were curious to know whether he was watched by any one. The shadows of

night were closing fast around, and he was soon lost in the gloom. It

was not, however, until she had traversed the lane from end to end,

and made sure that he was gone, that she re-entered the cottage, and

hurriedly barred the door and window.

'Mother!' said Barnaby. 'What is the matter? Where is the blind man?'

'He is gone.'

'Gone!' he cried, starting up. 'I must have more talk with him. Which

way did he take?'

'I don't know,' she answered, folding her arms about him. 'You must not

go out to-night. There are ghosts and dreams abroad.'

'Ay?' said Barnaby, in a frightened whisper.

'It is not safe to stir. We must leave this place to-morrow.'

'This place! This cottage--and the little garden, mother!'

'Yes! To-morrow morning at sunrise. We must travel to London; lose

ourselves in that wide place--there would be some trace of us in any

other town--then travel on again, and find some new abode.'

Little persuasion was required to reconcile Barnaby to anything that

promised change. In another minute, he was wild with delight; in

another, full of grief at the prospect of parting with his friends the

dogs; in another, wild again; then he was fearful of what she had said

to prevent his wandering abroad that night, and full of terrors and

strange questions. His light-heartedness in the end surmounted all his

other feelings, and lying down in his clothes to the end that he might

be ready on the morrow, he soon fell fast asleep before the poor turf

fire.

His mother did not close her eyes, but sat beside him, watching. Every

breath of wind sounded in her ears like that dreaded footstep at the

door, or like that hand upon the latch, and made the calm summer night,

a night of horror. At length the welcome day appeared. When she had made

the little preparations which were needful for their journey, and had

prayed upon her knees with many tears, she roused Barnaby, who jumped up

gaily at her summons.

His clothes were few enough, and to carry Grip was a labour of love. As

the sun shed his earliest beams upon the earth, they closed the door of

their deserted home, and turned away. The sky was blue and bright.

The air was fresh and filled with a thousand perfumes. Barnaby looked

upward, and laughed with all his heart.

But it was a day he usually devoted to a long ramble, and one of the

dogs--the ugliest of them all--came bounding up, and jumping round him

in the fulness of his joy. He had to bid him go back in a surly tone,

and his heart smote him while he did so. The dog retreated; turned

with a half-incredulous, half-imploring look; came a little back; and

stopped.

It was the last appeal of an old companion and a faithful friend--cast

off. Barnaby could bear no more, and as he shook his head and waved his

playmate home, he burst into tears.

'Oh mother, mother, how mournful he will be when he scratches at the

door, and finds it always shut!'

There was such a sense of home in the thought, that though her own eyes

overflowed she would not have obliterated the recollection of it, either

from her own mind or from his, for the wealth of the whole wide world.

Chapter 47

In the exhaustless catalogue of Heaven's mercies to mankind, the power

we have of finding some germs of comfort in the hardest trials must ever

occupy the foremost place; not only because it supports and upholds

us when we most require to be sustained, but because in this source of

consolation there is something, we have reason to believe, of the divine

spirit; something of that goodness which detects amidst our own evil

doings, a redeeming quality; something which, even in our fallen nature,

we possess in common with the angels; which had its being in the old

time when they trod the earth, and lingers on it yet, in pity.

How often, on their journey, did the widow remember with a grateful

heart, that out of his deprivation Barnaby's cheerfulness and affection

sprung! How often did she call to mind that but for that, he might have

been sullen, morose, unkind, far removed from her--vicious, perhaps, and

cruel! How often had she cause for comfort, in his strength, and hope,

and in his simple nature! Those feeble powers of mind which rendered him

so soon forgetful of the past, save in brief gleams and flashes,--even

they were a comfort now. The world to him was full of happiness; in

every tree, and plant, and flower, in every bird, and beast, and tiny

insect whom a breath of summer wind laid low upon the ground, he had

delight. His delight was hers; and where many a wise son would have

made her sorrowful, this poor light-hearted idiot filled her breast with

thankfulness and love.

Their stock of money was low, but from the hoard she had told into the

blind man's hand, the widow had withheld one guinea. This, with the few

pence she possessed besides, was to two persons of their frugal habits,

a goodly sum in bank. Moreover they had Grip in company; and when they

must otherwise have changed the guinea, it was but to make him exhibit

outside an alehouse door, or in a village street, or in the grounds or

gardens of a mansion of the better sort, and scores who would have given

nothing in charity, were ready to bargain for more amusement from the

talking bird.

One day--for they moved slowly, and although they had many rides in

carts and waggons, were on the road a week--Barnaby, with Grip upon his

shoulder and his mother following, begged permission at a trim lodge to

go up to the great house, at the other end of the avenue, and show his

raven. The man within was inclined to give them admittance, and was

indeed about to do so, when a stout gentleman with a long whip in his

hand, and a flushed face which seemed to indicate that he had had his

morning's draught, rode up to the gate, and called in a loud voice and

with more oaths than the occasion seemed to warrant to have it opened

directly.

'Who hast thou got here?' said the gentleman angrily, as the man threw

the gate wide open, and pulled off his hat, 'who are these? Eh? art a

beggar, woman?'

The widow answered with a curtsey, that they were poor travellers.

'Vagrants,' said the gentleman, 'vagrants and vagabonds. Thee wish to be

made acquainted with the cage, dost thee--the cage, the stocks, and the

whipping-post? Where dost come from?'

She told him in a timid manner,--for he was very loud, hoarse, and

red-faced,--and besought him not to be angry, for they meant no harm,

and would go upon their way that moment.

'Don't be too sure of that,' replied the gentleman, 'we don't allow

vagrants to roam about this place. I know what thou want'st---stray

linen drying on hedges, and stray poultry, eh? What hast got in that

basket, lazy hound?'

'Grip, Grip, Grip--Grip the clever, Grip the wicked, Grip the

knowing--Grip, Grip, Grip,' cried the raven, whom Barnaby had shut up

on the approach of this stern personage. 'I'm a devil I'm a devil I'm a

devil, Never say die Hurrah Bow wow wow, Polly put the kettle on we'll

all have tea.'

'Take the vermin out, scoundrel,' said the gentleman, 'and let me see

him.'

Barnaby, thus condescendingly addressed, produced his bird, but not

without much fear and trembling, and set him down upon the ground; which

he had no sooner done than Grip drew fifty corks at least, and then

began to dance; at the same time eyeing the gentleman with surprising

insolence of manner, and screwing his head so much on one side that he

appeared desirous of screwing it off upon the spot.

The cork-drawing seemed to make a greater impression on the gentleman's

mind, than the raven's power of speech, and was indeed particularly

adapted to his habits and capacity. He desired to have that done again,

but despite his being very peremptory, and notwithstanding that Barnaby

coaxed to the utmost, Grip turned a deaf ear to the request, and

preserved a dead silence.

'Bring him along,' said the gentleman, pointing to the house. But Grip,

who had watched the action, anticipated his master, by hopping on before

them;--constantly flapping his wings, and screaming 'cook!' meanwhile,

as a hint perhaps that there was company coming, and a small collation

would be acceptable.

Barnaby and his mother walked on, on either side of the gentleman on

horseback, who surveyed each of them from time to time in a proud and

coarse manner, and occasionally thundered out some question, the tone

of which alarmed Barnaby so much that he could find no answer, and, as

a matter of course, could make him no reply. On one of these occasions,

when the gentleman appeared disposed to exercise his horsewhip, the

widow ventured to inform him in a low voice and with tears in her eyes,

that her son was of weak mind.

'An idiot, eh?' said the gentleman, looking at Barnaby as he spoke. 'And

how long hast thou been an idiot?'

'She knows,' was Barnaby's timid answer, pointing to his

mother--'I--always, I believe.'

'From his birth,' said the widow.

'I don't believe it,' cried the gentleman, 'not a bit of it. It's an

excuse not to work. There's nothing like flogging to cure that disorder.

I'd make a difference in him in ten minutes, I'll be bound.'

'Heaven has made none in more than twice ten years, sir,' said the widow

mildly.

'Then why don't you shut him up? we pay enough for county institutions,

damn 'em. But thou'd rather drag him about to excite charity--of course.

Ay, I know thee.'

Now, this gentleman had various endearing appellations among his

intimate friends. By some he was called 'a country gentleman of the true

school,' by some 'a fine old country gentleman,' by some 'a sporting

gentleman,' by some 'a thorough-bred Englishman,' by some 'a genuine

John Bull;' but they all agreed in one respect, and that was, that it

was a pity there were not more like him, and that because there were

not, the country was going to rack and ruin every day. He was in the

commission of the peace, and could write his name almost legibly; but

his greatest qualifications were, that he was more severe with poachers,

was a better shot, a harder rider, had better horses, kept better dogs,

could eat more solid food, drink more strong wine, go to bed every night

more drunk and get up every morning more sober, than any man in the

county. In knowledge of horseflesh he was almost equal to a farrier, in

stable learning he surpassed his own head groom, and in gluttony not

a pig on his estate was a match for him. He had no seat in Parliament

himself, but he was extremely patriotic, and usually drove his voters

up to the poll with his own hands. He was warmly attached to church

and state, and never appointed to the living in his gift any but a

three-bottle man and a first-rate fox-hunter. He mistrusted the honesty

of all poor people who could read and write, and had a secret jealousy

of his own wife (a young lady whom he had married for what his friends

called 'the good old English reason,' that her father's property

adjoined his own) for possessing those accomplishments in a greater

degree than himself. In short, Barnaby being an idiot, and Grip a

creature of mere brute instinct, it would be very hard to say what this

gentleman was.

He rode up to the door of a handsome house approached by a great flight

of steps, where a man was waiting to take his horse, and led the way

into a large hall, which, spacious as it was, was tainted with the

fumes of last night's stale debauch. Greatcoats, riding-whips, bridles,

top-boots, spurs, and such gear, were strewn about on all sides, and

formed, with some huge stags' antlers, and a few portraits of dogs and

horses, its principal embellishments.

Throwing himself into a great chair (in which, by the bye, he often

snored away the night, when he had been, according to his admirers, a

finer country gentleman than usual) he bade the man to tell his mistress

to come down: and presently there appeared, a little flurried, as it

seemed, by the unwonted summons, a lady much younger than himself, who

had the appearance of being in delicate health, and not too happy.

'Here! Thou'st no delight in following the hounds as an Englishwoman

should have,' said the gentleman. 'See to this here. That'll please thee

perhaps.'

The lady smiled, sat down at a little distance from him, and glanced at

Barnaby with a look of pity.

'He's an idiot, the woman says,' observed the gentleman, shaking his

head; 'I don't believe it.'

'Are you his mother?' asked the lady.

She answered yes.

'What's the use of asking HER?' said the gentleman, thrusting his hands

into his breeches pockets. 'She'll tell thee so, of course. Most likely

he's hired, at so much a day. There. Get on. Make him do something.'

Grip having by this time recovered his urbanity, condescended, at

Barnaby's solicitation, to repeat his various phrases of speech, and to

go through the whole of his performances with the utmost success. The

corks, and the never say die, afforded the gentleman so much delight

that he demanded the repetition of this part of the entertainment, until

Grip got into his basket, and positively refused to say another word,

good or bad. The lady too, was much amused with him; and the closing

point of his obstinacy so delighted her husband that he burst into a

roar of laughter, and demanded his price.

Barnaby looked as though he didn't understand his meaning. Probably he

did not.

'His price,' said the gentleman, rattling the money in his pockets,

'what dost want for him? How much?'

'He's not to be sold,' replied Barnaby, shutting up the basket in a

great hurry, and throwing the strap over his shoulder. 'Mother, come

away.'

'Thou seest how much of an idiot he is, book-learner,' said the

gentleman, looking scornfully at his wife. 'He can make a bargain. What

dost want for him, old woman?'

'He is my son's constant companion,' said the widow. 'He is not to be

sold, sir, indeed.'

'Not to be sold!' cried the gentleman, growing ten times redder,

hoarser, and louder than before. 'Not to be sold!'

'Indeed no,' she answered. 'We have never thought of parting with him,

sir, I do assure you.'

He was evidently about to make a very passionate retort, when a few

murmured words from his wife happening to catch his ear, he turned

sharply round, and said, 'Eh? What?'

'We can hardly expect them to sell the bird, against their own desire,'

she faltered. 'If they prefer to keep him--'

'Prefer to keep him!' he echoed. 'These people, who go tramping about

the country a-pilfering and vagabondising on all hands, prefer to keep

a bird, when a landed proprietor and a justice asks his price! That old

woman's been to school. I know she has. Don't tell me no,' he roared to

the widow, 'I say, yes.'

Barnaby's mother pleaded guilty to the accusation, and hoped there was

no harm in it.

'No harm!' said the gentleman. 'No. No harm. No harm, ye old rebel, not

a bit of harm. If my clerk was here, I'd set ye in the stocks, I would,

or lay ye in jail for prowling up and down, on the look-out for petty

larcenies, ye limb of a gipsy. Here, Simon, put these pilferers out,

shove 'em into the road, out with 'em! Ye don't want to sell the bird,

ye that come here to beg, don't ye? If they an't out in double-quick,

set the dogs upon 'em!'

They waited for no further dismissal, but fled precipitately, leaving

the gentleman to storm away by himself (for the poor lady had already

retreated), and making a great many vain attempts to silence Grip, who,

excited by the noise, drew corks enough for a city feast as they hurried

down the avenue, and appeared to congratulate himself beyond measure on

having been the cause of the disturbance. When they had nearly reached

the lodge, another servant, emerging from the shrubbery, feigned to

be very active in ordering them off, but this man put a crown into the

widow's hand, and whispering that his lady sent it, thrust them gently

from the gate.

This incident only suggested to the widow's mind, when they halted at

an alehouse some miles further on, and heard the justice's character

as given by his friends, that perhaps something more than capacity of

stomach and tastes for the kennel and the stable, were required to form

either a perfect country gentleman, a thoroughbred Englishman, or

a genuine John Bull; and that possibly the terms were sometimes

misappropriated, not to say disgraced. She little thought then, that a

circumstance so slight would ever influence their future fortunes; but

time and experience enlightened her in this respect.

'Mother,' said Barnaby, as they were sitting next day in a waggon which

was to take them within ten miles of the capital, 'we're going to London

first, you said. Shall we see that blind man there?'

She was about to answer 'Heaven forbid!' but checked herself, and told

him No, she thought not; why did he ask?

'He's a wise man,' said Barnaby, with a thoughtful countenance. 'I wish

that we may meet with him again. What was it that he said of crowds?

That gold was to be found where people crowded, and not among the

trees and in such quiet places? He spoke as if he loved it; London is a

crowded place; I think we shall meet him there.'

'But why do you desire to see him, love?' she asked.

'Because,' said Barnaby, looking wistfully at her, 'he talked to me

about gold, which is a rare thing, and say what you will, a thing

you would like to have, I know. And because he came and went away so

strangely--just as white-headed old men come sometimes to my bed's foot

in the night, and say what I can't remember when the bright day returns.

He told me he'd come back. I wonder why he broke his word!'

'But you never thought of being rich or gay, before, dear Barnaby. You

have always been contented.'

He laughed and bade her say that again, then cried, 'Ay ay--oh yes,' and

laughed once more. Then something passed that caught his fancy, and

the topic wandered from his mind, and was succeeded by another just as

fleeting.

But it was plain from what he had said, and from his returning to the

point more than once that day, and on the next, that the blind man's

visit, and indeed his words, had taken strong possession of his mind.

Whether the idea of wealth had occurred to him for the first time

on looking at the golden clouds that evening--and images were often

presented to his thoughts by outward objects quite as remote and

distant; or whether their poor and humble way of life had suggested it,

by contrast, long ago; or whether the accident (as he would deem it) of

the blind man's pursuing the current of his own remarks, had done so at

the moment; or he had been impressed by the mere circumstance of the

man being blind, and, therefore, unlike any one with whom he had talked

before; it was impossible to tell. She tried every means to discover,

but in vain; and the probability is that Barnaby himself was equally in

the dark.

It filled her with uneasiness to find him harping on this string, but

all that she could do, was to lead him quickly to some other subject,

and to dismiss it from his brain. To caution him against their visitor,

to show any fear or suspicion in reference to him, would only be, she

feared, to increase that interest with which Barnaby regarded him, and

to strengthen his desire to meet him once again. She hoped, by plunging

into the crowd, to rid herself of her terrible pursuer, and then, by

journeying to a distance and observing increased caution, if that were

possible, to live again unknown, in secrecy and peace.

They reached, in course of time, their halting-place within ten miles of

London, and lay there for the night, after bargaining to be carried on

for a trifle next day, in a light van which was returning empty, and was

to start at five o'clock in the morning. The driver was punctual, the

road good--save for the dust, the weather being very hot and dry--and at

seven in the forenoon of Friday the second of June, one thousand seven

hundred and eighty, they alighted at the foot of Westminster Bridge,

bade their conductor farewell, and stood alone, together, on the

scorching pavement. For the freshness which night sheds upon such

busy thoroughfares had already departed, and the sun was shining with

uncommon lustre.

Chapter 48

Uncertain where to go next, and bewildered by the crowd of people who

were already astir, they sat down in one of the recesses on the bridge,

to rest. They soon became aware that the stream of life was all pouring

one way, and that a vast throng of persons were crossing the river

from the Middlesex to the Surrey shore, in unusual haste and evident

excitement. They were, for the most part, in knots of two or three, or

sometimes half-a-dozen; they spoke little together--many of them were

quite silent; and hurried on as if they had one absorbing object in

view, which was common to them all.

They were surprised to see that nearly every man in this great

concourse, which still came pouring past, without slackening in the

least, wore in his hat a blue cockade; and that the chance passengers

who were not so decorated, appeared timidly anxious to escape

observation or attack, and gave them the wall as if they would

conciliate them. This, however, was natural enough, considering their

inferiority in point of numbers; for the proportion of those who wore

blue cockades, to those who were dressed as usual, was at least forty or

fifty to one. There was no quarrelling, however: the blue cockades went

swarming on, passing each other when they could, and making all the

speed that was possible in such a multitude; and exchanged nothing more

than looks, and very often not even those, with such of the passers-by

as were not of their number.

At first, the current of people had been confined to the two pathways,

and but a few more eager stragglers kept the road. But after half an

hour or so, the passage was completely blocked up by the great press,

which, being now closely wedged together, and impeded by the carts and

coaches it encountered, moved but slowly, and was sometimes at a stand

for five or ten minutes together.

After the lapse of nearly two hours, the numbers began to diminish

visibly, and gradually dwindling away, by little and little, left the

bridge quite clear, save that, now and then, some hot and dusty man,

with the cockade in his hat, and his coat thrown over his shoulder, went

panting by, fearful of being too late, or stopped to ask which way

his friends had taken, and being directed, hastened on again like one

refreshed. In this comparative solitude, which seemed quite strange

and novel after the late crowd, the widow had for the first time an

opportunity of inquiring of an old man who came and sat beside them,

what was the meaning of that great assemblage.

'Why, where have you come from,' he returned, 'that you haven't heard of

Lord George Gordon's great association? This is the day that he presents

the petition against the Catholics, God bless him!'

'What have all these men to do with that?' she said.

'What have they to do with it!' the old man replied. 'Why, how you talk!

Don't you know his lordship has declared he won't present it to the

house at all, unless it is attended to the door by forty thousand good

and true men at least? There's a crowd for you!'

'A crowd indeed!' said Barnaby. 'Do you hear that, mother!'

'And they're mustering yonder, as I am told,' resumed the old man, 'nigh

upon a hundred thousand strong. Ah! Let Lord George alone. He knows

his power. There'll be a good many faces inside them three windows over

there,' and he pointed to where the House of Commons overlooked the

river, 'that'll turn pale when good Lord George gets up this afternoon,

and with reason too! Ay, ay. Let his lordship alone. Let him alone.

HE knows!' And so, with much mumbling and chuckling and shaking of his

forefinger, he rose, with the assistance of his stick, and tottered off.

'Mother!' said Barnaby, 'that's a brave crowd he talks of. Come!'

'Not to join it!' cried his mother.

'Yes, yes,' he answered, plucking at her sleeve. 'Why not? Come!'

'You don't know,' she urged, 'what mischief they may do, where they may

lead you, what their meaning is. Dear Barnaby, for my sake--'

'For your sake!' he cried, patting her hand. 'Well! It IS for your sake,

mother. You remember what the blind man said, about the gold. Here's a

brave crowd! Come! Or wait till I come back--yes, yes, wait here.'

She tried with all the earnestness her fears engendered, to turn him

from his purpose, but in vain. He was stooping down to buckle on his

shoe, when a hackney-coach passed them rather quickly, and a voice

inside called to the driver to stop.

'Young man,' said a voice within.

'Who's that?' cried Barnaby, looking up.

'Do you wear this ornament?' returned the stranger, holding out a blue

cockade.

'In Heaven's name, no. Pray do not give it him!' exclaimed the widow.

'Speak for yourself, woman,' said the man within the coach, coldly.

'Leave the young man to his choice; he's old enough to make it, and

to snap your apron-strings. He knows, without your telling, whether he

wears the sign of a loyal Englishman or not.'

Barnaby, trembling with impatience, cried, 'Yes! yes, yes, I do,' as

he had cried a dozen times already. The man threw him a cockade, and

crying, 'Make haste to St George's Fields,' ordered the coachman to

drive on fast; and left them.

With hands that trembled with his eagerness to fix the bauble in his

hat, Barnaby was adjusting it as he best could, and hurriedly replying

to the tears and entreaties of his mother, when two gentlemen passed on

the opposite side of the way. Observing them, and seeing how Barnaby was

occupied, they stopped, whispered together for an instant, turned back,

and came over to them.

'Why are you sitting here?' said one of them, who was dressed in a plain

suit of black, wore long lank hair, and carried a great cane. 'Why have

you not gone with the rest?'

'I am going, sir,' replied Barnaby, finishing his task, and putting his

hat on with an air of pride. 'I shall be there directly.'

'Say "my lord," young man, when his lordship does you the honour of

speaking to you,' said the second gentleman mildly. 'If you don't know

Lord George Gordon when you see him, it's high time you should.'

'Nay, Gashford,' said Lord George, as Barnaby pulled off his hat again

and made him a low bow, 'it's no great matter on a day like this, which

every Englishman will remember with delight and pride. Put on your hat,

friend, and follow us, for you lag behind and are late. It's past ten

now. Didn't you know that the hour for assembling was ten o'clock?'

Barnaby shook his head and looked vacantly from one to the other.

'You might have known it, friend,' said Gashford, 'it was perfectly

understood. How came you to be so ill informed?'

'He cannot tell you, sir,' the widow interposed. 'It's of no use to ask

him. We are but this morning come from a long distance in the country,

and know nothing of these matters.'

'The cause has taken a deep root, and has spread its branches far and

wide,' said Lord George to his secretary. 'This is a pleasant hearing. I

thank Heaven for it!'

'Amen!' cried Gashford with a solemn face.

'You do not understand me, my lord,' said the widow. 'Pardon me, but you

cruelly mistake my meaning. We know nothing of these matters. We have no

desire or right to join in what you are about to do. This is my son, my

poor afflicted son, dearer to me than my own life. In mercy's name, my

lord, go your way alone, and do not tempt him into danger!'

'My good woman,' said Gashford, 'how can you!--Dear me!--What do you

mean by tempting, and by danger? Do you think his lordship is a roaring

lion, going about and seeking whom he may devour? God bless me!'

'No, no, my lord, forgive me,' implored the widow, laying both her hands

upon his breast, and scarcely knowing what she did, or said, in the

earnestness of her supplication, 'but there are reasons why you should

hear my earnest, mother's prayer, and leave my son with me. Oh do! He is

not in his right senses, he is not, indeed!'

'It is a bad sign of the wickedness of these times,' said Lord George,

evading her touch, and colouring deeply, 'that those who cling to the

truth and support the right cause, are set down as mad. Have you the

heart to say this of your own son, unnatural mother!'

'I am astonished at you!' said Gashford, with a kind of meek severity.

'This is a very sad picture of female depravity.'

'He has surely no appearance,' said Lord George, glancing at Barnaby,

and whispering in his secretary's ear, 'of being deranged? And even

if he had, we must not construe any trifling peculiarity into madness.

Which of us'--and here he turned red again--'would be safe, if that were

made the law!'

'Not one,' replied the secretary; 'in that case, the greater the zeal,

the truth, and talent; the more direct the call from above; the clearer

would be the madness. With regard to this young man, my lord,' he added,

with a lip that slightly curled as he looked at Barnaby, who stood

twirling his hat, and stealthily beckoning them to come away, 'he is as

sensible and self-possessed as any one I ever saw.'

'And you desire to make one of this great body?' said Lord George,

addressing him; 'and intended to make one, did you?'

'Yes--yes,' said Barnaby, with sparkling eyes. 'To be sure I did! I told

her so myself.'

'I see,' replied Lord George, with a reproachful glance at the unhappy

mother. 'I thought so. Follow me and this gentleman, and you shall have

your wish.'

Barnaby kissed his mother tenderly on the cheek, and bidding her be

of good cheer, for their fortunes were both made now, did as he was

desired. She, poor woman, followed too--with how much fear and grief it

would be hard to tell.

They passed quickly through the Bridge Road, where the shops were all

shut up (for the passage of the great crowd and the expectation of

their return had alarmed the tradesmen for their goods and windows),

and where, in the upper stories, all the inhabitants were congregated,

looking down into the street below, with faces variously expressive

of alarm, of interest, expectancy, and indignation. Some of these

applauded, and some hissed; but regardless of these interruptions--for

the noise of a vast congregation of people at a little distance, sounded

in his ears like the roaring of the sea--Lord George Gordon quickened

his pace, and presently arrived before St George's Fields.

They were really fields at that time, and of considerable extent. Here

an immense multitude was collected, bearing flags of various kinds

and sizes, but all of the same colour--blue, like the cockades--some

sections marching to and fro in military array, and others drawn up in

circles, squares, and lines. A large portion, both of the bodies

which paraded the ground, and of those which remained stationary, were

occupied in singing hymns or psalms. With whomsoever this originated, it

was well done; for the sound of so many thousand voices in the air must

have stirred the heart of any man within him, and could not fail to have

a wonderful effect upon enthusiasts, however mistaken.

Scouts had been posted in advance of the great body, to give notice of

their leader's coming. These falling back, the word was quickly passed

through the whole host, and for a short interval there ensued a profound

and deathlike silence, during which the mass was so still and

quiet, that the fluttering of a banner caught the eye, and became a

circumstance of note. Then they burst into a tremendous shout, into

another, and another; and the air seemed rent and shaken, as if by the

discharge of cannon.

'Gashford!' cried Lord George, pressing his secretary's arm tight within

his own, and speaking with as much emotion in his voice, as in his

altered face, 'I am called indeed, now. I feel and know it. I am the

leader of a host. If they summoned me at this moment with one voice to

lead them on to death, I'd do it--Yes, and fall first myself!'

'It is a proud sight,' said the secretary. 'It is a noble day for

England, and for the great cause throughout the world. Such homage, my

lord, as I, an humble but devoted man, can render--'

'What are you doing?' cried his master, catching him by both hands;

for he had made a show of kneeling at his feet. 'Do not unfit me, dear

Gashford, for the solemn duty of this glorious day--' the tears stood in

the eyes of the poor gentleman as he said the words.--'Let us go

among them; we have to find a place in some division for this new

recruit--give me your hand.'

Gashford slid his cold insidious palm into his master's grasp, and so,

hand in hand, and followed still by Barnaby and by his mother too, they

mingled with the concourse.

They had by this time taken to their singing again, and as their leader

passed between their ranks, they raised their voices to their utmost.

Many of those who were banded together to support the religion of their

country, even unto death, had never heard a hymn or psalm in all their

lives. But these fellows having for the most part strong lungs, and

being naturally fond of singing, chanted any ribaldry or nonsense that

occurred to them, feeling pretty certain that it would not be detected

in the general chorus, and not caring much if it were. Many of these

voluntaries were sung under the very nose of Lord George Gordon, who,

quite unconscious of their burden, passed on with his usual stiff and

solemn deportment, very much edified and delighted by the pious conduct

of his followers.

So they went on and on, up this line, down that, round the exterior of

this circle, and on every side of that hollow square; and still there

were lines, and squares, and circles out of number to review. The day

being now intensely hot, and the sun striking down his fiercest rays

upon the field, those who carried heavy banners began to grow faint

and weary; most of the number assembled were fain to pull off their

neckcloths, and throw their coats and waistcoats open; and some, towards

the centre, quite overpowered by the excessive heat, which was of course

rendered more unendurable by the multitude around them, lay down upon

the grass, and offered all they had about them for a drink of water.

Still, no man left the ground, not even of those who were so distressed;

still Lord George, streaming from every pore, went on with Gashford; and

still Barnaby and his mother followed close behind them.

They had arrived at the top of a long line of some eight hundred men in

single file, and Lord George had turned his head to look back, when a

loud cry of recognition--in that peculiar and half-stifled tone which a

voice has, when it is raised in the open air and in the midst of a

great concourse of persons--was heard, and a man stepped with a shout

of laughter from the rank, and smote Barnaby on the shoulders with his

heavy hand.

'How now!' he cried. 'Barnaby Rudge! Why, where have you been hiding for

these hundred years?'

Barnaby had been thinking within himself that the smell of the trodden

grass brought back his old days at cricket, when he was a young boy

and played on Chigwell Green. Confused by this sudden and boisterous

address, he stared in a bewildered manner at the man, and could scarcely

say 'What! Hugh!'

'Hugh!' echoed the other; 'ay, Hugh--Maypole Hugh! You remember my dog?

He's alive now, and will know you, I warrant. What, you wear the colour,

do you? Well done! Ha ha ha!'

'You know this young man, I see,' said Lord George.

'Know him, my lord! as well as I know my own right hand. My captain

knows him. We all know him.'

'Will you take him into your division?'

'It hasn't in it a better, nor a nimbler, nor a more active man, than

Barnaby Rudge,' said Hugh. 'Show me the man who says it has! Fall in,

Barnaby. He shall march, my lord, between me and Dennis; and he shall

carry,' he added, taking a flag from the hand of a tired man who

tendered it, 'the gayest silken streamer in this valiant army.'

'In the name of God, no!' shrieked the widow, darting forward.

'Barnaby--my lord--see--he'll come back--Barnaby--Barnaby!'

'Women in the field!' cried Hugh, stepping between them, and holding her

off. 'Holloa! My captain there!'

'What's the matter here?' cried Simon Tappertit, bustling up in a great

heat. 'Do you call this order?'

'Nothing like it, captain,' answered Hugh, still holding her back with

his outstretched hand. 'It's against all orders. Ladies are carrying

off our gallant soldiers from their duty. The word of command, captain!

They're filing off the ground. Quick!'

'Close!' cried Simon, with the whole power of his lungs. 'Form! March!'

She was thrown to the ground; the whole field was in motion; Barnaby was

whirled away into the heart of a dense mass of men, and she saw him no

more.

Chapter 49

The mob had been divided from its first assemblage into four divisions;

the London, the Westminster, the Southwark, and the Scotch. Each of

these divisions being subdivided into various bodies, and these bodies

being drawn up in various forms and figures, the general arrangement

was, except to the few chiefs and leaders, as unintelligible as the

plan of a great battle to the meanest soldier in the field. It was not

without its method, however; for, in a very short space of time after

being put in motion, the crowd had resolved itself into three great

parties, and were prepared, as had been arranged, to cross the river

by different bridges, and make for the House of Commons in separate

detachments.

At the head of that division which had Westminster Bridge for its

approach to the scene of action, Lord George Gordon took his post; with

Gashford at his right hand, and sundry ruffians, of most unpromising

appearance, forming a kind of staff about him. The conduct of a second

party, whose route lay by Blackfriars, was entrusted to a committee of

management, including perhaps a dozen men: while the third, which was to

go by London Bridge, and through the main streets, in order that their

numbers and their serious intentions might be the better known and

appreciated by the citizens, were led by Simon Tappertit (assisted by

a few subalterns, selected from the Brotherhood of United Bulldogs),

Dennis the hangman, Hugh, and some others.

The word of command being given, each of these great bodies took the

road assigned to it, and departed on its way, in perfect order and

profound silence. That which went through the City greatly exceeded the

others in number, and was of such prodigious extent that when the

rear began to move, the front was nearly four miles in advance,

notwithstanding that the men marched three abreast and followed very

close upon each other.

At the head of this party, in the place where Hugh, in the madness

of his humour, had stationed him, and walking between that dangerous

companion and the hangman, went Barnaby; as many a man among the

thousands who looked on that day afterwards remembered well. Forgetful

of all other things in the ecstasy of the moment, his face flushed and

his eyes sparkling with delight, heedless of the weight of the great

banner he carried, and mindful only of its flashing in the sun and

rustling in the summer breeze, on he went, proud, happy, elated past

all telling:--the only light-hearted, undesigning creature, in the whole

assembly.

'What do you think of this?' asked Hugh, as they passed through the

crowded streets, and looked up at the windows which were thronged with

spectators. 'They have all turned out to see our flags and streamers?

Eh, Barnaby? Why, Barnaby's the greatest man of all the pack! His flag's

the largest of the lot, the brightest too. There's nothing in the show,

like Barnaby. All eyes are turned on him. Ha ha ha!'

'Don't make that din, brother,' growled the hangman, glancing with

no very approving eyes at Barnaby as he spoke: 'I hope he don't think

there's nothing to be done, but carrying that there piece of blue rag,

like a boy at a breaking up. You're ready for action I hope, eh? You, I

mean,' he added, nudging Barnaby roughly with his elbow. 'What are you

staring at? Why don't you speak?'

Barnaby had been gazing at his flag, and looked vacantly from his

questioner to Hugh.

'He don't understand your way,' said the latter. 'Here, I'll explain it

to him. Barnaby old boy, attend to me.'

'I'll attend,' said Barnaby, looking anxiously round; 'but I wish I

could see her somewhere.'

'See who?' demanded Dennis in a gruff tone. 'You an't in love I hope,

brother? That an't the sort of thing for us, you know. We mustn't have

no love here.'

'She would be proud indeed to see me now, eh Hugh?' said Barnaby.

'Wouldn't it make her glad to see me at the head of this large show?

She'd cry for joy, I know she would. Where CAN she be? She never sees me

at my best, and what do I care to be gay and fine if SHE'S not by?'

'Why, what palaver's this?' asked Mr Dennis with supreme disdain. 'We

an't got no sentimental members among us, I hope.'

'Don't be uneasy, brother,' cried Hugh, 'he's only talking of his

mother.'

'Of his what?' said Mr Dennis with a strong oath.

'His mother.'

'And have I combined myself with this here section, and turned out on

this here memorable day, to hear men talk about their mothers!' growled

Mr Dennis with extreme disgust. 'The notion of a man's sweetheart's bad

enough, but a man's mother!'--and here his disgust was so extreme that

he spat upon the ground, and could say no more.

'Barnaby's right,' cried Hugh with a grin, 'and I say it. Lookee, bold

lad. If she's not here to see, it's because I've provided for her, and

sent half-a-dozen gentlemen, every one of 'em with a blue flag (but not

half as fine as yours), to take her, in state, to a grand house all

hung round with gold and silver banners, and everything else you please,

where she'll wait till you come, and want for nothing.'

'Ay!' said Barnaby, his face beaming with delight: 'have you indeed?

That's a good hearing. That's fine! Kind Hugh!'

'But nothing to what will come, bless you,' retorted Hugh, with a

wink at Dennis, who regarded his new companion in arms with great

astonishment.

'No, indeed?' cried Barnaby.

'Nothing at all,' said Hugh. 'Money, cocked hats and feathers, red coats

and gold lace; all the fine things there are, ever were, or will be;

will belong to us if we are true to that noble gentleman--the best man

in the world--carry our flags for a few days, and keep 'em safe. That's

all we've got to do.'

'Is that all?' cried Barnaby with glistening eyes, as he clutched his

pole the tighter; 'I warrant you I keep this one safe, then. You have

put it in good hands. You know me, Hugh. Nobody shall wrest this flag

away.'

'Well said!' cried Hugh. 'Ha ha! Nobly said! That's the old stout

Barnaby, that I have climbed and leaped with, many and many a day--I

knew I was not mistaken in Barnaby.--Don't you see, man,' he added in

a whisper, as he slipped to the other side of Dennis, 'that the lad's a

natural, and can be got to do anything, if you take him the right way?

Letting alone the fun he is, he's worth a dozen men, in earnest, as

you'd find if you tried a fall with him. Leave him to me. You shall soon

see whether he's of use or not.'

Mr Dennis received these explanatory remarks with many nods and winks,

and softened his behaviour towards Barnaby from that moment. Hugh,

laying his finger on his nose, stepped back into his former place, and

they proceeded in silence.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon when the three

great parties met at Westminster, and, uniting into one huge mass,

raised a tremendous shout. This was not only done in token of their

presence, but as a signal to those on whom the task devolved, that it

was time to take possession of the lobbies of both Houses, and of

the various avenues of approach, and of the gallery stairs. To the

last-named place, Hugh and Dennis, still with their pupil between them,

rushed straightway; Barnaby having given his flag into the hands of one

of their own party, who kept them at the outer door. Their followers

pressing on behind, they were borne as on a great wave to the very doors

of the gallery, whence it was impossible to retreat, even if they had

been so inclined, by reason of the throng which choked up the passages.

It is a familiar expression in describing a great crowd, that a person

might have walked upon the people's heads. In this case it was actually

done; for a boy who had by some means got among the concourse, and was

in imminent danger of suffocation, climbed to the shoulders of a man

beside him and walked upon the people's hats and heads into the open

street; traversing in his passage the whole length of two staircases and

a long gallery. Nor was the swarm without less dense; for a basket

which had been tossed into the crowd, was jerked from head to head,

and shoulder to shoulder, and went spinning and whirling on above them,

until it was lost to view, without ever once falling in among them or

coming near the ground.

Through this vast throng, sprinkled doubtless here and there with honest

zealots, but composed for the most part of the very scum and refuse

of London, whose growth was fostered by bad criminal laws, bad prison

regulations, and the worst conceivable police, such of the members of

both Houses of Parliament as had not taken the precaution to be already

at their posts, were compelled to fight and force their way. Their

carriages were stopped and broken; the wheels wrenched off; the glasses

shivered to atoms; the panels beaten in; drivers, footmen, and masters,

pulled from their seats and rolled in the mud. Lords, commoners, and

reverend bishops, with little distinction of person or party, were

kicked and pinched and hustled; passed from hand to hand through various

stages of ill-usage; and sent to their fellow-senators at last with

their clothes hanging in ribands about them, their bagwigs torn off,

themselves speechless and breathless, and their persons covered with the

powder which had been cuffed and beaten out of their hair. One lord was

so long in the hands of the populace, that the Peers as a body resolved

to sally forth and rescue him, and were in the act of doing so, when he

happily appeared among them covered with dirt and bruises, and hardly to

be recognised by those who knew him best. The noise and uproar were on

the increase every moment. The air was filled with execrations, hoots,

and howlings. The mob raged and roared, like a mad monster as it was,

unceasingly, and each new outrage served to swell its fury.

Within doors, matters were even yet more threatening. Lord

George--preceded by a man who carried the immense petition on a porter's

knot through the lobby to the door of the House of Commons, where it

was received by two officers of the house who rolled it up to the table

ready for presentation--had taken his seat at an early hour, before the

Speaker went to prayers. His followers pouring in at the same time, the

lobby and all the avenues were immediately filled, as we have seen. Thus

the members were not only attacked in their passage through the streets,

but were set upon within the very walls of Parliament; while the tumult,

both within and without, was so great, that those who attempted to speak

could scarcely hear their own voices: far less, consult upon the course

it would be wise to take in such extremity, or animate each other to

dignified and firm resistance. So sure as any member, just arrived, with

dress disordered and dishevelled hair, came struggling through the crowd

in the lobby, it yelled and screamed in triumph; and when the door

of the House, partially and cautiously opened by those within for his

admission, gave them a momentary glimpse of the interior, they grew

more wild and savage, like beasts at the sight of prey, and made a rush

against the portal which strained its locks and bolts in their staples,

and shook the very beams.

The strangers' gallery, which was immediately above the door of the

House, had been ordered to be closed on the first rumour of disturbance,

and was empty; save that now and then Lord George took his seat there,

for the convenience of coming to the head of the stairs which led to

it, and repeating to the people what had passed within. It was on

these stairs that Barnaby, Hugh, and Dennis were posted. There were two

flights, short, steep, and narrow, running parallel to each other,

and leading to two little doors communicating with a low passage which

opened on the gallery. Between them was a kind of well, or unglazed

skylight, for the admission of light and air into the lobby, which might

be some eighteen or twenty feet below.

Upon one of these little staircases--not that at the head of which Lord

George appeared from time to time, but the other--Gashford stood with

his elbow on the bannister, and his cheek resting on his hand, with his

usual crafty aspect. Whenever he varied this attitude in the slightest

degree--so much as by the gentlest motion of his arm--the uproar was

certain to increase, not merely there, but in the lobby below; from

which place no doubt, some man who acted as fugleman to the rest, was

constantly looking up and watching him.

'Order!' cried Hugh, in a voice which made itself heard even above the

roar and tumult, as Lord George appeared at the top of the staircase.

'News! News from my lord!'

The noise continued, notwithstanding his appearance, until Gashford

looked round. There was silence immediately--even among the people in

the passages without, and on the other staircases, who could neither

see nor hear, but to whom, notwithstanding, the signal was conveyed with

marvellous rapidity.

'Gentlemen,' said Lord George, who was very pale and agitated, we must

be firm. They talk of delays, but we must have no delays. They talk of

taking your petition into consideration next Tuesday, but we must have

it considered now. Present appearances look bad for our success, but we

must succeed and will!'

'We must succeed and will!' echoed the crowd. And so among their shouts

and cheers and other cries, he bowed to them and retired, and presently

came back again. There was another gesture from Gashford, and a dead

silence directly.

'I am afraid,' he said, this time, 'that we have little reason,

gentlemen, to hope for any redress from the proceedings of Parliament.

But we must redress our own grievances, we must meet again, we must put

our trust in Providence, and it will bless our endeavours.'

This speech being a little more temperate than the last, was not so

favourably received. When the noise and exasperation were at their

height, he came back once more, and told them that the alarm had gone

forth for many miles round; that when the King heard of their assembling

together in that great body, he had no doubt, His Majesty would send

down private orders to have their wishes complied with; and--with the

manner of his speech as childish, irresolute, and uncertain as his

matter--was proceeding in this strain, when two gentlemen suddenly

appeared at the door where he stood, and pressing past him and coming a

step or two lower down upon the stairs, confronted the people.

The boldness of this action quite took them by surprise. They were

not the less disconcerted, when one of the gentlemen, turning to Lord

George, spoke thus--in a loud voice that they might hear him well, but

quite coolly and collectedly:

'You may tell these people, if you please, my lord, that I am General

Conway of whom they have heard; and that I oppose this petition, and all

their proceedings, and yours. I am a soldier, you may tell them, and I

will protect the freedom of this place with my sword. You see, my lord,

that the members of this House are all in arms to-day; you know that the

entrance to it is a narrow one; you cannot be ignorant that there are

men within these walls who are determined to defend that pass to the

last, and before whom many lives must fall if your adherents persevere.

Have a care what you do.'

'And my Lord George,' said the other gentleman, addressing him in like

manner, 'I desire them to hear this, from me--Colonel Gordon--your

near relation. If a man among this crowd, whose uproar strikes us deaf,

crosses the threshold of the House of Commons, I swear to run my sword

that moment--not into his, but into your body!'

With that, they stepped back again, keeping their faces towards the

crowd; took each an arm of the misguided nobleman; drew him into the

passage, and shut the door; which they directly locked and fastened on

the inside.

This was so quickly done, and the demeanour of both gentlemen--who

were not young men either--was so gallant and resolute, that the crowd

faltered and stared at each other with irresolute and timid looks. Many

tried to turn towards the door; some of the faintest-hearted cried they

had best go back, and called to those behind to give way; and the panic

and confusion were increasing rapidly, when Gashford whispered Hugh.

'What now!' Hugh roared aloud, turning towards them. 'Why go back? Where

can you do better than here, boys! One good rush against these doors and

one below at the same time, will do the business. Rush on, then! As to

the door below, let those stand back who are afraid. Let those who are

not afraid, try who shall be the first to pass it. Here goes! Look out

down there!'

Without the delay of an instant, he threw himself headlong over the

bannisters into the lobby below. He had hardly touched the ground when

Barnaby was at his side. The chaplain's assistant, and some members who

were imploring the people to retire, immediately withdrew; and then,

with a great shout, both crowds threw themselves against the doors

pell-mell, and besieged the House in earnest.

At that moment, when a second onset must have brought them into

collision with those who stood on the defensive within, in which case

great loss of life and bloodshed would inevitably have ensued,--the

hindmost portion of the crowd gave way, and the rumour spread from mouth

to mouth that a messenger had been despatched by water for the military,

who were forming in the street. Fearful of sustaining a charge in the

narrow passages in which they were so closely wedged together, the

throng poured out as impetuously as they had flocked in. As the whole

stream turned at once, Barnaby and Hugh went with it: and so, fighting

and struggling and trampling on fallen men and being trampled on in turn

themselves, they and the whole mass floated by degrees into the open

street, where a large detachment of the Guards, both horse and foot,

came hurrying up; clearing the ground before them so rapidly that the

people seemed to melt away as they advanced.

The word of command to halt being given, the soldiers formed across the

street; the rioters, breathless and exhausted with their late exertions,

formed likewise, though in a very irregular and disorderly manner. The

commanding officer rode hastily into the open space between the two

bodies, accompanied by a magistrate and an officer of the House of

Commons, for whose accommodation a couple of troopers had hastily

dismounted. The Riot Act was read, but not a man stirred.

In the first rank of the insurgents, Barnaby and Hugh stood side by

side. Somebody had thrust into Barnaby's hands when he came out into the

street, his precious flag; which, being now rolled up and tied round

the pole, looked like a giant quarter-staff as he grasped it firmly and

stood upon his guard. If ever man believed with his whole heart and soul

that he was engaged in a just cause, and that he was bound to stand by

his leader to the last, poor Barnaby believed it of himself and Lord

George Gordon.

After an ineffectual attempt to make himself heard, the magistrate gave

the word and the Horse Guards came riding in among the crowd. But, even

then, he galloped here and there, exhorting the people to disperse; and,

although heavy stones were thrown at the men, and some were desperately

cut and bruised, they had no orders but to make prisoners of such of the

rioters as were the most active, and to drive the people back with the

flat of their sabres. As the horses came in among them, the throng gave

way at many points, and the Guards, following up their advantage, were

rapidly clearing the ground, when two or three of the foremost, who were

in a manner cut off from the rest by the people closing round them, made

straight towards Barnaby and Hugh, who had no doubt been pointed out as

the two men who dropped into the lobby: laying about them now with some

effect, and inflicting on the more turbulent of their opponents, a few

slight flesh wounds, under the influence of which a man dropped,

here and there, into the arms of his fellows, amid much groaning and

confusion.

At the sight of gashed and bloody faces, seen for a moment in the crowd,

then hidden by the press around them, Barnaby turned pale and sick. But

he stood his ground, and grasping his pole more firmly yet, kept his

eye fixed upon the nearest soldier--nodding his head meanwhile, as Hugh,

with a scowling visage, whispered in his ear.

The soldier came spurring on, making his horse rear as the people

pressed about him, cutting at the hands of those who would have grasped

his rein and forced his charger back, and waving to his comrades to

follow--and still Barnaby, without retreating an inch, waited for his

coming. Some called to him to fly, and some were in the very act of

closing round him, to prevent his being taken, when the pole swept into

the air above the people's heads, and the man's saddle was empty in an

instant.

Then, he and Hugh turned and fled, the crowd opening to let them pass,

and closing up again so quickly that there was no clue to the course

they had taken. Panting for breath, hot, dusty, and exhausted with

fatigue, they reached the riverside in safety, and getting into a boat

with all despatch were soon out of any immediate danger.

As they glided down the river, they plainly heard the people cheering;

and supposing they might have forced the soldiers to retreat, lay upon

their oars for a few minutes, uncertain whether to return or not. But

the crowd passing along Westminster Bridge, soon assured them that the

populace were dispersing; and Hugh rightly guessed from this, that

they had cheered the magistrate for offering to dismiss the military on

condition of their immediate departure to their several homes, and that

he and Barnaby were better where they were. He advised, therefore, that

they should proceed to Blackfriars, and, going ashore at the bridge,

make the best of their way to The Boot; where there was not only good

entertainment and safe lodging, but where they would certainly be joined

by many of their late companions. Barnaby assenting, they decided on

this course of action, and pulled for Blackfriars accordingly.

They landed at a critical time, and fortunately for themselves at the

right moment. For, coming into Fleet Street, they found it in an unusual

stir; and inquiring the cause, were told that a body of Horse Guards had

just galloped past, and that they were escorting some rioters whom they

had made prisoners, to Newgate for safety. Not at all ill-pleased to

have so narrowly escaped the cavalcade, they lost no more time in asking

questions, but hurried to The Boot with as much speed as Hugh considered

it prudent to make, without appearing singular or attracting an

inconvenient share of public notice.

Chapter 50

They were among the first to reach the tavern, but they had not been

there many minutes, when several groups of men who had formed part of

the crowd, came straggling in. Among them were Simon Tappertit and Mr

Dennis; both of whom, but especially the latter, greeted Barnaby with

the utmost warmth, and paid him many compliments on the prowess he had

shown.

'Which,' said Dennis, with an oath, as he rested his bludgeon in a

corner with his hat upon it, and took his seat at the same table with

them, 'it does me good to think of. There was a opportunity! But it

led to nothing. For my part, I don't know what would. There's no spirit

among the people in these here times. Bring something to eat and drink

here. I'm disgusted with humanity.'

'On what account?' asked Mr Tappertit, who had been quenching his fiery

face in a half-gallon can. 'Don't you consider this a good beginning,

mister?'

'Give me security that it an't a ending,' rejoined the hangman. 'When

that soldier went down, we might have made London ours; but no;--we

stand, and gape, and look on--the justice (I wish he had had a bullet in

each eye, as he would have had, if we'd gone to work my way) says,

"My lads, if you'll give me your word to disperse, I'll order off the

military," our people sets up a hurrah, throws up the game with the

winning cards in their hands, and skulks away like a pack of tame curs

as they are. Ah,' said the hangman, in a tone of deep disgust, 'it makes

me blush for my feller creeturs. I wish I had been born a ox, I do!'

'You'd have been quite as agreeable a character if you had been, I

think,' returned Simon Tappertit, going out in a lofty manner.

'Don't be too sure of that,' rejoined the hangman, calling after him;

'if I was a horned animal at the present moment, with the smallest

grain of sense, I'd toss every man in this company, excepting them two,'

meaning Hugh and Barnaby, 'for his manner of conducting himself this

day.'

With which mournful review of their proceedings, Mr Dennis sought

consolation in cold boiled beef and beer; but without at all relaxing

the grim and dissatisfied expression of his face, the gloom of which was

rather deepened than dissipated by their grateful influence.

The company who were thus libelled might have retaliated by strong

words, if not by blows, but they were dispirited and worn out. The

greater part of them had fasted since morning; all had suffered

extremely from the excessive heat; and between the day's shouting,

exertion, and excitement, many had quite lost their voices, and so much

of their strength that they could hardly stand. Then they were uncertain

what to do next, fearful of the consequences of what they had done

already, and sensible that after all they had carried no point, but had

indeed left matters worse than they had found them. Of those who had

come to The Boot, many dropped off within an hour; such of them as were

really honest and sincere, never, after the morning's experience, to

return, or to hold any communication with their late companions. Others

remained but to refresh themselves, and then went home desponding;

others who had theretofore been regular in their attendance, avoided the

place altogether. The half-dozen prisoners whom the Guards had taken,

were magnified by report into half-a-hundred at least; and their

friends, being faint and sober, so slackened in their energy, and so

drooped beneath these dispiriting influences, that by eight o'clock in

the evening, Dennis, Hugh, and Barnaby, were left alone. Even they were

fast asleep upon the benches, when Gashford's entrance roused them.

'Oh! you ARE here then?' said the Secretary. 'Dear me!'

'Why, where should we be, Muster Gashford!' Dennis rejoined as he rose

into a sitting posture.

'Oh nowhere, nowhere,' he returned with excessive mildness. 'The streets

are filled with blue cockades. I rather thought you might have been

among them. I am glad you are not.'

'You have orders for us, master, then?' said Hugh.

'Oh dear, no. Not I. No orders, my good fellow. What orders should I

have? You are not in my service.'

'Muster Gashford,' remonstrated Dennis, 'we belong to the cause, don't

we?'

'The cause!' repeated the secretary, looking at him in a sort of

abstraction. 'There is no cause. The cause is lost.'

'Lost!'

'Oh yes. You have heard, I suppose? The petition is rejected by a

hundred and ninety-two, to six. It's quite final. We might have spared

ourselves some trouble. That, and my lord's vexation, are the only

circumstances I regret. I am quite satisfied in all other respects.'

As he said this, he took a penknife from his pocket, and putting his

hat upon his knee, began to busy himself in ripping off the blue cockade

which he had worn all day; at the same time humming a psalm tune which

had been very popular in the morning, and dwelling on it with a gentle

regret.

His two adherents looked at each other, and at him, as if they were at a

loss how to pursue the subject. At length Hugh, after some elbowing and

winking between himself and Mr Dennis, ventured to stay his hand, and to

ask him why he meddled with that riband in his hat.

'Because,' said the secretary, looking up with something between a snarl

and a smile; 'because to sit still and wear it, or to fall asleep and

wear it, is a mockery. That's all, friend.'

'What would you have us do, master!' cried Hugh.

'Nothing,' returned Gashford, shrugging his shoulders, 'nothing. When my

lord was reproached and threatened for standing by you, I, as a prudent

man, would have had you do nothing. When the soldiers were trampling you

under their horses' feet, I would have had you do nothing. When one of

them was struck down by a daring hand, and I saw confusion and dismay in

all their faces, I would have had you do nothing--just what you did,

in short. This is the young man who had so little prudence and so much

boldness. Ah! I am sorry for him.'

'Sorry, master!' cried Hugh.

'Sorry, Muster Gashford!' echoed Dennis.

'In case there should be a proclamation out to-morrow, offering five

hundred pounds, or some such trifle, for his apprehension; and in case

it should include another man who dropped into the lobby from the stairs

above,' said Gashford, coldly; 'still, do nothing.'

'Fire and fury, master!' cried Hugh, starting up. 'What have we done,

that you should talk to us like this!'

'Nothing,' returned Gashford with a sneer. 'If you are cast into prison;

if the young man--' here he looked hard at Barnaby's attentive face--'is

dragged from us and from his friends; perhaps from people whom he loves,

and whom his death would kill; is thrown into jail, brought out and

hanged before their eyes; still, do nothing. You'll find it your best

policy, I have no doubt.'

'Come on!' cried Hugh, striding towards the door. 'Dennis--Barnaby--come

on!'

'Where? To do what?' said Gashford, slipping past him, and standing with

his back against it.

'Anywhere! Anything!' cried Hugh. 'Stand aside, master, or the window

will serve our turn as well. Let us out!'

'Ha ha ha! You are of such--of such an impetuous nature,' said Gashford,

changing his manner for one of the utmost good fellowship and the

pleasantest raillery; 'you are such an excitable creature--but you'll

drink with me before you go?'

'Oh, yes--certainly,' growled Dennis, drawing his sleeve across his

thirsty lips. 'No malice, brother. Drink with Muster Gashford!'

Hugh wiped his heated brow, and relaxed into a smile. The artful

secretary laughed outright.

'Some liquor here! Be quick, or he'll not stop, even for that. He is a

man of such desperate ardour!' said the smooth secretary, whom Mr Dennis

corroborated with sundry nods and muttered oaths--'Once roused, he is a

fellow of such fierce determination!'

Hugh poised his sturdy arm aloft, and clapping Barnaby on the back,

bade him fear nothing. They shook hands together--poor Barnaby evidently

possessed with the idea that he was among the most virtuous and

disinterested heroes in the world--and Gashford laughed again.

'I hear,' he said smoothly, as he stood among them with a great measure

of liquor in his hand, and filled their glasses as quickly and as

often as they chose, 'I hear--but I cannot say whether it be true or

false--that the men who are loitering in the streets to-night are half

disposed to pull down a Romish chapel or two, and that they only want

leaders. I even heard mention of those in Duke Street, Lincoln's Inn

Fields, and in Warwick Street, Golden Square; but common report, you

know--You are not going?'

--'To do nothing, master, eh?' cried Hugh. 'No jails and halter for

Barnaby and me. They must be frightened out of that. Leaders are wanted,

are they? Now boys!'

'A most impetuous fellow!' cried the secretary. 'Ha ha! A courageous,

boisterous, most vehement fellow! A man who--'

There was no need to finish the sentence, for they had rushed out of the

house, and were far beyond hearing. He stopped in the middle of a laugh,

listened, drew on his gloves, and, clasping his hands behind him, paced

the deserted room for a long time, then bent his steps towards the busy

town, and walked into the streets.

They were filled with people, for the rumour of that day's proceedings

had made a great noise. Those persons who did not care to leave home,

were at their doors or windows, and one topic of discourse prevailed

on every side. Some reported that the riots were effectually put down;

others that they had broken out again: some said that Lord George Gordon

had been sent under a strong guard to the Tower; others that an attempt

had been made upon the King's life, that the soldiers had been again

called out, and that the noise of musketry in a distant part of the town

had been plainly heard within an hour. As it grew darker, these stories

became more direful and mysterious; and often, when some frightened

passenger ran past with tidings that the rioters were not far off,

and were coming up, the doors were shut and barred, lower windows

made secure, and as much consternation engendered, as if the city were

invaded by a foreign army.

Gashford walked stealthily about, listening to all he heard, and

diffusing or confirming, whenever he had an opportunity, such false

intelligence as suited his own purpose; and, busily occupied in this

way, turned into Holborn for the twentieth time, when a great many women

and children came flying along the street--often panting and looking

back--and the confused murmur of numerous voices struck upon his ear.

Assured by these tokens, and by the red light which began to flash

upon the houses on either side, that some of his friends were indeed

approaching, he begged a moment's shelter at a door which opened as he

passed, and running with some other persons to an upper window, looked

out upon the crowd.

They had torches among them, and the chief faces were distinctly

visible. That they had been engaged in the destruction of some building

was sufficiently apparent, and that it was a Catholic place of worship

was evident from the spoils they bore as trophies, which were easily

recognisable for the vestments of priests, and rich fragments of altar

furniture. Covered with soot, and dirt, and dust, and lime; their

garments torn to rags; their hair hanging wildly about them; their hands

and faces jagged and bleeding with the wounds of rusty nails; Barnaby,

Hugh, and Dennis hurried on before them all, like hideous madmen. After

them, the dense throng came fighting on: some singing; some shouting in

triumph; some quarrelling among themselves; some menacing the spectators

as they passed; some with great wooden fragments, on which they spent

their rage as if they had been alive, rending them limb from limb,

and hurling the scattered morsels high into the air; some in a drunken

state, unconscious of the hurts they had received from falling bricks,

and stones, and beams; one borne upon a shutter, in the very midst,

covered with a dingy cloth, a senseless, ghastly heap. Thus--a vision

of coarse faces, with here and there a blot of flaring, smoky light; a

dream of demon heads and savage eyes, and sticks and iron bars uplifted

in the air, and whirled about; a bewildering horror, in which so much

was seen, and yet so little, which seemed so long, and yet so short, in

which there were so many phantoms, not to be forgotten all through life,

and yet so many things that could not be observed in one distracting

glimpse--it flitted onward, and was gone.

As it passed away upon its work of wrath and ruin, a piercing scream was

heard. A knot of persons ran towards the spot; Gashford, who just then

emerged into the street, among them. He was on the outskirts of the

little concourse, and could not see or hear what passed within; but one

who had a better place, informed him that a widow woman had descried her

son among the rioters.

'Is that all?' said the secretary, turning his face homewards. 'Well! I

think this looks a little more like business!'

Chapter 51

Promising as these outrages were to Gashford's view, and much like

business as they looked, they extended that night no farther. The

soldiers were again called out, again they took half-a-dozen prisoners,

and again the crowd dispersed after a short and bloodless scuffle. Hot

and drunken though they were, they had not yet broken all bounds and

set all law and government at defiance. Something of their habitual

deference to the authority erected by society for its own preservation

yet remained among them, and had its majesty been vindicated in time,

the secretary would have had to digest a bitter disappointment.

By midnight, the streets were clear and quiet, and, save that there

stood in two parts of the town a heap of nodding walls and pile of

rubbish, where there had been at sunset a rich and handsome building,

everything wore its usual aspect. Even the Catholic gentry and

tradesmen, of whom there were many resident in different parts of the

City and its suburbs, had no fear for their lives or property, and

but little indignation for the wrong they had already sustained in

the plunder and destruction of their temples of worship. An honest

confidence in the government under whose protection they had lived for

many years, and a well-founded reliance on the good feeling and right

thinking of the great mass of the community, with whom, notwithstanding

their religious differences, they were every day in habits of

confidential, affectionate, and friendly intercourse, reassured them,

even under the excesses that had been committed; and convinced them that

they who were Protestants in anything but the name, were no more to

be considered as abettors of these disgraceful occurrences, than they

themselves were chargeable with the uses of the block, the rack, the

gibbet, and the stake in cruel Mary's reign.

The clock was on the stroke of one, when Gabriel Varden, with his

lady and Miss Miggs, sat waiting in the little parlour. This fact; the

toppling wicks of the dull, wasted candles; the silence that prevailed;

and, above all, the nightcaps of both maid and matron, were sufficient

evidence that they had been prepared for bed some time ago, and had some

reason for sitting up so far beyond their usual hour.

If any other corroborative testimony had been required, it would have

been abundantly furnished in the actions of Miss Miggs, who, having

arrived at that restless state and sensitive condition of the nervous

system which are the result of long watching, did, by a constant rubbing

and tweaking of her nose, a perpetual change of position (arising from

the sudden growth of imaginary knots and knobs in her chair), a frequent

friction of her eyebrows, the incessant recurrence of a small cough, a

small groan, a gasp, a sigh, a sniff, a spasmodic start, and by other

demonstrations of that nature, so file down and rasp, as it were, the

patience of the locksmith, that after looking at her in silence for some

time, he at last broke out into this apostrophe:--

'Miggs, my good girl, go to bed--do go to bed. You're really worse

than the dripping of a hundred water-butts outside the window, or the

scratching of as many mice behind the wainscot. I can't bear it. Do go

to bed, Miggs. To oblige me--do.'

'You haven't got nothing to untie, sir,' returned Miss Miggs, 'and

therefore your requests does not surprise me. But missis has--and

while you sit up, mim'--she added, turning to the locksmith's wife,

'I couldn't, no, not if twenty times the quantity of cold water was

aperiently running down my back at this moment, go to bed with a quiet

spirit.'

Having spoken these words, Miss Miggs made divers efforts to rub her

shoulders in an impossible place, and shivered from head to foot;

thereby giving the beholders to understand that the imaginary cascade

was still in full flow, but that a sense of duty upheld her under that

and all other sufferings, and nerved her to endurance.

Mrs Varden being too sleepy to speak, and Miss Miggs having, as the

phrase is, said her say, the locksmith had nothing for it but to sigh

and be as quiet as he could.

But to be quiet with such a basilisk before him was impossible. If he

looked another way, it was worse to feel that she was rubbing her

cheek, or twitching her ear, or winking her eye, or making all kinds of

extraordinary shapes with her nose, than to see her do it. If she was

for a moment free from any of these complaints, it was only because of

her foot being asleep, or of her arm having got the fidgets, or of her

leg being doubled up with the cramp, or of some other horrible disorder

which racked her whole frame. If she did enjoy a moment's ease, then

with her eyes shut and her mouth wide open, she would be seen to sit

very stiff and upright in her chair; then to nod a little way forward,

and stop with a jerk; then to nod a little farther forward, and stop

with another jerk; then to recover herself; then to come forward

again--lower--lower--lower--by very slow degrees, until, just as it

seemed impossible that she could preserve her balance for another

instant, and the locksmith was about to call out in an agony, to save

her from dashing down upon her forehead and fracturing her skull, then

all of a sudden and without the smallest notice, she would come upright

and rigid again with her eyes open, and in her countenance an expression

of defiance, sleepy but yet most obstinate, which plainly said, 'I've

never once closed 'em since I looked at you last, and I'll take my oath

of it!'

At length, after the clock had struck two, there was a sound at the

street door, as if somebody had fallen against the knocker by accident.

Miss Miggs immediately jumping up and clapping her hands, cried with a

drowsy mingling of the sacred and profane, 'Ally Looyer, mim! there's

Simmuns's knock!'

'Who's there?' said Gabriel.

'Me!' cried the well-known voice of Mr Tappertit. Gabriel opened the

door, and gave him admission.

He did not cut a very insinuating figure, for a man of his stature

suffers in a crowd; and having been active in yesterday morning's work,

his dress was literally crushed from head to foot: his hat being beaten

out of all shape, and his shoes trodden down at heel like slippers. His

coat fluttered in strips about him, the buckles were torn away both from

his knees and feet, half his neckerchief was gone, and the bosom of

his shirt was rent to tatters. Yet notwithstanding all these personal

disadvantages; despite his being very weak from heat and fatigue; and

so begrimed with mud and dust that he might have been in a case, for

anything of the real texture (either of his skin or apparel) that the

eye could discern; he stalked haughtily into the parlour, and throwing

himself into a chair, and endeavouring to thrust his hands into the

pockets of his small-clothes, which were turned inside out and displayed

upon his legs, like tassels, surveyed the household with a gloomy

dignity.

'Simon,' said the locksmith gravely, 'how comes it that you return home

at this time of night, and in this condition? Give me an assurance that

you have not been among the rioters, and I am satisfied.'

'Sir,' replied Mr Tappertit, with a contemptuous look, 'I wonder at YOUR

assurance in making such demands.'

'You have been drinking,' said the locksmith.

'As a general principle, and in the most offensive sense of the words,

sir,' returned his journeyman with great self-possession,

'I consider you a liar. In that last observation you have

unintentionally--unintentionally, sir,--struck upon the truth.'

'Martha,' said the locksmith, turning to his wife, and shaking his head

sorrowfully, while a smile at the absurd figure beside him still played

upon his open face, 'I trust it may turn out that this poor lad is not

the victim of the knaves and fools we have so often had words about, and

who have done so much harm to-day. If he has been at Warwick Street or

Duke Street to-night--'

'He has been at neither, sir,' cried Mr Tappertit in a loud voice, which

he suddenly dropped into a whisper as he repeated, with eyes fixed upon

the locksmith, 'he has been at neither.'

'I am glad of it, with all my heart,' said the locksmith in a serious

tone; 'for if he had been, and it could be proved against him, Martha,

your Great Association would have been to him the cart that draws men

to the gallows and leaves them hanging in the air. It would, as sure as

we're alive!'

Mrs Varden was too much scared by Simon's altered manner and appearance,

and by the accounts of the rioters which had reached her ears that

night, to offer any retort, or to have recourse to her usual matrimonial

policy. Miss Miggs wrung her hands, and wept.

'He was not at Duke Street, or at Warwick Street, G. Varden,' said

Simon, sternly; 'but he WAS at Westminster. Perhaps, sir, he kicked a

county member, perhaps, sir, he tapped a lord--you may stare, sir, I

repeat it--blood flowed from noses, and perhaps he tapped a lord. Who

knows? This,' he added, putting his hand into his waistcoat-pocket,

and taking out a large tooth, at the sight of which both Miggs and Mrs

Varden screamed, 'this was a bishop's. Beware, G. Varden!'

'Now, I would rather,' said the locksmith hastily, 'have paid five

hundred pounds, than had this come to pass. You idiot, do you know what

peril you stand in?'

'I know it, sir,' replied his journeyman, 'and it is my glory. I was

there, everybody saw me there. I was conspicuous, and prominent. I will

abide the consequences.'

The locksmith, really disturbed and agitated, paced to and fro in

silence--glancing at his former 'prentice every now and then--and at

length stopping before him, said:

'Get to bed, and sleep for a couple of hours that you may wake penitent,

and with some of your senses about you. Be sorry for what you have

done, and we will try to save you. If I call him by five o'clock,' said

Varden, turning hurriedly to his wife, and he washes himself clean

and changes his dress, he may get to the Tower Stairs, and away by the

Gravesend tide-boat, before any search is made for him. From there he

can easily get on to Canterbury, where your cousin will give him

work till this storm has blown over. I am not sure that I do right in

screening him from the punishment he deserves, but he has lived in this

house, man and boy, for a dozen years, and I should be sorry if for this

one day's work he made a miserable end. Lock the front-door, Miggs, and

show no light towards the street when you go upstairs. Quick, Simon! Get

to bed!'

'And do you suppose, sir,' retorted Mr Tappertit, with a thickness

and slowness of speech which contrasted forcibly with the rapidity and

earnestness of his kind-hearted master--'and do you suppose, sir, that I

am base and mean enough to accept your servile proposition?--Miscreant!'

'Whatever you please, Sim, but get to bed. Every minute is of

consequence. The light here, Miggs!'

'Yes yes, oh do! Go to bed directly,' cried the two women together.

Mr Tappertit stood upon his feet, and pushing his chair away to show

that he needed no assistance, answered, swaying himself to and fro, and

managing his head as if it had no connection whatever with his body:

'You spoke of Miggs, sir--Miggs may be smothered!'

'Oh Simmun!' ejaculated that young lady in a faint voice. 'Oh mim! Oh

sir! Oh goodness gracious, what a turn he has give me!'

'This family may ALL be smothered, sir,' returned Mr Tappertit, after

glancing at her with a smile of ineffable disdain, 'excepting Mrs V.

I have come here, sir, for her sake, this night. Mrs Varden, take this

piece of paper. It's a protection, ma'am. You may need it.'

With these words he held out at arm's length, a dirty, crumpled scrap of

writing. The locksmith took it from him, opened it, and read as follows:

'All good friends to our cause, I hope will be particular, and do no

injury to the property of any true Protestant. I am well assured that

the proprietor of this house is a staunch and worthy friend to the

cause.

GEORGE GORDON.'

'What's this!' said the locksmith, with an altered face.

'Something that'll do you good service, young feller,' replied his

journeyman, 'as you'll find. Keep that safe, and where you can lay your

hand upon it in an instant. And chalk "No Popery" on your door to-morrow

night, and for a week to come--that's all.'

'This is a genuine document,' said the locksmith, 'I know, for I have

seen the hand before. What threat does it imply? What devil is abroad?'

'A fiery devil,' retorted Sim; 'a flaming, furious devil. Don't you put

yourself in its way, or you're done for, my buck. Be warned in time, G.

Varden. Farewell!'

But here the two women threw themselves in his way--especially Miss

Miggs, who fell upon him with such fervour that she pinned him against

the wall--and conjured him in moving words not to go forth till he was

sober; to listen to reason; to think of it; to take some rest, and then

determine.

'I tell you,' said Mr Tappertit, 'that my mind is made up. My bleeding

country calls me and I go! Miggs, if you don't get out of the way, I'll

pinch you.'

Miss Miggs, still clinging to the rebel, screamed once vociferously--but

whether in the distraction of her mind, or because of his having

executed his threat, is uncertain.

'Release me,' said Simon, struggling to free himself from her chaste,

but spider-like embrace. 'Let me go! I have made arrangements for you in

an altered state of society, and mean to provide for you comfortably in

life--there! Will that satisfy you?'

'Oh Simmun!' cried Miss Miggs. 'Oh my blessed Simmun! Oh mim! what are

my feelings at this conflicting moment!'

Of a rather turbulent description, it would seem; for her nightcap

had been knocked off in the scuffle, and she was on her knees upon

the floor, making a strange revelation of blue and yellow curl-papers,

straggling locks of hair, tags of staylaces, and strings of it's

impossible to say what; panting for breath, clasping her hands, turning

her eyes upwards, shedding abundance of tears, and exhibiting various

other symptoms of the acutest mental suffering.

'I leave,' said Simon, turning to his master, with an utter disregard of

Miggs's maidenly affliction, 'a box of things upstairs. Do what you

like with 'em. I don't want 'em. I'm never coming back here, any more.

Provide yourself, sir, with a journeyman; I'm my country's journeyman;

henceforward that's MY line of business.'

'Be what you like in two hours' time, but now go up to bed,' returned

the locksmith, planting himself in the doorway. 'Do you hear me? Go to

bed!'

'I hear you, and defy you, Varden,' rejoined Simon Tappertit. 'This

night, sir, I have been in the country, planning an expedition which

shall fill your bell-hanging soul with wonder and dismay. The plot

demands my utmost energy. Let me pass!'

'I'll knock you down if you come near the door,' replied the locksmith.

'You had better go to bed!'

Simon made no answer, but gathering himself up as straight as he could,

plunged head foremost at his old master, and the two went driving out

into the workshop together, plying their hands and feet so briskly that

they looked like half-a-dozen, while Miggs and Mrs Varden screamed for

twelve.

It would have been easy for Varden to knock his old 'prentice down,

and bind him hand and foot; but as he was loth to hurt him in his then

defenceless state, he contented himself with parrying his blows when he

could, taking them in perfect good part when he could not, and keeping

between him and the door, until a favourable opportunity should present

itself for forcing him to retreat up-stairs, and shutting him up in his

own room. But, in the goodness of his heart, he calculated too much upon

his adversary's weakness, and forgot that drunken men who have lost

the power of walking steadily, can often run. Watching his time, Simon

Tappertit made a cunning show of falling back, staggered unexpectedly

forward, brushed past him, opened the door (he knew the trick of that

lock well), and darted down the street like a mad dog. The locksmith

paused for a moment in the excess of his astonishment, and then gave

chase.

It was an excellent season for a run, for at that silent hour the

streets were deserted, the air was cool, and the flying figure before

him distinctly visible at a great distance, as it sped away, with a long

gaunt shadow following at its heels. But the short-winded locksmith had

no chance against a man of Sim's youth and spare figure, though the day

had been when he could have run him down in no time. The space between

them rapidly increased, and as the rays of the rising sun streamed upon

Simon in the act of turning a distant corner, Gabriel Varden was fain

to give up, and sit down on a doorstep to fetch his breath. Simon

meanwhile, without once stopping, fled at the same degree of swiftness

to The Boot, where, as he well knew, some of his company were lying,

and at which respectable hostelry--for he had already acquired the

distinction of being in great peril of the law--a friendly watch had

been expecting him all night, and was even now on the look-out for his

coming.

'Go thy ways, Sim, go thy ways,' said the locksmith, as soon as he could

speak. 'I have done my best for thee, poor lad, and would have saved

thee, but the rope is round thy neck, I fear.'

So saying, and shaking his head in a very sorrowful and disconsolate

manner, he turned back, and soon re-entered his own house, where Mrs

Varden and the faithful Miggs had been anxiously expecting his return.

Now Mrs Varden (and by consequence Miss Miggs likewise) was impressed

with a secret misgiving that she had done wrong; that she had, to the

utmost of her small means, aided and abetted the growth of disturbances,

the end of which it was impossible to foresee; that she had led remotely

to the scene which had just passed; and that the locksmith's time for

triumph and reproach had now arrived indeed. And so strongly did Mrs

Varden feel this, and so crestfallen was she in consequence, that while

her husband was pursuing their lost journeyman, she secreted under her

chair the little red-brick dwelling-house with the yellow roof, lest it

should furnish new occasion for reference to the painful theme; and now

hid the same still more, with the skirts of her dress.

But it happened that the locksmith had been thinking of this very

article on his way home, and that, coming into the room and not seeing

it, he at once demanded where it was.

Mrs Varden had no resource but to produce it, which she did with many

tears, and broken protestations that if she could have known--

'Yes, yes,' said Varden, 'of course--I know that. I don't mean to

reproach you, my dear. But recollect from this time that all good things

perverted to evil purposes, are worse than those which are naturally

bad. A thoroughly wicked woman, is wicked indeed. When religion goes

wrong, she is very wrong, for the same reason. Let us say no more about

it, my dear.'

So he dropped the red-brick dwelling-house on the floor, and setting his

heel upon it, crushed it into pieces. The halfpence, and sixpences,

and other voluntary contributions, rolled about in all directions, but

nobody offered to touch them, or to take them up.

'That,' said the locksmith, 'is easily disposed of, and I would to

Heaven that everything growing out of the same society could be settled

as easily.'

'It happens very fortunately, Varden,' said his wife, with her

handkerchief to her eyes, 'that in case any more disturbances should

happen--which I hope not; I sincerely hope not--'

'I hope so too, my dear.'

'--That in case any should occur, we have the piece of paper which that

poor misguided young man brought.'

'Ay, to be sure,' said the locksmith, turning quickly round. 'Where is

that piece of paper?'

Mrs Varden stood aghast as he took it from her outstretched band, tore

it into fragments, and threw them under the grate.

'Not use it?' she said.

'Use it!' cried the locksmith. No! Let them come and pull the roof about

our ears; let them burn us out of house and home; I'd neither have the

protection of their leader, nor chalk their howl upon my door, though,

for not doing it, they shot me on my own threshold. Use it! Let them

come and do their worst. The first man who crosses my doorstep on such

an errand as theirs, had better be a hundred miles away. Let him look to

it. The others may have their will. I wouldn't beg or buy them off, if,

instead of every pound of iron in the place, there was a hundred weight

of gold. Get you to bed, Martha. I shall take down the shutters and go

to work.'

'So early!' said his wife.

'Ay,' replied the locksmith cheerily, 'so early. Come when they may,

they shall not find us skulking and hiding, as if we feared to take our

portion of the light of day, and left it all to them. So pleasant dreams

to you, my dear, and cheerful sleep!'

With that he gave his wife a hearty kiss, and bade her delay no longer,

or it would be time to rise before she lay down to rest. Mrs Varden

quite amiably and meekly walked upstairs, followed by Miggs, who,

although a good deal subdued, could not refrain from sundry stimulative

coughs and sniffs by the way, or from holding up her hands in

astonishment at the daring conduct of master.

Chapter 52

A mob is usually a creature of very mysterious existence, particularly

in a large city. Where it comes from or whither it goes, few men

can tell. Assembling and dispersing with equal suddenness, it is as

difficult to follow to its various sources as the sea itself; nor does

the parallel stop here, for the ocean is not more fickle and uncertain,

more terrible when roused, more unreasonable, or more cruel.

The people who were boisterous at Westminster upon the Friday morning,

and were eagerly bent upon the work of devastation in Duke Street and

Warwick Street at night, were, in the mass, the same. Allowing for the

chance accessions of which any crowd is morally sure in a town where

there must always be a large number of idle and profligate persons,

one and the same mob was at both places. Yet they spread themselves

in various directions when they dispersed in the afternoon, made no

appointment for reassembling, had no definite purpose or design, and

indeed, for anything they knew, were scattered beyond the hope of future

union.

At The Boot, which, as has been shown, was in a manner the head-quarters

of the rioters, there were not, upon this Friday night, a dozen people.

Some slept in the stable and outhouses, some in the common room, some

two or three in beds. The rest were in their usual homes or haunts.

Perhaps not a score in all lay in the adjacent fields and lanes, and

under haystacks, or near the warmth of brick-kilns, who had not their

accustomed place of rest beneath the open sky. As to the public ways

within the town, they had their ordinary nightly occupants, and no

others; the usual amount of vice and wretchedness, but no more.

The experience of one evening, however, had taught the reckless leaders

of disturbance, that they had but to show themselves in the streets, to

be immediately surrounded by materials which they could only have kept

together when their aid was not required, at great risk, expense, and

trouble. Once possessed of this secret, they were as confident as if

twenty thousand men, devoted to their will, had been encamped about

them, and assumed a confidence which could not have been surpassed,

though that had really been the case. All day, Saturday, they remained

quiet. On Sunday, they rather studied how to keep their men within call,

and in full hope, than to follow out, by any fierce measure, their first

day's proceedings.

'I hope,' said Dennis, as, with a loud yawn, he raised his body from

a heap of straw on which he had been sleeping, and supporting his head

upon his hand, appealed to Hugh on Sunday morning, 'that Muster Gashford

allows some rest? Perhaps he'd have us at work again already, eh?'

'It's not his way to let matters drop, you may be sure of that,' growled

Hugh in answer. 'I'm in no humour to stir yet, though. I'm as stiff as

a dead body, and as full of ugly scratches as if I had been fighting all

day yesterday with wild cats.'

'You've so much enthusiasm, that's it,' said Dennis, looking with great

admiration at the uncombed head, matted beard, and torn hands and face

of the wild figure before him; 'you're such a devil of a fellow. You

hurt yourself a hundred times more than you need, because you will be

foremost in everything, and will do more than the rest.'

'For the matter of that,' returned Hugh, shaking back his ragged hair

and glancing towards the door of the stable in which they lay; 'there's

one yonder as good as me. What did I tell you about him? Did I say he

was worth a dozen, when you doubted him?'

Mr Dennis rolled lazily over upon his breast, and resting his chin upon

his hand in imitation of the attitude in which Hugh lay, said, as he too

looked towards the door:

'Ay, ay, you knew him, brother, you knew him. But who'd suppose to look

at that chap now, that he could be the man he is! Isn't it a thousand

cruel pities, brother, that instead of taking his nat'ral rest and

qualifying himself for further exertions in this here honourable cause,

he should be playing at soldiers like a boy? And his cleanliness too!'

said Mr Dennis, who certainly had no reason to entertain a fellow

feeling with anybody who was particular on that score; 'what weaknesses

he's guilty of; with respect to his cleanliness! At five o'clock this

morning, there he was at the pump, though any one would think he had

gone through enough, the day before yesterday, to be pretty fast asleep

at that time. But no--when I woke for a minute or two, there he was at

the pump, and if you'd seen him sticking them peacock's feathers into

his hat when he'd done washing--ah! I'm sorry he's such a imperfect

character, but the best on us is incomplete in some pint of view or

another.'

The subject of this dialogue and of these concluding remarks, which were

uttered in a tone of philosophical meditation, was, as the reader will

have divined, no other than Barnaby, who, with his flag in hand, stood

sentry in the little patch of sunlight at the distant door, or walked

to and fro outside, singing softly to himself; and keeping time to the

music of some clear church bells. Whether he stood still, leaning with

both hands on the flagstaff, or, bearing it upon his shoulder, paced

slowly up and down, the careful arrangement of his poor dress, and his

erect and lofty bearing, showed how high a sense he had of the great

importance of his trust, and how happy and how proud it made him. To

Hugh and his companion, who lay in a dark corner of the gloomy shed,

he, and the sunlight, and the peaceful Sabbath sound to which he made

response, seemed like a bright picture framed by the door, and set

off by the stable's blackness. The whole formed such a contrast to

themselves, as they lay wallowing, like some obscene animals, in their

squalor and wickedness on the two heaps of straw, that for a few moments

they looked on without speaking, and felt almost ashamed.

'Ah!'said Hugh at length, carrying it off with a laugh: 'He's a rare

fellow is Barnaby, and can do more, with less rest, or meat, or drink,

than any of us. As to his soldiering, I put him on duty there.'

'Then there was a object in it, and a proper good one too, I'll be

sworn,' retorted Dennis with a broad grin, and an oath of the same

quality. 'What was it, brother?'

'Why, you see,' said Hugh, crawling a little nearer to him, 'that our

noble captain yonder, came in yesterday morning rather the worse for

liquor, and was--like you and me--ditto last night.'

Dennis looked to where Simon Tappertit lay coiled upon a truss of hay,

snoring profoundly, and nodded.

'And our noble captain,' continued Hugh with another laugh, 'our noble

captain and I, have planned for to-morrow a roaring expedition, with

good profit in it.'

'Again the Papists?' asked Dennis, rubbing his hands.

'Ay, against the Papists--against one of 'em at least, that some of us,

and I for one, owe a good heavy grudge to.'

'Not Muster Gashford's friend that he spoke to us about in my house,

eh?' said Dennis, brimfull of pleasant expectation.

'The same man,' said Hugh.

'That's your sort,' cried Mr Dennis, gaily shaking hands with him,

'that's the kind of game. Let's have revenges and injuries, and all

that, and we shall get on twice as fast. Now you talk, indeed!'

'Ha ha ha! The captain,' added Hugh, 'has thoughts of carrying off a

woman in the bustle, and--ha ha ha!--and so have I!'

Mr Dennis received this part of the scheme with a wry face, observing

that as a general principle he objected to women altogether, as being

unsafe and slippery persons on whom there was no calculating with any

certainty, and who were never in the same mind for four-and-twenty hours

at a stretch. He might have expatiated on this suggestive theme at

much greater length, but that it occurred to him to ask what connection

existed between the proposed expedition and Barnaby's being posted at

the stable-door as sentry; to which Hugh cautiously replied in these

words:

'Why, the people we mean to visit, were friends of his, once upon a

time, and I know that much of him to feel pretty sure that if he thought

we were going to do them any harm, he'd be no friend to our side, but

would lend a ready hand to the other. So I've persuaded him (for I know

him of old) that Lord George has picked him out to guard this place

to-morrow while we're away, and that it's a great honour--and so he's on

duty now, and as proud of it as if he was a general. Ha ha! What do you

say to me for a careful man as well as a devil of a one?'

Mr Dennis exhausted himself in compliments, and then added,

'But about the expedition itself--'

'About that,' said Hugh, 'you shall hear all particulars from me and

the great captain conjointly and both together--for see, he's waking up.

Rouse yourself, lion-heart. Ha ha! Put a good face upon it, and drink

again. Another hair of the dog that bit you, captain! Call for

drink! There's enough of gold and silver cups and candlesticks buried

underneath my bed,' he added, rolling back the straw, and pointing to

where the ground was newly turned, 'to pay for it, if it was a score of

casks full. Drink, captain!'

Mr Tappertit received these jovial promptings with a very bad grace,

being much the worse, both in mind and body, for his two nights of

debauch, and but indifferently able to stand upon his legs. With Hugh's

assistance, however, he contrived to stagger to the pump; and having

refreshed himself with an abundant draught of cold water, and a copious

shower of the same refreshing liquid on his head and face, he ordered

some rum and milk to be served; and upon that innocent beverage and some

biscuits and cheese made a pretty hearty meal. That done, he disposed

himself in an easy attitude on the ground beside his two companions (who

were carousing after their own tastes), and proceeded to enlighten Mr

Dennis in reference to to-morrow's project.

That their conversation was an interesting one, was rendered manifest by

its length, and by the close attention of all three. That it was not

of an oppressively grave character, but was enlivened by various

pleasantries arising out of the subject, was clear from their loud and

frequent roars of laughter, which startled Barnaby on his post, and made

him wonder at their levity. But he was not summoned to join them, until

they had eaten, and drunk, and slept, and talked together for some

hours; not, indeed, until the twilight; when they informed him that they

were about to make a slight demonstration in the streets--just to keep

the people's hands in, as it was Sunday night, and the public might

otherwise be disappointed--and that he was free to accompany them if he

would.

Without the slightest preparation, saving that they carried clubs and

wore the blue cockade, they sallied out into the streets; and, with no

more settled design than that of doing as much mischief as they could,

paraded them at random. Their numbers rapidly increasing, they soon

divided into parties; and agreeing to meet by-and-by, in the fields

near Welbeck Street, scoured the town in various directions. The largest

body, and that which augmented with the greatest rapidity, was the

one to which Hugh and Barnaby belonged. This took its way towards

Moorfields, where there was a rich chapel, and in which neighbourhood

several Catholic families were known to reside.

Beginning with the private houses so occupied, they broke open the doors

and windows; and while they destroyed the furniture and left but the

bare walls, made a sharp search for tools and engines of destruction,

such as hammers, pokers, axes, saws, and such like instruments. Many of

the rioters made belts of cord, of handkerchiefs, or any material they

found at hand, and wore these weapons as openly as pioneers upon a

field-day. There was not the least disguise or concealment--indeed, on

this night, very little excitement or hurry. From the chapels, they

tore down and took away the very altars, benches, pulpits, pews, and

flooring; from the dwelling-houses, the very wainscoting and stairs.

This Sunday evening's recreation they pursued like mere workmen who had

a certain task to do, and did it. Fifty resolute men might have turned

them at any moment; a single company of soldiers could have scattered

them like dust; but no man interposed, no authority restrained them,

and, except by the terrified persons who fled from their approach, they

were as little heeded as if they were pursuing their lawful occupations

with the utmost sobriety and good conduct.

In the same manner, they marched to the place of rendezvous agreed upon,

made great fires in the fields, and reserving the most valuable of their

spoils, burnt the rest. Priestly garments, images of saints, rich stuffs

and ornaments, altar-furniture and household goods, were cast into the

flames, and shed a glare on the whole country round; but they danced

and howled, and roared about these fires till they were tired, and were

never for an instant checked.

As the main body filed off from this scene of action, and passed down

Welbeck Street, they came upon Gashford, who had been a witness of their

proceedings, and was walking stealthily along the pavement. Keeping up

with him, and yet not seeming to speak, Hugh muttered in his ear:

'Is this better, master?'

'No,' said Gashford. 'It is not.'

'What would you have?' said Hugh. 'Fevers are never at their height at

once. They must get on by degrees.'

'I would have you,' said Gashford, pinching his arm with such

malevolence that his nails seemed to meet in the skin; 'I would have you

put some meaning into your work. Fools! Can you make no better bonfires

than of rags and scraps? Can you burn nothing whole?'

'A little patience, master,' said Hugh. 'Wait but a few hours, and you

shall see. Look for a redness in the sky, to-morrow night.'

With that, he fell back into his place beside Barnaby; and when the

secretary looked after him, both were lost in the crowd.

Chapter 53

The next day was ushered in by merry peals of bells, and by the firing

of the Tower guns; flags were hoisted on many of the church-steeples;

the usual demonstrations were made in honour of the anniversary of the

King's birthday; and every man went about his pleasure or business as

if the city were in perfect order, and there were no half-smouldering

embers in its secret places, which, on the approach of night, would

kindle up again and scatter ruin and dismay abroad. The leaders of the

riot, rendered still more daring by the success of last night and by

the booty they had acquired, kept steadily together, and only thought of

implicating the mass of their followers so deeply that no hope of pardon

or reward might tempt them to betray their more notorious confederates

into the hands of justice.

Indeed, the sense of having gone too far to be forgiven, held the timid

together no less than the bold. Many who would readily have pointed out

the foremost rioters and given evidence against them, felt that escape

by that means was hopeless, when their every act had been observed by

scores of people who had taken no part in the disturbances; who had

suffered in their persons, peace, or property, by the outrages of the

mob; who would be most willing witnesses; and whom the government would,

no doubt, prefer to any King's evidence that might be offered. Many of

this class had deserted their usual occupations on the Saturday morning;

some had been seen by their employers active in the tumult; others

knew they must be suspected, and that they would be discharged if they

returned; others had been desperate from the beginning, and comforted

themselves with the homely proverb, that, being hanged at all, they

might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. They all hoped and

believed, in a greater or less degree, that the government they seemed

to have paralysed, would, in its terror, come to terms with them in the

end, and suffer them to make their own conditions. The least sanguine

among them reasoned with himself that, at the worst, they were too many

to be all punished, and that he had as good a chance of escape as any

other man. The great mass never reasoned or thought at all, but were

stimulated by their own headlong passions, by poverty, by ignorance, by

the love of mischief, and the hope of plunder.

One other circumstance is worthy of remark; and that is, that from the

moment of their first outbreak at Westminster, every symptom of order

or preconcerted arrangement among them vanished. When they divided

into parties and ran to different quarters of the town, it was on the

spontaneous suggestion of the moment. Each party swelled as it went

along, like rivers as they roll towards the sea; new leaders sprang

up as they were wanted, disappeared when the necessity was over, and

reappeared at the next crisis. Each tumult took shape and form from the

circumstances of the moment; sober workmen, going home from their day's

labour, were seen to cast down their baskets of tools and become rioters

in an instant; mere boys on errands did the like. In a word, a moral

plague ran through the city. The noise, and hurry, and excitement, had

for hundreds and hundreds an attraction they had no firmness to resist.

The contagion spread like a dread fever: an infectious madness, as yet

not near its height, seized on new victims every hour, and society began

to tremble at their ravings.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon when Gashford

looked into the lair described in the last chapter, and seeing only

Barnaby and Dennis there, inquired for Hugh.

He was out, Barnaby told him; had gone out more than an hour ago; and

had not yet returned.

'Dennis!' said the smiling secretary, in his smoothest voice, as he sat

down cross-legged on a barrel, 'Dennis!'

The hangman struggled into a sitting posture directly, and with his eyes

wide open, looked towards him.

'How do you do, Dennis?' said Gashford, nodding. 'I hope you have

suffered no inconvenience from your late exertions, Dennis?'

'I always will say of you, Muster Gashford,' returned the hangman,

staring at him, 'that that 'ere quiet way of yours might almost wake a

dead man. It is,' he added, with a muttered oath--still staring at him

in a thoughtful manner--'so awful sly!'

'So distinct, eh Dennis?'

'Distinct!' he answered, scratching his head, and keeping his eyes upon

the secretary's face; 'I seem to hear it, Muster Gashford, in my wery

bones.'

'I am very glad your sense of hearing is so sharp, and that I succeed

in making myself so intelligible,' said Gashford, in his unvarying, even

tone. 'Where is your friend?'

Mr Dennis looked round as in expectation of beholding him asleep upon

his bed of straw; then remembering he had seen him go out, replied:

'I can't say where he is, Muster Gashford, I expected him back afore

now. I hope it isn't time that we was busy, Muster Gashford?'

'Nay,' said the secretary, 'who should know that as well as you? How

can I tell you, Dennis? You are perfect master of your own actions, you

know, and accountable to nobody--except sometimes to the law, eh?'

Dennis, who was very much baffled by the cool matter-of-course manner of

this reply, recovered his self-possession on his professional pursuits

being referred to, and pointing towards Barnaby, shook his head and

frowned.

'Hush!' cried Barnaby.

'Ah! Do hush about that, Muster Gashford,' said the hangman in a low

voice, 'pop'lar prejudices--you always forget--well, Barnaby, my lad,

what's the matter?'

'I hear him coming,' he answered: 'Hark! Do you mark that? That's his

foot! Bless you, I know his step, and his dog's too. Tramp, tramp,

pit-pat, on they come together, and, ha ha ha!--and here they are!' he

cried, joyfully welcoming Hugh with both hands, and then patting him

fondly on the back, as if instead of being the rough companion he was,

he had been one of the most prepossessing of men. 'Here he is, and safe

too! I am glad to see him back again, old Hugh!'

'I'm a Turk if he don't give me a warmer welcome always than any man

of sense,' said Hugh, shaking hands with him with a kind of ferocious

friendship, strange enough to see. 'How are you, boy?'

'Hearty!' cried Barnaby, waving his hat. 'Ha ha ha! And merry too,

Hugh! And ready to do anything for the good cause, and the right, and

to help the kind, mild, pale-faced gentleman--the lord they used so

ill--eh, Hugh?'

'Ay!' returned his friend, dropping his hand, and looking at Gashford

for an instant with a changed expression before he spoke to him. 'Good

day, master!'

'And good day to you,' replied the secretary, nursing his leg.

'And many good days--whole years of them, I hope. You are heated.'

'So would you have been, master,' said Hugh, wiping his face, 'if you'd

been running here as fast as I have.'

'You know the news, then? Yes, I supposed you would have heard it.'

'News! what news?'

'You don't?' cried Gashford, raising his eyebrows with an exclamation

of surprise. 'Dear me! Come; then I AM the first to make you acquainted

with your distinguished position, after all. Do you see the King's Arms

a-top?' he smilingly asked, as he took a large paper from his pocket,

unfolded it, and held it out for Hugh's inspection.

'Well!' said Hugh. 'What's that to me?'

'Much. A great deal,' replied the secretary. 'Read it.'

'I told you, the first time I saw you, that I couldn't read,' said Hugh,

impatiently. 'What in the Devil's name's inside of it?'

'It is a proclamation from the King in Council,' said Gashford, 'dated

to-day, and offering a reward of five hundred pounds--five hundred

pounds is a great deal of money, and a large temptation to some

people--to any one who will discover the person or persons most active

in demolishing those chapels on Saturday night.'

'Is that all?' cried Hugh, with an indifferent air. 'I knew of that.'

'Truly I might have known you did,' said Gashford, smiling, and folding

up the document again. 'Your friend, I might have guessed--indeed I did

guess--was sure to tell you.'

'My friend!' stammered Hugh, with an unsuccessful effort to appear

surprised. 'What friend?'

'Tut tut--do you suppose I don't know where you have been?' retorted

Gashford, rubbing his hands, and beating the back of one on the palm of

the other, and looking at him with a cunning eye. 'How dull you think

me! Shall I say his name?'

'No,' said Hugh, with a hasty glance towards Dennis.

'You have also heard from him, no doubt,' resumed the secretary, after a

moment's pause, 'that the rioters who have been taken (poor fellows) are

committed for trial, and that some very active witnesses have had the

temerity to appear against them. Among others--' and here he clenched

his teeth, as if he would suppress by force some violent words that rose

upon his tongue; and spoke very slowly. 'Among others, a gentleman

who saw the work going on in Warwick Street; a Catholic gentleman; one

Haredale.'

Hugh would have prevented his uttering the word, but it was out already.

Hearing the name, Barnaby turned swiftly round.

'Duty, duty, bold Barnaby!' cried Hugh, assuming his wildest and most

rapid manner, and thrusting into his hand his staff and flag which leant

against the wall. 'Mount guard without loss of time, for we are off upon

our expedition. Up, Dennis, and get ready! Take care that no one turns

the straw upon my bed, brave Barnaby; we know what's underneath it--eh?

Now, master, quick! What you have to say, say speedily, for the little

captain and a cluster of 'em are in the fields, and only waiting for us.

Sharp's the word, and strike's the action. Quick!'

Barnaby was not proof against this bustle and despatch. The look of

mingled astonishtnent and anger which had appeared in his face when he

turned towards them, faded from it as the words passed from his memory,

like breath from a polished mirror; and grasping the weapon which Hugh

forced upon him, he proudly took his station at the door, beyond their

hearing.

'You might have spoiled our plans, master,' said Hugh. 'YOU, too, of all

men!'

'Who would have supposed that HE would be so quick?' urged Gashford.

'He's as quick sometimes--I don't mean with his hands, for that you

know, but with his head--as you or any man,' said Hugh. 'Dennis, it's

time we were going; they're waiting for us; I came to tell you. Reach

me my stick and belt. Here! Lend a hand, master. Fling this over my

shoulder, and buckle it behind, will you?'

'Brisk as ever!' said the secretary, adjusting it for him as he desired.

'A man need be brisk to-day; there's brisk work a-foot.'

'There is, is there?' said Gashford. He said it with such a provoking

assumption of ignorance, that Hugh, looking over his shoulder and

angrily down upon him, replied:

'Is there! You know there is! Who knows better than you, master, that

the first great step to be taken is to make examples of these witnesses,

and frighten all men from appearing against us or any of our body, any

more?'

'There's one we know of,' returned Gashford, with an expressive smile,

'who is at least as well informed upon that subject as you or I.'

'If we mean the same gentleman, as I suppose we do,' Hugh rejoined

softly, 'I tell you this--he's as good and quick information about

everything as--' here he paused and looked round, as if to make sure

that the person in question was not within hearing, 'as Old Nick

himself. Have you done that, master? How slow you are!'

'It's quite fast now,' said Gashford, rising. 'I say--you didn't find

that your friend disapproved of to-day's little expedition? Ha ha ha!

It is fortunate it jumps so well with the witness policy; for, once

planned, it must have been carried out. And now you are going, eh?'

'Now we are going, master!' Hugh replied. 'Any parting words?'

'Oh dear, no,' said Gashford sweetly. 'None!'

'You're sure?' cried Hugh, nudging the grinning Dennis.

'Quite sure, eh, Muster Gashford?' chuckled the hangman.

Gashford paused a moment, struggling with his caution and his malice;

then putting himself between the two men, and laying a hand upon the arm

of each, said, in a cramped whisper:

'Do not, my good friends--I am sure you will not--forget our talk one

night--in your house, Dennis--about this person. No mercy, no quarter,

no two beams of his house to be left standing where the builder placed

them! Fire, the saying goes, is a good servant, but a bad master. Makes

it HIS master; he deserves no better. But I am sure you will be firm, I

am sure you will be very resolute, I am sure you will remember that he

thirsts for your lives, and those of all your brave companions. If

you ever acted like staunch fellows, you will do so to-day. Won't you,

Dennis--won't you, Hugh?'

The two looked at him, and at each other; then bursting into a roar of

laughter, brandished their staves above their heads, shook hands, and

hurried out.

When they had been gone a little time, Gashford followed. They were yet

in sight, and hastening to that part of the adjacent fields in

which their fellows had already mustered; Hugh was looking back, and

flourishing his hat to Barnaby, who, delighted with his trust, replied

in the same way, and then resumed his pacing up and down before the

stable-door, where his feet had worn a path already. And when Gashford

himself was far distant, and looked back for the last time, he was still

walking to and fro, with the same measured tread; the most devoted and

the blithest champion that ever maintained a post, and felt his heart

lifted up with a brave sense of duty, and determination to defend it to

the last.

Smiling at the simplicity of the poor idiot, Gashford betook himself to

Welbeck Street by a different path from that which he knew the rioters

would take, and sitting down behind a curtain in one of the upper

windows of Lord George Gordon's house, waited impatiently for their

coming. They were so long, that although he knew it had been settled

they should come that way, he had a misgiving they must have changed

their plans and taken some other route. But at length the roar of voices

was heard in the neighbouring fields, and soon afterwards they came

thronging past, in a great body.

However, they were not all, nor nearly all, in one body, but were, as he

soon found, divided into four parties, each of which stopped before the

house to give three cheers, and then went on; the leaders crying out in

what direction they were going, and calling on the spectators to join

them. The first detachment, carrying, by way of banners, some relics

of the havoc they had made in Moorfields, proclaimed that they were on

their way to Chelsea, whence they would return in the same order, to

make of the spoil they bore, a great bonfire, near at hand. The second

gave out that they were bound for Wapping, to destroy a chapel; the

third, that their place of destination was East Smithfield, and their

object the same. All this was done in broad, bright, summer day. Gay

carriages and chairs stopped to let them pass, or turned back to avoid

them; people on foot stood aside in doorways, or perhaps knocked and

begged permission to stand at a window, or in the hall, until the

rioters had passed: but nobody interfered with them; and when they had

gone by, everything went on as usual.

There still remained the fourth body, and for that the secretary looked

with a most intense eagerness. At last it came up. It was numerous, and

composed of picked men; for as he gazed down among them, he recognised

many upturned faces which he knew well--those of Simon Tappertit, Hugh,

and Dennis in the front, of course. They halted and cheered, as the

others had done; but when they moved again, they did not, like them,

proclaim what design they had. Hugh merely raised his hat upon the

bludgeon he carried, and glancing at a spectator on the opposite side of

the way, was gone.

Gashford followed the direction of his glance instinctively, and

saw, standing on the pavement, and wearing the blue cockade, Sir John

Chester. He held his hat an inch or two above his head, to propitiate

the mob; and, resting gracefully on his cane, smiling pleasantly, and

displaying his dress and person to the very best advantage, looked on

in the most tranquil state imaginable. For all that, and quick and

dexterous as he was, Gashford had seen him recognise Hugh with the air

of a patron. He had no longer any eyes for the crowd, but fixed his keen

regards upon Sir John.

He stood in the same place and posture until the last man in the

concourse had turned the corner of the street; then very deliberately

took the blue cockade out of his hat; put it carefully in his pocket,

ready for the next emergency; refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff;

put up his box; and was walking slowly off, when a passing carriage

stopped, and a lady's hand let down the glass. Sir John's hat was off

again immediately. After a minute's conversation at the carriage-window,

in which it was apparent that he was vastly entertaining on the subject

of the mob, he stepped lightly in, and was driven away.

The secretary smiled, but he had other thoughts to dwell upon, and

soon dismissed the topic. Dinner was brought him, but he sent it down

untasted; and, in restless pacings up and down the room, and constant

glances at the clock, and many futile efforts to sit down and read, or

go to sleep, or look out of the window, consumed four weary hours. When

the dial told him thus much time had crept away, he stole upstairs to

the top of the house, and coming out upon the roof sat down, with his

face towards the east.

Heedless of the fresh air that blew upon his heated brow, of the

pleasant meadows from which he turned, of the piles of roofs and

chimneys upon which he looked, of the smoke and rising mist he vainly

sought to pierce, of the shrill cries of children at their evening

sports, the distant hum and turmoil of the town, the cheerful country

breath that rustled past to meet it, and to droop, and die; he watched,

and watched, till it was dark save for the specks of light that twinkled

in the streets below and far away--and, as the darkness deepened,

strained his gaze and grew more eager yet.

'Nothing but gloom in that direction, still!' he muttered restlessly.

'Dog! where is the redness in the sky, you promised me!'

Chapter 54

Rumours of the prevailing disturbances had, by this time, begun to be

pretty generally circulated through the towns and villages round London,

and the tidings were everywhere received with that appetite for the

marvellous and love of the terrible which have probably been among the

natural characteristics of mankind since the creation of the world.

These accounts, however, appeared, to many persons at that day--as

they would to us at the present, but that we know them to be matter of

history--so monstrous and improbable, that a great number of those who

were resident at a distance, and who were credulous enough on other

points, were really unable to bring their minds to believe that such

things could be; and rejected the intelligence they received on all

hands, as wholly fabulous and absurd.

Mr Willet--not so much, perhaps, on account of his having argued and

settled the matter with himself, as by reason of his constitutional

obstinacy--was one of those who positively refused to entertain the

current topic for a moment. On this very evening, and perhaps at the

very time when Gashford kept his solitary watch, old John was so red in

the face with perpetually shaking his head in contradiction of his three

ancient cronies and pot companions, that he was quite a phenomenon to

behold, and lighted up the Maypole Porch wherein they sat together, like

a monstrous carbuncle in a fairy tale.

'Do you think, sir,' said Mr Willet, looking hard at Solomon Daisy--for

it was his custom in cases of personal altercation to fasten upon the

smallest man in the party--'do you think, sir, that I'm a born fool?'

'No, no, Johnny,' returned Solomon, looking round upon the little circle

of which he formed a part: 'We all know better than that. You're no

fool, Johnny. No, no!'

Mr Cobb and Mr Parkes shook their heads in unison, muttering, 'No, no,

Johnny, not you!' But as such compliments had usually the effect of

making Mr Willet rather more dogged than before, he surveyed them with a

look of deep disdain, and returned for answer:

'Then what do you mean by coming here, and telling me that this evening

you're a-going to walk up to London together--you three--you--and have

the evidence of your own senses? An't,' said Mr Willet, putting his pipe

in his mouth with an air of solemn disgust, 'an't the evidence of MY

senses enough for you?'

'But we haven't got it, Johnny,' pleaded Parkes, humbly.

'You haven't got it, sir?' repeated Mr Willet, eyeing him from top to

toe. 'You haven't got it, sir? You HAVE got it, sir. Don't I tell you

that His blessed Majesty King George the Third would no more stand a

rioting and rollicking in his streets, than he'd stand being crowed over

by his own Parliament?'

'Yes, Johnny, but that's your sense--not your senses,' said the

adventurous Mr Parkes.

'How do you know? 'retorted John with great dignity. 'You're a

contradicting pretty free, you are, sir. How do YOU know which it is?

I'm not aware I ever told you, sir.'

Mr Parkes, finding himself in the position of having got into

metaphysics without exactly seeing his way out of them, stammered forth

an apology and retreated from the argument. There then ensued a silence

of some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, at the expiration of which

period Mr Willet was observed to rumble and shake with laughter, and

presently remarked, in reference to his late adversary, 'that he hoped

he had tackled him enough.' Thereupon Messrs Cobb and Daisy laughed,

and nodded, and Parkes was looked upon as thoroughly and effectually put

down.

'Do you suppose if all this was true, that Mr Haredale would be

constantly away from home, as he is?' said John, after another silence.

'Do you think he wouldn't be afraid to leave his house with them two

young women in it, and only a couple of men, or so?'

'Ay, but then you know,' returned Solomon Daisy, 'his house is a goodish

way out of London, and they do say that the rioters won't go more than

two miles, or three at the farthest, off the stones. Besides, you

know, some of the Catholic gentlefolks have actually sent trinkets and

suchlike down here for safety--at least, so the story goes.'

'The story goes!' said Mr Willet testily. 'Yes, sir. The story goes that

you saw a ghost last March. But nobody believes it.'

'Well!' said Solomon, rising, to divert the attention of his two

friends, who tittered at this retort: 'believed or disbelieved, it's

true; and true or not, if we mean to go to London, we must be going at

once. So shake hands, Johnny, and good night.'

'I shall shake hands,' returned the landlord, putting his into his

pockets, 'with no man as goes to London on such nonsensical errands.'

The three cronies were therefore reduced to the necessity of shaking his

elbows; having performed that ceremony, and brought from the house their

hats, and sticks, and greatcoats, they bade him good night and departed;

promising to bring him on the morrow full and true accounts of the real

state of the city, and if it were quiet, to give him the full merit of

his victory.

John Willet looked after them, as they plodded along the road in the

rich glow of a summer evening; and knocking the ashes out of his pipe,

laughed inwardly at their folly, until his sides were sore. When he had

quite exhausted himself--which took some time, for he laughed as slowly

as he thought and spoke--he sat himself comfortably with his back to the

house, put his legs upon the bench, then his apron over his face, and

fell sound asleep.

How long he slept, matters not; but it was for no brief space, for

when he awoke, the rich light had faded, the sombre hues of night were

falling fast upon the landscape, and a few bright stars were already

twinkling overhead. The birds were all at roost, the daisies on the

green had closed their fairy hoods, the honeysuckle twining round the

porch exhaled its perfume in a twofold degree, as though it lost its

coyness at that silent time and loved to shed its fragrance on the

night; the ivy scarcely stirred its deep green leaves. How tranquil, and

how beautiful it was!

Was there no sound in the air, besides the gentle rustling of the

trees and the grasshopper's merry chirp? Hark! Something very faint and

distant, not unlike the murmuring in a sea-shell. Now it grew louder,

fainter now, and now it altogether died away. Presently, it came again,

subsided, came once more, grew louder, fainter--swelled into a roar. It

was on the road, and varied with its windings. All at once it burst into

a distinct sound--the voices, and the tramping feet of many men.

It is questionable whether old John Willet, even then, would have

thought of the rioters but for the cries of his cook and housemaid,

who ran screaming upstairs and locked themselves into one of the old

garrets,--shrieking dismally when they had done so, by way of rendering

their place of refuge perfectly secret and secure. These two females did

afterwards depone that Mr Willet in his consternation uttered but one

word, and called that up the stairs in a stentorian voice, six distinct

times. But as this word was a monosyllable, which, however inoffensive

when applied to the quadruped it denotes, is highly reprehensible when

used in connection with females of unimpeachable character, many persons

were inclined to believe that the young women laboured under some

hallucination caused by excessive fear; and that their ears deceived

them.

Be this as it may, John Willet, in whom the very uttermost extent of

dull-headed perplexity supplied the place of courage, stationed himself

in the porch, and waited for their coming up. Once, it dimly occurred

to him that there was a kind of door to the house, which had a lock and

bolts; and at the same time some shadowy ideas of shutters to the lower

windows, flitted through his brain. But he stood stock still, looking

down the road in the direction in which the noise was rapidly advancing,

and did not so much as take his hands out of his pockets.

He had not to wait long. A dark mass, looming through a cloud of dust,

soon became visible; the mob quickened their pace; shouting and whooping

like savages, they came rushing on pell mell; and in a few seconds he

was bandied from hand to hand, in the heart of a crowd of men.

'Halloa!' cried a voice he knew, as the man who spoke came cleaving

through the throng. 'Where is he? Give him to me. Don't hurt him. How

now, old Jack! Ha ha ha!'

Mr Willet looked at him, and saw it was Hugh; but he said nothing, and

thought nothing.

'These lads are thirsty and must drink!' cried Hugh, thrusting him back

towards the house. 'Bustle, Jack, bustle. Show us the best--the very

best--the over-proof that you keep for your own drinking, Jack!'

John faintly articulated the words, 'Who's to pay?'

'He says "Who's to pay?"' cried Hugh, with a roar of laughter which was

loudly echoed by the crowd. Then turning to John, he added, 'Pay! Why,

nobody.'

John stared round at the mass of faces--some grinning, some fierce, some

lighted up by torches, some indistinct, some dusky and shadowy: some

looking at him, some at his house, some at each other--and while he was,

as he thought, in the very act of doing so, found himself, without any

consciousness of having moved, in the bar; sitting down in an arm-chair,

and watching the destruction of his property, as if it were some queer

play or entertainment, of an astonishing and stupefying nature, but

having no reference to himself--that he could make out--at all.

Yes. Here was the bar--the bar that the boldest never entered without

special invitation--the sanctuary, the mystery, the hallowed ground:

here it was, crammed with men, clubs, sticks, torches, pistols; filled

with a deafening noise, oaths, shouts, screams, hootings; changed all at

once into a bear-garden, a madhouse, an infernal temple: men darting

in and out, by door and window, smashing the glass, turning the taps,

drinking liquor out of China punchbowls, sitting astride of casks,

smoking private and personal pipes, cutting down the sacred grove of

lemons, hacking and hewing at the celebrated cheese, breaking open

inviolable drawers, putting things in their pockets which didn't belong

to them, dividing his own money before his own eyes, wantonly wasting,

breaking, pulling down and tearing up: nothing quiet, nothing private:

men everywhere--above, below, overhead, in the bedrooms, in the kitchen,

in the yard, in the stables--clambering in at windows when there were

doors wide open; dropping out of windows when the stairs were handy;

leaping over the bannisters into chasms of passages: new faces and

figures presenting themselves every instant--some yelling, some singing,

some fighting, some breaking glass and crockery, some laying the dust

with the liquor they couldn't drink, some ringing the bells till they

pulled them down, others beating them with pokers till they beat them

into fragments: more men still--more, more, more--swarming on like

insects: noise, smoke, light, darkness, frolic, anger, laughter, groans,

plunder, fear, and ruin!

Nearly all the time while John looked on at this bewildering scene, Hugh

kept near him; and though he was the loudest, wildest, most destructive

villain there, he saved his old master's bones a score of times. Nay,

even when Mr Tappertit, excited by liquor, came up, and in assertion of

his prerogative politely kicked John Willet on the shins, Hugh bade him

return the compliment; and if old John had had sufficient presence of

mind to understand this whispered direction, and to profit by it, he

might no doubt, under Hugh's protection, have done so with impunity.

At length the band began to reassemble outside the house, and to call

to those within, to join them, for they were losing time. These murmurs

increasing, and attaining a high pitch, Hugh, and some of those who yet

lingered in the bar, and who plainly were the leaders of the troop, took

counsel together, apart, as to what was to be done with John, to keep

him quiet until their Chigwell work was over. Some proposed to set the

house on fire and leave him in it; others, that he should be reduced

to a state of temporary insensibility, by knocking on the head; others,

that he should be sworn to sit where he was until to-morrow at the same

hour; others again, that he should be gagged and taken off with them,

under a sufficient guard. All these propositions being overruled, it was

concluded, at last, to bind him in his chair, and the word was passed

for Dennis.

'Look'ee here, Jack!' said Hugh, striding up to him: 'We are going to

tie you, hand and foot, but otherwise you won't be hurt. D'ye hear?'

John Willet looked at another man, as if he didn't know which was the

speaker, and muttered something about an ordinary every Sunday at two

o'clock.

'You won't be hurt I tell you, Jack--do you hear me?' roared Hugh,

impressing the assurance upon him by means of a heavy blow on the back.

'He's so dead scared, he's woolgathering, I think. Give him a drop of

something to drink here. Hand over, one of you.'

A glass of liquor being passed forward, Hugh poured the contents down

old John's throat. Mr Willet feebly smacked his lips, thrust his hand

into his pocket, and inquired what was to pay; adding, as he looked

vacantly round, that he believed there was a trifle of broken glass--

'He's out of his senses for the time, it's my belief,' said Hugh, after

shaking him, without any visible effect upon his system, until his keys

rattled in his pocket. 'Where's that Dennis?'

The word was again passed, and presently Mr Dennis, with a long cord

bound about his middle, something after the manner of a friar, came

hurrying in, attended by a body-guard of half-a-dozen of his men.

'Come! Be alive here!' cried Hugh, stamping his foot upon the ground.

'Make haste!'

Dennis, with a wink and a nod, unwound the cord from about his person,

and raising his eyes to the ceiling, looked all over it, and round the

walls and cornice, with a curious eye; then shook his head.

'Move, man, can't you!' cried Hugh, with another impatient stamp of his

foot. 'Are we to wait here, till the cry has gone for ten miles round,

and our work's interrupted?'

'It's all very fine talking, brother,' answered Dennis, stepping towards

him; 'but unless--' and here he whispered in his ear--'unless we do it

over the door, it can't be done at all in this here room.'

'What can't?' Hugh demanded.

'What can't!' retorted Dennis. 'Why, the old man can't.'

'Why, you weren't going to hang him!' cried Hugh.

'No, brother?' returned the hangman with a stare. 'What else?'

Hugh made no answer, but snatching the rope from his companion's hand,

proceeded to bind old John himself; but his very first move was so

bungling and unskilful, that Mr Dennis entreated, almost with tears

in his eyes, that he might be permitted to perform the duty. Hugh

consenting, he achieved it in a twinkling.

'There,' he said, looking mournfully at John Willet, who displayed no

more emotion in his bonds than he had shown out of them. 'That's what I

call pretty and workmanlike. He's quite a picter now. But, brother, just

a word with you--now that he's ready trussed, as one may say, wouldn't

it be better for all parties if we was to work him off? It would read

uncommon well in the newspapers, it would indeed. The public would think

a great deal more on us!'

Hugh, inferring what his companion meant, rather from his gestures than

his technical mode of expressing himself (to which, as he was ignorant

of his calling, he wanted the clue), rejected this proposition for the

second time, and gave the word 'Forward!' which was echoed by a hundred

voices from without.

'To the Warren!' shouted Dennis as he ran out, followed by the rest. 'A

witness's house, my lads!'

A loud yell followed, and the whole throng hurried off, mad for pillage

and destruction. Hugh lingered behind for a few moments to stimulate

himself with more drink, and to set all the taps running, a few of which

had accidentally been spared; then, glancing round the despoiled and

plundered room, through whose shattered window the rioters had thrust

the Maypole itself,--for even that had been sawn down,--lighted a torch,

clapped the mute and motionless John Willet on the back, and waving his

light above his head, and uttering a fierce shout, hastened after his

companions.

Chapter 55

John Willet, left alone in his dismantled bar, continued to sit staring

about him; awake as to his eyes, certainly, but with all his powers of

reason and reflection in a sound and dreamless sleep. He looked round

upon the room which had been for years, and was within an hour ago, the

pride of his heart; and not a muscle of his face was moved. The night,

without, looked black and cold through the dreary gaps in the casement;

the precious liquids, now nearly leaked away, dripped with a hollow

sound upon the floor; the Maypole peered ruefully in through the broken

window, like the bowsprit of a wrecked ship; the ground might have

been the bottom of the sea, it was so strewn with precious fragments.

Currents of air rushed in, as the old doors jarred and creaked upon

their hinges; the candles flickered and guttered down, and made long

winding-sheets; the cheery deep-red curtains flapped and fluttered idly

in the wind; even the stout Dutch kegs, overthrown and lying empty in

dark corners, seemed the mere husks of good fellows whose jollity had

departed, and who could kindle with a friendly glow no more. John saw

this desolation, and yet saw it not. He was perfectly contented to sit

there, staring at it, and felt no more indignation or discomfort in his

bonds than if they had been robes of honour. So far as he was personally

concerned, old Time lay snoring, and the world stood still.

Save for the dripping from the barrels, the rustling of such light

fragments of destruction as the wind affected, and the dull creaking of

the open doors, all was profoundly quiet: indeed, these sounds, like

the ticking of the death-watch in the night, only made the silence they

invaded deeper and more apparent. But quiet or noisy, it was all one

to John. If a train of heavy artillery could have come up and commenced

ball practice outside the window, it would have been all the same to

him. He was a long way beyond surprise. A ghost couldn't have overtaken

him.

By and by he heard a footstep--a hurried, and yet cautious

footstep--coming on towards the house. It stopped, advanced again,

then seemed to go quite round it. Having done that, it came beneath the

window, and a head looked in.

It was strongly relieved against the darkness outside by the glare of

the guttering candles. A pale, worn, withered face; the eyes--but that

was owing to its gaunt condition--unnaturally large and bright; the

hair, a grizzled black. It gave a searching glance all round the room,

and a deep voice said:

'Are you alone in this house?'

John made no sign, though the question was repeated twice, and he heard

it distinctly. After a moment's pause, the man got in at the window.

John was not at all surprised at this, either. There had been so much

getting in and out of window in the course of the last hour or so, that

he had quite forgotten the door, and seemed to have lived among such

exercises from infancy.

The man wore a large, dark, faded cloak, and a slouched hat; he walked

up close to John, and looked at him. John returned the compliment with

interest.

'How long have you been sitting thus?' said the man.

John considered, but nothing came of it.

'Which way have the party gone?'

Some wandering speculations relative to the fashion of the stranger's

boots, got into Mr Willet's mind by some accident or other, but they got

out again in a hurry, and left him in his former state.

'You would do well to speak,' said the man; 'you may keep a whole skin,

though you have nothing else left that can be hurt. Which way have the

party gone?'

'That!' said John, finding his voice all at once, and nodding with

perfect good faith--he couldn't point; he was so tightly bound--in

exactly the opposite direction to the right one.

'You lie!' said the man angrily, and with a threatening gesture. 'I came

that way. You would betray me.'

It was so evident that John's imperturbability was not assumed, but was

the result of the late proceedings under his roof, that the man stayed

his hand in the very act of striking him, and turned away.

John looked after him without so much as a twitch in a single nerve

of his face. He seized a glass, and holding it under one of the little

casks until a few drops were collected, drank them greedily off; then

throwing it down upon the floor impatiently, he took the vessel in his

hands and drained it into his throat. Some scraps of bread and meat were

scattered about, and on these he fell next; eating them with voracity,

and pausing every now and then to listen for some fancied noise outside.

When he had refreshed himself in this manner with violent haste, and

raised another barrel to his lips, he pulled his hat upon his brow as

though he were about to leave the house, and turned to John.

'Where are your servants?'

Mr Willet indistinctly remembered to have heard the rioters calling to

them to throw the key of the room in which they were, out of window, for

their keeping. He therefore replied, 'Locked up.'

'Well for them if they remain quiet, and well for you if you do the

like,' said the man. 'Now show me the way the party went.'

This time Mr Willet indicated it correctly. The man was hurrying to the

door, when suddenly there came towards them on the wind, the loud

and rapid tolling of an alarm-bell, and then a bright and vivid glare

streamed up, which illumined, not only the whole chamber, but all the

country.

It was not the sudden change from darkness to this dreadful light, it

was not the sound of distant shrieks and shouts of triumph, it was not

this dread invasion of the serenity and peace of night, that drove the

man back as though a thunderbolt had struck him. It was the Bell. If the

ghastliest shape the human mind has ever pictured in its wildest dreams

had risen up before him, he could not have staggered backward from its

touch, as he did from the first sound of that loud iron voice. With eyes

that started from his head, his limbs convulsed, his face most horrible

to see, he raised one arm high up into the air, and holding something

visionary back and down, with his other hand, drove at it as though

he held a knife and stabbed it to the heart. He clutched his hair,

and stopped his ears, and travelled madly round and round; then gave a

frightful cry, and with it rushed away: still, still, the Bell tolled on

and seemed to follow him--louder and louder, hotter and hotter yet.

The glare grew brighter, the roar of voices deeper; the crash of heavy

bodies falling, shook the air; bright streams of sparks rose up into the

sky; but louder than them all--rising faster far, to Heaven--a million

times more fierce and furious--pouring forth dreadful secrets after its

long silence--speaking the language of the dead--the Bell--the Bell!

What hunt of spectres could surpass that dread pursuit and flight! Had

there been a legion of them on his track, he could have better borne it.

They would have had a beginning and an end, but here all space was full.

The one pursuing voice was everywhere: it sounded in the earth, the air;

shook the long grass, and howled among the trembling trees. The

echoes caught it up, the owls hooted as it flew upon the breeze, the

nightingale was silent and hid herself among the thickest boughs:

it seemed to goad and urge the angry fire, and lash it into madness;

everything was steeped in one prevailing red; the glow was everywhere;

nature was drenched in blood: still the remorseless crying of that awful

voice--the Bell, the Bell!

It ceased; but not in his ears. The knell was at his heart. No work of

man had ever voice like that which sounded there, and warned him that it

cried unceasingly to Heaven. Who could hear that hell, and not know what

it said! There was murder in its every note--cruel, relentless, savage

murder--the murder of a confiding man, by one who held his every trust.

Its ringing summoned phantoms from their graves. What face was that,

in which a friendly smile changed to a look of half incredulous horror,

which stiffened for a moment into one of pain, then changed again into

an imploring glance at Heaven, and so fell idly down with upturned

eyes, like the dead stags' he had often peeped at when a little child:

shrinking and shuddering--there was a dreadful thing to think of

now!--and clinging to an apron as he looked! He sank upon the ground,

and grovelling down as if he would dig himself a place to hide in,

covered his face and ears: but no, no, no,--a hundred walls and roofs of

brass would not shut out that bell, for in it spoke the wrathful voice

of God, and from that voice, the whole wide universe could not afford a

refuge!

While he rushed up and down, not knowing where to turn, and while he

lay crouching there, the work went briskly on indeed. When they left the

Maypole, the rioters formed into a solid body, and advanced at a quick

pace towards the Warren. Rumour of their approach having gone before,

they found the garden-doors fast closed, the windows made secure, and

the house profoundly dark: not a light being visible in any portion of

the building. After some fruitless ringing at the bells, and beating

at the iron gates, they drew off a few paces to reconnoitre, and confer

upon the course it would be best to take.

Very little conference was needed, when all were bent upon one desperate

purpose, infuriated with liquor, and flushed with successful riot.

The word being given to surround the house, some climbed the gates, or

dropped into the shallow trench and scaled the garden wall, while others

pulled down the solid iron fence, and while they made a breach to

enter by, made deadly weapons of the bars. The house being completely

encircled, a small number of men were despatched to break open a

tool-shed in the garden; and during their absence on this errand, the

remainder contented themselves with knocking violently at the doors, and

calling to those within, to come down and open them on peril of their

lives.

No answer being returned to this repeated summons, and the detachment

who had been sent away, coming back with an accession of pickaxes,

spades, and hoes, they,--together with those who had such arms already,

or carried (as many did) axes, poles, and crowbars,--struggled into the

foremost rank, ready to beset the doors and windows. They had not at

this time more than a dozen lighted torches among them; but when these

preparations were completed, flaming links were distributed and passed

from hand to hand with such rapidity, that, in a minute's time, at

least two-thirds of the whole roaring mass bore, each man in his hand,

a blazing brand. Whirling these about their heads they raised a loud

shout, and fell to work upon the doors and windows.

Amidst the clattering of heavy blows, the rattling of broken glass, the

cries and execrations of the mob, and all the din and turmoil of the

scene, Hugh and his friends kept together at the turret-door where Mr

Haredale had last admitted him and old John Willet; and spent their

united force on that. It was a strong old oaken door, guarded by good

bolts and a heavy bar, but it soon went crashing in upon the narrow

stairs behind, and made, as it were, a platform to facilitate their

tearing up into the rooms above. Almost at the same moment, a dozen

other points were forced, and at every one the crowd poured in like

water.

A few armed servant-men were posted in the hall, and when the rioters

forced an entrance there, they fired some half-a-dozen shots. But these

taking no effect, and the concourse coming on like an army of devils,

they only thought of consulting their own safety, and retreated, echoing

their assailants' cries, and hoping in the confusion to be taken

for rioters themselves; in which stratagem they succeeded, with the

exception of one old man who was never heard of again, and was said

to have had his brains beaten out with an iron bar (one of his fellows

reported that he had seen the old man fall), and to have been afterwards

burnt in the flames.

The besiegers being now in complete possession of the house, spread

themselves over it from garret to cellar, and plied their demon labours

fiercely. While some small parties kindled bonfires underneath the

windows, others broke up the furniture and cast the fragments down

to feed the flames below; where the apertures in the wall (windows no

longer) were large enough, they threw out tables, chests of drawers,

beds, mirrors, pictures, and flung them whole into the fire; while

every fresh addition to the blazing masses was received with shouts,

and howls, and yells, which added new and dismal terrors to the

conflagration. Those who had axes and had spent their fury on the

movables, chopped and tore down the doors and window frames, broke up

the flooring, hewed away the rafters, and buried men who lingered in the

upper rooms, in heaps of ruins. Some searched the drawers, the chests,

the boxes, writing-desks, and closets, for jewels, plate, and money;

while others, less mindful of gain and more mad for destruction, cast

their whole contents into the courtyard without examination, and called

to those below, to heap them on the blaze. Men who had been into the

cellars, and had staved the casks, rushed to and fro stark mad, setting

fire to all they saw--often to the dresses of their own friends--and

kindling the building in so many parts that some had no time for

escape, and were seen, with drooping hands and blackened faces, hanging

senseless on the window-sills to which they had crawled, until they were

sucked and drawn into the burning gulf. The more the fire crackled and

raged, the wilder and more cruel the men grew; as though moving in that

element they became fiends, and changed their earthly nature for the

qualities that give delight in hell.

The burning pile, revealing rooms and passages red hot, through gaps

made in the crumbling walls; the tributary fires that licked the outer

bricks and stones, with their long forked tongues, and ran up to meet

the glowing mass within; the shining of the flames upon the villains who

looked on and fed them; the roaring of the angry blaze, so bright and

high that it seemed in its rapacity to have swallowed up the very smoke;

the living flakes the wind bore rapidly away and hurried on with, like

a storm of fiery snow; the noiseless breaking of great beams of wood,

which fell like feathers on the heap of ashes, and crumbled in the very

act to sparks and powder; the lurid tinge that overspread the sky,

and the darkness, very deep by contrast, which prevailed around; the

exposure to the coarse, common gaze, of every little nook which usages

of home had made a sacred place, and the destruction by rude hands of

every little household favourite which old associations made a dear

and precious thing: all this taking place--not among pitying looks and

friendly murmurs of compassion, but brutal shouts and exultations,

which seemed to make the very rats who stood by the old house too long,

creatures with some claim upon the pity and regard of those its roof had

sheltered:--combined to form a scene never to be forgotten by those who

saw it and were not actors in the work, so long as life endured.

And who were they? The alarm-bell rang--and it was pulled by no faint or

hesitating hands--for a long time; but not a soul was seen. Some of the

insurgents said that when it ceased, they heard the shrieks of women,

and saw some garments fluttering in the air, as a party of men bore away

no unresisting burdens. No one could say that this was true or false, in

such an uproar; but where was Hugh? Who among them had seen him, since

the forcing of the doors? The cry spread through the body. Where was

Hugh!

'Here!' he hoarsely cried, appearing from the darkness; out of breath,

and blackened with the smoke. 'We have done all we can; the fire is

burning itself out; and even the corners where it hasn't spread, are

nothing but heaps of ruins. Disperse, my lads, while the coast's

clear; get back by different ways; and meet as usual!' With that, he

disappeared again,--contrary to his wont, for he was always first to

advance, and last to go away,--leaving them to follow homewards as they

would.

It was not an easy task to draw off such a throng. If Bedlam gates had

been flung wide open, there would not have issued forth such maniacs as

the frenzy of that night had made. There were men there, who danced and

trampled on the beds of flowers as though they trod down human enemies,

and wrenched them from the stalks, like savages who twisted human necks.

There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered

them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep

unseemly burns. There were men who rushed up to the fire, and paddled

in it with their hands as if in water; and others who were restrained by

force from plunging in, to gratify their deadly longing. On the skull of

one drunken lad--not twenty, by his looks--who lay upon the ground with

a bottle to his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a

shower of liquid fire, white hot; melting his head like wax. When the

scattered parties were collected, men--living yet, but singed as with

hot irons--were plucked out of the cellars, and carried off upon the

shoulders of others, who strove to wake them as they went along, with

ribald jokes, and left them, dead, in the passages of hospitals. But of

all the howling throng not one learnt mercy from, or sickened at, these

sights; nor was the fierce, besotted, senseless rage of one man glutted.

Slowly, and in small clusters, with hoarse hurrahs and repetitions

of their usual cry, the assembly dropped away. The last few red-eyed

stragglers reeled after those who had gone before; the distant noise of

men calling to each other, and whistling for others whom they missed,

grew fainter and fainter; at length even these sounds died away, and

silence reigned alone.

Silence indeed! The glare of the flames had sunk into a fitful, flashing

light; and the gentle stars, invisible till now, looked down upon the

blackening heap. A dull smoke hung upon the ruin, as though to hide it

from those eyes of Heaven; and the wind forbore to move it. Bare walls,

roof open to the sky--chambers, where the beloved dead had, many and

many a fair day, risen to new life and energy; where so many dear ones

had been sad and merry; which were connected with so many thoughts and

hopes, regrets and changes--all gone. Nothing left but a dull and dreary

blank--a smouldering heap of dust and ashes--the silence and solitude of

utter desolation.

Chapter 56

The Maypole cronies, little dreaming of the change so soon to come upon

their favourite haunt, struck through the Forest path upon their way to

London; and avoiding the main road, which was hot and dusty, kept to the

by-paths and the fields. As they drew nearer to their destination, they

began to make inquiries of the people whom they passed, concerning the

riots, and the truth or falsehood of the stories they had heard. The

answers went far beyond any intelligence that had spread to quiet

Chigwell. One man told them that that afternoon the Guards, conveying to

Newgate some rioters who had been re-examined, had been set upon by the

mob and compelled to retreat; another, that the houses of two witnesses

near Clare Market were about to be pulled down when he came away;

another, that Sir George Saville's house in Leicester Fields was to be

burned that night, and that it would go hard with Sir George if he fell

into the people's hands, as it was he who had brought in the Catholic

bill. All accounts agreed that the mob were out, in stronger numbers

and more numerous parties than had yet appeared; that the streets were

unsafe; that no man's house or life was worth an hour's purchase; that

the public consternation was increasing every moment; and that many

families had already fled the city. One fellow who wore the popular

colour, damned them for not having cockades in their hats, and bade them

set a good watch to-morrow night upon their prison doors, for the locks

would have a straining; another asked if they were fire-proof, that

they walked abroad without the distinguishing mark of all good and true

men;--and a third who rode on horseback, and was quite alone, ordered

them to throw each man a shilling, in his hat, towards the support of

the rioters. Although they were afraid to refuse compliance with this

demand, and were much alarmed by these reports, they agreed, having come

so far, to go forward, and see the real state of things with their own

eyes. So they pushed on quicker, as men do who are excited by portentous

news; and ruminating on what they had heard, spoke little to each other.

It was now night, and as they came nearer to the city they had dismal

confirmation of this intelligence in three great fires, all close

together, which burnt fiercely and were gloomily reflected in the sky.

Arriving in the immediate suburbs, they found that almost every house

had chalked upon its door in large characters 'No Popery,' that the

shops were shut, and that alarm and anxiety were depicted in every face

they passed.

Noting these things with a degree of apprehension which neither of the

three cared to impart, in its full extent, to his companions, they

came to a turnpike-gate, which was shut. They were passing through the

turnstile on the path, when a horseman rode up from London at a hard

gallop, and called to the toll-keeper in a voice of great agitation, to

open quickly in the name of God.

The adjuration was so earnest and vehement, that the man, with a lantern

in his hand, came running out--toll-keeper though he was--and was about

to throw the gate open, when happening to look behind him, he exclaimed,

'Good Heaven, what's that! Another fire!'

At this, the three turned their heads, and saw in the distance--straight

in the direction whence they had come--a broad sheet of flame, casting

a threatening light upon the clouds, which glimmered as though the

conflagration were behind them, and showed like a wrathful sunset.

'My mind misgives me,' said the horseman, 'or I know from what far

building those flames come. Don't stand aghast, my good fellow. Open the

gate!'

'Sir,' cried the man, laying his hand upon his horse's bridle as he let

him through: 'I know you now, sir; be advised by me; do not go on. I saw

them pass, and know what kind of men they are. You will be murdered.'

'So be it!' said the horseman, looking intently towards the fire, and

not at him who spoke.

'But sir--sir,' cried the man, grasping at his rein more tightly yet,

'if you do go on, wear the blue riband. Here, sir,' he added, taking one

from his own hat, 'it's necessity, not choice, that makes me wear it;

it's love of life and home, sir. Wear it for this one night, sir; only

for this one night.'

'Do!' cried the three friends, pressing round his horse. 'Mr

Haredale--worthy sir--good gentleman--pray be persuaded.'

'Who's that?' cried Mr Haredale, stooping down to look. 'Did I hear

Daisy's voice?'

'You did, sir,' cried the little man. 'Do be persuaded, sir. This

gentleman says very true. Your life may hang upon it.'

'Are you,' said Mr Haredale abruptly, 'afraid to come with me?'

'I, sir?--N-n-no.'

'Put that riband in your hat. If we meet the rioters, swear that I took

you prisoner for wearing it. I will tell them so with my own lips; for

as I hope for mercy when I die, I will take no quarter from them, nor

shall they have quarter from me, if we come hand to hand to-night.

Up here--behind me--quick! Clasp me tight round the body, and fear

nothing.'

In an instant they were riding away, at full gallop, in a dense cloud of

dust, and speeding on, like hunters in a dream.

It was well the good horse knew the road he traversed, for never

once--no, never once in all the journey--did Mr Haredale cast his eyes

upon the ground, or turn them, for an instant, from the light towards

which they sped so madly. Once he said in a low voice, 'It is my house,'

but that was the only time he spoke. When they came to dark and doubtful

places, he never forgot to put his hand upon the little man to hold him

more securely in his seat, but he kept his head erect and his eyes fixed

on the fire, then, and always.

The road was dangerous enough, for they went the nearest

way--headlong--far from the highway--by lonely lanes and paths, where

waggon-wheels had worn deep ruts; where hedge and ditch hemmed in

the narrow strip of ground; and tall trees, arching overhead, made it

profoundly dark. But on, on, on, with neither stop nor stumble, till

they reached the Maypole door, and could plainly see that the fire began

to fade, as if for want of fuel.

'Down--for one moment--for but one moment,' said Mr Haredale, helping

Daisy to the ground, and following himself. 'Willet--Willet--where are

my niece and servants--Willet!'

Crying to him distractedly, he rushed into the bar.--The landlord bound

and fastened to his chair; the place dismantled, stripped, and pulled

about his ears;--nobody could have taken shelter here.

He was a strong man, accustomed to restrain himself, and suppress his

strong emotions; but this preparation for what was to follow--though he

had seen that fire burning, and knew that his house must be razed to the

ground--was more than he could bear. He covered his face with his hands

for a moment, and turned away his head.

'Johnny, Johnny,' said Solomon--and the simple-hearted fellow cried

outright, and wrung his hands--'Oh dear old Johnny, here's a change!

That the Maypole bar should come to this, and we should live to see

it! The old Warren too, Johnny--Mr Haredale--oh, Johnny, what a piteous

sight this is!'

Pointing to Mr Haredale as he said these words, little Solomon Daisy put

his elbows on the back of Mr Willet's chair, and fairly blubbered on his

shoulder.

While Solomon was speaking, old John sat, mute as a stock-fish, staring

at him with an unearthly glare, and displaying, by every possible

symptom, entire and complete unconsciousness. But when Solomon was

silent again, John followed with his great round eyes the direction

of his looks, and did appear to have some dawning distant notion that

somebody had come to see him.

'You know us, don't you, Johnny?' said the little clerk, rapping himself

on the breast. 'Daisy, you know--Chigwell Church--bell-ringer--little

desk on Sundays--eh, Johnny?'

Mr Willet reflected for a few moments, and then muttered, as it were

mechanically: 'Let us sing to the praise and glory of--'

'Yes, to be sure,' cried the little man, hastily; 'that's it--that's me,

Johnny. You're all right now, an't you? Say you're all right, Johnny.'

'All right?' pondered Mr Willet, as if that were a matter entirely

between himself and his conscience. 'All right? Ah!'

'They haven't been misusing you with sticks, or pokers, or any other

blunt instruments--have they, Johnny?' asked Solomon, with a very

anxious glance at Mr Willet's head. 'They didn't beat you, did they?'

John knitted his brow; looked downwards, as if he were mentally engaged

in some arithmetical calculation; then upwards, as if the total would

not come at his call; then at Solomon Daisy, from his eyebrow to his

shoe-buckle; then very slowly round the bar. And then a great, round,

leaden-looking, and not at all transparent tear, came rolling out of

each eye, and he said, as he shook his head:

'If they'd only had the goodness to murder me, I'd have thanked 'em

kindly.'

'No, no, no, don't say that, Johnny,' whimpered his little friend. 'It's

very, very bad, but not quite so bad as that. No, no!'

'Look'ee here, sir!' cried John, turning his rueful eyes on Mr Haredale,

who had dropped on one knee, and was hastily beginning to untie

his bonds. 'Look'ee here, sir! The very Maypole--the old dumb

Maypole--stares in at the winder, as if it said, "John Willet, John

Willet, let's go and pitch ourselves in the nighest pool of water as is

deep enough to hold us; for our day is over!"'

'Don't, Johnny, don't,' cried his friend: no less affected with this

mournful effort of Mr Willet's imagination, than by the sepulchral tone

in which he had spoken of the Maypole. 'Please don't, Johnny!'

'Your loss is great, and your misfortune a heavy one,' said Mr Haredale,

looking restlessly towards the door: 'and this is not a time to comfort

you. If it were, I am in no condition to do so. Before I leave you, tell

me one thing, and try to tell me plainly, I implore you. Have you seen,

or heard of Emma?'

'No!' said Mr Willet.

'Nor any one but these bloodhounds?'

'No!'

'They rode away, I trust in Heaven, before these dreadful scenes began,'

said Mr Haredale, who, between his agitation, his eagerness to mount

his horse again, and the dexterity with which the cords were tied, had

scarcely yet undone one knot. 'A knife, Daisy!'

'You didn't,' said John, looking about, as though he had lost his

pocket-handkerchief, or some such slight article--'either of you

gentlemen--see a--a coffin anywheres, did you?'

'Willet!' cried Mr Haredale. Solomon dropped the knife, and instantly

becoming limp from head to foot, exclaimed 'Good gracious!'

'--Because,' said John, not at all regarding them, 'a dead man called a

little time ago, on his way yonder. I could have told you what name was

on the plate, if he had brought his coffin with him, and left it behind.

If he didn't, it don't signify.'

His landlord, who had listened to these words with breathless attention,

started that moment to his feet; and, without a word, drew Solomon

Daisy to the door, mounted his horse, took him up behind again, and flew

rather than galloped towards the pile of ruins, which that day's sun

had shone upon, a stately house. Mr Willet stared after them, listened,

looked down upon himself to make quite sure that he was still unbound,

and, without any manifestation of impatience, disappointment, or

surprise, gently relapsed into the condition from which he had so

imperfectly recovered.

Mr Haredale tied his horse to the trunk of a tree, and grasping his

companion's arm, stole softly along the footpath, and into what had

been the garden of his house. He stopped for an instant to look upon its

smoking walls, and at the stars that shone through roof and floor upon

the heap of crumbling ashes. Solomon glanced timidly in his face, but

his lips were tightly pressed together, a resolute and stern expression

sat upon his brow, and not a tear, a look, or gesture indicating grief,

escaped him.

He drew his sword; felt for a moment in his breast, as though he carried

other arms about him; then grasping Solomon by the wrist again, went

with a cautious step all round the house. He looked into every doorway

and gap in the wall; retraced his steps at every rustling of the air

among the leaves; and searched in every shadowed nook with outstretched

hands. Thus they made the circuit of the building: but they returned

to the spot from which they had set out, without encountering any human

being, or finding the least trace of any concealed straggler.

After a short pause, Mr Haredale shouted twice or thrice. Then cried

aloud, 'Is there any one in hiding here, who knows my voice! There is

nothing to fear now. If any of my people are near, I entreat them

to answer!' He called them all by name; his voice was echoed in many

mournful tones; then all was silent as before.

They were standing near the foot of the turret, where the alarm-bell

hung. The fire had raged there, and the floors had been sawn, and hewn,

and beaten down, besides. It was open to the night; but a part of the

staircase still remained, winding upward from a great mound of dust and

cinders. Fragments of the jagged and broken steps offered an insecure

and giddy footing here and there, and then were lost again, behind

protruding angles of the wall, or in the deep shadows cast upon it by

other portions of the ruin; for by this time the moon had risen, and

shone brightly.

As they stood here, listening to the echoes as they died away, and

hoping in vain to hear a voice they knew, some of the ashes in this

turret slipped and rolled down. Startled by the least noise in that

melancholy place, Solomon looked up in his companion's face, and saw

that he had turned towards the spot, and that he watched and listened

keenly.

He covered the little man's mouth with his hand, and looked again.

Instantly, with kindling eyes, he bade him on his life keep still, and

neither speak nor move. Then holding his breath, and stooping down,

he stole into the turret, with his drawn sword in his hand, and

disappeared.

Terrified to be left there by himself, under such desolate

circumstances, and after all he had seen and heard that night, Solomon

would have followed, but there had been something in Mr Haredale's

manner and his look, the recollection of which held him spellbound. He

stood rooted to the spot; and scarcely venturing to breathe, looked up

with mingled fear and wonder.

Again the ashes slipped and rolled--very, very softly--again--and then

again, as though they crumbled underneath the tread of a stealthy foot.

And now a figure was dimly visible; climbing very softly; and often

stopping to look down; now it pursued its difficult way; and now it was

hidden from the view again.

It emerged once more, into the shadowy and uncertain light--higher now,

but not much, for the way was steep and toilsome, and its progress very

slow. What phantom of the brain did he pursue; and why did he look down

so constantly? He knew he was alone. Surely his mind was not affected by

that night's loss and agony. He was not about to throw himself headlong

from the summit of the tottering wall. Solomon turned sick, and clasped

his hands. His limbs trembled beneath him, and a cold sweat broke out

upon his pallid face.

If he complied with Mr Haredale's last injunction now, it was because he

had not the power to speak or move. He strained his gaze, and fixed it

on a patch of moonlight, into which, if he continued to ascend, he must

soon emerge. When he appeared there, he would try to call to him.

Again the ashes slipped and crumbled; some stones rolled down, and fell

with a dull, heavy sound upon the ground below. He kept his eyes upon

the piece of moonlight. The figure was coming on, for its shadow was

already thrown upon the wall. Now it appeared--and now looked round at

him--and now--

The horror-stricken clerk uttered a scream that pierced the air, and

cried, 'The ghost! The ghost!'

Long before the echo of his cry had died away, another form rushed out

into the light, flung itself upon the foremost one, knelt down upon its

breast, and clutched its throat with both hands.

'Villain!' cried Mr Haredale, in a terrible voice--for it was he. 'Dead

and buried, as all men supposed through your infernal arts, but reserved

by Heaven for this--at last--at last I have you. You, whose hands are

red with my brother's blood, and that of his faithful servant, shed

to conceal your own atrocious guilt--You, Rudge, double murderer and

monster, I arrest you in the name of God, who has delivered you into my

hands. No. Though you had the strength of twenty men,' he added, as the

murderer writhed and struggled, you could not escape me or loosen my

grasp to-night!'

Chapter 57

Barnaby, armed as we have seen, continued to pace up and down before

the stable-door; glad to be alone again, and heartily rejoicing in the

unaccustomed silence and tranquillity. After the whirl of noise and riot

in which the last two days had been passed, the pleasures of solitude

and peace were enhanced a thousandfold. He felt quite happy; and as he

leaned upon his staff and mused, a bright smile overspread his face, and

none but cheerful visions floated into his brain.

Had he no thoughts of her, whose sole delight he was, and whom he had

unconsciously plunged in such bitter sorrow and such deep affliction?

Oh, yes. She was at the heart of all his cheerful hopes and proud

reflections. It was she whom all this honour and distinction were to

gladden; the joy and profit were for her. What delight it gave her

to hear of the bravery of her poor boy! Ah! He would have known that,

without Hugh's telling him. And what a precious thing it was to know she

lived so happily, and heard with so much pride (he pictured to himself

her look when they told her) that he was in such high esteem: bold among

the boldest, and trusted before them all! And when these frays were

over, and the good lord had conquered his enemies, and they were all at

peace again, and he and she were rich, what happiness they would have

in talking of these troubled times when he was a great soldier: and when

they sat alone together in the tranquil twilight, and she had no longer

reason to be anxious for the morrow, what pleasure would he have in the

reflection that this was his doing--his--poor foolish Barnaby's; and

in patting her on the cheek, and saying with a merry laugh, 'Am I silly

now, mother--am I silly now?'

With a lighter heart and step, and eyes the brighter for the happy tear

that dimmed them for a moment, Barnaby resumed his walk; and singing

gaily to himself, kept guard upon his quiet post.

His comrade Grip, the partner of his watch, though fond of basking in

the sunshine, preferred to-day to walk about the stable; having a great

deal to do in the way of scattering the straw, hiding under it such

small articles as had been casually left about, and haunting Hugh's

bed, to which he seemed to have taken a particular attachment. Sometimes

Barnaby looked in and called him, and then he came hopping out; but

he merely did this as a concession to his master's weakness, and soon

returned again to his own grave pursuits: peering into the straw with

his bill, and rapidly covering up the place, as if, Midas-like, he were

whispering secrets to the earth and burying them; constantly busying

himself upon the sly; and affecting, whenever Barnaby came past, to

look up in the clouds and have nothing whatever on his mind: in short,

conducting himself, in many respects, in a more than usually thoughtful,

deep, and mysterious manner.

As the day crept on, Barnaby, who had no directions forbidding him to

eat and drink upon his post, but had been, on the contrary, supplied

with a bottle of beer and a basket of provisions, determined to break

his fast, which he had not done since morning. To this end, he sat down

on the ground before the door, and putting his staff across his knees in

case of alarm or surprise, summoned Grip to dinner.

This call, the bird obeyed with great alacrity; crying, as he sidled

up to his master, 'I'm a devil, I'm a Polly, I'm a kettle, I'm a

Protestant, No Popery!' Having learnt this latter sentiment from the

gentry among whom he had lived of late, he delivered it with uncommon

emphasis.

'Well said, Grip!' cried his master, as he fed him with the daintiest

bits. 'Well said, old boy!'

'Never say die, bow wow wow, keep up your spirits, Grip Grip Grip,

Holloa! We'll all have tea, I'm a Protestant kettle, No Popery!' cried

the raven.

'Gordon for ever, Grip!' cried Barnaby.

The raven, placing his head upon the ground, looked at his master

sideways, as though he would have said, 'Say that again!' Perfectly

understanding his desire, Barnaby repeated the phrase a great many

times. The bird listened with profound attention; sometimes repeating

the popular cry in a low voice, as if to compare the two, and try if it

would at all help him to this new accomplishment; sometimes flapping

his wings, or barking; and sometimes in a kind of desperation drawing a

multitude of corks, with extraordinary viciousness.

Barnaby was so intent upon his favourite, that he was not at first

aware of the approach of two persons on horseback, who were riding at a

foot-pace, and coming straight towards his post. When he perceived them,

however, which he did when they were within some fifty yards of him, he

jumped hastily up, and ordering Grip within doors, stood with both hands

on his staff, waiting until he should know whether they were friends or

foes.

He had hardly done so, when he observed that those who advanced were a

gentleman and his servant; almost at the same moment he recognised Lord

George Gordon, before whom he stood uncovered, with his eyes turned

towards the ground.

'Good day!' said Lord George, not reining in his horse until he was

close beside him. 'Well!'

'All quiet, sir, all safe!' cried Barnaby. 'The rest are away--they went

by that path--that one. A grand party!'

'Ay?' said Lord George, looking thoughtfully at him. 'And you?'

'Oh! They left me here to watch--to mount guard--to keep everything

secure till they come back. I'll do it, sir, for your sake. You're a

good gentleman; a kind gentleman--ay, you are. There are many against

you, but we'll be a match for them, never fear!'

'What's that?' said Lord George--pointing to the raven who was peeping

out of the stable-door--but still looking thoughtfully, and in some

perplexity, it seemed, at Barnaby.

'Why, don't you know!' retorted Barnaby, with a wondering laugh. 'Not

know what HE is! A bird, to be sure. My bird--my friend--Grip.'

'A devil, a kettle, a Grip, a Polly, a Protestant, no Popery!' cried the

raven.

'Though, indeed,' added Barnaby, laying his hand upon the neck of Lord

George's horse, and speaking softly: 'you had good reason to ask me what

he is, for sometimes it puzzles me--and I am used to him--to think

he's only a bird. He's my brother, Grip is--always with me--always

talking--always merry--eh, Grip?'

The raven answered by an affectionate croak, and hopping on his master's

arm, which he held downward for that purpose, submitted with an air of

perfect indifference to be fondled, and turned his restless, curious

eye, now upon Lord George, and now upon his man.

Lord George, biting his nails in a discomfited manner, regarded Barnaby

for some time in silence; then beckoning to his servant, said:

'Come hither, John.'

John Grueby touched his hat, and came.

'Have you ever seen this young man before?' his master asked in a low

voice.

'Twice, my lord,' said John. 'I saw him in the crowd last night and

Saturday.'

'Did--did it seem to you that his manner was at all wild or strange?'

Lord George demanded, faltering.

'Mad,' said John, with emphatic brevity.

'And why do you think him mad, sir?' said his master, speaking in a

peevish tone. 'Don't use that word too freely. Why do you think him

mad?'

'My lord,' John Grueby answered, 'look at his dress, look at his eyes,

look at his restless way, hear him cry "No Popery!" Mad, my lord.'

'So because one man dresses unlike another,' returned his angry master,

glancing at himself; 'and happens to differ from other men in his

carriage and manner, and to advocate a great cause which the corrupt and

irreligious desert, he is to be accounted mad, is he?'

'Stark, staring, raving, roaring mad, my lord,' returned the unmoved

John.

'Do you say this to my face?' cried his master, turning sharply upon

him.

'To any man, my lord, who asks me,' answered John.

'Mr Gashford, I find, was right,' said Lord George; 'I thought him

prejudiced, though I ought to have known a man like him better than to

have supposed it possible!'

'I shall never have Mr Gashford's good word, my lord,' replied John,

touching his hat respectfully, 'and I don't covet it.'

'You are an ill-conditioned, most ungrateful fellow,' said Lord George:

'a spy, for anything I know. Mr Gashford is perfectly correct, as I

might have felt convinced he was. I have done wrong to retain you in

my service. It is a tacit insult to him as my choice and confidential

friend to do so, remembering the cause you sided with, on the day he was

maligned at Westminster. You will leave me to-night--nay, as soon as we

reach home. The sooner the better.'

'If it comes to that, I say so too, my lord. Let Mr Gashford have his

will. As to my being a spy, my lord, you know me better than to believe

it, I am sure. I don't know much about causes. My cause is the cause of

one man against two hundred; and I hope it always will be.'

'You have said quite enough,' returned Lord George, motioning him to go

back. 'I desire to hear no more.'

'If you'll let me have another word, my lord,' returned John Grueby,

'I'd give this silly fellow a caution not to stay here by himself. The

proclamation is in a good many hands already, and it's well known that

he was concerned in the business it relates to. He had better get to a

place of safety if he can, poor creature.'

'You hear what this man says?' cried Lord George, addressing Barnaby,

who had looked on and wondered while this dialogue passed. 'He thinks

you may be afraid to remain upon your post, and are kept here perhaps

against your will. What do you say?'

'I think, young man,' said John, in explanation, 'that the soldiers may

turn out and take you; and that if they do, you will certainly be hung

by the neck till you're dead--dead--dead. And I think you had better go

from here, as fast as you can. That's what I think.'

'He's a coward, Grip, a coward!' cried Barnaby, putting the raven on the

ground, and shouldering his staff. 'Let them come! Gordon for ever! Let

them come!'

'Ay!' said Lord George, 'let them! Let us see who will venture to attack

a power like ours; the solemn league of a whole people. THIS a madman!

You have said well, very well. I am proud to be the leader of such men

as you.'

Barnaby's heart swelled within his bosom as he heard these words. He took

Lord George's hand and carried it to his lips; patted his horse's crest,

as if the affection and admiration he had conceived for the man extended

to the animal he rode; then unfurling his flag, and proudly waving it,

resumed his pacing up and down.

Lord George, with a kindling eye and glowing cheek, took off his hat,

and flourishing it above his head, bade him exultingly Farewell!--then

cantered off at a brisk pace; after glancing angrily round to see that

his servant followed. Honest John set spurs to his horse and rode after

his master, but not before he had again warned Barnaby to retreat,

with many significant gestures, which indeed he continued to make, and

Barnaby to resist, until the windings of the road concealed them from

each other's view.

Left to himself again with a still higher sense of the importance of

his post, and stimulated to enthusiasm by the special notice and

encouragement of his leader, Barnaby walked to and fro in a delicious

trance rather than as a waking man. The sunshine which prevailed around

was in his mind. He had but one desire ungratified. If she could only

see him now!

The day wore on; its heat was gently giving place to the cool of

evening; a light wind sprung up, fanning his long hair, and making

the banner rustle pleasantly above his head. There was a freedom and

freshness in the sound and in the time, which chimed exactly with his

mood. He was happier than ever.

He was leaning on his staff looking towards the declining sun, and

reflecting with a smile that he stood sentinel at that moment over

buried gold, when two or three figures appeared in the distance, making

towards the house at a rapid pace, and motioning with their hands as

though they urged its inmates to retreat from some approaching danger.

As they drew nearer, they became more earnest in their gestures; and

they were no sooner within hearing, than the foremost among them cried

that the soldiers were coming up.

At these words, Barnaby furled his flag, and tied it round the pole. His

heart beat high while he did so, but he had no more fear or thought of

retreating than the pole itself. The friendly stragglers hurried past

him, after giving him notice of his danger, and quickly passed into the

house, where the utmost confusion immediately prevailed. As those within

hastily closed the windows and the doors, they urged him by looks and

signs to fly without loss of time, and called to him many times to do

so; but he only shook his head indignantly in answer, and stood the

firmer on his post. Finding that he was not to be persuaded, they took

care of themselves; and leaving the place with only one old woman in it,

speedily withdrew.

As yet there had been no symptom of the news having any better

foundation than in the fears of those who brought it, but The Boot had

not been deserted five minutes, when there appeared, coming across the

fields, a body of men who, it was easy to see, by the glitter of their

arms and ornaments in the sun, and by their orderly and regular mode of

advancing--for they came on as one man--were soldiers. In a very little

time, Barnaby knew that they were a strong detachment of the Foot

Guards, having along with them two gentlemen in private clothes, and a

small party of Horse; the latter brought up the rear, and were not in

number more than six or eight.

They advanced steadily; neither quickening their pace as they came

nearer, nor raising any cry, nor showing the least emotion or anxiety.

Though this was a matter of course in the case of regular troops,

even to Barnaby, there was something particularly impressive and

disconcerting in it to one accustomed to the noise and tumult of an

undisciplined mob. For all that, he stood his ground not a whit the less

resolutely, and looked on undismayed.

Presently, they marched into the yard, and halted. The

commanding-officer despatched a messenger to the horsemen, one of whom

came riding back. Some words passed between them, and they glanced at

Barnaby; who well remembered the man he had unhorsed at Westminster, and

saw him now before his eyes. The man being speedily dismissed, saluted,

and rode back to his comrades, who were drawn up apart at a short

distance.

The officer then gave the word to prime and load. The heavy ringing of

the musket-stocks upon the ground, and the sharp and rapid rattling of

the ramrods in their barrels, were a kind of relief to Barnaby, deadly

though he knew the purport of such sounds to be. When this was done,

other commands were given, and the soldiers instantaneously formed in

single file all round the house and stables; completely encircling them

in every part, at a distance, perhaps, of some half-dozen yards; at

least that seemed in Barnaby's eyes to be about the space left between

himself and those who confronted him. The horsemen remained drawn up by

themselves as before.

The two gentlemen in private clothes who had kept aloof, now rode

forward, one on either side the officer. The proclamation having been

produced and read by one of them, the officer called on Barnaby to

surrender.

He made no answer, but stepping within the door, before which he had

kept guard, held his pole crosswise to protect it. In the midst of a

profound silence, he was again called upon to yield.

Still he offered no reply. Indeed he had enough to do, to run his eye

backward and forward along the half-dozen men who immediately fronted

him, and settle hurriedly within himself at which of them he would

strike first, when they pressed on him. He caught the eye of one in the

centre, and resolved to hew that fellow down, though he died for it.

Again there was a dead silence, and again the same voice called upon him

to deliver himself up.

Next moment he was back in the stable, dealing blows about him like a

madman. Two of the men lay stretched at his feet: the one he had marked,

dropped first--he had a thought for that, even in the hot blood and

hurry of the struggle. Another blow--another! Down, mastered, wounded in

the breast by a heavy blow from the butt-end of a gun (he saw the weapon

in the act of falling)--breathless--and a prisoner.

An exclamation of surprise from the officer recalled him, in some

degree, to himself. He looked round. Grip, after working in secret all

the afternoon, and with redoubled vigour while everybody's attention was

distracted, had plucked away the straw from Hugh's bed, and turned up

the loose ground with his iron bill. The hole had been recklessly filled

to the brim, and was merely sprinkled with earth. Golden cups, spoons,

candlesticks, coined guineas--all the riches were revealed.

They brought spades and a sack; dug up everything that was hidden there;

and carried away more than two men could lift. They handcuffed him

and bound his arms, searched him, and took away all he had. Nobody

questioned or reproached him, or seemed to have much curiosity about

him. The two men he had stunned, were carried off by their companions in

the same business-like way in which everything else was done. Finally,

he was left under a guard of four soldiers with fixed bayonets, while

the officer directed in person the search of the house and the other

buildings connected with it.

This was soon completed. The soldiers formed again in the yard; he was

marched out, with his guard about him; and ordered to fall in, where a

space was left. The others closed up all round, and so they moved away,

with the prisoner in the centre.

When they came into the streets, he felt he was a sight; and looking up

as they passed quickly along, could see people running to the windows a

little too late, and throwing up the sashes to look after him. Sometimes

he met a staring face beyond the heads about him, or under the arms of

his conductors, or peering down upon him from a waggon-top or coach-box;

but this was all he saw, being surrounded by so many men. The very

noises of the streets seemed muffled and subdued; and the air came stale

and hot upon him, like the sickly breath of an oven.

Tramp, tramp. Tramp, tramp. Heads erect, shoulders square, every man

stepping in exact time--all so orderly and regular--nobody looking at

him--nobody seeming conscious of his presence,--he could hardly believe

he was a Prisoner. But at the word, though only thought, not spoken, he

felt the handcuffs galling his wrists, the cord pressing his arms to

his sides: the loaded guns levelled at his head; and those cold, bright,

sharp, shining points turned towards him: the mere looking down at

which, now that he was bound and helpless, made the warm current of his

life run cold.

Chapter 58

They were not long in reaching the barracks, for the officer who

commanded the party was desirous to avoid rousing the people by the

display of military force in the streets, and was humanely anxious

to give as little opportunity as possible for any attempt at rescue;

knowing that it must lead to bloodshed and loss of life, and that if the

civil authorities by whom he was accompanied, empowered him to order his

men to fire, many innocent persons would probably fall, whom curiosity

or idleness had attracted to the spot. He therefore led the party

briskly on, avoiding with a merciful prudence the more public and

crowded thoroughfares, and pursuing those which he deemed least likely

to be infested by disorderly persons. This wise proceeding not only

enabled them to gain their quarters without any interruption, but

completely baffled a body of rioters who had assembled in one of the

main streets, through which it was considered certain they would pass,

and who remained gathered together for the purpose of releasing the

prisoner from their hands, long after they had deposited him in a place

of security, closed the barrack-gates, and set a double guard at every

entrance for its better protection.

Arrived at this place, poor Barnaby was marched into a stone-floored

room, where there was a very powerful smell of tobacco, a strong

thorough draught of air, and a great wooden bedstead, large enough for a

score of men. Several soldiers in undress were lounging about, or eating

from tin cans; military accoutrements dangled on rows of pegs along the

whitewashed wall; and some half-dozen men lay fast asleep upon their

backs, snoring in concert. After remaining here just long enough to

note these things, he was marched out again, and conveyed across the

parade-ground to another portion of the building.

Perhaps a man never sees so much at a glance as when he is in a

situation of extremity. The chances are a hundred to one, that if

Barnaby had lounged in at the gate to look about him, he would have

lounged out again with a very imperfect idea of the place, and would

have remembered very little about it. But as he was taken handcuffed

across the gravelled area, nothing escaped his notice. The dry, arid

look of the dusty square, and of the bare brick building; the clothes

hanging at some of the windows; and the men in their shirt-sleeves and

braces, lolling with half their bodies out of the others; the green

sun-blinds at the officers' quarters, and the little scanty trees in

front; the drummer-boys practising in a distant courtyard; the men at

drill on the parade; the two soldiers carrying a basket between them,

who winked to each other as he went by, and slily pointed to their

throats; the spruce serjeant who hurried past with a cane in his hand,

and under his arm a clasped book with a vellum cover; the fellows in the

ground-floor rooms, furbishing and brushing up their different articles

of dress, who stopped to look at him, and whose voices as they

spoke together echoed loudly through the empty galleries and

passages;--everything, down to the stand of muskets before the

guard-house, and the drum with a pipe-clayed belt attached, in one

corner, impressed itself upon his observation, as though he had noticed

them in the same place a hundred times, or had been a whole day among

them, in place of one brief hurried minute.

He was taken into a small paved back yard, and there they opened a great

door, plated with iron, and pierced some five feet above the ground with

a few holes to let in air and light. Into this dungeon he was walked

straightway; and having locked him up there, and placed a sentry over

him, they left him to his meditations.

The cell, or black hole, for it had those words painted on the door, was

very dark, and having recently accommodated a drunken deserter, by no

means clean. Barnaby felt his way to some straw at the farther end, and

looking towards the door, tried to accustom himself to the gloom, which,

coming from the bright sunshine out of doors, was not an easy task.

There was a kind of portico or colonnade outside, and this obstructed

even the little light that at the best could have found its way through

the small apertures in the door. The footsteps of the sentinel echoed

monotonously as he paced its stone pavement to and fro (reminding

Barnaby of the watch he had so lately kept himself); and as he passed

and repassed the door, he made the cell for an instant so black by the

interposition of his body, that his going away again seemed like the

appearance of a new ray of light, and was quite a circumstance to look

for.

When the prisoner had sat sometime upon the ground, gazing at the

chinks, and listening to the advancing and receding footsteps of his

guard, the man stood still upon his post. Barnaby, quite unable to

think, or to speculate on what would be done with him, had been lulled

into a kind of doze by his regular pace; but his stopping roused him;

and then he became aware that two men were in conversation under the

colonnade, and very near the door of his cell.

How long they had been talking there, he could not tell, for he had

fallen into an unconsciousness of his real position, and when the

footsteps ceased, was answering aloud some question which seemed to have

been put to him by Hugh in the stable, though of the fancied purport,

either of question or reply, notwithstanding that he awoke with the

latter on his lips, he had no recollection whatever. The first words

that reached his ears, were these:

'Why is he brought here then, if he has to be taken away again so soon?'

'Why where would you have him go! Damme, he's not as safe anywhere as

among the king's troops, is he? What WOULD you do with him? Would you

hand him over to a pack of cowardly civilians, that shake in their

shoes till they wear the soles out, with trembling at the threats of the

ragamuffins he belongs to?'

'That's true enough.'

'True enough!--I'll tell you what. I wish, Tom Green, that I was a

commissioned instead of a non-commissioned officer, and that I had the

command of two companies--only two companies--of my own regiment.

Call me out to stop these riots--give me the needful authority, and

half-a-dozen rounds of ball cartridge--'

'Ay!' said the other voice. 'That's all very well, but they won't give

the needful authority. If the magistrate won't give the word, what's the

officer to do?'

Not very well knowing, as it seemed, how to overcome this difficulty,

the other man contented himself with damning the magistrates.

'With all my heart,' said his friend.

'Where's the use of a magistrate?' returned the other voice. 'What's

a magistrate in this case, but an impertinent, unnecessary,

unconstitutional sort of interference? Here's a proclamation. Here's a

man referred to in that proclamation. Here's proof against him, and a

witness on the spot. Damme! Take him out and shoot him, sir. Who wants a

magistrate?'

'When does he go before Sir John Fielding?' asked the man who had spoken

first.

'To-night at eight o'clock,' returned the other. 'Mark what follows. The

magistrate commits him to Newgate. Our people take him to Newgate. The

rioters pelt our people. Our people retire before the rioters. Stones

are thrown, insults are offered, not a shot's fired. Why? Because of the

magistrates. Damn the magistrates!'

When he had in some degree relieved his mind by cursing the magistrates

in various other forms of speech, the man was silent, save for a low

growling, still having reference to those authorities, which from time

to time escaped him.

Barnaby, who had wit enough to know that this conversation concerned,

and very nearly concerned, himself, remained perfectly quiet until they

ceased to speak, when he groped his way to the door, and peeping through

the air-holes, tried to make out what kind of men they were, to whom he

had been listening.

The one who condemned the civil power in such strong terms, was a

serjeant--engaged just then, as the streaming ribands in his cap

announced, on the recruiting service. He stood leaning sideways against

a pillar nearly opposite the door, and as he growled to himself, drew

figures on the pavement with his cane. The other man had his back

towards the dungeon, and Barnaby could only see his form. To judge from

that, he was a gallant, manly, handsome fellow, but he had lost his left

arm. It had been taken off between the elbow and the shoulder, and his

empty coat-sleeve hung across his breast.

It was probably this circumstance which gave him an interest beyond any

that his companion could boast of, and attracted Barnaby's attention.

There was something soldierly in his bearing, and he wore a jaunty cap

and jacket. Perhaps he had been in the service at one time or other.

If he had, it could not have been very long ago, for he was but a young

fellow now.

'Well, well,' he said thoughtfully; 'let the fault be where it may, it

makes a man sorrowful to come back to old England, and see her in this

condition.'

'I suppose the pigs will join 'em next,' said the serjeant, with

an imprecation on the rioters, 'now that the birds have set 'em the

example.'

'The birds!' repeated Tom Green.

'Ah--birds,' said the serjeant testily; 'that's English, an't it?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'Go to the guard-house, and see. You'll find a bird there, that's got

their cry as pat as any of 'em, and bawls "No Popery," like a man--or

like a devil, as he says he is. I shouldn't wonder. The devil's loose

in London somewhere. Damme if I wouldn't twist his neck round, on the

chance, if I had MY way.'

The young man had taken two or three steps away, as if to go and see

this creature, when he was arrested by the voice of Barnaby.

'It's mine,' he called out, half laughing and half weeping--'my pet,

my friend Grip. Ha ha ha! Don't hurt him, he has done no harm. I taught

him; it's my fault. Let me have him, if you please. He's the only friend

I have left now. He'll not dance, or talk, or whistle for you, I

know; but he will for me, because he knows me and loves me--though you

wouldn't think it--very well. You wouldn't hurt a bird, I'm sure. You're

a brave soldier, sir, and wouldn't harm a woman or a child--no, no, nor

a poor bird, I'm certain.'

This latter adjuration was addressed to the serjeant, whom Barnaby

judged from his red coat to be high in office, and able to seal Grip's

destiny by a word. But that gentleman, in reply, surlily damned him for

a thief and rebel as he was, and with many disinterested imprecations on

his own eyes, liver, blood, and body, assured him that if it rested with

him to decide, he would put a final stopper on the bird, and his master

too.

'You talk boldly to a caged man,' said Barnaby, in anger. 'If I was on

the other side of the door and there were none to part us, you'd change

your note--ay, you may toss your head--you would! Kill the bird--do.

Kill anything you can, and so revenge yourself on those who with their

bare hands untied could do as much to you!'

Having vented his defiance, he flung himself into the furthest corner

of his prison, and muttering, 'Good bye, Grip--good bye, dear old Grip!'

shed tears for the first time since he had been taken captive; and hid

his face in the straw.

He had had some fancy at first, that the one-armed man would help him,

or would give him a kind word in answer. He hardly knew why, but he

hoped and thought so. The young fellow had stopped when he called out,

and checking himself in the very act of turning round, stood listening

to every word he said. Perhaps he built his feeble trust on this;

perhaps on his being young, and having a frank and honest manner.

However that might be, he built on sand. The other went away directly

he had finished speaking, and neither answered him, nor returned. No

matter. They were all against him here: he might have known as much.

Good bye, old Grip, good bye!

After some time, they came and unlocked the door, and called to him to

come out. He rose directly, and complied, for he would not have THEM

think he was subdued or frightened. He walked out like a man, and looked

from face to face.

None of them returned his gaze or seemed to notice it. They marched

him back to the parade by the way they had brought him, and there they

halted, among a body of soldiers, at least twice as numerous as that

which had taken him prisoner in the afternoon. The officer he had seen

before, bade him in a few brief words take notice that if he attempted

to escape, no matter how favourable a chance he might suppose he had,

certain of the men had orders to fire upon him, that moment. They then

closed round him as before, and marched him off again.

In the same unbroken order they arrived at Bow Street, followed and

beset on all sides by a crowd which was continually increasing. Here

he was placed before a blind gentleman, and asked if he wished to say

anything. Not he. What had he got to tell them? After a very little

talking, which he was careless of and quite indifferent to, they told

him he was to go to Newgate, and took him away.

He went out into the street, so surrounded and hemmed in on every side

by soldiers, that he could see nothing; but he knew there was a great

crowd of people, by the murmur; and that they were not friendly to the

soldiers, was soon rendered evident by their yells and hisses. How often

and how eagerly he listened for the voice of Hugh! There was not a voice

he knew among them all. Was Hugh a prisoner too? Was there no hope!

As they came nearer and nearer to the prison, the hootings of the people

grew more violent; stones were thrown; and every now and then, a rush

was made against the soldiers, which they staggered under. One of them,

close before him, smarting under a blow upon the temple, levelled his

musket, but the officer struck it upwards with his sword, and ordered

him on peril of his life to desist. This was the last thing he saw

with any distinctness, for directly afterwards he was tossed about,

and beaten to and fro, as though in a tempestuous sea. But go where

he would, there were the same guards about him. Twice or thrice he was

thrown down, and so were they; but even then, he could not elude their

vigilance for a moment. They were up again, and had closed about him,

before he, with his wrists so tightly bound, could scramble to his feet.

Fenced in, thus, he felt himself hoisted to the top of a low flight of

steps, and then for a moment he caught a glimpse of the fighting in

the crowd, and of a few red coats sprinkled together, here and there,

struggling to rejoin their fellows. Next moment, everything was dark and

gloomy, and he was standing in the prison lobby; the centre of a group

of men.

A smith was speedily in attendance, who riveted upon him a set of heavy

irons. Stumbling on as well as he could, beneath the unusual burden of

these fetters, he was conducted to a strong stone cell, where, fastening

the door with locks, and bolts, and chains, they left him, well secured;

having first, unseen by him, thrust in Grip, who, with his head drooping

and his deep black plumes rough and rumpled, appeared to comprehend and

to partake, his master's fallen fortunes.

Chapter 59

It is necessary at this juncture to return to Hugh, who, having, as we

have seen, called to the rioters to disperse from about the Warren, and

meet again as usual, glided back into the darkness from which he had

emerged, and reappeared no more that night.

He paused in the copse which sheltered him from the observation of his

mad companions, and waited to ascertain whether they drew off at his

bidding, or still lingered and called to him to join them. Some few, he

saw, were indisposed to go away without him, and made towards the spot

where he stood concealed as though they were about to follow in his

footsteps, and urge him to come back; but these men, being in their turn

called to by their friends, and in truth not greatly caring to venture

into the dark parts of the grounds, where they might be easily surprised

and taken, if any of the neighbours or retainers of the family were

watching them from among the trees, soon abandoned the idea, and hastily

assembling such men as they found of their mind at the moment, straggled

off.

When he was satisfied that the great mass of the insurgents were

imitating this example, and that the ground was rapidly clearing, he

plunged into the thickest portion of the little wood; and, crashing the

branches as he went, made straight towards a distant light: guided by

that, and by the sullen glow of the fire behind him.

As he drew nearer and nearer to the twinkling beacon towards which he

bent his course, the red glare of a few torches began to reveal itself,

and the voices of men speaking together in a subdued tone broke the

silence which, save for a distant shouting now and then, already

prevailed. At length he cleared the wood, and, springing across a ditch,

stood in a dark lane, where a small body of ill-looking vagabonds, whom

he had left there some twenty minutes before, waited his coming with

impatience.

They were gathered round an old post-chaise or chariot, driven by one of

themselves, who sat postilion-wise upon the near horse. The blinds were

drawn up, and Mr Tappertit and Dennis kept guard at the two windows. The

former assumed the command of the party, for he challenged Hugh as he

advanced towards them; and when he did so, those who were resting on the

ground about the carriage rose to their feet and clustered round him.

'Well!' said Simon, in a low voice; 'is all right?'

'Right enough,' replied Hugh, in the same tone. 'They're dispersing

now--had begun before I came away.'

'And is the coast clear?'

'Clear enough before our men, I take it,' said Hugh. 'There are not many

who, knowing of their work over yonder, will want to meddle with 'em

to-night.--Who's got some drink here?'

Everybody had some plunder from the cellar; half-a-dozen flasks and

bottles were offered directly. He selected the largest, and putting it

to his mouth, sent the wine gurgling down his throat. Having emptied

it, he threw it down, and stretched out his hand for another, which he

emptied likewise, at a draught. Another was given him, and this he half

emptied too. Reserving what remained to finish with, he asked:

'Have you got anything to eat, any of you? I'm as ravenous as a hungry

wolf. Which of you was in the larder--come?'

'I was, brother,' said Dennis, pulling off his hat, and fumbling in

the crown. 'There's a matter of cold venison pasty somewhere or another

here, if that'll do.'

'Do!' cried Hugh, seating himself on the pathway. 'Bring it out! Quick!

Show a light here, and gather round! Let me sup in state, my lads! Ha ha

ha!'

Entering into his boisterous humour, for they all had drunk deeply, and

were as wild as he, they crowded about him, while two of their number

who had torches, held them up, one on either side of him, that his

banquet might not be despatched in the dark. Mr Dennis, having by this

time succeeded in extricating from his hat a great mass of pasty, which

had been wedged in so tightly that it was not easily got out, put it

before him; and Hugh, having borrowed a notched and jagged knife from

one of the company, fell to work upon it vigorously.

'I should recommend you to swallow a little fire every day, about an

hour afore dinner, brother,' said Dennis, after a pause. 'It seems to

agree with you, and to stimulate your appetite.'

Hugh looked at him, and at the blackened faces by which he was

surrounded, and, stopping for a moment to flourish his knife above his

head, answered with a roar of laughter.

'Keep order, there, will you?' said Simon Tappertit.

'Why, isn't a man allowed to regale himself, noble captain,' retorted

his lieutenant, parting the men who stood between them, with his knife,

that he might see him,--'to regale himself a little bit after such work

as mine? What a hard captain! What a strict captain! What a tyrannical

captain! Ha ha ha!'

'I wish one of you fellers would hold a bottle to his mouth to keep him

quiet,' said Simon, 'unless you want the military to be down upon us.'

'And what if they are down upon us!' retorted Hugh. 'Who cares? Who's

afraid? Let 'em come, I say, let 'em come. The more, the merrier. Give

me bold Barnaby at my side, and we two will settle the military, without

troubling any of you. Barnaby's the man for the military. Barnaby's

health!'

But as the majority of those present were by no means anxious for a

second engagement that night, being already weary and exhausted, they

sided with Mr Tappertit, and pressed him to make haste with his supper,

for they had already delayed too long. Knowing, even in the height of

his frenzy, that they incurred great danger by lingering so near the

scene of the late outrages, Hugh made an end of his meal without more

remonstrance, and rising, stepped up to Mr Tappertit, and smote him on

the back.

'Now then,' he cried, 'I'm ready. There are brave birds inside this

cage, eh? Delicate birds,--tender, loving, little doves. I caged 'em--I

caged 'em--one more peep!'

He thrust the little man aside as he spoke, and mounting on the steps,

which were half let down, pulled down the blind by force, and stared

into the chaise like an ogre into his larder.

'Ha ha ha! and did you scratch, and pinch, and struggle, pretty

mistress?' he cried, as he grasped a little hand that sought in vain to

free itself from his grip: 'you, so bright-eyed, and cherry-lipped, and

daintily made? But I love you better for it, mistress. Ay, I do. You

should stab me and welcome, so that it pleased you, and you had to

cure me afterwards. I love to see you proud and scornful. It makes you

handsomer than ever; and who so handsome as you at any time, my pretty

one!'

'Come!' said Mr Tappertit, who had waited during this speech with

considerable impatience. 'There's enough of that. Come down.'

The little hand seconded this admonition by thrusting Hugh's great head

away with all its force, and drawing up the blind, amidst his noisy

laughter, and vows that he must have another look, for the last glimpse

of that sweet face had provoked him past all bearing. However, as the

suppressed impatience of the party now broke out into open murmurs,

he abandoned this design, and taking his seat upon the bar, contented

himself with tapping at the front windows of the carriage, and trying to

steal a glance inside; Mr Tappertit, mounting the steps and hanging on

by the door, issued his directions to the driver with a commanding

voice and attitude; the rest got up behind, or ran by the side of the

carriage, as they could; some, in imitation of Hugh, endeavoured to

see the face he had praised so highly, and were reminded of their

impertinence by hints from the cudgel of Mr Tappertit. Thus they pursued

their journey by circuitous and winding roads; preserving, except when

they halted to take breath, or to quarrel about the best way of reaching

London, pretty good order and tolerable silence.

In the mean time, Dolly--beautiful, bewitching, captivating little

Dolly--her hair dishevelled, her dress torn, her dark eyelashes wet with

tears, her bosom heaving--her face, now pale with fear, now crimsoned

with indignation--her whole self a hundred times more beautiful in

this heightened aspect than ever she had been before--vainly strove to

comfort Emma Haredale, and to impart to her the consolation of which she

stood in so much need herself. The soldiers were sure to come; they must

be rescued; it would be impossible to convey them through the streets

of London when they set the threats of their guards at defiance, and

shrieked to the passengers for help. If they did this when they

came into the more frequented ways, she was certain--she was quite

certain--they must be released. So poor Dolly said, and so poor Dolly

tried to think; but the invariable conclusion of all such arguments was,

that Dolly burst into tears; cried, as she wrung her hands, what would

they do or think, or who would comfort them, at home, at the Golden Key;

and sobbed most piteously.

Miss Haredale, whose feelings were usually of a quieter kind than

Dolly's, and not so much upon the surface, was dreadfully alarmed, and

indeed had only just recovered from a swoon. She was very pale, and the

hand which Dolly held was quite cold; but she bade her, nevertheless,

remember that, under Providence, much must depend upon their own

discretion; that if they remained quiet and lulled the vigilance of the

ruffians into whose hands they had fallen, the chances of their being

able to procure assistance when they reached the town, were very much

increased; that unless society were quite unhinged, a hot pursuit must

be immediately commenced; and that her uncle, she might be sure, would

never rest until he had found them out and rescued them. But as she said

these latter words, the idea that he had fallen in a general massacre of

the Catholics that night--no very wild or improbable supposition after

what they had seen and undergone--struck her dumb; and, lost in the

horrors they had witnessed, and those they might be yet reserved for,

she sat incapable of thought, or speech, or outward show of grief: as

rigid, and almost as white and cold, as marble.

Oh, how many, many times, in that long ride, did Dolly think of her old

lover,--poor, fond, slighted Joe! How many, many times, did she recall

that night when she ran into his arms from the very man now projecting

his hateful gaze into the darkness where she sat, and leering through

the glass in monstrous admiration! And when she thought of Joe, and what

a brave fellow he was, and how he would have rode boldly up, and

dashed in among these villains now, yes, though they were double the

number--and here she clenched her little hand, and pressed her foot upon

the ground--the pride she felt for a moment in having won his heart,

faded in a burst of tears, and she sobbed more bitterly than ever.

As the night wore on, and they proceeded by ways which were quite

unknown to them--for they could recognise none of the objects of which

they sometimes caught a hurried glimpse--their fears increased; nor were

they without good foundation; it was not difficult for two beautiful

young women to find, in their being borne they knew not whither by a

band of daring villains who eyed them as some among these fellows did,

reasons for the worst alarm. When they at last entered London, by a

suburb with which they were wholly unacquainted, it was past midnight,

and the streets were dark and empty. Nor was this the worst, for the

carriage stopping in a lonely spot, Hugh suddenly opened the door,

jumped in, and took his seat between them.

It was in vain they cried for help. He put his arm about the neck of

each, and swore to stifle them with kisses if they were not as silent as

the grave.

'I come here to keep you quiet,' he said, 'and that's the means I shall

take. So don't be quiet, pretty mistresses--make a noise--do--and I

shall like it all the better.'

They were proceeding at a rapid pace, and apparently with fewer

attendants than before, though it was so dark (the torches being

extinguished) that this was mere conjecture. They shrunk from his touch,

each into the farthest corner of the carriage; but shrink as Dolly

would, his arm encircled her waist, and held her fast. She neither cried

nor spoke, for terror and disgust deprived her of the power; but she

plucked at his hand as though she would die in the effort to disengage

herself; and crouching on the ground, with her head averted and held

down, repelled him with a strength she wondered at as much as he. The

carriage stopped again.

'Lift this one out,' said Hugh to the man who opened the door, as

he took Miss Haredale's hand, and felt how heavily it fell. 'She's

fainted.'

'So much the better,' growled Dennis--it was that amiable gentleman.

'She's quiet. I always like 'em to faint, unless they're very tender and

composed.'

'Can you take her by yourself?' asked Hugh.

'I don't know till I try. I ought to be able to; I've lifted up a good

many in my time,' said the hangman. 'Up then! She's no small weight,

brother; none of these here fine gals are. Up again! Now we have her.'

Having by this time hoisted the young lady into his arms, he staggered

off with his burden.

'Look ye, pretty bird,' said Hugh, drawing Dolly towards him. 'Remember

what I told you--a kiss for every cry. Scream, if you love me, darling.

Scream once, mistress. Pretty mistress, only once, if you love me.'

Thrusting his face away with all her force, and holding down her head,

Dolly submitted to be carried out of the chaise, and borne after Miss

Haredale into a miserable cottage, where Hugh, after hugging her to his

breast, set her gently down upon the floor.

Poor Dolly! Do what she would, she only looked the better for it, and

tempted them the more. When her eyes flashed angrily, and her ripe lips

slightly parted, to give her rapid breathing vent, who could resist it?

When she wept and sobbed as though her heart would break, and bemoaned

her miseries in the sweetest voice that ever fell upon a listener's ear,

who could be insensible to the little winning pettishness which now

and then displayed itself, even in the sincerity and earnestness of her

grief? When, forgetful for a moment of herself, as she was now, she fell

on her knees beside her friend, and bent over her, and laid her cheek

to hers, and put her arms about her, what mortal eyes could have avoided

wandering to the delicate bodice, the streaming hair, the neglected

dress, the perfect abandonment and unconsciousness of the blooming

little beauty? Who could look on and see her lavish caresses and

endearments, and not desire to be in Emma Haredale's place; to be either

her or Dolly; either the hugging or the hugged? Not Hugh. Not Dennis.

'I tell you what it is, young women,' said Mr Dennis, 'I an't much of a

lady's man myself, nor am I a party in the present business further than

lending a willing hand to my friends: but if I see much more of this

here sort of thing, I shall become a principal instead of a accessory. I

tell you candid.'

'Why have you brought us here?' said Emma. 'Are we to be murdered?'

'Murdered!' cried Dennis, sitting down upon a stool, and regarding her

with great favour. 'Why, my dear, who'd murder sich chickabiddies as

you? If you was to ask me, now, whether you was brought here to be

married, there might be something in it.'

And here he exchanged a grin with Hugh, who removed his eyes from Dolly

for the purpose.

'No, no,' said Dennis, 'there'll be no murdering, my pets. Nothing of

that sort. Quite the contrairy.'

'You are an older man than your companion, sir,' said Emma, trembling.

'Have you no pity for us? Do you not consider that we are women?'

'I do indeed, my dear,' retorted Dennis. 'It would be very hard not to,

with two such specimens afore my eyes. Ha ha! Oh yes, I consider that.

We all consider that, miss.'

He shook his head waggishly, leered at Hugh again, and laughed very

much, as if he had said a noble thing, and rather thought he was coming

out.

'There'll be no murdering, my dear. Not a bit on it. I tell you what

though, brother,' said Dennis, cocking his hat for the convenience

of scratching his head, and looking gravely at Hugh, 'it's worthy of

notice, as a proof of the amazing equalness and dignity of our law, that

it don't make no distinction between men and women. I've heerd the judge

say, sometimes, to a highwayman or housebreaker as had tied the ladies

neck and heels--you'll excuse me making mention of it, my darlings--and

put 'em in a cellar, that he showed no consideration to women. Now, I

say that there judge didn't know his business, brother; and that if

I had been that there highwayman or housebreaker, I should have made

answer: "What are you a talking of, my lord? I showed the women as much

consideration as the law does, and what more would you have me do?" If

you was to count up in the newspapers the number of females as have

been worked off in this here city alone, in the last ten year,' said Mr

Dennis thoughtfully, 'you'd be surprised at the total--quite amazed, you

would. There's a dignified and equal thing; a beautiful thing! But we've

no security for its lasting. Now that they've begun to favour these here

Papists, I shouldn't wonder if they went and altered even THAT, one of

these days. Upon my soul, I shouldn't.'

The subject, perhaps from being of too exclusive and professional a

nature, failed to interest Hugh as much as his friend had anticipated.

But he had no time to pursue it, for at this crisis Mr Tappertit entered

precipitately; at sight of whom Dolly uttered a scream of joy, and

fairly threw herself into his arms.

'I knew it, I was sure of it!' cried Dolly. 'My dear father's at the

door. Thank God, thank God! Bless you, Sim. Heaven bless you for this!'

Simon Tappertit, who had at first implicitly believed that the

locksmith's daughter, unable any longer to suppress her secret passion

for himself, was about to give it full vent in its intensity, and to

declare that she was his for ever, looked extremely foolish when she

said these words;--the more so, as they were received by Hugh and Dennis

with a loud laugh, which made her draw back, and regard him with a fixed

and earnest look.

'Miss Haredale,' said Sim, after a very awkward silence, 'I hope

you're as comfortable as circumstances will permit of. Dolly Varden,

my darling--my own, my lovely one--I hope YOU'RE pretty comfortable

likewise.'

Poor little Dolly! She saw how it was; hid her face in her hands; and

sobbed more bitterly than ever.

'You meet in me, Miss V.,' said Simon, laying his hand upon his breast,

'not a 'prentice, not a workman, not a slave, not the wictim of your

father's tyrannical behaviour, but the leader of a great people, the

captain of a noble band, in which these gentlemen are, as I may say,

corporals and serjeants. You behold in me, not a private individual, but

a public character; not a mender of locks, but a healer of the wounds of

his unhappy country. Dolly V., sweet Dolly V., for how many years have

I looked forward to this present meeting! For how many years has it been

my intention to exalt and ennoble you! I redeem it. Behold in me, your

husband. Yes, beautiful Dolly--charmer--enslaver--S. Tappertit is all

your own!'

As he said these words he advanced towards her. Dolly retreated till she

could go no farther, and then sank down upon the floor. Thinking it very

possible that this might be maiden modesty, Simon essayed to raise her;

on which Dolly, goaded to desperation, wound her hands in his hair, and

crying out amidst her tears that he was a dreadful little wretch, and

always had been, shook, and pulled, and beat him, until he was fain to

call for help, most lustily. Hugh had never admired her half so much as

at that moment.

'She's in an excited state to-night,' said Simon, as he smoothed his

rumpled feathers, 'and don't know when she's well off. Let her be by

herself till to-morrow, and that'll bring her down a little. Carry her

into the next house!'

Hugh had her in his arms directly. It might be that Mr Tappertit's heart

was really softened by her distress, or it might be that he felt it in

some degree indecorous that his intended bride should be struggling in

the grasp of another man. He commanded him, on second thoughts, to put

her down again, and looked moodily on as she flew to Miss Haredale's

side, and clinging to her dress, hid her flushed face in its folds.

'They shall remain here together till to-morrow,' said Simon, who had

now quite recovered his dignity--'till to-morrow. Come away!'

'Ay!' cried Hugh. 'Come away, captain. Ha ha ha!'

'What are you laughing at?' demanded Simon sternly.

'Nothing, captain, nothing,' Hugh rejoined; and as he spoke, and clapped

his hand upon the shoulder of the little man, he laughed again, for some

unknown reason, with tenfold violence.

Mr Tappertit surveyed him from head to foot with lofty scorn (this only

made him laugh the more), and turning to the prisoners, said:

'You'll take notice, ladies, that this place is well watched on every

side, and that the least noise is certain to be attended with unpleasant

consequences. You'll hear--both of you--more of our intentions

to-morrow. In the mean time, don't show yourselves at the window, or

appeal to any of the people you may see pass it; for if you do, it'll

be known directly that you come from a Catholic house, and all the

exertions our men can make, may not be able to save your lives.'

With this last caution, which was true enough, he turned to the door,

followed by Hugh and Dennis. They paused for a moment, going out, to

look at them clasped in each other's arms, and then left the cottage;

fastening the door, and setting a good watch upon it, and indeed all

round the house.

'I say,' growled Dennis, as they walked away in company, 'that's a

dainty pair. Muster Gashford's one is as handsome as the other, eh?'

'Hush!' said Hugh, hastily. 'Don't you mention names. It's a bad habit.'

'I wouldn't like to be HIM, then (as you don't like names), when he

breaks it out to her; that's all,' said Dennis. 'She's one of them fine,

black-eyed, proud gals, as I wouldn't trust at such times with a knife

too near 'em. I've seen some of that sort, afore now. I recollect one

that was worked off, many year ago--and there was a gentleman in that

case too--that says to me, with her lip a trembling, but her hand as

steady as ever I see one: "Dennis, I'm near my end, but if I had a

dagger in these fingers, and he was within my reach, I'd strike him dead

afore me;"--ah, she did--and she'd have done it too!'

Strike who dead?' demanded Hugh.

'How should I know, brother?' answered Dennis. 'SHE never said; not

she.'

Hugh looked, for a moment, as though he would have made some further

inquiry into this incoherent recollection; but Simon Tappertit, who had

been meditating deeply, gave his thoughts a new direction.

'Hugh!' said Sim. 'You have done well to-day. You shall be rewarded.

So have you, Dennis.--There's no young woman YOU want to carry off, is

there?'

'N--no,' returned that gentleman, stroking his grizzly beard, which was

some two inches long. 'None in partickler, I think.'

'Very good,' said Sim; 'then we'll find some other way of making it up

to you. As to you, old boy'--he turned to Hugh--'you shall have Miggs

(her that I promised you, you know) within three days. Mind. I pass my

word for it.'

Hugh thanked him heartily; and as he did so, his laughing fit returned

with such violence that he was obliged to hold his side with one hand,

and to lean with the other on the shoulder of his small captain, without

whose support he would certainly have rolled upon the ground.

Chapter 60

The three worthies turned their faces towards The Boot, with the

intention of passing the night in that place of rendezvous, and of

seeking the repose they so much needed in the shelter of their old

den; for now that the mischief and destruction they had purposed were

achieved, and their prisoners were safely bestowed for the night, they

began to be conscious of exhaustion, and to feel the wasting effects of

the madness which had led to such deplorable results.

Notwithstanding the lassitude and fatigue which oppressed him now, in

common with his two companions, and indeed with all who had taken an

active share in that night's work, Hugh's boisterous merriment broke out

afresh whenever he looked at Simon Tappertit, and vented itself--much to

that gentleman's indignation--in such shouts of laughter as bade fair to

bring the watch upon them, and involve them in a skirmish, to which in

their present worn-out condition they might prove by no means equal.

Even Mr Dennis, who was not at all particular on the score of gravity

or dignity, and who had a great relish for his young friend's eccentric

humours, took occasion to remonstrate with him on this imprudent

behaviour, which he held to be a species of suicide, tantamount to a

man's working himself off without being overtaken by the law, than which

he could imagine nothing more ridiculous or impertinent.

Not abating one jot of his noisy mirth for these remonstrances, Hugh

reeled along between them, having an arm of each, until they hove in

sight of The Boot, and were within a field or two of that convenient

tavern. He happened by great good luck to have roared and shouted

himself into silence by this time. They were proceeding onward without

noise, when a scout who had been creeping about the ditches all night,

to warn any stragglers from encroaching further on what was now such

dangerous ground, peeped cautiously from his hiding-place, and called to

them to stop.

'Stop! and why?' said Hugh.

Because (the scout replied) the house was filled with constables and

soldiers; having been surprised that afternoon. The inmates had fled

or been taken into custody, he could not say which. He had prevented a

great many people from approaching nearer, and he believed they had

gone to the markets and such places to pass the night. He had seen the

distant fires, but they were all out now. He had heard the people who

passed and repassed, speaking of them too, and could report that the

prevailing opinion was one of apprehension and dismay. He had not heard

a word of Barnaby--didn't even know his name--but it had been said in

his hearing that some man had been taken and carried off to Newgate.

Whether this was true or false, he could not affirm.

The three took counsel together, on hearing this, and debated what it

might be best to do. Hugh, deeming it possible that Barnaby was in the

hands of the soldiers, and at that moment under detention at The Boot,

was for advancing stealthily, and firing the house; but his companions,

who objected to such rash measures unless they had a crowd at their

backs, represented that if Barnaby were taken he had assuredly been

removed to a stronger prison; they would never have dreamed of keeping

him all night in a place so weak and open to attack. Yielding to this

reasoning, and to their persuasions, Hugh consented to turn back and

to repair to Fleet Market; for which place, it seemed, a few of their

boldest associates had shaped their course, on receiving the same

intelligence.

Feeling their strength recruited and their spirits roused, now that

there was a new necessity for action, they hurried away, quite forgetful

of the fatigue under which they had been sinking but a few minutes

before; and soon arrived at their new place of destination.

Fleet Market, at that time, was a long irregular row of wooden sheds

and penthouses, occupying the centre of what is now called Farringdon

Street. They were jumbled together in a most unsightly fashion, in the

middle of the road; to the great obstruction of the thoroughfare and the

annoyance of passengers, who were fain to make their way, as they best

could, among carts, baskets, barrows, trucks, casks, bulks, and benches,

and to jostle with porters, hucksters, waggoners, and a motley crowd

of buyers, sellers, pick-pockets, vagrants, and idlers. The air was

perfumed with the stench of rotten leaves and faded fruit; the refuse of

the butchers' stalls, and offal and garbage of a hundred kinds. It

was indispensable to most public conveniences in those days, that they

should be public nuisances likewise; and Fleet Market maintained the

principle to admiration.

To this place, perhaps because its sheds and baskets were a tolerable

substitute for beds, or perhaps because it afforded the means of a hasty

barricade in case of need, many of the rioters had straggled, not only

that night, but for two or three nights before. It was now broad day,

but the morning being cold, a group of them were gathered round a fire

in a public-house, drinking hot purl, and smoking pipes, and planning

new schemes for to-morrow.

Hugh and his two friends being known to most of these men, were received

with signal marks of approbation, and inducted into the most honourable

seats. The room-door was closed and fastened to keep intruders at a

distance, and then they proceeded to exchange news.

'The soldiers have taken possession of The Boot, I hear,' said Hugh.

'Who knows anything about it?'

Several cried that they did; but the majority of the company having

been engaged in the assault upon the Warren, and all present having been

concerned in one or other of the night's expeditions, it proved that

they knew no more than Hugh himself; having been merely warned by each

other, or by the scout, and knowing nothing of their own knowledge.

'We left a man on guard there to-day,' said Hugh, looking round him,

'who is not here. You know who it is--Barnaby, who brought the soldier

down, at Westminster. Has any man seen or heard of him?'

They shook their heads, and murmured an answer in the negative, as each

man looked round and appealed to his fellow; when a noise was heard

without, and a man was heard to say that he wanted Hugh--that he must

see Hugh.

'He is but one man,' cried Hugh to those who kept the door; 'let him

come in.'

'Ay, ay!' muttered the others. 'Let him come in. Let him come in.'

The door was accordingly unlocked and opened. A one-armed man, with

his head and face tied up with a bloody cloth, as though he had been

severely beaten, his clothes torn, and his remaining hand grasping a

thick stick, rushed in among them, and panting for breath, demanded

which was Hugh.

'Here he is,' replied the person he inquired for. 'I am Hugh. What do

you want with me?'

'I have a message for you,' said the man. 'You know one Barnaby.'

'What of him? Did he send the message?'

'Yes. He's taken. He's in one of the strong cells in Newgate. He

defended himself as well as he could, but was overpowered by numbers.

That's his message.'

'When did you see him?' asked Hugh, hastily.

'On his way to prison, where he was taken by a party of soldiers. They

took a by-road, and not the one we expected. I was one of the few who

tried to rescue him, and he called to me, and told me to tell Hugh where

he was. We made a good struggle, though it failed. Look here!'

He pointed to his dress and to his bandaged head, and still panting for

breath, glanced round the room; then faced towards Hugh again.

'I know you by sight,' he said, 'for I was in the crowd on Friday, and

on Saturday, and yesterday, but I didn't know your name. You're a bold

fellow, I know. So is he. He fought like a lion tonight, but it was of

no use. I did my best, considering that I want this limb.'

Again he glanced inquisitively round the room or seemed to do so, for

his face was nearly hidden by the bandage--and again facing sharply

towards Hugh, grasped his stick as if he half expected to be set upon,

and stood on the defensive.

If he had any such apprehension, however, he was speedily reassured by

the demeanour of all present. None thought of the bearer of the tidings.

He was lost in the news he brought. Oaths, threats, and execrations,

were vented on all sides. Some cried that if they bore this tamely,

another day would see them all in jail; some, that they should have

rescued the other prisoners, and this would not have happened. One man

cried in a loud voice, 'Who'll follow me to Newgate!' and there was a

loud shout and general rush towards the door.

But Hugh and Dennis stood with their backs against it, and kept them

back, until the clamour had so far subsided that their voices could be

heard, when they called to them together that to go now, in broad day,

would be madness; and that if they waited until night and arranged a

plan of attack, they might release, not only their own companions, but

all the prisoners, and burn down the jail.

'Not that jail alone,' cried Hugh, 'but every jail in London. They shall

have no place to put their prisoners in. We'll burn them all down; make

bonfires of them every one! Here!' he cried, catching at the hangman's

hand. 'Let all who're men here, join with us. Shake hands upon it.

Barnaby out of jail, and not a jail left standing! Who joins?'

Every man there. And they swore a great oath to release their friends

from Newgate next night; to force the doors and burn the jail; or perish

in the fire themselves.

Chapter 61

On that same night--events so crowd upon each other in convulsed and

distracted times, that more than the stirring incidents of a whole life

often become compressed into the compass of four-and-twenty hours--on

that same night, Mr Haredale, having strongly bound his prisoner,

with the assistance of the sexton, and forced him to mount his horse,

conducted him to Chigwell; bent upon procuring a conveyance to London

from that place, and carrying him at once before a justice. The

disturbed state of the town would be, he knew, a sufficient reason for

demanding the murderer's committal to prison before daybreak, as no man

could answer for the security of any of the watch-houses or ordinary

places of detention; and to convey a prisoner through the streets when

the mob were again abroad, would not only be a task of great danger and

hazard, but would be to challenge an attempt at rescue. Directing the

sexton to lead the horse, he walked close by the murderer's side, and in

this order they reached the village about the middle of the night.

The people were all awake and up, for they were fearful of being burnt

in their beds, and sought to comfort and assure each other by watching

in company. A few of the stoutest-hearted were armed and gathered in a

body on the green. To these, who knew him well, Mr Haredale addressed

himself, briefly narrating what had happened, and beseeching them to aid

in conveying the criminal to London before the dawn of day.

But not a man among them dared to help him by so much as the motion of

a finger. The rioters, in their passage through the village, had

menaced with their fiercest vengeance, any person who should aid in

extinguishing the fire, or render the least assistance to him, or any

Catholic whomsoever. Their threats extended to their lives and all they

possessed. They were assembled for their own protection, and could not

endanger themselves by lending any aid to him. This they told him, not

without hesitation and regret, as they kept aloof in the moonlight and

glanced fearfully at the ghostly rider, who, with his head drooping on

his breast and his hat slouched down upon his brow, neither moved nor

spoke.

Finding it impossible to persuade them, and indeed hardly knowing how

to do so after what they had seen of the fury of the crowd, Mr Haredale

besought them that at least they would leave him free to act for

himself, and would suffer him to take the only chaise and pair of

horses that the place afforded. This was not acceded to without some

difficulty, but in the end they told him to do what he would, and go

away from them in heaven's name.

Leaving the sexton at the horse's bridle, he drew out the chaise

with his own hands, and would have harnessed the horses, but that the

post-boy of the village--a soft-hearted, good-for-nothing, vagabond kind

of fellow--was moved by his earnestness and passion, and, throwing down

a pitchfork with which he was armed, swore that the rioters might cut

him into mincemeat if they liked, but he would not stand by and see

an honest gentleman who had done no wrong, reduced to such extremity,

without doing what he could to help him. Mr Haredale shook him warmly

by the hand, and thanked him from his heart. In five minutes' time the

chaise was ready, and this good scapegrace in his saddle. The murderer

was put inside, the blinds were drawn up, the sexton took his seat upon

the bar, Mr Haredale mounted his horse and rode close beside the door;

and so they started in the dead of night, and in profound silence, for

London.

The consternation was so extreme that even the horses which had escaped

the flames at the Warren, could find no friends to shelter them. They

passed them on the road, browsing on the stunted grass; and the driver

told them, that the poor beasts had wandered to the village first, but

had been driven away, lest they should bring the vengeance of the crowd

on any of the inhabitants.

Nor was this feeling confined to such small places, where the people

were timid, ignorant, and unprotected. When they came near London they

met, in the grey light of morning, more than one poor Catholic family

who, terrified by the threats and warnings of their neighbours, were

quitting the city on foot, and who told them they could hire no cart or

horse for the removal of their goods, and had been compelled to leave

them behind, at the mercy of the crowd. Near Mile End they passed a

house, the master of which, a Catholic gentleman of small means, having

hired a waggon to remove his furniture by midnight, had had it all

brought down into the street, to wait the vehicle's arrival, and save

time in the packing. But the man with whom he made the bargain, alarmed

by the fires that night, and by the sight of the rioters passing his

door, had refused to keep it: and the poor gentleman, with his wife and

servant and their little children, were sitting trembling among their

goods in the open street, dreading the arrival of day and not knowing

where to turn or what to do.

It was the same, they heard, with the public conveyances. The panic

was so great that the mails and stage-coaches were afraid to carry

passengers who professed the obnoxious religion. If the drivers knew

them, or they admitted that they held that creed, they would not take

them, no, though they offered large sums; and yesterday, people had

been afraid to recognise Catholic acquaintance in the streets, lest

they should be marked by spies, and burnt out, as it was called, in

consequence. One mild old man--a priest, whose chapel was destroyed;

a very feeble, patient, inoffensive creature--who was trudging away,

alone, designing to walk some distance from town, and then try his

fortune with the coaches, told Mr Haredale that he feared he might not

find a magistrate who would have the hardihood to commit a prisoner to

jail, on his complaint. But notwithstanding these discouraging accounts

they went on, and reached the Mansion House soon after sunrise.

Mr Haredale threw himself from his horse, but he had no need to knock

at the door, for it was already open, and there stood upon the step

a portly old man, with a very red, or rather purple face, who with an

anxious expression of countenance, was remonstrating with some unseen

personage upstairs, while the porter essayed to close the door by

degrees and get rid of him. With the intense impatience and excitement

natural to one in his condition, Mr Haredale thrust himself forward and

was about to speak, when the fat old gentleman interposed:

'My good sir,' said he, 'pray let me get an answer. This is the sixth

time I have been here. I was here five times yesterday. My house is

threatened with destruction. It is to be burned down to-night, and was

to have been last night, but they had other business on their hands.

Pray let me get an answer.'

'My good sir,' returned Mr Haredale, shaking his head, 'my house is

burned to the ground. But heaven forbid that yours should be. Get your

answer. Be brief, in mercy to me.'

'Now, you hear this, my lord?'--said the old gentleman, calling up

the stairs, to where the skirt of a dressing-gown fluttered on the

landing-place. 'Here is a gentleman here, whose house was actually burnt

down last night.'

'Dear me, dear me,' replied a testy voice, 'I am very sorry for it, but

what am I to do? I can't build it up again. The chief magistrate of the

city can't go and be a rebuilding of people's houses, my good sir. Stuff

and nonsense!'

'But the chief magistrate of the city can prevent people's houses from

having any need to be rebuilt, if the chief magistrate's a man, and

not a dummy--can't he, my lord?' cried the old gentleman in a choleric

manner.

'You are disrespectable, sir,' said the Lord Mayor--'leastways,

disrespectful I mean.'

'Disrespectful, my lord!' returned the old gentleman. 'I was respectful

five times yesterday. I can't be respectful for ever. Men can't stand

on being respectful when their houses are going to be burnt over their

heads, with them in 'em. What am I to do, my lord? AM I to have any

protection!'

'I told you yesterday, sir,' said the Lord Mayor, 'that you might have

an alderman in your house, if you could get one to come.'

'What the devil's the good of an alderman?' returned the choleric old

gentleman.

'--To awe the crowd, sir,' said the Lord Mayor.

'Oh Lord ha' mercy!' whimpered the old gentleman, as he wiped his

forehead in a state of ludicrous distress, 'to think of sending an

alderman to awe a crowd! Why, my lord, if they were even so many babies,

fed on mother's milk, what do you think they'd care for an alderman!

Will YOU come?'

'I!' said the Lord Mayor, most emphatically: 'Certainly not.'

'Then what,' returned the old gentleman, 'what am I to do? Am I a

citizen of England? Am I to have the benefit of the laws? Am I to have

any return for the King's taxes?'

'I don't know, I am sure,' said the Lord Mayor; 'what a pity it is

you're a Catholic! Why couldn't you be a Protestant, and then you

wouldn't have got yourself into such a mess? I'm sure I don't know

what's to be done.--There are great people at the bottom of these

riots.--Oh dear me, what a thing it is to be a public character!--You

must look in again in the course of the day.--Would a javelin-man

do?--Or there's Philips the constable,--HE'S disengaged,--he's not very

old for a man at his time of life, except in his legs, and if you put

him up at a window he'd look quite young by candle-light, and might

frighten 'em very much.--Oh dear!--well!--we'll see about it.'

'Stop!' cried Mr Haredale, pressing the door open as the porter strove

to shut it, and speaking rapidly, 'My Lord Mayor, I beg you not to go

away. I have a man here, who committed a murder eight-and-twenty years

ago. Half-a-dozen words from me, on oath, will justify you in committing

him to prison for re-examination. I only seek, just now, to have him

consigned to a place of safety. The least delay may involve his being

rescued by the rioters.'

'Oh dear me!' cried the Lord Mayor. 'God bless my soul--and body--oh

Lor!--well I!--there are great people at the bottom of these riots, you

know.--You really mustn't.'

'My lord,' said Mr Haredale, 'the murdered gentleman was my brother; I

succeeded to his inheritance; there were not wanting slanderous tongues

at that time, to whisper that the guilt of this most foul and cruel deed

was mine--mine, who loved him, as he knows, in Heaven, dearly. The time

has come, after all these years of gloom and misery, for avenging him,

and bringing to light a crime so artful and so devilish that it has no

parallel. Every second's delay on your part loosens this man's bloody

hands again, and leads to his escape. My lord, I charge you hear me, and

despatch this matter on the instant.'

'Oh dear me!' cried the chief magistrate; 'these an't business

hours, you know--I wonder at you--how ungentlemanly it is of you--you

mustn't--you really mustn't.--And I suppose you are a Catholic too?'

'I am,' said Mr Haredale.

'God bless my soul, I believe people turn Catholics a'purpose to vex

and worrit me,' cried the Lord Mayor. 'I wish you wouldn't come here;

they'll be setting the Mansion House afire next, and we shall have you

to thank for it. You must lock your prisoner up, sir--give him to a

watchman--and--call again at a proper time. Then we'll see about it!'

Before Mr Haredale could answer, the sharp closing of a door and drawing

of its bolts, gave notice that the Lord Mayor had retreated to his

bedroom, and that further remonstrance would be unavailing. The two

clients retreated likewise, and the porter shut them out into the

street.

'That's the way he puts me off,' said the old gentleman, 'I can get no

redress and no help. What are you going to do, sir?'

'To try elsewhere,' answered Mr Haredale, who was by this time on

horseback.

'I feel for you, I assure you--and well I may, for we are in a common

cause,' said the old gentleman. 'I may not have a house to offer you

to-night; let me tender it while I can. On second thoughts though,' he

added, putting up a pocket-book he had produced while speaking, 'I'll

not give you a card, for if it was found upon you, it might get you

into trouble. Langdale--that's my name--vintner and distiller--Holborn

Hill--you're heartily welcome, if you'll come.'

Mr Haredale bowed, and rode off, close beside the chaise as before;

determining to repair to the house of Sir John Fielding, who had the

reputation of being a bold and active magistrate, and fully resolved, in

case the rioters should come upon them, to do execution on the murderer

with his own hands, rather than suffer him to be released.

They arrived at the magistrate's dwelling, however, without molestation

(for the mob, as we have seen, were then intent on deeper schemes), and

knocked at the door. As it had been pretty generally rumoured that Sir

John was proscribed by the rioters, a body of thief-takers had been

keeping watch in the house all night. To one of them Mr Haredale stated

his business, which appearing to the man of sufficient moment to warrant

his arousing the justice, procured him an immediate audience.

No time was lost in committing the murderer to Newgate; then a new

building, recently completed at a vast expense, and considered to be of

enormous strength. The warrant being made out, three of the thief-takers

bound him afresh (he had been struggling, it seemed, in the chaise, and

had loosened his manacles); gagged him lest they should meet with any

of the mob, and he should call to them for help; and seated themselves,

along with him, in the carriage. These men being all well armed, made

a formidable escort; but they drew up the blinds again, as though the

carriage were empty, and directed Mr Haredale to ride forward, that he

might not attract attention by seeming to belong to it.

The wisdom of this proceeding was sufficiently obvious, for as they

hurried through the city they passed among several groups of men, who,

if they had not supposed the chaise to be quite empty, would certainly

have stopped it. But those within keeping quite close, and the driver

tarrying to be asked no questions, they reached the prison without

interruption, and, once there, had him out, and safe within its gloomy

walls, in a twinkling.

With eager eyes and strained attention, Mr Haredale saw him chained, and

locked and barred up in his cell. Nay, when he had left the jail, and

stood in the free street, without, he felt the iron plates upon the

doors, with his hands, and drew them over the stone wall, to assure

himself that it was real; and to exult in its being so strong, and

rough, and cold. It was not until he turned his back upon the jail, and

glanced along the empty streets, so lifeless and quiet in the bright

morning, that he felt the weight upon his heart; that he knew he was

tortured by anxiety for those he had left at home; and that home itself

was but another bead in the long rosary of his regrets.

Chapter 62

The prisoner, left to himself, sat down upon his bedstead: and resting

his elbows on his knees, and his chin upon his hands, remained in

that attitude for hours. It would be hard to say, of what nature his

reflections were. They had no distinctness, and, saving for some

flashes now and then, no reference to his condition or the train of

circumstances by which it had been brought about. The cracks in the

pavement of his cell, the chinks in the wall where stone was joined

to stone, the bars in the window, the iron ring upon the floor,--such

things as these, subsiding strangely into one another, and awakening an

indescribable kind of interest and amusement, engrossed his whole mind;

and although at the bottom of his every thought there was an uneasy

sense of guilt, and dread of death, he felt no more than that vague

consciousness of it, which a sleeper has of pain. It pursues him through

his dreams, gnaws at the heart of all his fancied pleasures, robs the

banquet of its taste, music of its sweetness, makes happiness itself

unhappy, and yet is no bodily sensation, but a phantom without shape,

or form, or visible presence; pervading everything, but having no

existence; recognisable everywhere, but nowhere seen, or touched, or met

with face to face, until the sleep is past, and waking agony returns.

After a long time the door of his cell opened. He looked up; saw the

blind man enter; and relapsed into his former position.

Guided by his breathing, the visitor advanced to where he sat; and

stopping beside him, and stretching out his hand to assure himself that

he was right, remained, for a good space, silent.

'This is bad, Rudge. This is bad,' he said at length.

The prisoner shuffled with his feet upon the ground in turning his body

from him, but made no other answer.

'How were you taken?' he asked. 'And where? You never told me more than

half your secret. No matter; I know it now. How was it, and where, eh?'

he asked again, coming still nearer to him.

'At Chigwell,' said the other.

'At Chigwell! How came you there?'

'Because I went there to avoid the man I stumbled on,' he answered.

'Because I was chased and driven there, by him and Fate. Because I was

urged to go there, by something stronger than my own will. When I found

him watching in the house she used to live in, night after night, I knew

I never could escape him--never! and when I heard the Bell--'

He shivered; muttered that it was very cold; paced quickly up and down

the narrow cell; and sitting down again, fell into his old posture.

'You were saying,' said the blind man, after another pause, 'that when

you heard the Bell--'

'Let it be, will you?' he retorted in a hurried voice. 'It hangs there

yet.'

The blind man turned a wistful and inquisitive face towards him, but he

continued to speak, without noticing him.

'I went to Chigwell, in search of the mob. I have been so hunted and

beset by this man, that I knew my only hope of safety lay in joining

them. They had gone on before; I followed them when it left off.'

'When what left off?'

'The Bell. They had quitted the place. I hoped that some of them might

be still lingering among the ruins, and was searching for them when

I heard--' he drew a long breath, and wiped his forehead with his

sleeve--'his voice.'

'Saying what?'

'No matter what. I don't know. I was then at the foot of the turret,

where I did the--'

'Ay,' said the blind man, nodding his head with perfect composure, 'I

understand.'

'I climbed the stair, or so much of it as was left; meaning to hide till

he had gone. But he heard me; and followed almost as soon as I set foot

upon the ashes.'

'You might have hidden in the wall, and thrown him down, or stabbed

him,' said the blind man.

'Might I? Between that man and me, was one who led him on--I saw it,

though he did not--and raised above his head a bloody hand. It was in

the room above that HE and I stood glaring at each other on the night of

the murder, and before he fell he raised his hand like that, and fixed

his eyes on me. I knew the chase would end there.'

'You have a strong fancy,' said the blind man, with a smile.

'Strengthen yours with blood, and see what it will come to.'

He groaned, and rocked himself, and looking up for the first time, said,

in a low, hollow voice:

'Eight-and-twenty years! Eight-and-twenty years! He has never changed

in all that time, never grown older, nor altered in the least degree.

He has been before me in the dark night, and the broad sunny day; in the

twilight, the moonlight, the sunlight, the light of fire, and lamp,

and candle; and in the deepest gloom. Always the same! In company, in

solitude, on land, on shipboard; sometimes leaving me alone for months,

and sometimes always with me. I have seen him, at sea, come gliding in

the dead of night along the bright reflection of the moon in the calm

water; and I have seen him, on quays and market-places, with his hand

uplifted, towering, the centre of a busy crowd, unconscious of the

terrible form that had its silent stand among them. Fancy! Are you real?

Am I? Are these iron fetters, riveted on me by the smith's hammer, or

are they fancies I can shatter at a blow?'

The blind man listened in silence.

'Fancy! Do I fancy that I killed him? Do I fancy that as I left the

chamber where he lay, I saw the face of a man peeping from a dark door,

who plainly showed me by his fearful looks that he suspected what I

had done? Do I remember that I spoke fairly to him--that I drew

nearer--nearer yet--with the hot knife in my sleeve? Do I fancy how HE

died? Did he stagger back into the angle of the wall into which I had

hemmed him, and, bleeding inwardly, stand, not fail, a corpse before

me? Did I see him, for an instant, as I see you now, erect and on his

feet--but dead!'

The blind man, who knew that he had risen, motioned him to sit down

again upon his bedstead; but he took no notice of the gesture.

'It was then I thought, for the first time, of fastening the murder upon

him. It was then I dressed him in my clothes, and dragged him down

the back-stairs to the piece of water. Do I remember listening to the

bubbles that came rising up when I had rolled him in? Do I remember

wiping the water from my face, and because the body splashed it there,

in its descent, feeling as if it MUST be blood?

'Did I go home when I had done? And oh, my God! how long it took to do!

Did I stand before my wife, and tell her? Did I see her fall upon the

ground; and, when I stooped to raise her, did she thrust me back with a

force that cast me off as if I had been a child, staining the hand with

which she clasped my wrist? Is THAT fancy?

'Did she go down upon her knees, and call on Heaven to witness that she

and her unborn child renounced me from that hour; and did she, in words

so solemn that they turned me cold--me, fresh from the horrors my own

hands had made--warn me to fly while there was time; for though she

would be silent, being my wretched wife, she would not shelter me? Did I

go forth that night, abjured of God and man, and anchored deep in hell,

to wander at my cable's length about the earth, and surely be drawn down

at last?'

'Why did you return? said the blind man.

'Why is blood red? I could no more help it, than I could live without

breath. I struggled against the impulse, but I was drawn back, through

every difficult and adverse circumstance, as by a mighty engine. Nothing

could stop me. The day and hour were none of my choice. Sleeping and

waking, I had been among the old haunts for years--had visited my own

grave. Why did I come back? Because this jail was gaping for me, and he

stood beckoning at the door.'

'You were not known?' said the blind man.

'I was a man who had been twenty-two years dead. No. I was not known.'

'You should have kept your secret better.'

'MY secret? MINE? It was a secret, any breath of air could whisper at

its will. The stars had it in their twinkling, the water in its flowing,

the leaves in their rustling, the seasons in their return. It lurked

in strangers' faces, and their voices. Everything had lips on which it

always trembled.--MY secret!'

'It was revealed by your own act at any rate,' said the blind man.

'The act was not mine. I did it, but it was not mine. I was forced

at times to wander round, and round, and round that spot. If you had

chained me up when the fit was on me, I should have broken away, and

gone there. As truly as the loadstone draws iron towards it, so he,

lying at the bottom of his grave, could draw me near him when he would.

Was that fancy? Did I like to go there, or did I strive and wrestle with

the power that forced me?'

The blind man shrugged his shoulders, and smiled incredulously. The

prisoner again resumed his old attitude, and for a long time both were

mute.

'I suppose then,' said his visitor, at length breaking silence, 'that

you are penitent and resigned; that you desire to make peace with

everybody (in particular, with your wife who has brought you to this);

and that you ask no greater favour than to be carried to Tyburn as soon

as possible? That being the case, I had better take my leave. I am not

good enough to be company for you.'

'Have I not told you,' said the other fiercely, 'that I have striven

and wrestled with the power that brought me here? Has my whole life, for

eight-and-twenty years, been one perpetual struggle and resistance, and

do you think I want to lie down and die? Do all men shrink from death--I

most of all!'

'That's better said. That's better spoken, Rudge--but I'll not call you

that again--than anything you have said yet,' returned the blind man,

speaking more familiarly, and laying his hands upon his arm. 'Lookye,--I

never killed a man myself, for I have never been placed in a position

that made it worth my while. Farther, I am not an advocate for killing

men, and I don't think I should recommend it or like it--for it's very

hazardous--under any circumstances. But as you had the misfortune to get

into this trouble before I made your acquaintance, and as you have been

my companion, and have been of use to me for a long time now, I overlook

that part of the matter, and am only anxious that you shouldn't die

unnecessarily. Now, I do not consider that, at present, it is at all

necessary.'

'What else is left me?' returned the prisoner. 'To eat my way through

these walls with my teeth?'

'Something easier than that,' returned his friend. 'Promise me that you

will talk no more of these fancies of yours--idle, foolish things, quite

beneath a man--and I'll tell you what I mean.'

'Tell me,' said the other.

'Your worthy lady with the tender conscience; your scrupulous, virtuous,

punctilious, but not blindly affectionate wife--'

'What of her?'

'Is now in London.'

'A curse upon her, be she where she may!'

'That's natural enough. If she had taken her annuity as usual, you would

not have been here, and we should have been better off. But that's apart

from the business. She's in London. Scared, as I suppose, and have no

doubt, by my representation when I waited upon her, that you were close

at hand (which I, of course, urged only as an inducement to compliance,

knowing that she was not pining to see you), she left that place, and

travelled up to London.'

'How do you know?'

'From my friend the noble captain--the illustrious general--the bladder,

Mr Tappertit. I learnt from him the last time I saw him, which was

yesterday, that your son who is called Barnaby--not after his father, I

suppose--'

'Death! does that matter now!'

'--You are impatient,' said the blind man, calmly; 'it's a good sign,

and looks like life--that your son Barnaby had been lured away from her

by one of his companions who knew him of old, at Chigwell; and that he

is now among the rioters.'

'And what is that to me? If father and son be hanged together, what

comfort shall I find in that?'

'Stay--stay, my friend,' returned the blind man, with a cunning look,

'you travel fast to journeys' ends. Suppose I track my lady out, and say

thus much: "You want your son, ma'am--good. I, knowing those who tempt

him to remain among them, can restore him to you, ma'am--good. You must

pay a price, ma'am, for his restoration--good again. The price is small,

and easy to be paid--dear ma'am, that's best of all."'

'What mockery is this?'

'Very likely, she may reply in those words. "No mockery at all," I

answer: "Madam, a person said to be your husband (identity is difficult

of proof after the lapse of many years) is in prison, his life in

peril--the charge against him, murder. Now, ma'am, your husband has been

dead a long, long time. The gentleman never can be confounded with him,

if you will have the goodness to say a few words, on oath, as to when he

died, and how; and that this person (who I am told resembles him in some

degree) is no more he than I am. Such testimony will set the question

quite at rest. Pledge yourself to me to give it, ma' am, and I will

undertake to keep your son (a fine lad) out of harm's way until you have

done this trifling service, when he shall be delivered up to you, safe

and sound. On the other hand, if you decline to do so, I fear he will be

betrayed, and handed over to the law, which will assuredly sentence him

to suffer death. It is, in fact, a choice between his life and death. If

you refuse, he swings. If you comply, the timber is not grown, nor the

hemp sown, that shall do him any harm."'

'There is a gleam of hope in this!' cried the prisoner.

'A gleam!' returned his friend, 'a noon-blaze; a full and glorious

daylight. Hush! I hear the tread of distant feet. Rely on me.'

'When shall I hear more?'

'As soon as I do. I should hope, to-morrow. They are coming to say that

our time for talk is over. I hear the jingling of the keys. Not another

word of this just now, or they may overhear us.'

As he said these words, the lock was turned, and one of the prison

turnkeys appearing at the door, announced that it was time for visitors

to leave the jail.

'So soon!' said Stagg, meekly. 'But it can't be helped. Cheer up,

friend. This mistake will soon be set at rest, and then you are a man

again! If this charitable gentleman will lead a blind man (who has

nothing in return but prayers) to the prison-porch, and set him with his

face towards the west, he will do a worthy deed. Thank you, good sir. I

thank you very kindly.'

So saying, and pausing for an instant at the door to turn his grinning

face towards his friend, he departed.

When the officer had seen him to the porch, he returned, and again

unlocking and unbarring the door of the cell, set it wide open,

informing its inmate that he was at liberty to walk in the adjacent

yard, if he thought proper, for an hour.

The prisoner answered with a sullen nod; and being left alone again, sat

brooding over what he had heard, and pondering upon the hopes the recent

conversation had awakened; gazing abstractedly, the while he did so,

on the light without, and watching the shadows thrown by one wall on

another, and on the stone-paved ground.

It was a dull, square yard, made cold and gloomy by high walls, and

seeming to chill the very sunlight. The stone, so bare, and rough,

and obdurate, filled even him with longing thoughts of meadow-land and

trees; and with a burning wish to be at liberty. As he looked, he rose,

and leaning against the door-post, gazed up at the bright blue sky,

smiling even on that dreary home of crime. He seemed, for a moment, to

remember lying on his back in some sweet-scented place, and gazing at it

through moving branches, long ago.

His attention was suddenly attracted by a clanking sound--he knew what

it was, for he had startled himself by making the same noise in walking

to the door. Presently a voice began to sing, and he saw the shadow of

a figure on the pavement. It stopped--was silent all at once, as

though the person for a moment had forgotten where he was, but

soon remembered--and so, with the same clanking noise, the shadow

disappeared.

He walked out into the court and paced it to and fro; startling the

echoes, as he went, with the harsh jangling of his fetters. There was a

door near his, which, like his, stood ajar.

He had not taken half-a-dozen turns up and down the yard, when, standing

still to observe this door, he heard the clanking sound again. A face

looked out of the grated window--he saw it very dimly, for the cell was

dark and the bars were heavy--and directly afterwards, a man appeared,

and came towards him.

For the sense of loneliness he had, he might have been in jail a year.

Made eager by the hope of companionship, he quickened his pace, and

hastened to meet the man half way--

What was this! His son!

They stood face to face, staring at each other. He shrinking and cowed,

despite himself; Barnahy struggling with his imperfect memory, and

wondering where he had seen that face before. He was not uncertain long,

for suddenly he laid hands upon him, and striving to bear him to the

ground, cried:

'Ah! I know! You are the robber!'

He said nothing in reply at first, but held down his head, and struggled

with him silently. Finding the younger man too strong for him, he raised

his face, looked close into his eyes, and said,

'I am your father.'

God knows what magic the name had for his ears; but Barnaby released his

hold, fell back, and looked at him aghast. Suddenly he sprung towards

him, put his arms about his neck, and pressed his head against his

cheek.

Yes, yes, he was; he was sure he was. But where had he been so long, and

why had he left his mother by herself, or worse than by herself, with

her poor foolish boy? And had she really been as happy as they said?

And where was she? Was she near there? She was not happy now, and he in

jail? Ah, no.

Not a word was said in answer; but Grip croaked loudly, and hopped

about them, round and round, as if enclosing them in a magic circle, and

invoking all the powers of mischief.

Chapter 63

During the whole of this day, every regiment in or near the metropolis

was on duty in one or other part of the town; and the regulars and

militia, in obedience to the orders which were sent to every barrack and

station within twenty-four hours' journey, began to pour in by all the

roads. But the disturbance had attained to such a formidable height, and

the rioters had grown, with impunity, to be so audacious, that the sight

of this great force, continually augmented by new arrivals, instead of

operating as a check, stimulated them to outrages of greater hardihood

than any they had yet committed; and helped to kindle a flame in

London, the like of which had never been beheld, even in its ancient and

rebellious times.

All yesterday, and on this day likewise, the commander-in-chief

endeavoured to arouse the magistrates to a sense of their duty, and in

particular the Lord Mayor, who was the faintest-hearted and most timid

of them all. With this object, large bodies of the soldiery were several

times despatched to the Mansion House to await his orders: but as he

could, by no threats or persuasions, be induced to give any, and as the

men remained in the open street, fruitlessly for any good purpose, and

thrivingly for a very bad one; these laudable attempts did harm rather

than good. For the crowd, becoming speedily acquainted with the Lord

Mayor's temper, did not fail to take advantage of it by boasting that

even the civil authorities were opposed to the Papists, and could not

find it in their hearts to molest those who were guilty of no other

offence. These vaunts they took care to make within the hearing of the

soldiers; and they, being naturally loth to quarrel with the people,

received their advances kindly enough: answering, when they were asked

if they desired to fire upon their countrymen, 'No, they would be damned

if they did;' and showing much honest simplicity and good nature.

The feeling that the military were No-Popery men, and were ripe for

disobeying orders and joining the mob, soon became very prevalent in

consequence. Rumours of their disaffection, and of their leaning towards

the popular cause, spread from mouth to mouth with astonishing rapidity;

and whenever they were drawn up idly in the streets or squares, there

was sure to be a crowd about them, cheering and shaking hands, and

treating them with a great show of confidence and affection.

By this time, the crowd was everywhere; all concealment and disguise

were laid aside, and they pervaded the whole town. If any man among them

wanted money, he had but to knock at the door of a dwelling-house, or

walk into a shop, and demand it in the rioters name; and his demand

was instantly complied with. The peaceable citizens being afraid to lay

hands upon them, singly and alone, it may be easily supposed that

when gathered together in bodies, they were perfectly secure from

interruption. They assembled in the streets, traversed them at their

will and pleasure, and publicly concerted their plans. Business was

quite suspended; the greater part of the shops were closed; most of the

houses displayed a blue flag in token of their adherence to the popular

side; and even the Jews in Houndsditch, Whitechapel, and those quarters,

wrote upon their doors or window-shutters, 'This House is a True

Protestant.' The crowd was the law, and never was the law held in

greater dread, or more implicitly obeyed.

It was about six o'clock in the evening, when a vast mob poured

into Lincoln's Inn Fields by every avenue, and divided--evidently in

pursuance of a previous design--into several parties. It must not be

understood that this arrangement was known to the whole crowd, but that

it was the work of a few leaders; who, mingling with the men as they

came upon the ground, and calling to them to fall into this or that

parry, effected it as rapidly as if it had been determined on by a

council of the whole number, and every man had known his place.

It was perfectly notorious to the assemblage that the largest body,

which comprehended about two-thirds of the whole, was designed for

the attack on Newgate. It comprehended all the rioters who had been

conspicuous in any of their former proceedings; all those whom they

recommended as daring hands and fit for the work; all those whose

companions had been taken in the riots; and a great number of people

who were relatives or friends of felons in the jail. This last class

included, not only the most desperate and utterly abandoned villains in

London, but some who were comparatively innocent. There was more than

one woman there, disguised in man's attire, and bent upon the rescue

of a child or brother. There were the two sons of a man who lay under

sentence of death, and who was to be executed along with three

others, on the next day but one. There was a great parry of boys whose

fellow-pickpockets were in the prison; and at the skirts of all, a score

of miserable women, outcasts from the world, seeking to release some

other fallen creature as miserable as themselves, or moved by a general

sympathy perhaps--God knows--with all who were without hope, and

wretched.

Old swords, and pistols without ball or powder; sledge-hammers, knives,

axes, saws, and weapons pillaged from the butchers' shops; a forest of

iron bars and wooden clubs; long ladders for scaling the walls, each

carried on the shoulders of a dozen men; lighted torches; tow smeared

with pitch, and tar, and brimstone; staves roughly plucked from fence

and paling; and even crutches taken from crippled beggars in the

streets; composed their arms. When all was ready, Hugh and Dennis, with

Simon Tappertit between them, led the way. Roaring and chafing like an

angry sea, the crowd pressed after them.

Instead of going straight down Holborn to the jail, as all expected,

their leaders took the way to Clerkenwell, and pouring down a quiet

street, halted before a locksmith's house--the Golden Key.

'Beat at the door,' cried Hugh to the men about him. 'We want one of his

craft to-night. Beat it in, if no one answers.'

The shop was shut. Both door and shutters were of a strong and sturdy

kind, and they knocked without effect. But the impatient crowd raising

a cry of 'Set fire to the house!' and torches being passed to the front,

an upper window was thrown open, and the stout old locksmith stood

before them.

'What now, you villains!' he demanded. 'Where is my daughter?'

'Ask no questions of us, old man,' retorted Hugh, waving his comrades

to be silent, 'but come down, and bring the tools of your trade. We want

you.'

'Want me!' cried the locksmith, glancing at the regimental dress he

wore: 'Ay, and if some that I could name possessed the hearts of mice,

ye should have had me long ago. Mark me, my lad--and you about him do

the same. There are a score among ye whom I see now and know, who are

dead men from this hour. Begone! and rob an undertaker's while you can!

You'll want some coffins before long.'

'Will you come down?' cried Hugh.

'Will you give me my daughter, ruffian?' cried the locksmith.

'I know nothing of her,' Hugh rejoined. 'Burn the door!'

'Stop!' cried the locksmith, in a voice that made them

falter--presenting, as he spoke, a gun. 'Let an old man do that. You can

spare him better.'

The young fellow who held the light, and who was stooping down before

the door, rose hastily at these words, and fell back. The locksmith ran

his eye along the upturned faces, and kept the weapon levelled at the

threshold of his house. It had no other rest than his shoulder, but was

as steady as the house itself.

'Let the man who does it, take heed to his prayers,' he said firmly; 'I

warn him.'

Snatching a torch from one who stood near him, Hugh was stepping forward

with an oath, when he was arrested by a shrill and piercing shriek, and,

looking upward, saw a fluttering garment on the house-top.

There was another shriek, and another, and then a shrill voice cried,

'Is Simmun below!' At the same moment a lean neck was stretched over

the parapet, and Miss Miggs, indistinctly seen in the gathering gloom

of evening, screeched in a frenzied manner, 'Oh! dear gentlemen, let me

hear Simmuns's answer from his own lips. Speak to me, Simmun. Speak to

me!'

Mr Tappertit, who was not at all flattered by this compliment, looked

up, and bidding her hold her peace, ordered her to come down and open

the door, for they wanted her master, and would take no denial.

'Oh good gentlemen!' cried Miss Miggs. 'Oh my own precious, precious

Simmun--'

'Hold your nonsense, will you!' retorted Mr Tappertit; 'and come down

and open the door.--G. Varden, drop that gun, or it will be worse for

you.'

'Don't mind his gun,' screamed Miggs. 'Simmun and gentlemen, I poured a

mug of table-beer right down the barrel.'

The crowd gave a loud shout, which was followed by a roar of laughter.

'It wouldn't go off, not if you was to load it up to the muzzle,'

screamed Miggs. 'Simmun and gentlemen, I'm locked up in the front attic,

through the little door on the right hand when you think you've got to

the very top of the stairs--and up the flight of corner steps, being

careful not to knock your heads against the rafters, and not to tread on

one side in case you should fall into the two-pair bedroom through the

lath and plasture, which do not bear, but the contrairy. Simmun and

gentlemen, I've been locked up here for safety, but my endeavours has

always been, and always will be, to be on the right side--the blessed

side and to prenounce the Pope of Babylon, and all her inward and

her outward workings, which is Pagin. My sentiments is of little

consequences, I know,' cried Miggs, with additional shrillness, 'for my

positions is but a servant, and as sich, of humilities, still I gives

expressions to my feelings, and places my reliances on them which

entertains my own opinions!'

Without taking much notice of these outpourings of Miss Miggs after she

had made her first announcement in relation to the gun, the crowd

raised a ladder against the window where the locksmith stood, and

notwithstanding that he closed, and fastened, and defended it manfully,

soon forced an entrance by shivering the glass and breaking in the

frames. After dealing a few stout blows about him, he found himself

defenceless, in the midst of a furious crowd, which overflowed the room

and softened off in a confused heap of faces at the door and window.

They were very wrathful with him (for he had wounded two men), and

even called out to those in front, to bring him forth and hang him on

a lamp-post. But Gabriel was quite undaunted, and looked from Hugh and

Dennis, who held him by either arm, to Simon Tappertit, who confronted

him.

'You have robbed me of my daughter,' said the locksmith, 'who is far

dearer to me than my life; and you may take my life, if you will. I

bless God that I have been enabled to keep my wife free of this scene;

and that He has made me a man who will not ask mercy at such hands as

yours.'

'And a wery game old gentleman you are,' said Mr Dennis, approvingly;

'and you express yourself like a man. What's the odds, brother, whether

it's a lamp-post to-night, or a feather-bed ten year to come, eh?'

The locksmith glanced at him disdainfully, but returned no other answer.

'For my part,' said the hangman, who particularly favoured the lamp-post

suggestion, 'I honour your principles. They're mine exactly. In such

sentiments as them,' and here he emphasised his discourse with an oath,

'I'm ready to meet you or any man halfway.--Have you got a bit of cord

anywheres handy? Don't put yourself out of the way, if you haven't. A

handkecher will do.'

'Don't be a fool, master,' whispered Hugh, seizing Varden roughly by

the shoulder; 'but do as you're bid. You'll soon hear what you're wanted

for. Do it!'

'I'll do nothing at your request, or that of any scoundrel here,'

returned the locksmith. 'If you want any service from me, you may spare

yourselves the pains of telling me what it is. I tell you, beforehand,

I'll do nothing for you.'

Mr Dennis was so affected by this constancy on the part of the staunch

old man, that he protested--almost with tears in his eyes--that to baulk

his inclinations would be an act of cruelty and hard dealing to which

he, for one, never could reconcile his conscience. The gentleman, he

said, had avowed in so many words that he was ready for working off;

such being the case, he considered it their duty, as a civilised and

enlightened crowd, to work him off. It was not often, he observed, that

they had it in their power to accommodate themselves to the wishes of

those from whom they had the misfortune to differ. Having now found an

individual who expressed a desire which they could reasonably indulge

(and for himself he was free to confess that in his opinion that desire

did honour to his feelings), he hoped they would decide to accede to

his proposition before going any further. It was an experiment which,

skilfully and dexterously performed, would be over in five minutes, with

great comfort and satisfaction to all parties; and though it did not

become him (Mr Dennis) to speak well of himself he trusted he might

be allowed to say that he had practical knowledge of the subject, and,

being naturally of an obliging and friendly disposition, would work the

gentleman off with a deal of pleasure.

These remarks, which were addressed in the midst of a frightful din and

turmoil to those immediately about him, were received with great favour;

not so much, perhaps, because of the hangman's eloquence, as on account

of the locksmith's obstinacy. Gabriel was in imminent peril, and he knew

it; but he preserved a steady silence; and would have done so, if they

had been debating whether they should roast him at a slow fire.

As the hangman spoke, there was some stir and confusion on the ladder;

and directly he was silent--so immediately upon his holding his peace,

that the crowd below had no time to learn what he had been saying, or to

shout in response--some one at the window cried:

'He has a grey head. He is an old man: Don't hurt him!'

The locksmith turned, with a start, towards the place from which the

words had come, and looked hurriedly at the people who were hanging on

the ladder and clinging to each other.

'Pay no respect to my grey hair, young man,' he said, answering the

voice and not any one he saw. 'I don't ask it. My heart is green enough

to scorn and despise every man among you, band of robbers that you are!'

This incautious speech by no means tended to appease the ferocity of the

crowd. They cried again to have him brought out; and it would have gone

hard with the honest locksmith, but that Hugh reminded them, in answer,

that they wanted his services, and must have them.

'So, tell him what we want,' he said to Simon Tappertit, 'and quickly.

And open your ears, master, if you would ever use them after to-night.'

Gabriel folded his arms, which were now at liberty, and eyed his old

'prentice in silence.

'Lookye, Varden,' said Sim, 'we're bound for Newgate.'

'I know you are,' returned the locksmith. 'You never said a truer word

than that.'

'To burn it down, I mean,' said Simon, 'and force the gates, and set the

prisoners at liberty. You helped to make the lock of the great door.'

'I did,' said the locksmith. 'You owe me no thanks for that--as you'll

find before long.'

'Maybe,' returned his journeyman, 'but you must show us how to force

it.'

'Must I!'

'Yes; for you know, and I don't. You must come along with us, and pick

it with your own hands.'

'When I do,' said the locksmith quietly, 'my hands shall drop off at the

wrists, and you shall wear them, Simon Tappertit, on your shoulders for

epaulettes.'

'We'll see that,' cried Hugh, interposing, as the indignation of the

crowd again burst forth. 'You fill a basket with the tools he'll want,

while I bring him downstairs. Open the doors below, some of you. And

light the great captain, others! Is there no business afoot, my lads,

that you can do nothing but stand and grumble?'

They looked at one another, and quickly dispersing, swarmed over the

house, plundering and breaking, according to their custom, and carrying

off such articles of value as happened to please their fancy. They had

no great length of time for these proceedings, for the basket of tools

was soon prepared and slung over a man's shoulders. The preparations

being now completed, and everything ready for the attack, those who

were pillaging and destroying in the other rooms were called down to the

workshop. They were about to issue forth, when the man who had been last

upstairs, stepped forward, and asked if the young woman in the garret

(who was making a terrible noise, he said, and kept on screaming without

the least cessation) was to be released?

For his own part, Simon Tappertit would certainly have replied in the

negative, but the mass of his companions, mindful of the good service

she had done in the matter of the gun, being of a different opinion, he

had nothing for it but to answer, Yes. The man, accordingly, went back

again to the rescue, and presently returned with Miss Miggs, limp and

doubled up, and very damp from much weeping.

As the young lady had given no tokens of consciousness on their way

downstairs, the bearer reported her either dead or dying; and being at

some loss what to do with her, was looking round for a convenient bench

or heap of ashes on which to place her senseless form, when she suddenly

came upon her feet by some mysterious means, thrust back her hair,

stared wildly at Mr Tappertit, cried, 'My Simmuns's life is not a

wictim!' and dropped into his arms with such promptitude that he

staggered and reeled some paces back, beneath his lovely burden.

'Oh bother!' said Mr Tappertit. 'Here. Catch hold of her, somebody. Lock

her up again; she never ought to have been let out.'

'My Simmun!' cried Miss Miggs, in tears, and faintly. 'My for ever, ever

blessed Simmun!'

'Hold up, will you,' said Mr Tappertit, in a very unresponsive tone,

'I'll let you fall if you don't. What are you sliding your feet off the

ground for?'

'My angel Simmuns!' murmured Miggs--'he promised--'

'Promised! Well, and I'll keep my promise,' answered Simon, testily. 'I

mean to provide for you, don't I? Stand up!'

'Where am I to go? What is to become of me after my actions of this

night!' cried Miggs. 'What resting-places now remains but in the silent

tombses!'

'I wish you was in the silent tombses, I do,' cried Mr Tappertit, 'and

boxed up tight, in a good strong one. Here,' he cried to one of the

bystanders, in whose ear he whispered for a moment: 'Take her off, will

you. You understand where?'

The fellow nodded; and taking her in his arms, notwithstanding her

broken protestations, and her struggles (which latter species of

opposition, involving scratches, was much more difficult of resistance),

carried her away. They who were in the house poured out into the street;

the locksmith was taken to the head of the crowd, and required to walk

between his two conductors; the whole body was put in rapid motion;

and without any shouts or noise they bore down straight on Newgate, and

halted in a dense mass before the prison-gate.

Chapter 64

Breaking the silence they had hitherto preserved, they raised a great

cry as soon as they were ranged before the jail, and demanded to speak

to the governor. This visit was not wholly unexpected, for his house,

which fronted the street, was strongly barricaded, the wicket-gate of

the prison was closed up, and at no loophole or grating was any person

to be seen. Before they had repeated their summons many times, a man

appeared upon the roof of the governor's house, and asked what it was

they wanted.

Some said one thing, some another, and some only groaned and hissed. It

being now nearly dark, and the house high, many persons in the throng

were not aware that any one had come to answer them, and continued their

clamour until the intelligence was gradually diffused through the whole

concourse. Ten minutes or more elapsed before any one voice could be

heard with tolerable distinctness; during which interval the figure

remained perched alone, against the summer-evening sky, looking down

into the troubled street.

'Are you,' said Hugh at length, 'Mr Akerman, the head jailer here?'

'Of course he is, brother,' whispered Dennis. But Hugh, without minding

him, took his answer from the man himself.

'Yes,' he said. 'I am.'

'You have got some friends of ours in your custody, master.'

'I have a good many people in my custody.' He glanced downward, as

he spoke, into the jail: and the feeling that he could see into the

different yards, and that he overlooked everything which was hidden from

their view by the rugged walls, so lashed and goaded the mob, that they

howled like wolves.

'Deliver up our friends,' said Hugh, 'and you may keep the rest.'

'It's my duty to keep them all. I shall do my duty.'

'If you don't throw the doors open, we shall break 'em down,' said Hugh;

'for we will have the rioters out.'

'All I can do, good people,' Akerman replied, 'is to exhort you to

disperse; and to remind you that the consequences of any disturbance in

this place, will be very severe, and bitterly repented by most of you,

when it is too late.'

He made as though he would retire when he said these words, but he was

checked by the voice of the locksmith.

'Mr Akerman,' cried Gabriel, 'Mr Akerman.'

'I will hear no more from any of you,' replied the governor, turning

towards the speaker, and waving his hand.

'But I am not one of them,' said Gabriel. 'I am an honest man, Mr

Akerman; a respectable tradesman--Gabriel Varden, the locksmith. You

know me?'

'You among the crowd!' cried the governor in an altered voice.

'Brought here by force--brought here to pick the lock of the great door

for them,' rejoined the locksmith. 'Bear witness for me, Mr Akerman,

that I refuse to do it; and that I will not do it, come what may of my

refusal. If any violence is done to me, please to remember this.'

'Is there no way of helping you?' said the governor.

'None, Mr Akerman. You'll do your duty, and I'll do mine. Once again,

you robbers and cut-throats,' said the locksmith, turning round upon

them, 'I refuse. Ah! Howl till you're hoarse. I refuse.'

'Stay--stay!' said the jailer, hastily. 'Mr Varden, I know you for

a worthy man, and one who would do no unlawful act except upon

compulsion--'

'Upon compulsion, sir,' interposed the locksmith, who felt that the tone

in which this was said, conveyed the speaker's impression that he had

ample excuse for yielding to the furious multitude who beset and hemmed

him in, on every side, and among whom he stood, an old man, quite alone;

'upon compulsion, sir, I'll do nothing.'

'Where is that man,' said the keeper, anxiously, 'who spoke to me just

now?'

'Here!' Hugh replied.

'Do you know what the guilt of murder is, and that by keeping that

honest tradesman at your side you endanger his life!'

'We know it very well,' he answered, 'for what else did we bring him

here? Let's have our friends, master, and you shall have your friend. Is

that fair, lads?'

The mob replied to him with a loud Hurrah!

'You see how it is, sir?' cried Varden. 'Keep 'em out, in King George's

name. Remember what I have said. Good night!'

There was no more parley. A shower of stones and other missiles

compelled the keeper of the jail to retire; and the mob, pressing on,

and swarming round the walls, forced Gabriel Varden close up to the

door.

In vain the basket of tools was laid upon the ground before him, and

he was urged in turn by promises, by blows, by offers of reward, and

threats of instant death, to do the office for which they had brought

him there. 'No,' cried the sturdy locksmith, 'I will not!'

He had never loved his life so well as then, but nothing could move him.

The savage faces that glared upon him, look where he would; the cries of

those who thirsted, like wild animals, for his blood; the sight of men

pressing forward, and trampling down their fellows, as they strove to

reach him, and struck at him above the heads of other men, with axes and

with iron bars; all failed to daunt him. He looked from man to man, and

face to face, and still, with quickened breath and lessening colour,

cried firmly, 'I will not!'

Dennis dealt him a blow upon the face which felled him to the ground. He

sprung up again like a man in the prime of life, and with blood upon his

forehead, caught him by the throat.

'You cowardly dog!' he said: 'Give me my daughter. Give me my daughter.'

They struggled together. Some cried 'Kill him,' and some (but they were

not near enough) strove to trample him to death. Tug as he would at the

old man's wrists, the hangman could not force him to unclench his hands.

'Is this all the return you make me, you ungrateful monster?' he

articulated with great difficulty, and with many oaths.

'Give me my daughter!' cried the locksmith, who was now as fierce as

those who gathered round him: 'Give me my daughter!'

He was down again, and up, and down once more, and buffeting with a

score of them, who bandied him from hand to hand, when one tall fellow,

fresh from a slaughter-house, whose dress and great thigh-boots smoked

hot with grease and blood, raised a pole-axe, and swearing a horrible

oath, aimed it at the old man's uncovered head. At that instant, and in

the very act, he fell himself, as if struck by lightning, and over his

body a one-armed man came darting to the locksmith's side. Another man

was with him, and both caught the locksmith roughly in their grasp.

'Leave him to us!' they cried to Hugh--struggling, as they spoke, to

force a passage backward through the crowd. 'Leave him to us. Why do you

waste your whole strength on such as he, when a couple of men can finish

him in as many minutes! You lose time. Remember the prisoners! remember

Barnaby!'

The cry ran through the mob. Hammers began to rattle on the walls; and

every man strove to reach the prison, and be among the foremost rank.

Fighting their way through the press and struggle, as desperately as if

they were in the midst of enemies rather than their own friends, the two

men retreated with the locksmith between them, and dragged him through

the very heart of the concourse.

And now the strokes began to fall like hail upon the gate, and on the

strong building; for those who could not reach the door, spent their

fierce rage on anything--even on the great blocks of stone, which

shivered their weapons into fragments, and made their hands and arms to

tingle as if the walls were active in their stout resistance, and dealt

them back their blows. The clash of iron ringing upon iron, mingled

with the deafening tumult and sounded high above it, as the great

sledge-hammers rattled on the nailed and plated door: the sparks flew

off in showers; men worked in gangs, and at short intervals relieved

each other, that all their strength might be devoted to the work; but

there stood the portal still, as grim and dark and strong as ever, and,

saving for the dints upon its battered surface, quite unchanged.

While some brought all their energies to bear upon this toilsome task;

and some, rearing ladders against the prison, tried to clamber to the

summit of the walls they were too short to scale; and some again engaged

a body of police a hundred strong, and beat them back and trod them

under foot by force of numbers; others besieged the house on which the

jailer had appeared, and driving in the door, brought out his furniture,

and piled it up against the prison-gate, to make a bonfire which should

burn it down. As soon as this device was understood, all those who had

laboured hitherto, cast down their tools and helped to swell the heap;

which reached half-way across the street, and was so high, that those

who threw more fuel on the top, got up by ladders. When all the keeper's

goods were flung upon this costly pile, to the last fragment, they

smeared it with the pitch, and tar, and rosin they had brought, and

sprinkled it with turpentine. To all the woodwork round the prison-doors

they did the like, leaving not a joist or beam untouched. This infernal

christening performed, they fired the pile with lighted matches and with

blazing tow, and then stood by, awaiting the result.

The furniture being very dry, and rendered more combustible by wax

and oil, besides the arts they had used, took fire at once. The flames

roared high and fiercely, blackening the prison-wall, and twining up

its loftly front like burning serpents. At first they crowded round the

blaze, and vented their exultation only in their looks: but when it grew

hotter and fiercer--when it crackled, leaped, and roared, like a great

furnace--when it shone upon the opposite houses, and lighted up not only

the pale and wondering faces at the windows, but the inmost corners of

each habitation--when through the deep red heat and glow, the fire was

seen sporting and toying with the door, now clinging to its obdurate

surface, now gliding off with fierce inconstancy and soaring high into

the sky, anon returning to fold it in its burning grasp and lure it to

its ruin--when it shone and gleamed so brightly that the church clock of

St Sepulchre's so often pointing to the hour of death, was legible as in

broad day, and the vane upon its steeple-top glittered in the unwonted

light like something richly jewelled--when blackened stone and sombre

brick grew ruddy in the deep reflection, and windows shone like

burnished gold, dotting the longest distance in the fiery vista

with their specks of brightness--when wall and tower, and roof and

chimney-stack, seemed drunk, and in the flickering glare appeared to

reel and stagger--when scores of objects, never seen before, burst out

upon the view, and things the most familiar put on some new aspect--then

the mob began to join the whirl, and with loud yells, and shouts, and

clamour, such as happily is seldom heard, bestirred themselves to feed

the fire, and keep it at its height.

Although the heat was so intense that the paint on the houses over

against the prison, parched and crackled up, and swelling into boils,

as it were from excess of torture, broke and crumbled away; although the

glass fell from the window-sashes, and the lead and iron on the roofs

blistered the incautious hand that touched them, and the sparrows in the

eaves took wing, and rendered giddy by the smoke, fell fluttering down

upon the blazing pile; still the fire was tended unceasingly by busy

hands, and round it, men were going always. They never slackened in

their zeal, or kept aloof, but pressed upon the flames so hard, that

those in front had much ado to save themselves from being thrust in; if

one man swooned or dropped, a dozen struggled for his place, and that

although they knew the pain, and thirst, and pressure to be unendurable.

Those who fell down in fainting-fits, and were not crushed or burnt,

were carried to an inn-yard close at hand, and dashed with water from a

pump; of which buckets full were passed from man to man among the crowd;

but such was the strong desire of all to drink, and such the fighting to

be first, that, for the most part, the whole contents were spilled upon

the ground, without the lips of one man being moistened.

Meanwhile, and in the midst of all the roar and outcry, those who were

nearest to the pile, heaped up again the burning fragments that came

toppling down, and raked the fire about the door, which, although a

sheet of flame, was still a door fast locked and barred, and kept

them out. Great pieces of blazing wood were passed, besides, above the

people's heads to such as stood about the ladders, and some of these,

climbing up to the topmost stave, and holding on with one hand by the

prison wall, exerted all their skill and force to cast these fire-brands

on the roof, or down into the yards within. In many instances their

efforts were successful; which occasioned a new and appalling addition

to the horrors of the scene: for the prisoners within, seeing from

between their bars that the fire caught in many places and thrived

fiercely, and being all locked up in strong cells for the night, began

to know that they were in danger of being burnt alive. This terrible

fear, spreading from cell to cell and from yard to yard, vented itself

in such dismal cries and wailings, and in such dreadful shrieks for

help, that the whole jail resounded with the noise; which was loudly

heard even above the shouting of the mob and roaring of the flames, and

was so full of agony and despair, that it made the boldest tremble.

It was remarkable that these cries began in that quarter of the jail

which fronted Newgate Street, where, it was well known, the men who were

to suffer death on Thursday were confined. And not only were these four

who had so short a time to live, the first to whom the dread of being

burnt occurred, but they were, throughout, the most importunate of all:

for they could be plainly heard, notwithstanding the great thickness of

the walls, crying that the wind set that way, and that the flames would

shortly reach them; and calling to the officers of the jail to come

and quench the fire from a cistern which was in their yard, and full

of water. Judging from what the crowd outside the walls could hear from

time to time, these four doomed wretches never ceased to call for

help; and that with as much distraction, and in as great a frenzy of

attachment to existence, as though each had an honoured, happy life

before him, instead of eight-and-forty hours of miserable imprisonment,

and then a violent and shameful death.

But the anguish and suffering of the two sons of one of these men, when

they heard, or fancied that they heard, their father's voice, is past

description. After wringing their hands and rushing to and fro as if

they were stark mad, one mounted on the shoulders of his brother, and

tried to clamber up the face of the high wall, guarded at the top with

spikes and points of iron. And when he fell among the crowd, he was not

deterred by his bruises, but mounted up again, and fell again, and, when

he found the feat impossible, began to beat the stones and tear them

with his hands, as if he could that way make a breach in the strong

building, and force a passage in. At last, they cleft their way among

the mob about the door, though many men, a dozen times their match, had

tried in vain to do so, and were seen, in--yes, in--the fire, striving

to prize it down, with crowbars.

Nor were they alone affected by the outcry from within the prison. The

women who were looking on, shrieked loudly, beat their hands together,

stopped their ears; and many fainted: the men who were not near the

walls and active in the siege, rather than do nothing, tore up the

pavement of the street, and did so with a haste and fury they could

not have surpassed if that had been the jail, and they were near their

object. Not one living creature in the throng was for an instant still.

The whole great mass were mad.

A shout! Another! Another yet, though few knew why, or what it meant.

But those around the gate had seen it slowly yield, and drop from its

topmost hinge. It hung on that side by but one, but it was upright

still, because of the bar, and its having sunk, of its own weight, into

the heap of ashes at its foot. There was now a gap at the top of the

doorway, through which could be descried a gloomy passage, cavernous and

dark. Pile up the fire!

It burnt fiercely. The door was red-hot, and the gap wider. They vainly

tried to shield their faces with their hands, and standing as if in

readiness for a spring, watched the place. Dark figures, some crawling

on their hands and knees, some carried in the arms of others, were seen

to pass along the roof. It was plain the jail could hold out no longer.

The keeper, and his officers, and their wives and children, were

escaping. Pile up the fire!

The door sank down again: it settled deeper in the

cinders--tottered--yielded--was down!

As they shouted again, they fell back, for a moment, and left a clear

space about the fire that lay between them and the jail entry. Hugh

leapt upon the blazing heap, and scattering a train of sparks into the

air, and making the dark lobby glitter with those that hung upon his

dress, dashed into the jail.

The hangman followed. And then so many rushed upon their track, that the

fire got trodden down and thinly strewn about the street; but there was

no need of it now, for, inside and out, the prison was in flames.

Chapter 65

During the whole course of the terrible scene which was now at its

height, one man in the jail suffered a degree of fear and mental torment

which had no parallel in the endurance, even of those who lay under

sentence of death.

When the rioters first assembled before the building, the murderer

was roused from sleep--if such slumbers as his may have that blessed

name--by the roar of voices, and the struggling of a great crowd. He

started up as these sounds met his ear, and, sitting on his bedstead,

listened.

After a short interval of silence the noise burst out again. Still

listening attentively, he made out, in course of time, that the jail was

besieged by a furious multitude. His guilty conscience instantly arrayed

these men against himself, and brought the fear upon him that he would

be singled out, and torn to pieces.

Once impressed with the terror of this conceit, everything tended to

confirm and strengthen it. His double crime, the circumstances under

which it had been committed, the length of time that had elapsed, and

its discovery in spite of all, made him, as it were, the visible object

of the Almighty's wrath. In all the crime and vice and moral gloom of

the great pest-house of the capital, he stood alone, marked and singled

out by his great guilt, a Lucifer among the devils. The other prisoners

were a host, hiding and sheltering each other--a crowd like that without

the walls. He was one man against the whole united concourse; a single,

solitary, lonely man, from whom the very captives in the jail fell off

and shrunk appalled.

It might be that the intelligence of his capture having been bruited

abroad, they had come there purposely to drag him out and kill him in

the street; or it might be that they were the rioters, and, in pursuance

of an old design, had come to sack the prison. But in either case he had

no belief or hope that they would spare him. Every shout they raised,

and every sound they made, was a blow upon his heart. As the attack went

on, he grew more wild and frantic in his terror: tried to pull away the

bars that guarded the chimney and prevented him from climbing up: called

loudly on the turnkeys to cluster round the cell and save him from the

fury of the rabble; or put him in some dungeon underground, no matter

of what depth, how dark it was, or loathsome, or beset with rats and

creeping things, so that it hid him and was hard to find.

But no one came, or answered him. Fearful, even while he cried to them,

of attracting attention, he was silent. By and bye, he saw, as he looked

from his grated window, a strange glimmering on the stone walls and

pavement of the yard. It was feeble at first, and came and went, as

though some officers with torches were passing to and fro upon the roof

of the prison. Soon it reddened, and lighted brands came whirling down,

spattering the ground with fire, and burning sullenly in corners. One

rolled beneath a wooden bench, and set it in a blaze; another caught a

water-spout, and so went climbing up the wall, leaving a long straight

track of fire behind it. After a time, a slow thick shower of burning

fragments, from some upper portion of the prison which was blazing nigh,

began to fall before his door. Remembering that it opened outwards, he

knew that every spark which fell upon the heap, and in the act lost

its bright life, and died an ugly speck of dust and rubbish, helped

to entomb him in a living grave. Still, though the jail resounded with

shrieks and cries for help,--though the fire bounded up as if each

separate flame had had a tiger's life, and roared as though, in every

one, there were a hungry voice--though the heat began to grow intense,

and the air suffocating, and the clamour without increased, and the

danger of his situation even from one merciless element was every moment

more extreme,--still he was afraid to raise his voice again, lest

the crowd should break in, and should, of their own ears or from the

information given them by the other prisoners, get the clue to his place

of confinement. Thus fearful alike, of those within the prison and

of those without; of noise and silence; light and darkness; of being

released, and being left there to die; he was so tortured and tormented,

that nothing man has ever done to man in the horrible caprice of power

and cruelty, exceeds his self-inflicted punishment.

Now, now, the door was down. Now they came rushing through the jail,

calling to each other in the vaulted passages; clashing the iron gates

dividing yard from yard; beating at the doors of cells and wards;

wrenching off bolts and locks and bars; tearing down the door-posts to

get men out; endeavouring to drag them by main force through gaps and

windows where a child could scarcely pass; whooping and yelling without

a moment's rest; and running through the heat and flames as if they were

cased in metal. By their legs, their arms, the hair upon their heads,

they dragged the prisoners out. Some threw themselves upon the captives

as they got towards the door, and tried to file away their irons; some

danced about them with a frenzied joy, and rent their clothes, and were

ready, as it seemed, to tear them limb from limb. Now a party of a dozen

men came darting through the yard into which the murderer cast fearful

glances from his darkened window; dragging a prisoner along the ground

whose dress they had nearly torn from his body in their mad eagerness to

set him free, and who was bleeding and senseless in their hands. Now

a score of prisoners ran to and fro, who had lost themselves in the

intricacies of the prison, and were so bewildered with the noise and

glare that they knew not where to turn or what to do, and still cried

out for help, as loudly as before. Anon some famished wretch whose theft

had been a loaf of bread, or scrap of butcher's meat, came skulking

past, barefooted--going slowly away because that jail, his house, was

burning; not because he had any other, or had friends to meet, or old

haunts to revisit, or any liberty to gain, but liberty to starve and

die. And then a knot of highwaymen went trooping by, conducted by the

friends they had among the crowd, who muffled their fetters as they went

along, with handkerchiefs and bands of hay, and wrapped them in coats

and cloaks, and gave them drink from bottles, and held it to their lips,

because of their handcuffs which there was no time to remove. All this,

and Heaven knows how much more, was done amidst a noise, a hurry, and

distraction, like nothing that we know of, even in our dreams; which

seemed for ever on the rise, and never to decrease for the space of a

single instant.

He was still looking down from his window upon these things, when a band

of men with torches, ladders, axes, and many kinds of weapons, poured

into the yard, and hammering at his door, inquired if there were any

prisoner within. He left the window when he saw them coming, and drew

back into the remotest corner of the cell; but although he returned them

no answer, they had a fancy that some one was inside, for they presently

set ladders against it, and began to tear away the bars at the casement;

not only that, indeed, but with pickaxes to hew down the very stones in

the wall.

As soon as they had made a breach at the window, large enough for the

admission of a man's head, one of them thrust in a torch and looked all

round the room. He followed this man's gaze until it rested on himself,

and heard him demand why he had not answered, but made him no reply.

In the general surprise and wonder, they were used to this; without

saying anything more, they enlarged the breach until it was large enough

to admit the body of a man, and then came dropping down upon the floor,

one after another, until the cell was full. They caught him up among

them, handed him to the window, and those who stood upon the ladders

passed him down upon the pavement of the yard. Then the rest came out,

one after another, and, bidding him fly, and lose no time, or the way

would be choked up, hurried away to rescue others.

It seemed not a minute's work from first to last. He staggered to his

feet, incredulous of what had happened, when the yard was filled

again, and a crowd rushed on, hurrying Barnaby among them. In another

minute--not so much: another minute! the same instant, with no lapse or

interval between!--he and his son were being passed from hand to hand,

through the dense crowd in the street, and were glancing backward at a

burning pile which some one said was Newgate.

From the moment of their first entrance into the prison, the crowd

dispersed themselves about it, and swarmed into every chink and crevice,

as if they had a perfect acquaintance with its innermost parts, and bore

in their minds an exact plan of the whole. For this immediate knowledge

of the place, they were, no doubt, in a great degree, indebted to the

hangman, who stood in the lobby, directing some to go this way, some

that, and some the other; and who materially assisted in bringing about

the wonderful rapidity with which the release of the prisoners was

effected.

But this functionary of the law reserved one important piece of

intelligence, and kept it snugly to himself. When he had issued his

instructions relative to every other part of the building, and the mob

were dispersed from end to end, and busy at their work, he took a bundle

of keys from a kind of cupboard in the wall, and going by a kind of

passage near the chapel (it joined the governors house, and was then

on fire), betook himself to the condemned cells, which were a series of

small, strong, dismal rooms, opening on a low gallery, guarded, at the

end at which he entered, by a strong iron wicket, and at its opposite

extremity by two doors and a thick grate. Having double locked the

wicket, and assured himself that the other entrances were well secured,

he sat down on a bench in the gallery, and sucked the head of his stick

with the utmost complacency, tranquillity, and contentment.

It would have been strange enough, a man's enjoying himself in this

quiet manner, while the prison was burning, and such a tumult was

cleaving the air, though he had been outside the walls. But here, in the

very heart of the building, and moreover with the prayers and cries

of the four men under sentence sounding in his ears, and their hands,

stretched our through the gratings in their cell-doors, clasped in

frantic entreaty before his very eyes, it was particularly remarkable.

Indeed, Mr Dennis appeared to think it an uncommon circumstance, and to

banter himself upon it; for he thrust his hat on one side as some men do

when they are in a waggish humour, sucked the head of his stick with a

higher relish, and smiled as though he would say, 'Dennis, you're a rum

dog; you're a queer fellow; you're capital company, Dennis, and quite a

character!'

He sat in this way for some minutes, while the four men in the cells,

who were certain that somebody had entered the gallery, but could not

see who, gave vent to such piteous entreaties as wretches in their

miserable condition may be supposed to have been inspired with: urging,

whoever it was, to set them at liberty, for the love of Heaven; and

protesting, with great fervour, and truly enough, perhaps, for the time,

that if they escaped, they would amend their ways, and would never,

never, never again do wrong before God or man, but would lead penitent

and sober lives, and sorrowfully repent the crimes they had committed.

The terrible energy with which they spoke, would have moved any person,

no matter how good or just (if any good or just person could have

strayed into that sad place that night), to have set them at liberty:

and, while he would have left any other punishment to its free course,

to have saved them from this last dreadful and repulsive penalty; which

never turned a man inclined to evil, and has hardened thousands who were

half inclined to good.

Mr Dennis, who had been bred and nurtured in the good old school, and

had administered the good old laws on the good old plan, always once

and sometimes twice every six weeks, for a long time, bore these appeals

with a deal of philosophy. Being at last, however, rather disturbed in

his pleasant reflection by their repetition, he rapped at one of the

doors with his stick, and cried:

'Hold your noise there, will you?'

At this they all cried together that they were to be hanged on the next

day but one; and again implored his aid.

'Aid! For what!' said Mr Dennis, playfully rapping the knuckles of the

hand nearest him.

'To save us!' they cried.

'Oh, certainly,' said Mr Dennis, winking at the wall in the absence

of any friend with whom he could humour the joke. 'And so you're to be

worked off, are you, brothers?'

'Unless we are released to-night,' one of them cried, 'we are dead men!'

'I tell you what it is,' said the hangman, gravely; 'I'm afraid, my

friend, that you're not in that 'ere state of mind that's suitable to

your condition, then; you're not a-going to be released: don't think

it--Will you leave off that 'ere indecent row? I wonder you an't ashamed

of yourselves, I do.'

He followed up this reproof by rapping every set of knuckles one after

the other, and having done so, resumed his seat again with a cheerful

countenance.

'You've had law,' he said, crossing his legs and elevating his eyebrows:

'laws have been made a' purpose for you; a wery handsome prison's

been made a' purpose for you; a parson's kept a purpose for you;

a constitootional officer's appointed a' purpose for you; carts is

maintained a' purpose for you--and yet you're not contented!--WILL you

hold that noise, you sir in the furthest?'

A groan was the only answer.

'So well as I can make out,' said Mr Dennis, in a tone of mingled

badinage and remonstrance, 'there's not a man among you. I begin to

think I'm on the opposite side, and among the ladies; though for the

matter of that, I've seen a many ladies face it out, in a manner that

did honour to the sex.--You in number two, don't grind them teeth of

yours. Worse manners,' said the hangman, rapping at the door with his

stick, 'I never see in this place afore. I'm ashamed of you. You're a

disgrace to the Bailey.'

After pausing for a moment to hear if anything could be pleaded in

justification, Mr Dennis resumed in a sort of coaxing tone:

'Now look'ee here, you four. I'm come here to take care of you, and see

that you an't burnt, instead of the other thing. It's no use your making

any noise, for you won't be found out by them as has broken in, and

you'll only be hoarse when you come to the speeches,--which is a pity.

What I say in respect to the speeches always is, "Give it mouth." That's

my maxim. Give it mouth. I've heerd,' said the hangman, pulling off his

hat to take his handkerchief from the crown and wipe his face, and then

putting it on again a little more on one side than before, 'I've heerd a

eloquence on them boards--you know what boards I mean--and have heerd

a degree of mouth given to them speeches, that they was as clear as a

bell, and as good as a play. There's a pattern! And always, when a thing

of this natur's to come off, what I stand up for, is, a proper frame of

mind. Let's have a proper frame of mind, and we can go through with it,

creditable--pleasant--sociable. Whatever you do (and I address myself in

particular, to you in the furthest), never snivel. I'd sooner by half,

though I lose by it, see a man tear his clothes a' purpose to spile

'em before they come to me, than find him snivelling. It's ten to one a

better frame of mind, every way!'

While the hangman addressed them to this effect, in the tone and with

the air of a pastor in familiar conversation with his flock, the noise

had been in some degree subdued; for the rioters were busy in conveying

the prisoners to the Sessions House, which was beyond the main walls of

the prison, though connected with it, and the crowd were busy too, in

passing them from thence along the street. But when he had got thus far

in his discourse, the sound of voices in the yard showed plainly that

the mob had returned and were coming that way; and directly afterwards a

violent crashing at the grate below, gave note of their attack upon the

cells (as they were called) at last.

It was in vain the hangman ran from door to door, and covered the

grates, one after another, with his hat, in futile efforts to stifle

the cries of the four men within; it was in vain he dogged their

outstretched hands, and beat them with his stick, or menaced them

with new and lingering pains in the execution of his office; the place

resounded with their cries. These, together with the feeling that they

were now the last men in the jail, so worked upon and stimulated the

besiegers, that in an incredibly short space of time they forced the

strong grate down below, which was formed of iron rods two inches

square, drove in the two other doors, as if they had been but deal

partitions, and stood at the end of the gallery with only a bar or two

between them and the cells.

'Halloa!' cried Hugh, who was the first to look into the dusky passage:

'Dennis before us! Well done, old boy. Be quick, and open here, for we

shall be suffocated in the smoke, going out.'

'Go out at once, then,' said Dennis. 'What do you want here?'

'Want!' echoed Hugh. 'The four men.'

'Four devils!' cried the hangman. 'Don't you know they're left for death

on Thursday? Don't you respect the law--the constitootion--nothing? Let

the four men be.'

'Is this a time for joking?' cried Hugh. 'Do you hear 'em? Pull away

these bars that have got fixed between the door and the ground; and let

us in.'

'Brother,' said the hangman, in a low voice, as he stooped under

pretence of doing what Hugh desired, but only looked up in his face,

'can't you leave these here four men to me, if I've the whim! You

do what you like, and have what you like of everything for your

share,--give me my share. I want these four men left alone, I tell you!'

'Pull the bars down, or stand out of the way,' was Hugh's reply.

'You can turn the crowd if you like, you know that well enough,

brother,' said the hangman, slowly. 'What! You WILL come in, will you?'

'Yes.'

'You won't let these men alone, and leave 'em to me? You've no respect

for nothing--haven't you?' said the hangman, retreating to the door by

which he had entered, and regarding his companion with a scowl. 'You

WILL come in, will you, brother!'

'I tell you, yes. What the devil ails you? Where are you going?'

'No matter where I'm going,' rejoined the hangman, looking in again at

the iron wicket, which he had nearly shut upon himself, and held ajar.

'Remember where you're coming. That's all!'

With that, he shook his likeness at Hugh, and giving him a grin,

compared with which his usual smile was amiable, disappeared, and shut

the door.

Hugh paused no longer, but goaded alike by the cries of the convicts,

and by the impatience of the crowd, warned the man immediately behind

him--the way was only wide enough for one abreast--to stand back, and

wielded a sledge-hammer with such strength, that after a few blows the

iron bent and broke, and gave them free admittance.

It the two sons of one of these men, of whom mention has been made,

were furious in their zeal before, they had now the wrath and vigour of

lions. Calling to the man within each cell, to keep as far back as he

could, lest the axes crashing through the door should wound him, a party

went to work upon each one, to beat it in by sheer strength, and force

the bolts and staples from their hold. But although these two lads had

the weakest party, and the worst armed, and did not begin until after

the others, having stopped to whisper to him through the grate, that

door was the first open, and that man was the first out. As they dragged

him into the gallery to knock off his irons, he fell down among them,

a mere heap of chains, and was carried out in that state on men's

shoulders, with no sign of life.

The release of these four wretched creatures, and conveying them,

astounded and bewildered, into the streets so full of life--a spectacle

they had never thought to see again, until they emerged from solitude

and silence upon that last journey, when the air should be heavy with

the pent-up breath of thousands, and the streets and houses should

be built and roofed with human faces, not with bricks and tiles and

stones--was the crowning horror of the scene. Their pale and haggard

looks and hollow eyes; their staggering feet, and hands stretched out as

if to save themselves from falling; their wandering and uncertain air;

the way they heaved and gasped for breath, as though in water, when they

were first plunged into the crowd; all marked them for the men. No need

to say 'this one was doomed to die;' for there were the words broadly

stamped and branded on his face. The crowd fell off, as if they had been

laid out for burial, and had risen in their shrouds; and many were seen

to shudder, as though they had been actually dead men, when they chanced

to touch or brush against their garments.

At the bidding of the mob, the houses were all illuminated that

night--lighted up from top to bottom as at a time of public gaiety and

joy. Many years afterwards, old people who lived in their youth near

this part of the city, remembered being in a great glare of light,

within doors and without, and as they looked, timid and frightened

children, from the windows, seeing a FACE go by. Though the whole great

crowd and all its other terrors had faded from their recollection, this

one object remained; alone, distinct, and well remembered. Even in the

unpractised minds of infants, one of these doomed men darting past,

and but an instant seen, was an image of force enough to dim the whole

concourse; to find itself an all-absorbing place, and hold it ever

after.

When this last task had been achieved, the shouts and cries grew

fainter; the clank of fetters, which had resounded on all sides as

the prisoners escaped, was heard no more; all the noises of the crowd

subsided into a hoarse and sullen murmur as it passed into the distance;

and when the human tide had rolled away, a melancholy heap of smoking

ruins marked the spot where it had lately chafed and roared.

Chapter 66

Although he had had no rest upon the previous night, and had watched

with little intermission for some weeks past, sleeping only in the day

by starts and snatches, Mr Haredale, from the dawn of morning until

sunset, sought his niece in every place where he deemed it possible she

could have taken refuge. All day long, nothing, save a draught of water,

passed his lips; though he prosecuted his inquiries far and wide, and

never so much as sat down, once.

In every quarter he could think of; at Chigwell and in London; at the

houses of the tradespeople with whom he dealt, and of the friends he

knew; he pursued his search. A prey to the most harrowing anxieties and

apprehensions, he went from magistrate to magistrate, and finally to the

Secretary of State. The only comfort he received was from this minister,

who assured him that the Government, being now driven to the exercise

of the extreme prerogatives of the Crown, were determined to exert them;

that a proclamation would probably be out upon the morrow, giving to the

military, discretionary and unlimited power in the suppression of the

riots; that the sympathies of the King, the Administration, and both

Houses of Parliament, and indeed of all good men of every religious

persuasion, were strongly with the injured Catholics; and that justice

should be done them at any cost or hazard. He told him, moreover, that

other persons whose houses had been burnt, had for a time lost sight of

their children or their relatives, but had, in every case, within his

knowledge, succeeded in discovering them; that his complaint should be

remembered, and fully stated in the instructions given to the officers

in command, and to all the inferior myrmidons of justice; and that

everything that could be done to help him, should be done, with a

goodwill and in good faith.

Grateful for this consolation, feeble as it was in its reference to the

past, and little hope as it afforded him in connection with the subject

of distress which lay nearest to his heart; and really thankful for the

interest the minister expressed, and seemed to feel, in his condition;

Mr Haredale withdrew. He found himself, with the night coming on, alone

in the streets; and destitute of any place in which to lay his head.

He entered an hotel near Charing Cross, and ordered some refreshment and

a bed. He saw that his faint and worn appearance attracted the attention

of the landlord and his waiters; and thinking that they might suppose

him to be penniless, took out his purse, and laid it on the table. It

was not that, the landlord said, in a faltering voice. If he were one

of those who had suffered by the rioters, he durst not give him

entertainment. He had a family of children, and had been twice warned to

be careful in receiving guests. He heartily prayed his forgiveness, but

what could he do?

Nothing. No man felt that more sincerely than Mr Haredale. He told the

man as much, and left the house.

Feeling that he might have anticipated this occurrence, after what

he had seen at Chigwell in the morning, where no man dared to touch a

spade, though he offered a large reward to all who would come and dig

among the ruins of his house, he walked along the Strand; too proud

to expose himself to another refusal, and of too generous a spirit

to involve in distress or ruin any honest tradesman who might be weak

enough to give him shelter. He wandered into one of the streets by the

side of the river, and was pacing in a thoughtful manner up and

down, thinking of things that had happened long ago, when he heard a

servant-man at an upper window call to another on the opposite side of

the street, that the mob were setting fire to Newgate.

To Newgate! where that man was! His failing strength returned, his

energies came back with tenfold vigour, on the instant. If it were

possible--if they should set the murderer free--was he, after all he had

undergone, to die with the suspicion of having slain his own brother,

dimly gathering about him--

He had no consciousness of going to the jail; but there he stood, before

it. There was the crowd wedged and pressed together in a dense, dark,

moving mass; and there were the flames soaring up into the air. His head

turned round and round, lights flashed before his eyes, and he struggled

hard with two men.

'Nay, nay,' said one. 'Be more yourself, my good sir. We attract

attention here. Come away. What can you do among so many men?'

'The gentleman's always for doing something,' said the other, forcing

him along as he spoke. 'I like him for that. I do like him for that.'

They had by this time got him into a court, hard by the prison. He

looked from one to the other, and as he tried to release himself, felt

that he tottered on his feet. He who had spoken first, was the old

gentleman whom he had seen at the Lord Mayor's. The other was John

Grueby, who had stood by him so manfully at Westminster.

'What does this mean?' he asked them faintly. 'How came we together?'

'On the skirts of the crowd,' returned the distiller; 'but come with us.

Pray come with us. You seem to know my friend here?'

'Surely,' said Mr Haredale, looking in a kind of stupor at John.

'He'll tell you then,' returned the old gentleman, 'that I am a man

to be trusted. He's my servant. He was lately (as you know, I have no

doubt) in Lord George Gordon's service; but he left it, and brought,

in pure goodwill to me and others, who are marked by the rioters, such

intelligence as he had picked up, of their designs.'

--'On one condition, please, sir,' said John, touching his hat. No

evidence against my lord--a misled man--a kind-hearted man, sir. My lord

never intended this.'

'The condition will be observed, of course,' rejoined the old distiller.

'It's a point of honour. But come with us, sir; pray come with us.'

John Grueby added no entreaties, but he adopted a different kind of

persuasion, by putting his arm through one of Mr Haredale's, while his

master took the other, and leading him away with all speed.

Sensible, from a strange lightness in his head, and a difficulty in

fixing his thoughts on anything, even to the extent of bearing his

companions in his mind for a minute together without looking at them,

that his brain was affected by the agitation and suffering through which

he had passed, and to which he was still a prey, Mr Haredale let them

lead him where they would. As they went along, he was conscious of

having no command over what he said or thought, and that he had a fear

of going mad.

The distiller lived, as he had told him when they first met, on Holborn

Hill, where he had great storehouses and drove a large trade. They

approached his house by a back entrance, lest they should attract the

notice of the crowd, and went into an upper room which faced towards the

street; the windows, however, in common with those of every other room

in the house, were boarded up inside, in order that, out of doors, all

might appear quite dark.

They laid him on a sofa in this chamber, perfectly insensible; but John

immediately fetching a surgeon, who took from him a large quantity of

blood, he gradually came to himself. As he was, for the time, too weak

to walk, they had no difficulty in persuading him to remain there all

night, and got him to bed without loss of a minute. That done, they

gave him cordial and some toast, and presently a pretty strong

composing-draught, under the influence of which he soon fell into a

lethargy, and, for a time, forgot his troubles.

The vintner, who was a very hearty old fellow and a worthy man, had

no thoughts of going to bed himself, for he had received several

threatening warnings from the rioters, and had indeed gone out that

evening to try and gather from the conversation of the mob whether his

house was to be the next attacked. He sat all night in an easy-chair in

the same room--dozing a little now and then--and received from time

to time the reports of John Grueby and two or three other trustworthy

persons in his employ, who went out into the streets as scouts; and

for whose entertainment an ample allowance of good cheer (which the old

vintner, despite his anxiety, now and then attacked himself) was set

forth in an adjoining chamber.

These accounts were of a sufficiently alarming nature from the first;

but as the night wore on, they grew so much worse, and involved such a

fearful amount of riot and destruction, that in comparison with these

new tidings all the previous disturbances sunk to nothing.

The first intelligence that came, was of the taking of Newgate, and the

escape of all the prisoners, whose track, as they made up Holborn and

into the adjacent streets, was proclaimed to those citizens who were

shut up in their houses, by the rattling of their chains, which formed

a dismal concert, and was heard in every direction, as though so many

forges were at work. The flames too, shone so brightly through the

vintner's skylights, that the rooms and staircases below were nearly as

light as in broad day; while the distant shouting of the mob seemed to

shake the very walls and ceilings.

At length they were heard approaching the house, and some minutes of

terrible anxiety ensued. They came close up, and stopped before it;

but after giving three loud yells, went on. And although they returned

several times that night, creating new alarms each time, they did

nothing there; having their hands full. Shortly after they had gone away

for the first time, one of the scouts came running in with the news that

they had stopped before Lord Mansfield's house in Bloomsbury Square.

Soon afterwards there came another, and another, and then the first

returned again, and so, by little and little, their tale was this:--That

the mob gathering round Lord Mansfield's house, had called on those

within to open the door, and receiving no reply (for Lord and Lady

Mansfield were at that moment escaping by the backway), forced an

entrance according to their usual custom. That they then began to

demolish the house with great fury, and setting fire to it in several

parts, involved in a common ruin the whole of the costly furniture, the

plate and jewels, a beautiful gallery of pictures, the rarest collection

of manuscripts ever possessed by any one private person in the world,

and worse than all, because nothing could replace this loss, the great

Law Library, on almost every page of which were notes in the Judge's

own hand, of inestimable value,--being the results of the study and

experience of his whole life. That while they were howling and exulting

round the fire, a troop of soldiers, with a magistrate among them, came

up, and being too late (for the mischief was by that time done), began

to disperse the crowd. That the Riot Act being read, and the crowd still

resisting, the soldiers received orders to fire, and levelling their

muskets shot dead at the first discharge six men and a woman, and

wounded many persons; and loading again directly, fired another volley,

but over the people's heads it was supposed, as none were seen to fall.

That thereupon, and daunted by the shrieks and tumult, the crowd began

to disperse, and the soldiers went away, leaving the killed and wounded

on the ground: which they had no sooner done than the rioters came back

again, and taking up the dead bodies, and the wounded people, formed

into a rude procession, having the bodies in the front. That in this

order they paraded off with a horrible merriment; fixing weapons in the

dead men's hands to make them look as if alive; and preceded by a fellow

ringing Lord Mansfield's dinner-bell with all his might.

The scouts reported further, that this party meeting with some others

who had been at similar work elsewhere, they all united into one, and

drafting off a few men with the killed and wounded, marched away to Lord

Mansfield's country seat at Caen Wood, between Hampstead and Highgate;

bent upon destroying that house likewise, and lighting up a great fire

there, which from that height should be seen all over London. But in

this, they were disappointed, for a party of horse having arrived before

them, they retreated faster than they went, and came straight back to

town.

There being now a great many parties in the streets, each went to

work according to its humour, and a dozen houses were quickly blazing,

including those of Sir John Fielding and two other justices, and four

in Holborn--one of the greatest thoroughfares in London--which were all

burning at the same time, and burned until they went out of themselves,

for the people cut the engine hose, and would not suffer the firemen to

play upon the flames. At one house near Moorfields, they found in one of

the rooms some canary birds in cages, and these they cast into the fire

alive. The poor little creatures screamed, it was said, like infants,

when they were flung upon the blaze; and one man was so touched that he

tried in vain to save them, which roused the indignation of the crowd,

and nearly cost him his life.

At this same house, one of the fellows who went through the rooms,

breaking the furniture and helping to destroy the building, found a

child's doll--a poor toy--which he exhibited at the window to the mob

below, as the image of some unholy saint which the late occupants had

worshipped. While he was doing this, another man with an equally tender

conscience (they had both been foremost in throwing down the canary

birds for roasting alive), took his seat on the parapet of the house,

and harangued the crowd from a pamphlet circulated by the Association,

relative to the true principles of Christianity! Meanwhile the Lord

Mayor, with his hands in his pockets, looked on as an idle man might

look at any other show, and seemed mightily satisfied to have got a good

place.

Such were the accounts brought to the old vintner by his servants as he

sat at the side of Mr Haredale's bed, having been unable even to doze,

after the first part of the night; too much disturbed by his own fears;

by the cries of the mob, the light of the fires, and the firing of the

soldiers. Such, with the addition of the release of all the prisoners in

the New Jail at Clerkenwell, and as many robberies of passengers in

the streets, as the crowd had leisure to indulge in, were the scenes of

which Mr Haredale was happily unconscious, and which were all enacted

before midnight.

Chapter 67

When darkness broke away and morning began to dawn, the town wore a

strange aspect indeed.

Sleep had hardly been thought of all night. The general alarm was so

apparent in the faces of the inhabitants, and its expression was so

aggravated by want of rest (few persons, with any property to lose,

having dared go to bed since Monday), that a stranger coming into the

streets would have supposed some mortal pest or plague to have been

raging. In place of the usual cheerfulness and animation of morning,

everything was dead and silent. The shops remained closed, offices and

warehouses were shut, the coach and chair stands were deserted, no carts

or waggons rumbled through the slowly waking streets, the early cries

were all hushed; a universal gloom prevailed. Great numbers of people

were out, even at daybreak, but they flitted to and fro as though they

shrank from the sound of their own footsteps; the public ways were

haunted rather than frequented; and round the smoking ruins people stood

apart from one another and in silence, not venturing to condemn the

rioters, or to be supposed to do so, even in whispers.

At the Lord President's in Piccadilly, at Lambeth Palace, at the Lord

Chancellor's in Great Ormond Street, in the Royal Exchange, the Bank,

the Guildhall, the Inns of Court, the Courts of Law, and every chamber

fronting the streets near Westminster Hall and the Houses of Parliament,

parties of soldiers were posted before daylight. A body of Horse Guards

paraded Palace Yard; an encampment was formed in the Park, where fifteen

hundred men and five battalions of Militia were under arms; the Tower

was fortified, the drawbridges were raised, the cannon loaded and

pointed, and two regiments of artillery busied in strengthening the

fortress and preparing it for defence. A numerous detachment of soldiers

were stationed to keep guard at the New River Head, which the people had

threatened to attack, and where, it was said, they meant to cut off the

main-pipes, so that there might be no water for the extinction of the

flames. In the Poultry, and on Cornhill, and at several other leading

points, iron chains were drawn across the street; parties of soldiers

were distributed in some of the old city churches while it was yet

dark; and in several private houses (among them, Lord Rockingham's in

Grosvenor Square); which were blockaded as though to sustain a siege,

and had guns pointed from the windows. When the sun rose, it shone into

handsome apartments filled with armed men; the furniture hastily heaped

away in corners, and made of little or no account, in the terror of the

time--on arms glittering in city chambers, among desks and stools, and

dusty books--into little smoky churchyards in odd lanes and by-ways,

with soldiers lying down among the tombs, or lounging under the shade of

the one old tree, and their pile of muskets sparkling in the light--on

solitary sentries pacing up and down in courtyards, silent now, but

yesterday resounding with the din and hum of business--everywhere on

guard-rooms, garrisons, and threatening preparations.

As the day crept on, still more unusual sights were witnessed in the

streets. The gates of the King's Bench and Fleet Prisons being opened at

the usual hour, were found to have notices affixed to them, announcing

that the rioters would come that night to burn them down. The wardens,

too well knowing the likelihood there was of this promise being

fulfilled, were fain to set their prisoners at liberty, and give

them leave to move their goods; so, all day, such of them as had any

furniture were occupied in conveying it, some to this place, some to

that, and not a few to the brokers' shops, where they gladly sold it,

for any wretched price those gentry chose to give. There were some

broken men among these debtors who had been in jail so long, and were

so miserable and destitute of friends, so dead to the world, and utterly

forgotten and uncared for, that they implored their jailers not to

set them free, and to send them, if need were, to some other place of

custody. But they, refusing to comply, lest they should incur the anger

of the mob, turned them into the streets, where they wandered up and

down hardly remembering the ways untrodden by their feet so long, and

crying--such abject things those rotten-hearted jails had made them--as

they slunk off in their rags, and dragged their slipshod feet along the

pavement.

Even of the three hundred prisoners who had escaped from Newgate, there

were some--a few, but there were some--who sought their jailers out and

delivered themselves up: preferring imprisonment and punishment to the

horrors of such another night as the last. Many of the convicts, drawn

back to their old place of captivity by some indescribable attraction,

or by a desire to exult over it in its downfall and glut their revenge

by seeing it in ashes, actually went back in broad noon, and loitered

about the cells. Fifty were retaken at one time on this next day, within

the prison walls; but their fate did not deter others, for there they

went in spite of everything, and there they were taken in twos and

threes, twice or thrice a day, all through the week. Of the fifty just

mentioned, some were occupied in endeavouring to rekindle the fire; but

in general they seemed to have no object in view but to prowl and lounge

about the old place: being often found asleep in the ruins, or sitting

talking there, or even eating and drinking, as in a choice retreat.

Besides the notices on the gates of the Fleet and the King's Bench,

many similar announcements were left, before one o'clock at noon, at

the houses of private individuals; and further, the mob proclaimed their

intention of seizing on the Bank, the Mint, the Arsenal at Woolwich, and

the Royal Palaces. The notices were seldom delivered by more than one

man, who, if it were at a shop, went in, and laid it, with a bloody

threat perhaps, upon the counter; or if it were at a private

house, knocked at the door, and thrust it in the servant's hand.

Notwithstanding the presence of the military in every quarter of the

town, and the great force in the Park, these messengers did their

errands with impunity all through the day. So did two boys who went

down Holborn alone, armed with bars taken from the railings of Lord

Mansfield's house, and demanded money for the rioters. So did a tall man

on horseback who made a collection for the same purpose in Fleet Street,

and refused to take anything but gold.

A rumour had now got into circulation, too, which diffused a greater

dread all through London, even than these publicly announced intentions

of the rioters, though all men knew that if they were successfully

effected, there must ensue a national bankruptcy and general ruin. It

was said that they meant to throw the gates of Bedlam open, and let all

the madmen loose. This suggested such dreadful images to the people's

minds, and was indeed an act so fraught with new and unimaginable

horrors in the contemplation, that it beset them more than any loss or

cruelty of which they could foresee the worst, and drove many sane men

nearly mad themselves.

So the day passed on: the prisoners moving their goods; people running

to and fro in the streets, carrying away their property; groups standing

in silence round the ruins; all business suspended; and the soldiers

disposed as has been already mentioned, remaining quite inactive. So the

day passed on, and dreaded night drew near again.

At last, at seven o'clock in the evening, the Privy Council issued a

solemn proclamation that it was now necessary to employ the military,

and that the officers had most direct and effectual orders, by an

immediate exertion of their utmost force, to repress the disturbances;

and warning all good subjects of the King to keep themselves, their

servants, and apprentices, within doors that night. There was then

delivered out to every soldier on duty, thirty-six rounds of powder and

ball; the drums beat; and the whole force was under arms at sunset.

The City authorities, stimulated by these vigorous measures, held a

Common Council; passed a vote thanking the military associations who

had tendered their aid to the civil authorities; accepted it; and placed

them under the direction of the two sheriffs. At the Queen's palace,

a double guard, the yeomen on duty, the groom-porters, and all other

attendants, were stationed in the passages and on the staircases at

seven o'clock, with strict instructions to be watchful on their posts

all night; and all the doors were locked. The gentlemen of the Temple,

and the other Inns, mounted guard within their gates, and strengthened

them with the great stones of the pavement, which they took up for the

purpose. In Lincoln's Inn, they gave up the hall and commons to the

Northumberland Militia, under the command of Lord Algernon Percy; in

some few of the city wards, the burgesses turned out, and without

making a very fierce show, looked brave enough. Some hundreds of stout

gentlemen threw themselves, armed to the teeth, into the halls of the

different companies, double-locked and bolted all the gates, and

dared the rioters (among themselves) to come on at their peril. These

arrangements being all made simultaneously, or nearly so, were completed

by the time it got dark; and then the streets were comparatively clear,

and were guarded at all the great corners and chief avenues by

the troops: while parties of the officers rode up and down in all

directions, ordering chance stragglers home, and admonishing the

residents to keep within their houses, and, if any firing ensued, not

to approach the windows. More chains were drawn across such of the

thoroughfares as were of a nature to favour the approach of a great

crowd, and at each of these points a considerable force was stationed.

All these precautions having been taken, and it being now quite dark,

those in command awaited the result in some anxiety: and not without a

hope that such vigilant demonstrations might of themselves dishearten

the populace, and prevent any new outrages.

But in this reckoning they were cruelly mistaken, for in half an hour,

or less, as though the setting in of night had been their preconcerted

signal, the rioters having previously, in small parties, prevented the

lighting of the street lamps, rose like a great sea; and that in so many

places at once, and with such inconceivable fury, that those who had the

direction of the troops knew not, at first, where to turn or what to do.

One after another, new fires blazed up in every quarter of the town,

as though it were the intention of the insurgents to wrap the city in a

circle of flames, which, contracting by degrees, should burn the whole

to ashes; the crowd swarmed and roared in every street; and none but

rioters and soldiers being out of doors, it seemed to the latter as if

all London were arrayed against them, and they stood alone against the

town.

In two hours, six-and-thirty fires were raging--six-and-thirty great

conflagrations: among them the Borough Clink in Tooley Street, the

King's Bench, the Fleet, and the New Bridewell. In almost every street,

there was a battle; and in every quarter the muskets of the troops were

heard above the shouts and tumult of the mob. The firing began in the

Poultry, where the chain was drawn across the road, where nearly a score

of people were killed on the first discharge. Their bodies having been

hastily carried into St Mildred's Church by the soldiers, the latter

fired again, and following fast upon the crowd, who began to give way

when they saw the execution that was done, formed across Cheapside, and

charged them at the point of the bayonet.

The streets were now a dreadful spectacle. The shouts of the rabble,

the shrieks of women, the cries of the wounded, and the constant firing,

formed a deafening and an awful accompaniment to the sights which every

corner presented. Wherever the road was obstructed by the chains, there

the fighting and the loss of life were greatest; but there was hot work

and bloodshed in almost every leading thoroughfare.

At Holborn Bridge, and on Holborn Hill, the confusion was greater than

in any other part; for the crowd that poured out of the city in two

great streams, one by Ludgate Hill, and one by Newgate Street, united at

that spot, and formed a mass so dense, that at every volley the people

seemed to fall in heaps. At this place a large detachment of soldiery

were posted, who fired, now up Fleet Market, now up Holborn, now up Snow

Hill--constantly raking the streets in each direction. At this place

too, several large fires were burning, so that all the terrors of that

terrible night seemed to be concentrated in one spot.

Full twenty times, the rioters, headed by one man who wielded an axe

in his right hand, and bestrode a brewer's horse of great size and

strength, caparisoned with fetters taken out of Newgate, which clanked

and jingled as he went, made an attempt to force a passage at this

point, and fire the vintner's house. Full twenty times they were

repulsed with loss of life, and still came back again; and though

the fellow at their head was marked and singled out by all, and was a

conspicuous object as the only rioter on horseback, not a man could

hit him. So surely as the smoke cleared away, so surely there was he;

calling hoarsely to his companions, brandishing his axe above his head,

and dashing on as though he bore a charmed life, and was proof against

ball and powder.

This man was Hugh; and in every part of the riot, he was seen. He headed

two attacks upon the Bank, helped to break open the Toll-houses on

Blackfriars Bridge, and cast the money into the street: fired two of the

prisons with his own hand: was here, and there, and everywhere--always

foremost--always active--striking at the soldiers, cheering on the

crowd, making his horse's iron music heard through all the yell and

uproar: but never hurt or stopped. Turn him at one place, and he made

a new struggle in another; force him to retreat at this point, and he

advanced on that, directly. Driven from Holborn for the twentieth

time, he rode at the head of a great crowd straight upon Saint Paul's,

attacked a guard of soldiers who kept watch over a body of prisoners

within the iron railings, forced them to retreat, rescued the men they

had in custody, and with this accession to his party, came back again,

mad with liquor and excitement, and hallooing them on like a demon.

It would have been no easy task for the most careful rider to sit a

horse in the midst of such a throng and tumult; but though this madman

rolled upon his back (he had no saddle) like a boat upon the sea, he

never for an instant lost his seat, or failed to guide him where he

would. Through the very thickest of the press, over dead bodies and

burning fragments, now on the pavement, now in the road, now riding up

a flight of steps to make himself the more conspicuous to his party,

and now forcing a passage through a mass of human beings, so closely

squeezed together that it seemed as if the edge of a knife would

scarcely part them,--on he went, as though he could surmount all

obstacles by the mere exercise of his will. And perhaps his not being

shot was in some degree attributable to this very circumstance; for his

extreme audacity, and the conviction that he must be one of those to

whom the proclamation referred, inspired the soldiers with a desire to

take him alive, and diverted many an aim which otherwise might have been

more near the mark.

The vintner and Mr Haredale, unable to sit quietly listening to the

noise without seeing what went on, had climbed to the roof of the house,

and hiding behind a stack of chimneys, were looking cautiously down into

the street, almost hoping that after so many repulses the rioters would

be foiled, when a great shout proclaimed that a parry were coming round

the other way; and the dismal jingling of those accursed fetters warned

them next moment that they too were led by Hugh. The soldiers had

advanced into Fleet Market and were dispersing the people there; so that

they came on with hardly any check, and were soon before the house.

'All's over now,' said the vintner. 'Fifty thousand pounds will be

scattered in a minute. We must save ourselves. We can do no more, and

shall have reason to be thankful if we do as much.'

Their first impulse was, to clamber along the roofs of the houses, and,

knocking at some garret window for admission, pass down that way into

the street, and so escape. But another fierce cry from below, and a

general upturning of the faces of the crowd, apprised them that they

were discovered, and even that Mr Haredale was recognised; for Hugh,

seeing him plainly in the bright glare of the fire, which in that part

made it as light as day, called to him by his name, and swore to have

his life.

'Leave me here,' said Mr Haredale, 'and in Heaven's name, my good

friend, save yourself! Come on!' he muttered, as he turned towards Hugh

and faced him without any further effort at concealment: 'This roof is

high, and if we close, we will die together!'

'Madness,' said the honest vintner, pulling him back, 'sheer madness.

Hear reason, sir. My good sir, hear reason. I could never make myself

heard by knocking at a window now; and even if I could, no one would be

bold enough to connive at my escape. Through the cellars, there's a kind

of passage into the back street by which we roll casks in and out. We

shall have time to get down there before they can force an entry. Do

not delay an instant, but come with me--for both our sakes--for mine--my

dear good sir!'

As he spoke, and drew Mr Haredale back, they had both a glimpse of the

street. It was but a glimpse, but it showed them the crowd, gathering

and clustering round the house: some of the armed men pressing to the

front to break down the doors and windows, some bringing brands from

the nearest fire, some with lifted faces following their course upon the

roof and pointing them out to their companions: all raging and roaring

like the flames they lighted up. They saw some men thirsting for the

treasures of strong liquor which they knew were stored within; they saw

others, who had been wounded, sinking down into the opposite doorways

and dying, solitary wretches, in the midst of all the vast assemblage;

here a frightened woman trying to escape; and there a lost child; and

there a drunken ruffian, unconscious of the death-wound on his head,

raving and fighting to the last. All these things, and even such trivial

incidents as a man with his hat off, or turning round, or stooping down,

or shaking hands with another, they marked distinctly; yet in a glance

so brief, that, in the act of stepping back, they lost the whole, and

saw but the pale faces of each other, and the red sky above them.

Mr Haredale yielded to the entreaties of his companion--more because he

was resolved to defend him, than for any thought he had of his own life,

or any care he entertained for his own safety--and quickly re-entering

the house, they descended the stairs together. Loud blows were

thundering on the shutters, crowbars were already thrust beneath the

door, the glass fell from the sashes, a deep light shone through every

crevice, and they heard the voices of the foremost in the crowd so close

to every chink and keyhole, that they seemed to be hoarsely whispering

their threats into their very ears. They had but a moment reached the

bottom of the cellar-steps and shut the door behind them, when the mob

broke in.

The vaults were profoundly dark, and having no torch or candle--for

they had been afraid to carry one, lest it should betray their place of

refuge--they were obliged to grope with their hands. But they were not

long without light, for they had not gone far when they heard the crowd

forcing the door; and, looking back among the low-arched passages,

could see them in the distance, hurrying to and fro with flashing links,

broaching the casks, staving the great vats, turning off upon the right

hand and the left, into the different cellars, and lying down to drink

at the channels of strong spirits which were already flowing on the

ground.

They hurried on, not the less quickly for this; and had reached the only

vault which lay between them and the passage out, when suddenly, from

the direction in which they were going, a strong light gleamed upon

their faces; and before they could slip aside, or turn back, or hide

themselves, two men (one bearing a torch) came upon them, and cried in

an astonished whisper, 'Here they are!'

At the same instant they pulled off what they wore upon their heads. Mr

Haredale saw before him Edward Chester, and then saw, when the vintner

gasped his name, Joe Willet.

Ay, the same Joe, though with an arm the less, who used to make the

quarterly journey on the grey mare to pay the bill to the purple-faced

vintner; and that very same purple-faced vintner, formerly of Thames

Street, now looked him in the face, and challenged him by name.

'Give me your hand,' said Joe softly, taking it whether the astonished

vintner would or no. 'Don't fear to shake it; it's a friendly one and

a hearty one, though it has no fellow. Why, how well you look and how

bluff you are! And you--God bless you, sir. Take heart, take heart.

We'll find them. Be of good cheer; we have not been idle.'

There was something so honest and frank in Joe's speech, that Mr

Haredale put his hand in his involuntarily, though their meeting

was suspicious enough. But his glance at Edward Chester, and that

gentleman's keeping aloof, were not lost upon Joe, who said bluntly,

glancing at Edward while he spoke:

'Times are changed, Mr Haredale, and times have come when we ought to

know friends from enemies, and make no confusion of names. Let me tell

you that but for this gentleman, you would most likely have been dead by

this time, or badly wounded at the best.'

'What do you say?' cried Mr Haredale.

'I say,' said Joe, 'first, that it was a bold thing to be in the crowd

at all disguised as one of them; though I won't say much about that, on

second thoughts, for that's my case too. Secondly, that it was a brave

and glorious action--that's what I call it--to strike that fellow off

his horse before their eyes!'

'What fellow! Whose eyes!'

'What fellow, sir!' cried Joe: 'a fellow who has no goodwill to you, and

who has the daring and devilry in him of twenty fellows. I know him of

old. Once in the house, HE would have found you, here or anywhere. The

rest owe you no particular grudge, and, unless they see you, will only

think of drinking themselves dead. But we lose time. Are you ready?'

'Quite,' said Edward. 'Put out the torch, Joe, and go on. And be silent,

there's a good fellow.'

'Silent or not silent,' murmured Joe, as he dropped the flaring link

upon the ground, crushed it with his foot, and gave his hand to Mr

Haredale, 'it was a brave and glorious action;--no man can alter that.'

Both Mr Haredale and the worthy vintner were too amazed and too much

hurried to ask any further questions, so followed their conductors

in silence. It seemed, from a short whispering which presently ensued

between them and the vintner relative to the best way of escape, that

they had entered by the back-door, with the connivance of John Grueby,

who watched outside with the key in his pocket, and whom they had taken

into their confidence. A party of the crowd coming up that way, just as

they entered, John had double-locked the door again, and made off for

the soldiers, so that means of retreat was cut off from under them.

However, as the front-door had been forced, and this minor crowd, being

anxious to get at the liquor, had no fancy for losing time in breaking

down another, but had gone round and got in from Holborn with the rest,

the narrow lane in the rear was quite free of people. So, when they had

crawled through the passage indicated by the vintner (which was a mere

shelving-trap for the admission of casks), and had managed with some

difficulty to unchain and raise the door at the upper end, they emerged

into the street without being observed or interrupted. Joe still holding

Mr Haredale tight, and Edward taking the same care of the vintner, they

hurried through the streets at a rapid pace; occasionally standing aside

to let some fugitives go by, or to keep out of the way of the soldiers

who followed them, and whose questions, when they halted to put any,

were speedily stopped by one whispered word from Joe.

Chapter 68

While Newgate was burning on the previous night, Barnaby and his

father, having been passed among the crowd from hand to hand, stood in

Smithfield, on the outskirts of the mob, gazing at the flames like men

who had been suddenly roused from sleep. Some moments elapsed before

they could distinctly remember where they were, or how they got

there; or recollected that while they were standing idle and listless

spectators of the fire, they had tools in their hands which had been

hurriedly given them that they might free themselves from their fetters.

Barnaby, heavily ironed as he was, if he had obeyed his first impulse,

or if he had been alone, would have made his way back to the side of

Hugh, who to his clouded intellect now shone forth with the new lustre

of being his preserver and truest friend. But his father's terror

of remaining in the streets, communicated itself to him when he

comprehended the full extent of his fears, and impressed him with the

same eagerness to fly to a place of safety.

In a corner of the market among the pens for cattle, Barnaby knelt down,

and pausing every now and then to pass his hand over his father's face,

or look up to him with a smile, knocked off his irons. When he had seen

him spring, a free man, to his feet, and had given vent to the transport

of delight which the sight awakened, he went to work upon his own, which

soon fell rattling down upon the ground, and left his limbs unfettered.

Gliding away together when this task was accomplished, and passing

several groups of men, each gathered round a stooping figure to hide

him from those who passed, but unable to repress the clanking sound of

hammers, which told that they too were busy at the same work,--the two

fugitives made towards Clerkenwell, and passing thence to Islington, as

the nearest point of egress, were quickly in the fields. After wandering

about for a long time, they found in a pasture near Finchley a poor

shed, with walls of mud, and roof of grass and brambles, built for

some cowherd, but now deserted. Here, they lay down for the rest of the

night.

They wandered to and fro when it was day, and once Barnaby went off

alone to a cluster of little cottages two or three miles away, to

purchase some bread and milk. But finding no better shelter, they

returned to the same place, and lay down again to wait for night.

Heaven alone can tell, with what vague hopes of duty, and affection;

with what strange promptings of nature, intelligible to him as to a man

of radiant mind and most enlarged capacity; with what dim memories of

children he had played with when a child himself, who had prattled

of their fathers, and of loving them, and being loved; with how many

half-remembered, dreamy associations of his mother's grief and tears and

widowhood; he watched and tended this man. But that a vague and shadowy

crowd of such ideas came slowly on him; that they taught him to be sorry

when he looked upon his haggard face, that they overflowed his eyes when

he stooped to kiss him, that they kept him waking in a tearful gladness,

shading him from the sun, fanning him with leaves, soothing him when he

started in his sleep--ah! what a troubled sleep it was--and wondering

when SHE would come to join them and be happy, is the truth. He sat

beside him all that day; listening for her footsteps in every breath

of air, looking for her shadow on the gently-waving grass, twining the

hedge flowers for her pleasure when she came, and his when he awoke; and

stooping down from time to time to listen to his mutterings, and wonder

why he was so restless in that quiet place. The sun went down, and night

came on, and he was still quite tranquil; busied with these thoughts, as

if there were no other people in the world, and the dull cloud of smoke

hanging on the immense city in the distance, hid no vices, no crimes, no

life or death, or cause of disquiet--nothing but clear air.

But the hour had now come when he must go alone to find out the blind

man (a task that filled him with delight) and bring him to that place;

taking especial care that he was not watched or followed on his way

back. He listened to the directions he must observe, repeated them again

and again, and after twice or thrice returning to surprise his father

with a light-hearted laugh, went forth, at last, upon his errand:

leaving Grip, whom he had carried from the jail in his arms, to his

care.

Fleet of foot, and anxious to return, he sped swiftly on towards the

city, but could not reach it before the fires began, and made the night

angry with their dismal lustre. When he entered the town--it might be

that he was changed by going there without his late companions, and on

no violent errand; or by the beautiful solitude in which he had passed

the day, or by the thoughts that had come upon him,--but it seemed

peopled by a legion of devils. This flight and pursuit, this cruel

burning and destroying, these dreadful cries and stunning noises, were

THEY the good lord's noble cause!

Though almost stupefied by the bewildering scene, still be found the

blind man's house. It was shut up and tenantless.

He waited for a long while, but no one came. At last he withdrew; and as

he knew by this time that the soldiers were firing, and many people must

have been killed, he went down into Holborn, where he heard the great

crowd was, to try if he could find Hugh, and persuade him to avoid the

danger, and return with him.

If he had been stunned and shocked before, his horror was increased a

thousandfold when he got into this vortex of the riot, and not being an

actor in the terrible spectacle, had it all before his eyes. But there,

in the midst, towering above them all, close before the house they were

attacking now, was Hugh on horseback, calling to the rest!

Sickened by the sights surrounding him on every side, and by the heat

and roar, and crash, he forced his way among the crowd (where many

recognised him, and with shouts pressed back to let him pass), and in

time was nearly up with Hugh, who was savagely threatening some one, but

whom or what he said, he could not, in the great confusion, understand.

At that moment the crowd forced their way into the house, and Hugh--it

was impossible to see by what means, in such a concourse--fell headlong

down.

Barnaby was beside him when he staggered to his feet. It was well he

made him hear his voice, or Hugh, with his uplifted axe, would have

cleft his skull in twain.

'Barnaby--you! Whose hand was that, that struck me down?'

'Not mine.'

'Whose!--I say, whose!' he cried, reeling back, and looking wildly

round. 'What are you doing? Where is he? Show me!'

'You are hurt,' said Barnaby--as indeed he was, in the head, both by the

blow he had received, and by his horse's hoof. 'Come away with me.'

As he spoke, he took the horse's bridle in his hand, turned him, and

dragged Hugh several paces. This brought them out of the crowd, which

was pouring from the street into the vintner's cellars.

'Where's--where's Dennis?' said Hugh, coming to a stop, and checking

Barnaby with his strong arm. 'Where has he been all day? What did

he mean by leaving me as he did, in the jail, last night? Tell me,

you--d'ye hear!'

With a flourish of his dangerous weapon, he fell down upon the ground

like a log. After a minute, though already frantic with drinking and

with the wound in his head, he crawled to a stream of burning spirit

which was pouring down the kennel, and began to drink at it as if it

were a brook of water.

Barnaby drew him away, and forced him to rise. Though he could neither

stand nor walk, he involuntarily staggered to his horse, climbed upon

his back, and clung there. After vainly attempting to divest the animal

of his clanking trappings, Barnaby sprung up behind him, snatched the

bridle, turned into Leather Lane, which was close at hand, and urged the

frightened horse into a heavy trot.

He looked back, once, before he left the street; and looked upon a sight

not easily to be erased, even from his remembrance, so long as he had

life.

The vintner's house with a half-a-dozen others near at hand, was one

great, glowing blaze. All night, no one had essayed to quench the

flames, or stop their progress; but now a body of soldiers were actively

engaged in pulling down two old wooden houses, which were every moment

in danger of taking fire, and which could scarcely fail, if they were

left to burn, to extend the conflagration immensely. The tumbling

down of nodding walls and heavy blocks of wood, the hooting and

the execrations of the crowd, the distant firing of other military

detachments, the distracted looks and cries of those whose habitations

were in danger, the hurrying to and fro of frightened people with

their goods; the reflections in every quarter of the sky, of deep, red,

soaring flames, as though the last day had come and the whole universe

were burning; the dust, and smoke, and drift of fiery particles,

scorching and kindling all it fell upon; the hot unwholesome vapour,

the blight on everything; the stars, and moon, and very sky,

obliterated;--made up such a sum of dreariness and ruin, that it seemed

as if the face of Heaven were blotted out, and night, in its rest and

quiet, and softened light, never could look upon the earth again.

But there was a worse spectacle than this--worse by far than fire and

smoke, or even the rabble's unappeasable and maniac rage. The gutters

of the street, and every crack and fissure in the stones, ran with

scorching spirit, which being dammed up by busy hands, overflowed

the road and pavement, and formed a great pool, into which the people

dropped down dead by dozens. They lay in heaps all round this fearful

pond, husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, women

with children in their arms and babies at their breasts, and drank until

they died. While some stooped with their lips to the brink and never

raised their heads again, others sprang up from their fiery draught,

and danced, half in a mad triumph, and half in the agony of suffocation,

until they fell, and steeped their corpses in the liquor that had killed

them. Nor was even this the worst or most appalling kind of death that

happened on this fatal night. From the burning cellars, where they

drank out of hats, pails, buckets, tubs, and shoes, some men were drawn,

alive, but all alight from head to foot; who, in their unendurable

anguish and suffering, making for anything that had the look of water,

rolled, hissing, in this hideous lake, and splashed up liquid fire

which lapped in all it met with as it ran along the surface, and

neither spared the living nor the dead. On this last night of the great

riots--for the last night it was--the wretched victims of a senseless

outcry, became themselves the dust and ashes of the flames they had

kindled, and strewed the public streets of London.

With all he saw in this last glance fixed indelibly upon his mind,

Barnaby hurried from the city which enclosed such horrors; and holding

down his head that he might not even see the glare of the fires upon the

quiet landscape, was soon in the still country roads.

He stopped at about half-a-mile from the shed where his father lay, and

with some difficulty making Hugh sensible that he must dismount, sunk

the horse's furniture in a pool of stagnant water, and turned the animal

loose. That done, he supported his companion as well as he could, and

led him slowly forward.

Chapter 69

It was the dead of night, and very dark, when Barnaby, with his

stumbling comrade, approached the place where he had left his father;

but he could see him stealing away into the gloom, distrustful even of

him, and rapidly retreating. After calling to him twice or thrice that

there was nothing to fear, but without effect, he suffered Hugh to sink

upon the ground, and followed to bring him back.

He continued to creep away, until Barnaby was close upon him; then

turned, and said in a terrible, though suppressed voice:

'Let me go. Do not lay hands upon me. You have told her; and you and she

together have betrayed me!'

Barnaby looked at him, in silence.

'You have seen your mother!'

'No,' cried Barnaby, eagerly. 'Not for a long time--longer than I can

tell. A whole year, I think. Is she here?'

His father looked upon him steadfastly for a few moments, and then

said--drawing nearer to him as he spoke, for, seeing his face, and

hearing his words, it was impossible to doubt his truth:

'What man is that?'

'Hugh--Hugh. Only Hugh. You know him. HE will not harm you. Why, you're

afraid of Hugh! Ha ha ha! Afraid of gruff, old, noisy Hugh!'

'What man is he, I ask you,' he rejoined so fiercely, that Barnaby

stopped in his laugh, and shrinking back, surveyed him with a look of

terrified amazement.

'Why, how stern you are! You make me fear you, though you are my father.

Why do you speak to me so?'

--'I want,' he answered, putting away the hand which his son, with

a timid desire to propitiate him, laid upon his sleeve,--'I want an

answer, and you give me only jeers and questions. Who have you brought

with you to this hiding-place, poor fool; and where is the blind man?'

'I don't know where. His house was close shut. I waited, but no person

came; that was no fault of mine. This is Hugh--brave Hugh, who broke

into that ugly jail, and set us free. Aha! You like him now, do you? You

like him now!'

'Why does he lie upon the ground?'

'He has had a fall, and has been drinking. The fields and trees go

round, and round, and round with him, and the ground heaves under his

feet. You know him? You remember? See!'

They had by this time returned to where he lay, and both stooped over

him to look into his face.

'I recollect the man,' his father murmured. 'Why did you bring him

here?'

'Because he would have been killed if I had left him over yonder. They

were firing guns and shedding blood. Does the sight of blood turn you

sick, father? I see it does, by your face. That's like me--What are you

looking at?'

'At nothing!' said the murderer softly, as he started back a pace or

two, and gazed with sunken jaw and staring eyes above his son's head.

'At nothing!'

He remained in the same attitude and with the same expression on his

face for a minute or more; then glanced slowly round as if he had lost

something; and went shivering back, towards the shed.

'Shall I bring him in, father?' asked Barnaby, who had looked on,

wondering.

He only answered with a suppressed groan, and lying down upon the

ground, wrapped his cloak about his head, and shrunk into the darkest

corner.

Finding that nothing would rouse Hugh now, or make him sensible for a

moment, Barnaby dragged him along the grass, and laid him on a little

heap of refuse hay and straw which had been his own bed; first having

brought some water from a running stream hard by, and washed his wound,

and laved his hands and face. Then he lay down himself, between the two,

to pass the night; and looking at the stars, fell fast asleep.

Awakened early in the morning, by the sunshine and the songs of birds,

and hum of insects, he left them sleeping in the hut, and walked into

the sweet and pleasant air. But he felt that on his jaded senses,

oppressed and burdened with the dreadful scenes of last night, and many

nights before, all the beauties of opening day, which he had so often

tasted, and in which he had had such deep delight, fell heavily. He

thought of the blithe mornings when he and the dogs went bounding on

together through the woods and fields; and the recollection filled his

eyes with tears. He had no consciousness, God help him, of having done

wrong, nor had he any new perception of the merits of the cause in which

he had been engaged, or those of the men who advocated it; but he was

full of cares now, and regrets, and dismal recollections, and wishes

(quite unknown to him before) that this or that event had never

happened, and that the sorrow and suffering of so many people had been

spared. And now he began to think how happy they would be--his father,

mother, he, and Hugh--if they rambled away together, and lived in some

lonely place, where there were none of these troubles; and that perhaps

the blind man, who had talked so wisely about gold, and told him of

the great secrets he knew, could teach them how to live without being

pinched by want. As this occurred to him, he was the more sorry that he

had not seen him last night; and he was still brooding over this regret,

when his father came, and touched him on the shoulder.

'Ah!' cried Barnaby, starting from his fit of thoughtfulness. 'Is it

only you?'

'Who should it be?'

'I almost thought,' he answered, 'it was the blind man. I must have some

talk with him, father.'

'And so must I, for without seeing him, I don't know where to fly or

what to do, and lingering here, is death. You must go to him again, and

bring him here.'

'Must I!' cried Barnaby, delighted; 'that's brave, father. That's what I

want to do.'

'But you must bring only him, and none other. And though you wait at

his door a whole day and night, still you must wait, and not come back

without him.'

'Don't you fear that,' he cried gaily. 'He shall come, he shall come.'

'Trim off these gewgaws,' said his father, plucking the scraps of ribbon

and the feathers from his hat, 'and over your own dress wear my cloak.

Take heed how you go, and they will be too busy in the streets to notice

you. Of your coming back you need take no account, for he'll manage

that, safely.'

'To be sure!' said Barnaby. 'To be sure he will! A wise man, father, and

one who can teach us to be rich. Oh! I know him, I know him.'

He was speedily dressed, and as well disguised as he could be. With a

lighter heart he then set off upon his second journey, leaving Hugh,

who was still in a drunken stupor, stretched upon the ground within the

shed, and his father walking to and fro before it.

The murderer, full of anxious thoughts, looked after him, and paced up

and down, disquieted by every breath of air that whispered among the

boughs, and by every light shadow thrown by the passing clouds upon the

daisied ground. He was anxious for his safe return, and yet, though his

own life and safety hung upon it, felt a relief while he was gone. In

the intense selfishness which the constant presence before him of his

great crimes, and their consequences here and hereafter, engendered,

every thought of Barnaby, as his son, was swallowed up and lost. Still,

his presence was a torture and reproach; in his wild eyes, there were

terrible images of that guilty night; with his unearthly aspect, and his

half-formed mind, he seemed to the murderer a creature who had sprung

into existence from his victim's blood. He could not bear his look, his

voice, his touch; and yet he was forced, by his own desperate condition

and his only hope of cheating the gibbet, to have him by his side, and

to know that he was inseparable from his single chance of escape.

He walked to and fro, with little rest, all day, revolving these things

in his mind; and still Hugh lay, unconscious, in the shed. At length,

when the sun was setting, Barnaby returned, leading the blind man, and

talking earnestly to him as they came along together.

The murderer advanced to meet them, and bidding his son go on and speak

to Hugh, who had just then staggered to his feet, took his place at the

blind man's elbow, and slowly followed, towards the shed.

'Why did you send HIM?' said Stagg. 'Don't you know it was the way to

have him lost, as soon as found?'

'Would you have had me come myself?' returned the other.

'Humph! Perhaps not. I was before the jail on Tuesday night, but missed

you in the crowd. I was out last night, too. There was good work last

night--gay work--profitable work'--he added, rattling the money in his

pockets.

'Have you--'

--'Seen your good lady? Yes.'

'Do you mean to tell me more, or not?'

'I'll tell you all,' returned the blind man, with a laugh. 'Excuse

me--but I love to see you so impatient. There's energy in it.'

'Does she consent to say the word that may save me?'

'No,' returned the blind man emphatically, as he turned his face towards

him. 'No. Thus it is. She has been at death's door since she lost her

darling--has been insensible, and I know not what. I tracked her to a

hospital, and presented myself (with your leave) at her bedside. Our

talk was not a long one, for she was weak, and there being people near

I was not quite easy. But I told her all that you and I agreed upon, and

pointed out the young gentleman's position, in strong terms. She tried

to soften me, but that, of course (as I told her), was lost time. She

cried and moaned, you may be sure; all women do. Then, of a sudden, she

found her voice and strength, and said that Heaven would help her and

her innocent son; and that to Heaven she appealed against us--which she

did; in really very pretty language, I assure you. I advised her, as

a friend, not to count too much on assistance from any such distant

quarter--recommended her to think of it--told her where I lived--said I

knew she would send to me before noon, next day--and left her, either in

a faint or shamming.'

When he had concluded this narration, during which he had made several

pauses, for the convenience of cracking and eating nuts, of which

he seemed to have a pocketful, the blind man pulled a flask from his

pocket, took a draught himself, and offered it to his companion.

'You won't, won't you?' he said, feeling that he pushed it from him.

'Well! Then the gallant gentleman who's lodging with you, will. Hallo,

bully!'

'Death!' said the other, holding him back. 'Will you tell me what I am

to do!'

'Do! Nothing easier. Make a moonlight flitting in two hours' time with

the young gentleman (he's quite ready to go; I have been giving him good

advice as we came along), and get as far from London as you can. Let me

know where you are, and leave the rest to me. She MUST come round; she

can't hold out long; and as to the chances of your being retaken in

the meanwhile, why it wasn't one man who got out of Newgate, but three

hundred. Think of that, for your comfort.'

'We must support life. How?'

'How!' repeated the blind man. 'By eating and drinking. And how get meat

and drink, but by paying for it! Money!' he cried, slapping his pocket.

'Is money the word? Why, the streets have been running money. Devil send

that the sport's not over yet, for these are jolly times; golden, rare,

roaring, scrambling times. Hallo, bully! Hallo! Hallo! Drink, bully,

drink. Where are ye there! Hallo!'

With such vociferations, and with a boisterous manner which bespoke his

perfect abandonment to the general licence and disorder, he groped his

way towards the shed, where Hugh and Barnaby were sitting on the ground.

'Put it about!' he cried, handing his flask to Hugh. 'The kennels run

with wine and gold. Guineas and strong water flow from the very pumps.

About with it, don't spare it!'

Exhausted, unwashed, unshorn, begrimed with smoke and dust, his hair

clotted with blood, his voice quite gone, so that he spoke in whispers;

his skin parched up by fever, his whole body bruised and cut, and beaten

about, Hugh still took the flask, and raised it to his lips. He was in

the act of drinking, when the front of the shed was suddenly darkened,

and Dennis stood before them.

'No offence, no offence,' said that personage in a conciliatory tone, as

Hugh stopped in his draught, and eyed him, with no pleasant look, from

head to foot. 'No offence, brother. Barnaby here too, eh? How are you,

Barnaby? And two other gentlemen! Your humble servant, gentlemen. No

offence to YOU either, I hope. Eh, brothers?'

Notwithstanding that he spoke in this very friendly and confident

manner, he seemed to have considerable hesitation about entering, and

remained outside the roof. He was rather better dressed than usual:

wearing the same suit of threadbare black, it is true, but having round

his neck an unwholesome-looking cravat of a yellowish white; and, on his

hands, great leather gloves, such as a gardener might wear in following

his trade. His shoes were newly greased, and ornamented with a pair of

rusty iron buckles; the packthread at his knees had been renewed; and

where he wanted buttons, he wore pins. Altogether, he had something the

look of a tipstaff, or a bailiff's follower, desperately faded, but who

had a notion of keeping up the appearance of a professional character,

and making the best of the worst means.

'You're very snug here,' said Mr Dennis, pulling out a mouldy

pocket-handkerchief, which looked like a decomposed halter, and wiping

his forehead in a nervous manner.

'Not snug enough to prevent your finding us, it seems,' Hugh answered,

sulkily.

'Why I'll tell you what, brother,' said Dennis, with a friendly smile,

'when you don't want me to know which way you're riding, you must wear

another sort of bells on your horse. Ah! I know the sound of them you

wore last night, and have got quick ears for 'em; that's the truth.

Well, but how are you, brother?'

He had by this time approached, and now ventured to sit down by him.

'How am I?' answered Hugh. 'Where were you yesterday? Where did you go

when you left me in the jail? Why did you leave me? And what did you

mean by rolling your eyes and shaking your fist at me, eh?'

'I shake my fist!--at you, brother!' said Dennis, gently checking Hugh's

uplifted hand, which looked threatening.

'Your stick, then; it's all one.'

'Lord love you, brother, I meant nothing. You don't understand me by

half. I shouldn't wonder now,' he added, in the tone of a desponding and

an injured man, 'but you thought, because I wanted them chaps left in

the prison, that I was a going to desert the banners?'

Hugh told him, with an oath, that he had thought so.

'Well!' said Mr Dennis, mournfully, 'if you an't enough to make a man

mistrust his feller-creeturs, I don't know what is. Desert the banners!

Me! Ned Dennis, as was so christened by his own father!--Is this axe

your'n, brother?'

Yes, it's mine,' said Hugh, in the same sullen manner as before; 'it

might have hurt you, if you had come in its way once or twice last

night. Put it down.'

'Might have hurt me!' said Mr Dennis, still keeping it in his hand, and

feeling the edge with an air of abstraction. 'Might have hurt me! and me

exerting myself all the time to the wery best advantage. Here's a world!

And you're not a-going to ask me to take a sup out of that 'ere bottle,

eh?'

Hugh passed it towards him. As he raised it to his lips, Barnaby jumped

up, and motioning them to be silent, looked eagerly out.

'What's the matter, Barnaby?' said Dennis, glancing at Hugh and dropping

the flask, but still holding the axe in his hand.

'Hush!' he answered softly. 'What do I see glittering behind the hedge?'

'What!' cried the hangman, raising his voice to its highest pitch, and

laying hold of him and Hugh. 'Not SOLDIERS, surely!'

That moment, the shed was filled with armed men; and a body of horse,

galloping into the field, drew up before it.

'There!' said Dennis, who remained untouched among them when they had

seized their prisoners; 'it's them two young ones, gentlemen, that the

proclamation puts a price on. This other's an escaped felon.--I'm sorry

for it, brother,' he added, in a tone of resignation, addressing himself

to Hugh; 'but you've brought it on yourself; you forced me to do it; you

wouldn't respect the soundest constitootional principles, you know; you

went and wiolated the wery framework of society. I had sooner have

given away a trifle in charity than done this, I would upon my soul.--If

you'll keep fast hold on 'em, gentlemen, I think I can make a shift to

tie 'em better than you can.'

But this operation was postponed for a few moments by a new occurrence.

The blind man, whose ears were quicker than most people's sight, had

been alarmed, before Barnaby, by a rustling in the bushes, under cover

of which the soldiers had advanced. He retreated instantly--had hidden

somewhere for a minute--and probably in his confusion mistaking the

point at which he had emerged, was now seen running across the open

meadow.

An officer cried directly that he had helped to plunder a house last

night. He was loudly called on, to surrender. He ran the harder, and in

a few seconds would have been out of gunshot. The word was given, and

the men fired.

There was a breathless pause and a profound silence, during which all

eyes were fixed upon him. He had been seen to start at the discharge, as

if the report had frightened him. But he neither stopped nor slackened

his pace in the least, and ran on full forty yards further. Then,

without one reel or stagger, or sign of faintness, or quivering of any

limb, he dropped.

Some of them hurried up to where he lay;--the hangman with them.

Everything had passed so quickly, that the smoke had not yet scattered,

but curled slowly off in a little cloud, which seemed like the dead

man's spirit moving solemnly away. There were a few drops of blood upon

the grass--more, when they turned him over--that was all.

'Look here! Look here!' said the hangman, stooping one knee beside the

body, and gazing up with a disconsolate face at the officer and men.

'Here's a pretty sight!'

'Stand out of the way,' replied the officer. 'Serjeant! see what he had

about him.'

The man turned his pockets out upon the grass, and counted, besides some

foreign coins and two rings, five-and-forty guineas in gold. These were

bundled up in a handkerchief and carried away; the body remained there

for the present, but six men and the serjeant were left to take it to

the nearest public-house.

'Now then, if you're going,' said the serjeant, clapping Dennis on the

back, and pointing after the officer who was walking towards the shed.

To which Mr Dennis only replied, 'Don't talk to me!' and then repeated

what he had said before, namely, 'Here's a pretty sight!'

'It's not one that you care for much, I should think,' observed the

serjeant coolly.

'Why, who,' said Mr Dennis rising, 'should care for it, if I don't?'

'Oh! I didn't know you was so tender-hearted,' said the serjeant.

'That's all!'

'Tender-hearted!' echoed Dennis. 'Tender-hearted! Look at this man. Do

you call THIS constitootional? Do you see him shot through and through

instead of being worked off like a Briton? Damme, if I know which

party to side with. You're as bad as the other. What's to become of the

country if the military power's to go a superseding the ciwilians in

this way? Where's this poor feller-creetur's rights as a citizen, that

he didn't have ME in his last moments! I was here. I was willing. I

was ready. These are nice times, brother, to have the dead crying out

against us in this way, and sleep comfortably in our beds arterwards;

wery nice!'

Whether he derived any material consolation from binding the prisoners,

is uncertain; most probably he did. At all events his being summoned to

that work, diverted him, for the time, from these painful reflections,

and gave his thoughts a more congenial occupation.

They were not all three carried off together, but in two parties;

Barnaby and his father, going by one road in the centre of a body of

foot; and Hugh, fast bound upon a horse, and strongly guarded by a troop

of cavalry, being taken by another.

They had no opportunity for the least communication, in the short

interval which preceded their departure; being kept strictly apart. Hugh

only observed that Barnaby walked with a drooping head among his guard,

and, without raising his eyes, that he tried to wave his fettered hand

when he passed. For himself, he buoyed up his courage as he rode along,

with the assurance that the mob would force his jail wherever it might

be, and set him at liberty. But when they got into London, and more

especially into Fleet Market, lately the stronghold of the rioters,

where the military were rooting out the last remnant of the crowd, he

saw that this hope was gone, and felt that he was riding to his death.

Chapter 70

Mr Dennis having despatched this piece of business without any personal

hurt or inconvenience, and having now retired into the tranquil

respectability of private life, resolved to solace himself with half an

hour or so of female society. With this amiable purpose in his mind,

he bent his steps towards the house where Dolly and Miss Haredale were

still confined, and whither Miss Miggs had also been removed by order of

Mr Simon Tappertit.

As he walked along the streets with his leather gloves clasped

behind him, and his face indicative of cheerful thought and pleasant

calculation, Mr Dennis might have been likened unto a farmer ruminating

among his crops, and enjoying by anticipation the bountiful gifts of

Providence. Look where he would, some heap of ruins afforded him rich

promise of a working off; the whole town appeared to have been ploughed

and sown, and nurtured by most genial weather; and a goodly harvest was

at hand.

Having taken up arms and resorted to deeds of violence, with the great

main object of preserving the Old Bailey in all its purity, and the

gallows in all its pristine usefulness and moral grandeur, it would

perhaps be going too far to assert that Mr Dennis had ever distinctly

contemplated and foreseen this happy state of things. He rather looked

upon it as one of those beautiful dispensations which are inscrutably

brought about for the behoof and advantage of good men. He felt, as

it were, personally referred to, in this prosperous ripening for the

gibbet; and had never considered himself so much the pet and favourite

child of Destiny, or loved that lady so well or with such a calm and

virtuous reliance, in all his life.

As to being taken up, himself, for a rioter, and punished with the

rest, Mr Dennis dismissed that possibility from his thoughts as an idle

chimera; arguing that the line of conduct he had adopted at Newgate,

and the service he had rendered that day, would be more than a set-off

against any evidence which might identify him as a member of the crowd.

That any charge of companionship which might be made against him by

those who were themselves in danger, would certainly go for nought. And

that if any trivial indiscretion on his part should unluckily come out,

the uncommon usefulness of his office, at present, and the great demand

for the exercise of its functions, would certainly cause it to be winked

at, and passed over. In a word, he had played his cards throughout, with

great care; had changed sides at the very nick of time; had delivered

up two of the most notorious rioters, and a distinguished felon to boot;

and was quite at his ease.

Saving--for there is a reservation; and even Mr Dennis was not perfectly

happy--saving for one circumstance; to wit, the forcible detention of

Dolly and Miss Haredale, in a house almost adjoining his own. This was

a stumbling-block; for if they were discovered and released, they could,

by the testimony they had it in their power to give, place him in a

situation of great jeopardy; and to set them at liberty, first extorting

from them an oath of secrecy and silence, was a thing not to be thought

of. It was more, perhaps, with an eye to the danger which lurked in this

quarter, than from his abstract love of conversation with the sex, that

the hangman, quickening his steps, now hastened into their society,

cursing the amorous natures of Hugh and Mr Tappertit with great

heartiness, at every step he took.

When he entered the miserable room in which they were confined, Dolly

and Miss Haredale withdrew in silence to the remotest corner. But Miss

Miggs, who was particularly tender of her reputation, immediately fell

upon her knees and began to scream very loud, crying, 'What will become

of me!'--'Where is my Simmuns!'--'Have mercy, good gentlemen, on my

sex's weaknesses!'--with other doleful lamentations of that nature,

which she delivered with great propriety and decorum.

'Miss, miss,' whispered Dennis, beckoning to her with his forefinger,

'come here--I won't hurt you. Come here, my lamb, will you?'

On hearing this tender epithet, Miss Miggs, who had left off screaming

when he opened his lips, and had listened to him attentively, began

again, crying: 'Oh I'm his lamb! He says I'm his lamb! Oh gracious, why

wasn't I born old and ugly! Why was I ever made to be the youngest of

six, and all of 'em dead and in their blessed graves, excepting

one married sister, which is settled in Golden Lion Court, number

twenty-sivin, second bell-handle on the--!'

'Don't I say I an't a-going to hurt you?' said Dennis, pointing to a

chair. 'Why miss, what's the matter?'

'I don't know what mayn't be the matter!' cried Miss Miggs, clasping her

hands distractedly. 'Anything may be the matter!'

'But nothing is, I tell you,' said the hangman. 'First stop that noise

and come and sit down here, will you, chuckey?'

The coaxing tone in which he said these latter words might have failed

in its object, if he had not accompanied them with sundry sharp jerks of

his thumb over one shoulder, and with divers winks and thrustings of his

tongue into his cheek, from which signals the damsel gathered that he

sought to speak to her apart, concerning Miss Haredale and Dolly. Her

curiosity being very powerful, and her jealousy by no means inactive,

she arose, and with a great deal of shivering and starting back, and

much muscular action among all the small bones in her throat, gradually

approached him.

'Sit down,' said the hangman.

Suiting the action to the word, he thrust her rather suddenly and

prematurely into a chair, and designing to reassure her by a little

harmless jocularity, such as is adapted to please and fascinate the sex,

converted his right forefinger into an ideal bradawl or gimlet, and

made as though he would screw the same into her side--whereat Miss Miggs

shrieked again, and evinced symptoms of faintness.

'Lovey, my dear,' whispered Dennis, drawing his chair close to hers.

'When was your young man here last, eh?'

'MY young man, good gentleman!' answered Miggs in a tone of exquisite

distress.

'Ah! Simmuns, you know--him?' said Dennis.

'Mine indeed!' cried Miggs, with a burst of bitterness--and as she said

it, she glanced towards Dolly. 'MINE, good gentleman!'

This was just what Mr Dennis wanted, and expected.

'Ah!' he said, looking so soothingly, not to say amorously on Miggs,

that she sat, as she afterwards remarked, on pins and needles of

the sharpest Whitechapel kind, not knowing what intentions might be

suggesting that expression to his features: 'I was afraid of that. I saw

as much myself. It's her fault. She WILL entice 'em.'

'I wouldn't,' cried Miggs, folding her hands and looking upwards with

a kind of devout blankness, 'I wouldn't lay myself out as she does; I

wouldn't be as bold as her; I wouldn't seem to say to all male creeturs

"Come and kiss me"'--and here a shudder quite convulsed her frame--'for

any earthly crowns as might be offered. Worlds,' Miggs added solemnly,

'should not reduce me. No. Not if I was Wenis.'

'Well, but you ARE Wenus, you know,' said Mr Dennis, confidentially.

'No, I am not, good gentleman,' answered Miggs, shaking her head with an

air of self-denial which seemed to imply that she might be if she chose,

but she hoped she knew better. 'No, I am not, good gentleman. Don't

charge me with it.'

Up to this time she had turned round, every now and then, to where Dolly

and Miss Haredale had retired and uttered a scream, or groan, or laid

her hand upon her heart and trembled excessively, with a view of keeping

up appearances, and giving them to understand that she conversed with

the visitor, under protest and on compulsion, and at a great personal

sacrifice, for their common good. But at this point, Mr Dennis looked

so very full of meaning, and gave such a singularly expressive twitch

to his face as a request to her to come still nearer to him, that

she abandoned these little arts, and gave him her whole and undivided

attention.

'When was Simmuns here, I say?' quoth Dennis, in her ear.

'Not since yesterday morning; and then only for a few minutes. Not all

day, the day before.'

'You know he meant all along to carry off that one!' said Dennis,

indicating Dolly by the slightest possible jerk of his head:--'And to

hand you over to somebody else.'

Miss Miggs, who had fallen into a terrible state of grief when the first

part of this sentence was spoken, recovered a little at the second,

and seemed by the sudden check she put upon her tears, to intimate

that possibly this arrangement might meet her views; and that it might,

perhaps, remain an open question.

'--But unfort'nately,' pursued Dennis, who observed this: 'somebody else

was fond of her too, you see; and even if he wasn't, somebody else is

took for a rioter, and it's all over with him.'

Miss Miggs relapsed.

'Now I want,' said Dennis, 'to clear this house, and to see you righted.

What if I was to get her off, out of the way, eh?'

Miss Miggs, brightening again, rejoined, with many breaks and pauses

from excess of feeling, that temptations had been Simmuns's bane. That

it was not his faults, but hers (meaning Dolly's). That men did not see

through these dreadful arts as women did, and therefore was caged

and trapped, as Simmun had been. That she had no personal motives to

serve--far from it--on the contrary, her intentions was good towards

all parties. But forasmuch as she knowed that Simmun, if united to any

designing and artful minxes (she would name no names, for that was not

her dispositions)--to ANY designing and artful minxes--must be made

miserable and unhappy for life, she DID incline towards prewentions.

Such, she added, was her free confessions. But as this was private

feelings, and might perhaps be looked upon as wengeance, she begged the

gentleman would say no more. Whatever he said, wishing to do her duty

by all mankind, even by them as had ever been her bitterest enemies, she

would not listen to him. With that she stopped her ears, and shook her

head from side to side, to intimate to Mr Dennis that though he talked

until he had no breath left, she was as deaf as any adder.

'Lookee here, my sugar-stick,' said Mr Dennis, 'if your view's the same

as mine, and you'll only be quiet and slip away at the right time, I

can have the house clear to-morrow, and be out of this trouble.--Stop

though! there's the other.'

'Which other, sir?' asked Miggs--still with her fingers in her ears and

her head shaking obstinately.

'Why, the tallest one, yonder,' said Dennis, as he stroked his chin, and

added, in an undertone to himself, something about not crossing Muster

Gashford.

Miss Miggs replied (still being profoundly deaf) that if Miss Haredale

stood in the way at all, he might make himself quite easy on that score;

as she had gathered, from what passed between Hugh and Mr Tappertit when

they were last there, that she was to be removed alone (not by them, but

by somebody else), to-morrow night.

Mr Dennis opened his eyes very wide at this piece of information,

whistled once, considered once, and finally slapped his head once and

nodded once, as if he had got the clue to this mysterious removal, and

so dismissed it. Then he imparted his design concerning Dolly to Miss

Miggs, who was taken more deaf than before, when he began; and so

remained, all through.

The notable scheme was this. Mr Dennis was immediately to seek out from

among the rioters, some daring young fellow (and he had one in his eye,

he said), who, terrified by the threats he could hold out to him, and

alarmed by the capture of so many who were no better and no worse than

he, would gladly avail himself of any help to get abroad, and out of

harm's way, with his plunder, even though his journey were incumbered

by an unwilling companion; indeed, the unwilling companion being

a beautiful girl, would probably be an additional inducement and

temptation. Such a person found, he proposed to bring him there on

the ensuing night, when the tall one was taken off, and Miss Miggs had

purposely retired; and then that Dolly should be gagged, muffled in a

cloak, and carried in any handy conveyance down to the river's side;

where there were abundant means of getting her smuggled snugly off in

any small craft of doubtful character, and no questions asked. With

regard to the expense of this removal, he would say, at a rough

calculation, that two or three silver tea or coffee-pots, with something

additional for drink (such as a muffineer, or toast-rack), would more

than cover it. Articles of plate of every kind having been buried by the

rioters in several lonely parts of London, and particularly, as he

knew, in St James's Square, which, though easy of access, was little

frequented after dark, and had a convenient piece of water in the midst,

the needful funds were close at hand, and could be had upon the shortest

notice. With regard to Dolly, the gentleman would exercise his own

discretion. He would be bound to do nothing but to take her away,

and keep her away. All other arrangements and dispositions would rest

entirely with himself.

If Miss Miggs had had her hearing, no doubt she would have been greatly

shocked by the indelicacy of a young female's going away with a stranger

by night (for her moral feelings, as we have said, were of the tenderest

kind); but directly Mr Dennis ceased to speak, she reminded him that he

had only wasted breath. She then went on to say (still with her fingers

in her ears) that nothing less than a severe practical lesson would save

the locksmith's daughter from utter ruin; and that she felt it, as it

were, a moral obligation and a sacred duty to the family, to wish that

some one would devise one for her reformation. Miss Miggs remarked, and

very justly, as an abstract sentiment which happened to occur to her

at the moment, that she dared to say the locksmith and his wife would

murmur, and repine, if they were ever, by forcible abduction, or

otherwise, to lose their child; but that we seldom knew, in this world,

what was best for us: such being our sinful and imperfect natures, that

very few arrived at that clear understanding.

Having brought their conversation to this satisfactory end, they parted:

Dennis, to pursue his design, and take another walk about his farm; Miss

Miggs, to launch, when he left her, into such a burst of mental anguish

(which she gave them to understand was occasioned by certain tender

things he had had the presumption and audacity to say), that little

Dolly's heart was quite melted. Indeed, she said and did so much to

soothe the outraged feelings of Miss Miggs, and looked so beautiful

while doing so, that if that young maid had not had ample vent for her

surpassing spite, in a knowledge of the mischief that was brewing, she

must have scratched her features, on the spot.

Chapter 71

All next day, Emma Haredale, Dolly, and Miggs, remained cooped up

together in what had now been their prison for so many days, without

seeing any person, or hearing any sound but the murmured conversation,

in an outer room, of the men who kept watch over them. There appeared to

be more of these fellows than there had been hitherto; and they could

no longer hear the voices of women, which they had before plainly

distinguished. Some new excitement, too, seemed to prevail among them;

for there was much stealthy going in and out, and a constant questioning

of those who were newly arrived. They had previously been quite reckless

in their behaviour; often making a great uproar; quarrelling among

themselves, fighting, dancing, and singing. They were now very subdued

and silent, conversing almost in whispers, and stealing in and out with

a soft and stealthy tread, very different from the boisterous trampling

in which their arrivals and departures had hitherto been announced to

the trembling captives.

Whether this change was occasioned by the presence among them of some

person of authority in their ranks, or by any other cause, they were

unable to decide. Sometimes they thought it was in part attributable to

there being a sick man in the chamber, for last night there had been a

shuffling of feet, as though a burden were brought in, and afterwards a

moaning noise. But they had no means of ascertaining the truth: for

any question or entreaty on their parts only provoked a storm of

execrations, or something worse; and they were too happy to be left

alone, unassailed by threats or admiration, to risk even that comfort,

by any voluntary communication with those who held them in durance.

It was sufficiently evident, both to Emma and to the locksmith's poor

little daughter herself, that she, Dolly, was the great object of

attraction; and that so soon as they should have leisure to indulge in

the softer passion, Hugh and Mr Tappertit would certainly fall to blows

for her sake; in which latter case, it was not very difficult to see

whose prize she would become. With all her old horror of that man

revived, and deepened into a degree of aversion and abhorrence which no

language can describe; with a thousand old recollections and regrets,

and causes of distress, anxiety, and fear, besetting her on all sides;

poor Dolly Varden--sweet, blooming, buxom Dolly--began to hang her head,

and fade, and droop, like a beautiful flower. The colour fled from her

cheeks, her courage forsook her, her gentle heart failed. Unmindful

of all her provoking caprices, forgetful of all her conquests and

inconstancy, with all her winning little vanities quite gone, she

nestled all the livelong day in Emma Haredale's bosom; and, sometimes

calling on her dear old grey-haired father, sometimes on her mother, and

sometimes even on her old home, pined slowly away, like a poor bird in

its cage.

Light hearts, light hearts, that float so gaily on a smooth stream, that

are so sparkling and buoyant in the sunshine--down upon fruit, bloom

upon flowers, blush in summer air, life of the winged insect, whose

whole existence is a day--how soon ye sink in troubled water! Poor

Dolly's heart--a little, gentle, idle, fickle thing; giddy, restless,

fluttering; constant to nothing but bright looks, and smiles and

laughter--Dolly's heart was breaking.

Emma had known grief, and could bear it better. She had little comfort

to impart, but she could soothe and tend her, and she did so; and Dolly

clung to her like a child to its nurse. In endeavouring to inspire her

with some fortitude, she increased her own; and though the nights

were long, and the days dismal, and she felt the wasting influence

of watching and fatigue, and had perhaps a more defined and clear

perception of their destitute condition and its worst dangers, she

uttered no complaint. Before the ruffians, in whose power they were, she

bore herself so calmly, and with such an appearance, in the midst of all

her terror, of a secret conviction that they dared not harm her, that

there was not a man among them but held her in some degree of dread;

and more than one believed she had a weapon hidden in her dress, and was

prepared to use it.

Such was their condition when they were joined by Miss Miggs, who gave

them to understand that she too had been taken prisoner because of her

charms, and detailed such feats of resistance she had performed (her

virtue having given her supernatural strength), that they felt it quite

a happiness to have her for a champion. Nor was this the only comfort

they derived at first from Miggs's presence and society: for that young

lady displayed such resignation and long-suffering, and so much meek

endurance, under her trials, and breathed in all her chaste discourse a

spirit of such holy confidence and resignation, and devout belief that

all would happen for the best, that Emma felt her courage strengthened

by the bright example; never doubting but that everything she said was

true, and that she, like them, was torn from all she loved, and agonised

by doubt and apprehension. As to poor Dolly, she was roused, at

first, by seeing one who came from home; but when she heard under what

circumstances she had left it, and into whose hands her father had

fallen, she wept more bitterly than ever, and refused all comfort.

Miss Miggs was at some trouble to reprove her for this state of mind,

and to entreat her to take example by herself, who, she said, was now

receiving back, with interest, tenfold the amount of her subscriptions

to the red-brick dwelling-house, in the articles of peace of mind and a

quiet conscience. And, while on serious topics, Miss Miggs considered it

her duty to try her hand at the conversion of Miss Haredale; for whose

improvement she launched into a polemical address of some length, in the

course whereof, she likened herself unto a chosen missionary, and that

young lady to a cannibal in darkness. Indeed, she returned so often to

these subjects, and so frequently called upon them to take a lesson from

her,--at the same time vaunting and, as it were, rioting in, her huge

unworthiness, and abundant excess of sin,--that, in the course of a

short time, she became, in that small chamber, rather a nuisance than a

comfort, and rendered them, if possible, even more unhappy than they had

been before.

The night had now come; and for the first time (for their jailers had

been regular in bringing food and candles), they were left in darkness.

Any change in their condition in such a place inspired new fears; and

when some hours had passed, and the gloom was still unbroken, Emma could

no longer repress her alarm.

They listened attentively. There was the same murmuring in the outer

room, and now and then a moan which seemed to be wrung from a person in

great pain, who made an effort to subdue it, but could not. Even these

men seemed to be in darkness too; for no light shone through the chinks

in the door, nor were they moving, as their custom was, but quite still:

the silence being unbroken by so much as the creaking of a board.

At first, Miss Miggs wondered greatly in her own mind who this sick

person might be; but arriving, on second thoughts, at the conclusion

that he was a part of the schemes on foot, and an artful device soon to

be employed with great success, she opined, for Miss Haredale's comfort,

that it must be some misguided Papist who had been wounded: and this

happy supposition encouraged her to say, under her breath, 'Ally

Looyer!' several times.

'Is it possible,' said Emma, with some indignation, 'that you who have

seen these men committing the outrages you have told us of, and who have

fallen into their hands, like us, can exult in their cruelties!'

'Personal considerations, miss,' rejoined Miggs, 'sinks into nothing,

afore a noble cause. Ally Looyer! Ally Looyer! Ally Looyer, good

gentlemen!'

It seemed from the shrill pertinacity with which Miss Miggs repeated

this form of acclamation, that she was calling the same through the

keyhole of the door; but in the profound darkness she could not be seen.

'If the time has come--Heaven knows it may come at any moment--when they

are bent on prosecuting the designs, whatever they may be, with which

they have brought us here, can you still encourage, and take part with

them?' demanded Emma.

'I thank my goodness-gracious-blessed-stars I can, miss,' returned

Miggs, with increased energy.--'Ally Looyer, good gentlemen!'

Even Dolly, cast down and disappointed as she was, revived at this, and

bade Miggs hold her tongue directly.

'WHICH, was you pleased to observe, Miss Varden?' said Miggs, with a

strong emphasis on the irrelative pronoun.

Dolly repeated her request.

'Ho, gracious me!' cried Miggs, with hysterical derision. 'Ho, gracious

me! Yes, to be sure I will. Ho yes! I am a abject slave, and a

toiling, moiling, constant-working, always-being-found-fault-with,

never-giving-satisfactions, nor-having-no-time-to-clean-oneself,

potter's wessel--an't I, miss! Ho yes! My situations is lowly, and my

capacities is limited, and my duties is to humble myself afore the

base degenerating daughters of their blessed mothers as is--fit to

keep companies with holy saints but is born to persecutions from

wicked relations--and to demean myself before them as is no better than

Infidels--an't it, miss! Ho yes! My only becoming occupations is to help

young flaunting pagins to brush and comb and titiwate theirselves into

whitening and suppulchres, and leave the young men to think that there

an't a bit of padding in it nor no pinching ins nor fillings out nor

pomatums nor deceits nor earthly wanities--an't it, miss! Yes, to be

sure it is--ho yes!'

Having delivered these ironical passages with a most wonderful

volubility, and with a shrillness perfectly deafening (especially when

she jerked out the interjections), Miss Miggs, from mere habit, and not

because weeping was at all appropriate to the occasion, which was one of

triumph, concluded by bursting into a flood of tears, and calling in an

impassioned manner on the name of Simmuns.

What Emma Haredale and Dolly would have done, or how long Miss Miggs,

now that she had hoisted her true colours, would have gone on waving

them before their astonished senses, it is impossible to tell. Nor is

it necessary to speculate on these matters, for a startling interruption

occurred at that moment, which took their whole attention by storm.

This was a violent knocking at the door of the house, and then its

sudden bursting open; which was immediately succeeded by a scuffle in

the room without, and the clash of weapons. Transported with the hope

that rescue had at length arrived, Emma and Dolly shrieked aloud for

help; nor were their shrieks unanswered; for after a hurried interval, a

man, bearing in one hand a drawn sword, and in the other a taper, rushed

into the chamber where they were confined.

It was some check upon their transport to find in this person an entire

stranger, but they appealed to him, nevertheless, and besought him, in

impassioned language, to restore them to their friends.

'For what other purpose am I here?' he answered, closing the door, and

standing with his back against it. 'With what object have I made my way

to this place, through difficulty and danger, but to preserve you?'

With a joy for which it was impossible to find adequate expression, they

embraced each other, and thanked Heaven for this most timely aid. Their

deliverer stepped forward for a moment to put the light upon the table,

and immediately returning to his former position against the door, bared

his head, and looked on smilingly.

'You have news of my uncle, sir?' said Emma, turning hastily towards

him.

'And of my father and mother?' added Dolly.

'Yes,' he said. 'Good news.'

'They are alive and unhurt?' they both cried at once.

'Yes, and unhurt,' he rejoined.

'And close at hand?'

'I did not say close at hand,' he answered smoothly; 'they are at no

great distance. YOUR friends, sweet one,' he added, addressing Dolly,

'are within a few hours' journey. You will be restored to them, I hope,

to-night.'

'My uncle, sir--' faltered Emma.

'Your uncle, dear Miss Haredale, happily--I say happily, because he has

succeeded where many of our creed have failed, and is safe--has crossed

the sea, and is out of Britain.'

'I thank God for it,' said Emma, faintly.

'You say well. You have reason to be thankful: greater reason than it is

possible for you, who have seen but one night of these cruel outrages,

to imagine.'

'Does he desire,' said Emma, 'that I should follow him?'

'Do you ask if he desires it?' cried the stranger in surprise. 'IF he

desires it! But you do not know the danger of remaining in England,

the difficulty of escape, or the price hundreds would pay to secure the

means, when you make that inquiry. Pardon me. I had forgotten that you

could not, being prisoner here.'

'I gather, sir,' said Emma, after a moment's pause, 'from what you hint

at, but fear to tell me, that I have witnessed but the beginning, and

the least, of the violence to which we are exposed, and that it has not

yet slackened in its fury?'

He shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, lifted up his hands; and with

the same smooth smile, which was not a pleasant one to see, cast his

eyes upon the ground, and remained silent.

'You may venture, sir, to speak plain,' said Emma, 'and to tell me the

worst. We have undergone some preparation for it.'

But here Dolly interposed, and entreated her not to hear the worst, but

the best; and besought the gentleman to tell them the best, and to

keep the remainder of his news until they were safe among their friends

again.

'It is told in three words,' he said, glancing at the locksmith's

daughter with a look of some displeasure. 'The people have risen, to a

man, against us; the streets are filled with soldiers, who support

them and do their bidding. We have no protection but from above, and no

safety but in flight; and that is a poor resource; for we are watched on

every hand, and detained here, both by force and fraud. Miss Haredale,

I cannot bear--believe me, that I cannot bear--by speaking of myself,

or what I have done, or am prepared to do, to seem to vaunt my services

before you. But, having powerful Protestant connections, and having my

whole wealth embarked with theirs in shipping and commerce, I happily

possessed the means of saving your uncle. I have the means of saving

you; and in redemption of my sacred promise, made to him, I am here;

pledged not to leave you until I have placed you in his arms. The

treachery or penitence of one of the men about you, led to the discovery

of your place of confinement; and that I have forced my way here, sword

in hand, you see.'

'You bring,' said Emma, faltering, 'some note or token from my uncle?'

'No, he doesn't,' cried Dolly, pointing at him earnestly; 'now I am sure

he doesn't. Don't go with him for the world!'

'Hush, pretty fool--be silent,' he replied, frowning angrily upon her.

'No, Miss Haredale, I have no letter, nor any token of any kind; for

while I sympathise with you, and such as you, on whom misfortune so

heavy and so undeserved has fallen, I value my life. I carry, therefore,

no writing which, found upon me, would lead to its certain loss. I

never thought of bringing any other token, nor did Mr Haredale think of

entrusting me with one--possibly because he had good experience of my

faith and honesty, and owed his life to me.'

There was a reproof conveyed in these words, which to a nature like

Emma Haredale's, was well addressed. But Dolly, who was differently

constituted, was by no means touched by it, and still conjured her, in

all the terms of affection and attachment she could think of, not to be

lured away.

'Time presses,' said their visitor, who, although he sought to express

the deepest interest, had something cold and even in his speech, that

grated on the ear; 'and danger surrounds us. If I have exposed myself to

it, in vain, let it be so; but if you and he should ever meet again, do

me justice. If you decide to remain (as I think you do), remember, Miss

Haredale, that I left you with a solemn caution, and acquitting myself

of all the consequences to which you expose yourself.'

'Stay, sir!' cried Emma--one moment, I beg you. Cannot we--and she drew

Dolly closer to her--'cannot we go together?'

'The task of conveying one female in safety through such scenes as we

must encounter, to say nothing of attracting the attention of those who

crowd the streets,' he answered, 'is enough. I have said that she will

be restored to her friends to-night. If you accept the service I tender,

Miss Haredale, she shall be instantly placed in safe conduct, and that

promise redeemed. Do you decide to remain? People of all ranks and

creeds are flying from the town, which is sacked from end to end. Let me

be of use in some quarter. Do you stay, or go?'

'Dolly,' said Emma, in a hurried manner, 'my dear girl, this is our last

hope. If we part now, it is only that we may meet again in happiness and

honour. I will trust to this gentleman.'

'No no-no!' cried Dolly, clinging to her. 'Pray, pray, do not!'

'You hear,' said Emma, 'that to-night--only to-night--within a few

hours--think of that!--you will be among those who would die of grief to

lose you, and who are now plunged in the deepest misery for your sake.

Pray for me, dear girl, as I will for you; and never forget the many

quiet hours we have passed together. Say one "God bless you!" Say that

at parting!'

But Dolly could say nothing; no, not when Emma kissed her cheek a

hundred times, and covered it with tears, could she do more than hang

upon her neck, and sob, and clasp, and hold her tight.

'We have time for no more of this,' cried the man, unclenching her

hands, and pushing her roughly off, as he drew Emma Haredale towards the

door: 'Now! Quick, outside there! are you ready?'

'Ay!' cried a loud voice, which made him start. 'Quite ready! Stand back

here, for your lives!'

And in an instant he was felled like an ox in the butcher's

shambles--struck down as though a block of marble had fallen from the

roof and crushed him--and cheerful light, and beaming faces came pouring

in--and Emma was clasped in her uncle's embrace, and Dolly, with a

shriek that pierced the air, fell into the arms of her father and

mother.

What fainting there was, what laughing, what crying, what sobbing, what

smiling, how much questioning, no answering, all talking together, all

beside themselves with joy; what kissing, congratulating, embracing,

shaking of hands, and falling into all these raptures, over and over and

over again; no language can describe.

At length, and after a long time, the old locksmith went up and fairly

hugged two strangers, who had stood apart and left them to themselves;

and then they saw--whom? Yes, Edward Chester and Joseph Willet.

'See here!' cried the locksmith. 'See here! where would any of us have

been without these two? Oh, Mr Edward, Mr Edward--oh, Joe, Joe, how

light, and yet how full, you have made my old heart to-night!'

'It was Mr Edward that knocked him down, sir,' said Joe: 'I longed to do

it, but I gave it up to him. Come, you brave and honest gentleman! Get

your senses together, for you haven't long to lie here.'

He had his foot upon the breast of their sham deliverer, in the absence

of a spare arm; and gave him a gentle roll as he spoke. Gashford, for

it was no other, crouching yet malignant, raised his scowling face, like

sin subdued, and pleaded to be gently used.

'I have access to all my lord's papers, Mr Haredale,' he said, in a

submissive voice: Mr Haredale keeping his back towards him, and not once

looking round: 'there are very important documents among them. There are

a great many in secret drawers, and distributed in various places, known

only to my lord and me. I can give some very valuable information, and

render important assistance to any inquiry. You will have to answer it,

if I receive ill usage.

'Pah!' cried Joe, in deep disgust. 'Get up, man; you're waited for,

outside. Get up, do you hear?'

Gashford slowly rose; and picking up his hat, and looking with a baffled

malevolence, yet with an air of despicable humility, all round the room,

crawled out.

'And now, gentlemen,' said Joe, who seemed to be the spokesman of the

party, for all the rest were silent; 'the sooner we get back to the

Black Lion, the better, perhaps.'

Mr Haredale nodded assent, and drawing his niece's arm through his,

and taking one of her hands between his own, passed out straightway;

followed by the locksmith, Mrs Varden, and Dolly--who would scarcely

have presented a sufficient surface for all the hugs and caresses they

bestowed upon her though she had been a dozen Dollys. Edward Chester and

Joe followed.

And did Dolly never once look behind--not once? Was there not one little

fleeting glimpse of the dark eyelash, almost resting on her flushed

cheek, and of the downcast sparkling eye it shaded? Joe thought there

was--and he is not likely to have been mistaken; for there were not many

eyes like Dolly's, that's the truth.

The outer room through which they had to pass, was full of men; among

them, Mr Dennis in safe keeping; and there, had been since yesterday,

lying in hiding behind a wooden screen which was now thrown down,

Simon Tappertit, the recreant 'prentice, burnt and bruised, and with a

gun-shot wound in his body; and his legs--his perfect legs, the pride

and glory of his life, the comfort of his existence--crushed into

shapeless ugliness. Wondering no longer at the moans they had heard,

Dolly kept closer to her father, and shuddered at the sight; but neither

bruises, burns, nor gun-shot wound, nor all the torture of his shattered

limbs, sent half so keen a pang to Simon's breast, as Dolly passing out,

with Joe for her preserver.

A coach was ready at the door, and Dolly found herself safe and whole

inside, between her father and mother, with Emma Haredale and her uncle,

quite real, sitting opposite. But there was no Joe, no Edward; and they

had said nothing. They had only bowed once, and kept at a distance. Dear

heart! what a long way it was to the Black Lion!

Chapter 72

The Black Lion was so far off, and occupied such a length of time in the

getting at, that notwithstanding the strong presumptive evidence she had

about her of the late events being real and of actual occurrence, Dolly

could not divest herself of the belief that she must be in a dream which

was lasting all night. Nor was she quite certain that she saw and heard

with her own proper senses, even when the coach, in the fulness of time,

stopped at the Black Lion, and the host of that tavern approached in a

gush of cheerful light to help them to dismount, and give them hearty

welcome.

There too, at the coach door, one on one side, one upon the other, were

already Edward Chester and Joe Willet, who must have followed in another

coach: and this was such a strange and unaccountable proceeding, that

Dolly was the more inclined to favour the idea of her being fast asleep.

But when Mr Willet appeared--old John himself--so heavy-headed and

obstinate, and with such a double chin as the liveliest imagination

could never in its boldest flights have conjured up in all its vast

proportions--then she stood corrected, and unwillingly admitted to

herself that she was broad awake.

And Joe had lost an arm--he--that well-made, handsome, gallant fellow!

As Dolly glanced towards him, and thought of the pain he must have

suffered, and the far-off places in which he had been wandering, and

wondered who had been his nurse, and hoped that whoever it was, she

had been as kind and gentle and considerate as she would have been,

the tears came rising to her bright eyes, one by one, little by little,

until she could keep them back no longer, and so before them all, wept

bitterly.

'We are all safe now, Dolly,' said her father, kindly. 'We shall not be

separated any more. Cheer up, my love, cheer up!'

The locksmith's wife knew better perhaps, than he, what ailed her

daughter. But Mrs Varden being quite an altered woman--for the riots had

done that good--added her word to his, and comforted her with similar

representations.

'Mayhap,' said Mr Willet, senior, looking round upon the company, 'she's

hungry. That's what it is, depend upon it--I am, myself.'

The Black Lion, who, like old John, had been waiting supper past all

reasonable and conscionable hours, hailed this as a philosophical

discovery of the profoundest and most penetrating kind; and the table

being already spread, they sat down to supper straightway.

The conversation was not of the liveliest nature, nor were the appetites

of some among them very keen. But, in both these respects, old John more

than atoned for any deficiency on the part of the rest, and very much

distinguished himself.

It was not in point of actual conversation that Mr Willet shone so

brilliantly, for he had none of his old cronies to 'tackle,' and was

rather timorous of venturing on Joe; having certain vague misgivings

within him, that he was ready on the shortest notice, and on receipt of

the slightest offence, to fell the Black Lion to the floor of his own

parlour, and immediately to withdraw to China or some other remote and

unknown region, there to dwell for evermore, or at least until he had

got rid of his remaining arm and both legs, and perhaps an eye or so,

into the bargain. It was with a peculiar kind of pantomime that Mr

Willet filled up every pause; and in this he was considered by the Black

Lion, who had been his familiar for some years, quite to surpass and

go beyond himself, and outrun the expectations of his most admiring

friends.

The subject that worked in Mr Willet's mind, and occasioned these

demonstrations, was no other than his son's bodily disfigurement, which

he had never yet got himself thoroughly to believe, or comprehend.

Shortly after their first meeting, he had been observed to wander, in

a state of great perplexity, to the kitchen, and to direct his gaze

towards the fire, as if in search of his usual adviser in all matters of

doubt and difficulty. But there being no boiler at the Black Lion, and

the rioters having so beaten and battered his own that it was quite

unfit for further service, he wandered out again, in a perfect bog of

uncertainty and mental confusion, and in that state took the strangest

means of resolving his doubts: such as feeling the sleeve of his son's

greatcoat as deeming it possible that his arm might be there; looking at

his own arms and those of everybody else, as if to assure himself that

two and not one was the usual allowance; sitting by the hour together in

a brown study, as if he were endeavouring to recall Joe's image in his

younger days, and to remember whether he really had in those times one

arm or a pair; and employing himself in many other speculations of the

same kind.

Finding himself at this supper, surrounded by faces with which he had

been so well acquainted in old times, Mr Willet recurred to the subject

with uncommon vigour; apparently resolved to understand it now or never.

Sometimes, after every two or three mouthfuls, he laid down his knife

and fork, and stared at his son with all his might--particularly at his

maimed side; then, he looked slowly round the table until he caught some

person's eye, when he shook his head with great solemnity, patted his

shoulder, winked, or as one may say--for winking was a very slow process

with him--went to sleep with one eye for a minute or two; and so, with

another solemn shaking of his head, took up his knife and fork

again, and went on eating. Sometimes, he put his food into his mouth

abstractedly, and, with all his faculties concentrated on Joe, gazed at

him in a fit of stupefaction as he cut his meat with one hand, until he

was recalled to himself by symptoms of choking on his own part, and was

by that means restored to consciousness. At other times he resorted to

such small devices as asking him for the salt, the pepper, the vinegar,

the mustard--anything that was on his maimed side--and watching him as

he handed it. By dint of these experiments, he did at last so satisfy

and convince himself, that, after a longer silence than he had yet

maintained, he laid down his knife and fork on either side his plate,

drank a long draught from a tankard beside him (still keeping his eyes

on Joe), and leaning backward in his chair and fetching a long breath,

said, as he looked all round the board:

'It's been took off!'

'By George!' said the Black Lion, striking the table with his hand,

'he's got it!'

'Yes, sir,' said Mr Willet, with the look of a man who felt that he had

earned a compliment, and deserved it. 'That's where it is. It's been

took off.'

'Tell him where it was done,' said the Black Lion to Joe.

'At the defence of the Savannah, father.'

'At the defence of the Salwanners,' repeated Mr Willet, softly; again

looking round the table.

'In America, where the war is,' said Joe.

'In America, where the war is,' repeated Mr Willet. 'It was took off in

the defence of the Salwanners in America where the war is.' Continuing

to repeat these words to himself in a low tone of voice (the same

information had been conveyed to him in the same terms, at least fifty

times before), Mr Willet arose from table, walked round to Joe, felt his

empty sleeve all the way up, from the cuff, to where the stump of his

arm remained; shook his hand; lighted his pipe at the fire, took a long

whiff, walked to the door, turned round once when he had reached it,

wiped his left eye with the back of his forefinger, and said, in

a faltering voice: 'My son's arm--was took off--at the defence of

the--Salwanners--in America--where the war is'--with which words he

withdrew, and returned no more that night.

Indeed, on various pretences, they all withdrew one after another, save

Dolly, who was left sitting there alone. It was a great relief to be

alone, and she was crying to her heart's content, when she heard Joe's

voice at the end of the passage, bidding somebody good night.

Good night! Then he was going elsewhere--to some distance, perhaps. To

what kind of home COULD he be going, now that it was so late!

She heard him walk along the passage, and pass the door. But there was a

hesitation in his footsteps. He turned back--Dolly's heart beat high--he

looked in.

'Good night!'--he didn't say Dolly, but there was comfort in his not

saying Miss Varden.

'Good night!' sobbed Dolly.

'I am sorry you take on so much, for what is past and gone,' said Joe

kindly. 'Don't. I can't bear to see you do it. Think of it no longer.

You are safe and happy now.'

Dolly cried the more.

'You must have suffered very much within these few days--and yet you're

not changed, unless it's for the better. They said you were, but I don't

see it. You were--you were always very beautiful,' said Joe, 'but you

are more beautiful than ever, now. You are indeed. There can be no harm

in my saying so, for you must know it. You are told so very often, I am

sure.'

As a general principle, Dolly DID know it, and WAS told so, very often.

But the coachmaker had turned out, years ago, to be a special donkey;

and whether she had been afraid of making similar discoveries in others,

or had grown by dint of long custom to be careless of compliments

generally, certain it is that although she cried so much, she was better

pleased to be told so now, than ever she had been in all her life.

'I shall bless your name,' sobbed the locksmith's little daughter, 'as

long as I live. I shall never hear it spoken without feeling as if my

heart would burst. I shall remember it in my prayers, every night and

morning till I die!'

'Will you?' said Joe, eagerly. 'Will you indeed? It makes me--well, it

makes me very glad and proud to hear you say so.'

Dolly still sobbed, and held her handkerchief to her eyes. Joe still

stood, looking at her.

'Your voice,' said Joe, 'brings up old times so pleasantly, that, for

the moment, I feel as if that night--there can be no harm in talking

of that night now--had come back, and nothing had happened in the mean

time. I feel as if I hadn't suffered any hardships, but had knocked down

poor Tom Cobb only yesterday, and had come to see you with my bundle on

my shoulder before running away.--You remember?'

Remember! But she said nothing. She raised her eyes for an instant. It

was but a glance; a little, tearful, timid glance. It kept Joe silent

though, for a long time.

'Well!' he said stoutly, 'it was to be otherwise, and was. I have been

abroad, fighting all the summer and frozen up all the winter, ever

since. I have come back as poor in purse as I went, and crippled for

life besides. But, Dolly, I would rather have lost this other arm--ay, I

would rather have lost my head--than have come back to find you dead,

or anything but what I always pictured you to myself, and what I always

hoped and wished to find you. Thank God for all!'

Oh how much, and how keenly, the little coquette of five years ago, felt

now! She had found her heart at last. Never having known its worth till

now, she had never known the worth of his. How priceless it appeared!

'I did hope once,' said Joe, in his homely way, 'that I might come back

a rich man, and marry you. But I was a boy then, and have long known

better than that. I am a poor, maimed, discharged soldier, and must

be content to rub through life as I can. I can't say, even now, that I

shall be glad to see you married, Dolly; but I AM glad--yes, I am, and

glad to think I can say so--to know that you are admired and courted,

and can pick and choose for a happy life. It's a comfort to me to know

that you'll talk to your husband about me; and I hope the time will come

when I may be able to like him, and to shake hands with him, and to

come and see you as a poor friend who knew you when you were a girl. God

bless you!'

His hand DID tremble; but for all that, he took it away again, and left

her.

Chapter 73

By this Friday night--for it was on Friday in the riot week, that Emma

and Dolly were rescued, by the timely aid of Joe and Edward Chester--the

disturbances were entirely quelled, and peace and order were restored

to the affrighted city. True, after what had happened, it was impossible

for any man to say how long this better state of things might last, or

how suddenly new outrages, exceeding even those so lately witnessed,

might burst forth and fill its streets with ruin and bloodshed; for

this reason, those who had fled from the recent tumults still kept at

a distance, and many families, hitherto unable to procure the means

of flight, now availed themselves of the calm, and withdrew into the

country. The shops, too, from Tyburn to Whitechapel, were still shut;

and very little business was transacted in any of the places of great

commercial resort. But, notwithstanding, and in spite of the melancholy

forebodings of that numerous class of society who see with the greatest

clearness into the darkest perspectives, the town remained profoundly

quiet. The strong military force disposed in every advantageous quarter,

and stationed at every commanding point, held the scattered fragments

of the mob in check; the search after rioters was prosecuted with

unrelenting vigour; and if there were any among them so desperate and

reckless as to be inclined, after the terrible scenes they had beheld,

to venture forth again, they were so daunted by these resolute measures,

that they quickly shrunk into their hiding-places, and had no thought

but for their safety.

In a word, the crowd was utterly routed. Upwards of two hundred had been

shot dead in the streets. Two hundred and fifty more were lying, badly

wounded, in the hospitals; of whom seventy or eighty died within a short

time afterwards. A hundred were already in custody, and more were taken

every hour. How many perished in the conflagrations, or by their own

excesses, is unknown; but that numbers found a terrible grave in the hot

ashes of the flames they had kindled, or crept into vaults and cellars

to drink in secret or to nurse their sores, and never saw the light

again, is certain. When the embers of the fires had been black and cold

for many weeks, the labourers' spades proved this, beyond a doubt.

Seventy-two private houses and four strong jails were destroyed in the

four great days of these riots. The total loss of property, as estimated

by the sufferers, was one hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds; at the

lowest and least partial estimate of disinterested persons, it exceeded

one hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds. For this immense loss,

compensation was soon afterwards made out of the public purse, in

pursuance of a vote of the House of Commons; the sum being levied on the

various wards in the city, on the county, and the borough of Southwark.

Both Lord Mansfield and Lord Saville, however, who had been great

sufferers, refused to accept of any compensation whatever.

The House of Commons, sitting on Tuesday with locked and guarded doors,

had passed a resolution to the effect that, as soon as the tumults

subsided, it would immediately proceed to consider the petitions

presented from many of his Majesty's Protestant subjects, and would take

the same into its serious consideration. While this question was under

debate, Mr Herbert, one of the members present, indignantly rose and

called upon the House to observe that Lord George Gordon was then

sitting under the gallery with the blue cockade, the signal of

rebellion, in his hat. He was not only obliged, by those who sat near,

to take it out; but offering to go into the street to pacify the mob

with the somewhat indefinite assurance that the House was prepared to

give them 'the satisfaction they sought,' was actually held down in his

seat by the combined force of several members. In short, the disorder

and violence which reigned triumphant out of doors, penetrated into

the senate, and there, as elsewhere, terror and alarm prevailed, and

ordinary forms were for the time forgotten.

On the Thursday, both Houses had adjourned until the following Monday

se'nnight, declaring it impossible to pursue their deliberations with

the necessary gravity and freedom, while they were surrounded by armed

troops. And now that the rioters were dispersed, the citizens were beset

with a new fear; for, finding the public thoroughfares and all their

usual places of resort filled with soldiers entrusted with the free use

of fire and sword, they began to lend a greedy ear to the rumours which

were afloat of martial law being declared, and to dismal stories of

prisoners having been seen hanging on lamp-posts in Cheapside and

Fleet Street. These terrors being promptly dispelled by a Proclamation

declaring that all the rioters in custody would be tried by a special

commission in due course of law, a fresh alarm was engendered by its

being whispered abroad that French money had been found on some of the

rioters, and that the disturbances had been fomented by foreign powers

who sought to compass the overthrow and ruin of England. This report,

which was strengthened by the diffusion of anonymous handbills, but

which, if it had any foundation at all, probably owed its origin to the

circumstance of some few coins which were not English money having been

swept into the pockets of the insurgents with other miscellaneous booty,

and afterwards discovered on the prisoners or the dead bodies,--caused

a great sensation; and men's minds being in that excited state when they

are most apt to catch at any shadow of apprehension, was bruited about

with much industry.

All remaining quiet, however, during the whole of this Friday, and on

this Friday night, and no new discoveries being made, confidence began

to be restored, and the most timid and desponding breathed again.

In Southwark, no fewer than three thousand of the inhabitants formed

themselves into a watch, and patrolled the streets every hour. Nor were

the citizens slow to follow so good an example: and it being the manner

of peaceful men to be very bold when the danger is over, they were

abundantly fierce and daring; not scrupling to question the stoutest

passenger with great severity, and carrying it with a very high hand

over all errand-boys, servant-girls, and 'prentices.

As day deepened into evening, and darkness crept into the nooks and

corners of the town as if it were mustering in secret and gathering

strength to venture into the open ways, Barnaby sat in his dungeon,

wondering at the silence, and listening in vain for the noise and outcry

which had ushered in the night of late. Beside him, with his hand in

hers, sat one in whose companionship he felt at peace. She was worn, and

altered, full of grief, and heavy-hearted; but the same to him.

'Mother,' he said, after a long silence: 'how long,--how many days and

nights,--shall I be kept here?'

'Not many, dear. I hope not many.'

'You hope! Ay, but your hoping will not undo these chains. I hope, but

they don't mind that. Grip hopes, but who cares for Grip?'

The raven gave a short, dull, melancholy croak. It said 'Nobody,' as

plainly as a croak could speak.

'Who cares for Grip, except you and me?' said Barnaby, smoothing the

bird's rumpled feathers with his hand. 'He never speaks in this place;

he never says a word in jail; he sits and mopes all day in his dark

corner, dozing sometimes, and sometimes looking at the light that creeps

in through the bars, and shines in his bright eye as if a spark from

those great fires had fallen into the room and was burning yet. But who

cares for Grip?'

The raven croaked again--Nobody.

'And by the way,' said Barnaby, withdrawing his hand from the bird, and

laying it upon his mother's arm, as he looked eagerly in her face; 'if

they kill me--they may: I heard it said they would--what will become of

Grip when I am dead?'

The sound of the word, or the current of his own thoughts, suggested to

Grip his old phrase 'Never say die!' But he stopped short in the middle

of it, drew a dismal cork, and subsided into a faint croak, as if he

lacked the heart to get through the shortest sentence.

'Will they take HIS life as well as mine?' said Barnaby. 'I wish they

would. If you and I and he could die together, there would be none to

feel sorry, or to grieve for us. But do what they will, I don't fear

them, mother!'

'They will not harm you,' she said, her tears choking her utterance.

'They never will harm you, when they know all. I am sure they never

will.'

'Oh! Don't be too sure of that,' cried Barnaby, with a strange pleasure

in the belief that she was self-deceived, and in his own sagacity. 'They

have marked me from the first. I heard them say so to each other when

they brought me to this place last night; and I believe them. Don't you

cry for me. They said that I was bold, and so I am, and so I will be.

You may think that I am silly, but I can die as well as another.--I have

done no harm, have I?' he added quickly.

'None before Heaven,' she answered.

'Why then,' said Barnaby, 'let them do their worst. You told me

once--you--when I asked you what death meant, that it was nothing to

be feared, if we did no harm--Aha! mother, you thought I had forgotten

that!'

His merry laugh and playful manner smote her to the heart. She drew him

closer to her, and besought him to talk to her in whispers and to be

very quiet, for it was getting dark, and their time was short, and she

would soon have to leave him for the night.

'You will come to-morrow?' said Barnaby.

Yes. And every day. And they would never part again.

He joyfully replied that this was well, and what he wished, and what he

had felt quite certain she would tell him; and then he asked her where

she had been so long, and why she had not come to see him when he had

been a great soldier, and ran through the wild schemes he had had for

their being rich and living prosperously, and with some faint notion in

his mind that she was sad and he had made her so, tried to console and

comfort her, and talked of their former life and his old sports and

freedom: little dreaming that every word he uttered only increased her

sorrow, and that her tears fell faster at the freshened recollection of

their lost tranquillity.

'Mother,' said Barnaby, as they heard the man approaching to close the

cells for the night,' when I spoke to you just now about my father you

cried "Hush!" and turned away your head. Why did you do so? Tell me why,

in a word. You thought HE was dead. You are not sorry that he is alive

and has come back to us. Where is he? Here?'

'Do not ask any one where he is, or speak about him,' she made answer.

'Why not?' said Barnaby. 'Because he is a stern man, and talks roughly?

Well! I don't like him, or want to be with him by myself; but why not

speak about him?'

'Because I am sorry that he is alive; sorry that he has come back;

and sorry that he and you have ever met. Because, dear Barnaby, the

endeavour of my life has been to keep you two asunder.'

'Father and son asunder! Why?'

'He has,' she whispered in his ear, 'he has shed blood. The time has

come when you must know it. He has shed the blood of one who loved him

well, and trusted him, and never did him wrong in word or deed.'

Barnaby recoiled in horror, and glancing at his stained wrist for an

instant, wrapped it, shuddering, in his dress.

'But,' she added hastily as the key turned in the lock, 'although we

shun him, he is your father, dearest, and I am his wretched wife. They

seek his life, and he will lose it. It must not be by our means; nay, if

we could win him back to penitence, we should be bound to love him yet.

Do not seem to know him, except as one who fled with you from the jail,

and if they question you about him, do not answer them. God be with you

through the night, dear boy! God be with you!'

She tore herself away, and in a few seconds Barnaby was alone. He stood

for a long time rooted to the spot, with his face hidden in his hands;

then flung himself, sobbing, on his miserable bed.

But the moon came slowly up in all her gentle glory, and the stars

looked out, and through the small compass of the grated window, as

through the narrow crevice of one good deed in a murky life of guilt,

the face of Heaven shone bright and merciful. He raised his head;

gazed upward at the quiet sky, which seemed to smile upon the earth in

sadness, as if the night, more thoughtful than the day, looked down in

sorrow on the sufferings and evil deeds of men; and felt its peace sink

deep into his heart. He, a poor idiot, caged in his narrow cell, was as

much lifted up to God, while gazing on the mild light, as the freest and

most favoured man in all the spacious city; and in his ill-remembered

prayer, and in the fragment of the childish hymn, with which he sung and

crooned himself asleep, there breathed as true a spirit as ever studied

homily expressed, or old cathedral arches echoed.

As his mother crossed a yard on her way out, she saw, through a grated

door which separated it from another court, her husband, walking round

and round, with his hands folded on his breast, and his head hung down.

She asked the man who conducted her, if she might speak a word with

this prisoner. Yes, but she must be quick for he was locking up for

the night, and there was but a minute or so to spare. Saying this, he

unlocked the door, and bade her go in.

It grated harshly as it turned upon its hinges, but he was deaf to

the noise, and still walked round and round the little court, without

raising his head or changing his attitude in the least. She spoke to

him, but her voice was weak, and failed her. At length she put herself

in his track, and when he came near, stretched out her hand and touched

him.

He started backward, trembling from head to foot; but seeing who it was,

demanded why she came there. Before she could reply, he spoke again.

'Am I to live or die? Do you murder too, or spare?'

'My son--our son,' she answered, 'is in this prison.'

'What is that to me?' he cried, stamping impatiently on the stone

pavement. 'I know it. He can no more aid me than I can aid him. If you

are come to talk of him, begone!'

As he spoke he resumed his walk, and hurried round the court as before.

When he came again to where she stood, he stopped, and said,

'Am I to live or die? Do you repent?'

'Oh!--do YOU?' she answered. 'Will you, while time remains? Do not

believe that I could save you, if I dared.'

'Say if you would,' he answered with an oath, as he tried to disengage

himself and pass on. 'Say if you would.'

'Listen to me for one moment,' she returned; 'for but a moment. I am but

newly risen from a sick-bed, from which I never hoped to rise again. The

best among us think, at such a time, of good intentions half-performed

and duties left undone. If I have ever, since that fatal night, omitted

to pray for your repentance before death--if I omitted, even then,

anything which might tend to urge it on you when the horror of your

crime was fresh--if, in our later meeting, I yielded to the dread that

was upon me, and forgot to fall upon my knees and solemnly adjure you,

in the name of him you sent to his account with Heaven, to prepare for

the retribution which must come, and which is stealing on you now--I

humbly before you, and in the agony of supplication in which you see me,

beseech that you will let me make atonement.'

'What is the meaning of your canting words?' he answered roughly. 'Speak

so that I may understand you.'

'I will,' she answered, 'I desire to. Bear with me for a moment more.

The hand of Him who set His curse on murder, is heavy on us now. You

cannot doubt it. Our son, our innocent boy, on whom His anger fell

before his birth, is in this place in peril of his life--brought here

by your guilt; yes, by that alone, as Heaven sees and knows, for he

has been led astray in the darkness of his intellect, and that is the

terrible consequence of your crime.'

'If you come, woman-like, to load me with reproaches--' he muttered,

again endeavouring to break away.

'I do not. I have a different purpose. You must hear it. If not

to-night, to-morrow; if not to-morrow, at another time. You MUST hear

it. Husband, escape is hopeless--impossible.'

'You tell me so, do you?' he said, raising his manacled hand, and

shaking it. 'You!'

'Yes,' she said, with indescribable earnestness. 'But why?'

'To make me easy in this jail. To make the time 'twixt this and death,

pass pleasantly. For my good--yes, for my good, of course,' he said,

grinding his teeth, and smiling at her with a livid face.

'Not to load you with reproaches,' she replied; 'not to aggravate the

tortures and miseries of your condition, not to give you one hard word,

but to restore you to peace and hope. Husband, dear husband, if you will

but confess this dreadful crime; if you will but implore forgiveness of

Heaven and of those whom you have wronged on earth; if you will dismiss

these vain uneasy thoughts, which never can be realised, and will rely

on Penitence and on the Truth, I promise you, in the great name of the

Creator, whose image you have defaced, that He will comfort and console

you. And for myself,' she cried, clasping her hands, and looking upward,

'I swear before Him, as He knows my heart and reads it now, that from

that hour I will love and cherish you as I did of old, and watch you

night and day in the short interval that will remain to us, and

soothe you with my truest love and duty, and pray with you, that one

threatening judgment may be arrested, and that our boy may be spared to

bless God, in his poor way, in the free air and light!'

He fell back and gazed at her while she poured out these words, as

though he were for a moment awed by her manner, and knew not what to do.

But anger and fear soon got the mastery of him, and he spurned her from

him.

'Begone!' he cried. 'Leave me! You plot, do you! You plot to get speech

with me, and let them know I am the man they say I am. A curse on you

and on your boy.'

'On him the curse has already fallen,' she replied, wringing her hands.

'Let it fall heavier. Let it fall on one and all. I hate you both. The

worst has come to me. The only comfort that I seek or I can have, will

be the knowledge that it comes to you. Now go!'

She would have urged him gently, even then, but he menaced her with his

chain.

'I say go--I say it for the last time. The gallows has me in its grasp,

and it is a black phantom that may urge me on to something more. Begone!

I curse the hour that I was born, the man I slew, and all the living

world!'

In a paroxysm of wrath, and terror, and the fear of death, he broke from

her, and rushed into the darkness of his cell, where he cast himself

jangling down upon the stone floor, and smote it with his ironed hands.

The man returned to lock the dungeon door, and having done so, carried

her away.

On that warm, balmy night in June, there were glad faces and light

hearts in all quarters of the town, and sleep, banished by the late

horrors, was doubly welcomed. On that night, families made merry in

their houses, and greeted each other on the common danger they had

escaped; and those who had been denounced, ventured into the streets;

and they who had been plundered, got good shelter. Even the timorous

Lord Mayor, who was summoned that night before the Privy Council to

answer for his conduct, came back contented; observing to all his

friends that he had got off very well with a reprimand, and repeating

with huge satisfaction his memorable defence before the Council, 'that

such was his temerity, he thought death would have been his portion.'

On that night, too, more of the scattered remnants of the mob were

traced to their lurking-places, and taken; and in the hospitals, and

deep among the ruins they had made, and in the ditches, and fields, many

unshrouded wretches lay dead: envied by those who had been active in

the disturbances, and who pillowed their doomed heads in the temporary

jails.

And in the Tower, in a dreary room whose thick stone walls shut out

the hum of life, and made a stillness which the records left by former

prisoners with those silent witnesses seemed to deepen and intensify;

remorseful for every act that had been done by every man among the cruel

crowd; feeling for the time their guilt his own, and their lives put in

peril by himself; and finding, amidst such reflections, little comfort

in fanaticism, or in his fancied call; sat the unhappy author of

all--Lord George Gordon.

He had been made prisoner that evening. 'If you are sure it's me you

want,' he said to the officers, who waited outside with the warrant for

his arrest on a charge of High Treason, 'I am ready to accompany you--'

which he did without resistance. He was conducted first before the Privy

Council, and afterwards to the Horse Guards, and then was taken by way

of Westminster Bridge, and back over London Bridge (for the purpose of

avoiding the main streets), to the Tower, under the strongest guard ever

known to enter its gates with a single prisoner.

Of all his forty thousand men, not one remained to bear him company.

Friends, dependents, followers,--none were there. His fawning secretary

had played the traitor; and he whose weakness had been goaded and urged

on by so many for their own purposes, was desolate and alone.

Chapter 74

Me Dennis, having been made prisoner late in the evening, was removed to

a neighbouring round-house for that night, and carried before a justice

for examination on the next day, Saturday. The charges against him

being numerous and weighty, and it being in particular proved, by the

testimony of Gabriel Varden, that he had shown a special desire to take

his life, he was committed for trial. Moreover he was honoured with

the distinction of being considered a chief among the insurgents, and

received from the magistrate's lips the complimentary assurance that

he was in a position of imminent danger, and would do well to prepare

himself for the worst.

To say that Mr Dennis's modesty was not somewhat startled by these

honours, or that he was altogether prepared for so flattering a

reception, would be to claim for him a greater amount of stoical

philosophy than even he possessed. Indeed this gentleman's stoicism was

of that not uncommon kind, which enables a man to bear with exemplary

fortitude the afflictions of his friends, but renders him, by way of

counterpoise, rather selfish and sensitive in respect of any that happen

to befall himself. It is therefore no disparagement to the great officer

in question to state, without disguise or concealment, that he was at

first very much alarmed, and that he betrayed divers emotions of fear,

until his reasoning powers came to his relief, and set before him a more

hopeful prospect.

In proportion as Mr Dennis exercised these intellectual qualities

with which he was gifted, in reviewing his best chances of coming off

handsomely and with small personal inconvenience, his spirits rose, and

his confidence increased. When he remembered the great estimation in

which his office was held, and the constant demand for his services;

when he bethought himself, how the Statute Book regarded him as a kind

of Universal Medicine applicable to men, women, and children, of every

age and variety of criminal constitution; and how high he stood, in

his official capacity, in the favour of the Crown, and both Houses of

Parliament, the Mint, the Bank of England, and the Judges of the land;

when he recollected that whatever Ministry was in or out, he remained

their peculiar pet and panacea, and that for his sake England stood

single and conspicuous among the civilised nations of the earth: when

he called these things to mind and dwelt upon them, he felt certain that

the national gratitude MUST relieve him from the consequences of his

late proceedings, and would certainly restore him to his old place in

the happy social system.

With these crumbs, or as one may say, with these whole loaves of comfort

to regale upon, Mr Dennis took his place among the escort that awaited

him, and repaired to jail with a manly indifference. Arriving at

Newgate, where some of the ruined cells had been hastily fitted up for

the safe keeping of rioters, he was warmly received by the turnkeys,

as an unusual and interesting case, which agreeably relieved their

monotonous duties. In this spirit, he was fettered with great care, and

conveyed into the interior of the prison.

'Brother,' cried the hangman, as, following an officer, he traversed

under these novel circumstances the remains of passages with which he

was well acquainted, 'am I going to be along with anybody?'

'If you'd have left more walls standing, you'd have been alone,' was the

reply. 'As it is, we're cramped for room, and you'll have company.'

'Well,' returned Dennis, 'I don't object to company, brother. I rather

like company. I was formed for society, I was.'

'That's rather a pity, an't it?' said the man.

'No,' answered Dennis, 'I'm not aware that it is. Why should it be a

pity, brother?'

'Oh! I don't know,' said the man carelessly. 'I thought that was what

you meant. Being formed for society, and being cut off in your flower,

you know--'

'I say,' interposed the other quickly, 'what are you talking of? Don't.

Who's a-going to be cut off in their flowers?'

'Oh, nobody particular. I thought you was, perhaps,' said the man.

Mr Dennis wiped his face, which had suddenly grown very hot, and

remarking in a tremulous voice to his conductor that he had always been

fond of his joke, followed him in silence until he stopped at a door.

'This is my quarters, is it?' he asked facetiously.

'This is the shop, sir,' replied his friend.

He was walking in, but not with the best possible grace, when he

suddenly stopped, and started back.

'Halloa!' said the officer. 'You're nervous.'

'Nervous!' whispered Dennis in great alarm. 'Well I may be. Shut the

door.'

'I will, when you're in,' returned the man.

'But I can't go in there,' whispered Dennis. 'I can't be shut up with

that man. Do you want me to be throttled, brother?'

The officer seemed to entertain no particular desire on the subject one

way or other, but briefly remarking that he had his orders, and intended

to obey them, pushed him in, turned the key, and retired.

Dennis stood trembling with his back against the door, and involuntarily

raising his arm to defend himself, stared at a man, the only other

tenant of the cell, who lay, stretched at his fall length, upon a stone

bench, and who paused in his deep breathing as if he were about to wake.

But he rolled over on one side, let his arm fall negligently down, drew

a long sigh, and murmuring indistinctly, fell fast asleep again.

Relieved in some degree by this, the hangman took his eyes for an

instant from the slumbering figure, and glanced round the cell in search

of some 'vantage-ground or weapon of defence. There was nothing moveable

within it, but a clumsy table which could not be displaced without

noise, and a heavy chair. Stealing on tiptoe towards this latter

piece of furniture, he retired with it into the remotest corner,

and intrenching himself behind it, watched the enemy with the utmost

vigilance and caution.

The sleeping man was Hugh; and perhaps it was not unnatural for Dennis

to feel in a state of very uncomfortable suspense, and to wish with

his whole soul that he might never wake again. Tired of standing, he

crouched down in his corner after some time, and rested on the cold

pavement; but although Hugh's breathing still proclaimed that he

was sleeping soundly, he could not trust him out of his sight for an

instant. He was so afraid of him, and of some sudden onslaught, that he

was not content to see his closed eyes through the chair-back, but

every now and then, rose stealthily to his feet, and peered at him with

outstretched neck, to assure himself that he really was still asleep,

and was not about to spring upon him when he was off his guard.

He slept so long and so soundly, that Mr Dennis began to think he might

sleep on until the turnkey visited them. He was congratulating himself

upon these promising appearances, and blessing his stars with much

fervour, when one or two unpleasant symptoms manifested themselves: such

as another motion of the arm, another sigh, a restless tossing of the

head. Then, just as it seemed that he was about to fall heavily to the

ground from his narrow bed, Hugh's eyes opened.

It happened that his face was turned directly towards his unexpected

visitor. He looked lazily at him for some half-dozen seconds without any

aspect of surprise or recognition; then suddenly jumped up, and with a

great oath pronounced his name.

'Keep off, brother, keep off!' cried Dennis, dodging behind the chair.

'Don't do me a mischief. I'm a prisoner like you. I haven't the free use

of my limbs. I'm quite an old man. Don't hurt me!'

He whined out the last three words in such piteous accents, that Hugh,

who had dragged away the chair, and aimed a blow at him with it, checked

himself, and bade him get up.

'I'll get up certainly, brother,' cried Dennis, anxious to propitiate

him by any means in his power. 'I'll comply with any request of yours,

I'm sure. There--I'm up now. What can I do for you? Only say the word,

and I'll do it.'

'What can you do for me!' cried Hugh, clutching him by the collar with

both hands, and shaking him as though he were bent on stopping his

breath by that means. 'What have you done for me?'

'The best. The best that could be done,' returned the hangman.

Hugh made him no answer, but shaking him in his strong grip until his

teeth chattered in his head, cast him down upon the floor, and flung

himself on the bench again.

'If it wasn't for the comfort it is to me, to see you here,' he

muttered, 'I'd have crushed your head against it; I would.'

It was some time before Dennis had breath enough to speak, but as soon

as he could resume his propitiatory strain, he did so.

'I did the best that could be done, brother,' he whined; 'I did indeed.

I was forced with two bayonets and I don't know how many bullets on each

side of me, to point you out. If you hadn't been taken, you'd have been

shot; and what a sight that would have been--a fine young man like you!'

'Will it be a better sight now?' asked Hugh, raising his head, with such

a fierce expression, that the other durst not answer him just then.

'A deal better,' said Dennis meekly, after a pause. 'First, there's all

the chances of the law, and they're five hundred strong. We may get off

scot-free. Unlikelier things than that have come to pass. Even if we

shouldn't, and the chances fail, we can but be worked off once: and when

it's well done, it's so neat, so skilful, so captiwating, if that don't

seem too strong a word, that you'd hardly believe it could be brought

to sich perfection. Kill one's fellow-creeturs off, with muskets!--Pah!'

and his nature so revolted at the bare idea, that he spat upon the

dungeon pavement.

His warming on this topic, which to one unacquainted with his pursuits

and tastes appeared like courage; together with his artful suppression

of his own secret hopes, and mention of himself as being in the same

condition with Hugh; did more to soothe that ruffian than the most

elaborate arguments could have done, or the most abject submission.

He rested his arms upon his knees, and stooping forward, looked from

beneath his shaggy hair at Dennis, with something of a smile upon his

face.

'The fact is, brother,' said the hangman, in a tone of greater

confidence, 'that you got into bad company. The man that was with you

was looked after more than you, and it was him I wanted. As to me, what

have I got by it? Here we are, in one and the same plight.'

'Lookee, rascal,' said Hugh, contracting his brows, 'I'm not altogether

such a shallow blade but I know you expected to get something by it, or

you wouldn't have done it. But it's done, and you're here, and it will

soon be all over with you and me; and I'd as soon die as live, or live

as die. Why should I trouble myself to have revenge on you? To eat, and

drink, and go to sleep, as long as I stay here, is all I care for. If

there was but a little more sun to bask in, than can find its way into

this cursed place, I'd lie in it all day, and not trouble myself to sit

or stand up once. That's all the care I have for myself. Why should I

care for YOU?'

Finishing this speech with a growl like the yawn of a wild beast, he

stretched himself upon the bench again, and closed his eyes once more.

After looking at him in silence for some moments, Dennis, who was

greatly relieved to find him in this mood, drew the chair towards his

rough couch and sat down near him--taking the precaution, however, to

keep out of the range of his brawny arm.

'Well said, brother; nothing could be better said,' he ventured to

observe. 'We'll eat and drink of the best, and sleep our best, and make

the best of it every way. Anything can be got for money. Let's spend it

merrily.'

'Ay,' said Hugh, coiling himself into a new position.--'Where is it?'

'Why, they took mine from me at the lodge,' said Mr Dennis; 'but mine's

a peculiar case.'

'Is it? They took mine too.'

'Why then, I tell you what, brother,' Dennis began. 'You must look up

your friends--'

'My friends!' cried Hugh, starting up and resting on his hands. 'Where

are my friends?'

'Your relations then,' said Dennis.

'Ha ha ha!' laughed Hugh, waving one arm above his head. 'He talks of

friends to me--talks of relations to a man whose mother died the death

in store for her son, and left him, a hungry brat, without a face he

knew in all the world! He talks of this to me!'

'Brother,' cried the hangman, whose features underwent a sudden change,

'you don't mean to say--'

'I mean to say,' Hugh interposed, 'that they hung her up at Tyburn. What

was good enough for her, is good enough for me. Let them do the like by

me as soon as they please--the sooner the better. Say no more to me. I'm

going to sleep.'

'But I want to speak to you; I want to hear more about that,' said

Dennis, changing colour.

'If you're a wise man,' growled Hugh, raising his head to look at him

with a frown, 'you'll hold your tongue. I tell you I'm going to sleep.'

Dennis venturing to say something more in spite of this caution, the

desperate fellow struck at him with all his force, and missing him, lay

down again with many muttered oaths and imprecations, and turned his

face towards the wall. After two or three ineffectual twitches at his

dress, which he was hardy enough to venture upon, notwithstanding his

dangerous humour, Mr Dennis, who burnt, for reasons of his own, to

pursue the conversation, had no alternative but to sit as patiently as

he could: waiting his further pleasure.

Chapter 75

A month has elapsed,--and we stand in the bedchamber of Sir John

Chester. Through the half-opened window, the Temple Garden looks green

and pleasant; the placid river, gay with boat and barge, and dimpled

with the plash of many an oar, sparkles in the distance; the sky is blue

and clear; and the summer air steals gently in, filling the room with

perfume. The very town, the smoky town, is radiant. High roofs and

steeple-tops, wont to look black and sullen, smile a cheerful grey;

every old gilded vane, and ball, and cross, glitters anew in the bright

morning sun; and, high among them all, St Paul's towers up, showing its

lofty crest in burnished gold.

Sir John was breakfasting in bed. His chocolate and toast stood upon a

little table at his elbow; books and newspapers lay ready to his hand,

upon the coverlet; and, sometimes pausing to glance with an air of

tranquil satisfaction round the well-ordered room, and sometimes to

gaze indolently at the summer sky, he ate, and drank, and read the news

luxuriously.

The cheerful influence of the morning seemed to have some effect, even

upon his equable temper. His manner was unusually gay; his smile more

placid and agreeable than usual; his voice more clear and pleasant. He

laid down the newspaper he had been reading; leaned back upon his

pillow with the air of one who resigned himself to a train of charming

recollections; and after a pause, soliloquised as follows:

'And my friend the centaur, goes the way of his mamma! I am not

surprised. And his mysterious friend Mr Dennis, likewise! I am not

surprised. And my old postman, the exceedingly free-and-easy young

madman of Chigwell! I am quite rejoiced. It's the very best thing that

could possibly happen to him.'

After delivering himself of these remarks, he fell again into his

smiling train of reflection; from which he roused himself at length

to finish his chocolate, which was getting cold, and ring the bell for

more.

The new supply arriving, he took the cup from his servant's hand;

and saying, with a charming affability, 'I am obliged to you, Peak,'

dismissed him.

'It is a remarkable circumstance,' he mused, dallying lazily with the

teaspoon, 'that my friend the madman should have been within an ace of

escaping, on his trial; and it was a good stroke of chance (or, as the

world would say, a providential occurrence) that the brother of my Lord

Mayor should have been in court, with other country justices, into whose

very dense heads curiosity had penetrated. For though the brother of my

Lord Mayor was decidedly wrong; and established his near relationship

to that amusing person beyond all doubt, in stating that my friend

was sane, and had, to his knowledge, wandered about the country with a

vagabond parent, avowing revolutionary and rebellious sentiments; I am

not the less obliged to him for volunteering that evidence. These insane

creatures make such very odd and embarrassing remarks, that they really

ought to be hanged for the comfort of society.'

The country justice had indeed turned the wavering scale against poor

Barnaby, and solved the doubt that trembled in his favour. Grip little

thought how much he had to answer for.

'They will be a singular party,' said Sir John, leaning his head upon

his hand, and sipping his chocolate; 'a very curious party. The hangman

himself; the centaur; and the madman. The centaur would make a very

handsome preparation in Surgeons' Hall, and would benefit science

extremely. I hope they have taken care to bespeak him.--Peak, I am not

at home, of course, to anybody but the hairdresser.'

This reminder to his servant was called forth by a knock at the door,

which the man hastened to open. After a prolonged murmur of question and

answer, he returned; and as he cautiously closed the room-door behind

him, a man was heard to cough in the passage.

'Now, it is of no use, Peak,' said Sir John, raising his hand in

deprecation of his delivering any message; 'I am not at home. I cannot

possibly hear you. I told you I was not at home, and my word is sacred.

Will you never do as you are desired?'

Having nothing to oppose to this reproof, the man was about to withdraw,

when the visitor who had given occasion to it, probably rendered

impatient by delay, knocked with his knuckles at the chamber-door, and

called out that he had urgent business with Sir John Chester, which

admitted of no delay.

'Let him in,' said Sir John. 'My good fellow,' he added, when the door

was opened, 'how come you to intrude yourself in this extraordinary

manner upon the privacy of a gentleman? How can you be so wholly

destitute of self-respect as to be guilty of such remarkable

ill-breeding?'

'My business, Sir John, is not of a common kind, I do assure you,'

returned the person he addressed. 'If I have taken any uncommon course

to get admission to you, I hope I shall be pardoned on that account.'

'Well! we shall see; we shall see,' returned Sir John, whose face

cleared up when he saw who it was, and whose prepossessing smile was now

restored. 'I am sure we have met before,' he added in his winning tone,

'but really I forget your name?'

'My name is Gabriel Varden, sir.'

'Varden, of course, Varden,' returned Sir John, tapping his forehead.

'Dear me, how very defective my memory becomes! Varden to be sure--Mr

Varden the locksmith. You have a charming wife, Mr Varden, and a most

beautiful daughter. They are well?'

Gabriel thanked him, and said they were.

'I rejoice to hear it,' said Sir John. 'Commend me to them when you

return, and say that I wished I were fortunate enough to convey, myself,

the salute which I entrust you to deliver. And what,' he asked very

sweetly, after a moment's pause, 'can I do for you? You may command me

freely.'

'I thank you, Sir John,' said Gabriel, with some pride in his

manner, 'but I have come to ask no favour of you, though I come on

business.--Private,' he added, with a glance at the man who stood

looking on, 'and very pressing business.'

'I cannot say you are the more welcome for being independent, and having

nothing to ask of me,' returned Sir John, graciously, 'for I should have

been happy to render you a service; still, you are welcome on any terms.

Oblige me with some more chocolate, Peak, and don't wait.'

The man retired, and left them alone.

'Sir John,' said Gabriel, 'I am a working-man, and have been so, all my

life. If I don't prepare you enough for what I have to tell; if I come

to the point too abruptly; and give you a shock, which a gentleman could

have spared you, or at all events lessened very much; I hope you will

give me credit for meaning well. I wish to be careful and considerate,

and I trust that in a straightforward person like me, you'll take the

will for the deed.'

'Mr Varden,' returned the other, perfectly composed under this exordium;

'I beg you'll take a chair. Chocolate, perhaps, you don't relish? Well!

it IS an acquired taste, no doubt.'

'Sir John,' said Gabriel, who had acknowledged with a bow the invitation

to be seated, but had not availed himself of it. 'Sir John'--he

dropped his voice and drew nearer to the bed--'I am just now come from

Newgate--'

'Good Gad!' cried Sir John, hastily sitting up in bed; 'from Newgate,

Mr Varden! How could you be so very imprudent as to come from Newgate!

Newgate, where there are jail-fevers, and ragged people, and bare-footed

men and women, and a thousand horrors! Peak, bring the camphor, quick!

Heaven and earth, Mr Varden, my dear, good soul, how COULD you come from

Newgate?'

Gabriel returned no answer, but looked on in silence while Peak (who had

entered with the hot chocolate) ran to a drawer, and returning with

a bottle, sprinkled his master's dressing-gown and the bedding; and

besides moistening the locksmith himself, plentifully, described a

circle round about him on the carpet. When he had done this, he again

retired; and Sir John, reclining in an easy attitude upon his pillow,

once more turned a smiling face towards his visitor.

'You will forgive me, Mr Varden, I am sure, for being at first a little

sensitive both on your account and my own. I confess I was startled,

notwithstanding your delicate exordium. Might I ask you to do me the

favour not to approach any nearer?--You have really come from Newgate!'

The locksmith inclined his head.

'In-deed! And now, Mr Varden, all exaggeration and embellishment apart,'

said Sir John Chester, confidentially, as he sipped his chocolate, 'what

kind of place IS Newgate?'

'A strange place, Sir John,' returned the locksmith, 'of a sad and

doleful kind. A strange place, where many strange things are heard and

seen; but few more strange than that I come to tell you of. The case is

urgent. I am sent here.'

'Not--no, no--not from the jail?'

'Yes, Sir John; from the jail.'

'And my good, credulous, open-hearted friend,' said Sir John, setting

down his cup, and laughing,--'by whom?'

'By a man called Dennis--for many years the hangman, and to-morrow

morning the hanged,' returned the locksmith.

Sir John had expected--had been quite certain from the first--that he

would say he had come from Hugh, and was prepared to meet him on that

point. But this answer occasioned him a degree of astonishment, which,

for the moment, he could not, with all his command of feature, prevent

his face from expressing. He quickly subdued it, however, and said in

the same light tone:

'And what does the gentleman require of me? My memory may be at

fault again, but I don't recollect that I ever had the pleasure of

an introduction to him, or that I ever numbered him among my personal

friends, I do assure you, Mr Varden.'

'Sir John,' returned the locksmith, gravely, 'I will tell you, as nearly

as I can, in the words he used to me, what he desires that you should

know, and what you ought to know without a moment's loss of time.'

Sir John Chester settled himself in a position of greater repose, and

looked at his visitor with an expression of face which seemed to say,

'This is an amusing fellow! I'll hear him out.'

'You may have seen in the newspapers, sir,' said Gabriel, pointing to

the one which lay by his side, 'that I was a witness against this man

upon his trial some days since; and that it was not his fault I was

alive, and able to speak to what I knew.'

'MAY have seen!' cried Sir John. 'My dear Mr Varden, you are quite

a public character, and live in all men's thoughts most deservedly.

Nothing can exceed the interest with which I read your testimony,

and remembered that I had the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with

you.---I hope we shall have your portrait published?'

'This morning, sir,' said the locksmith, taking no notice of these

compliments, 'early this morning, a message was brought to me from

Newgate, at this man's request, desiring that I would go and see him,

for he had something particular to communicate. I needn't tell you

that he is no friend of mine, and that I had never seen him, until the

rioters beset my house.'

Sir John fanned himself gently with the newspaper, and nodded.

'I knew, however, from the general report,' resumed Gabriel, 'that the

order for his execution to-morrow, went down to the prison last night;

and looking upon him as a dying man, I complied with his request.'

'You are quite a Christian, Mr Varden,' said Sir John; 'and in that

amiable capacity, you increase my desire that you should take a chair.'

'He said,' continued Gabriel, looking steadily at the knight, 'that he

had sent to me, because he had no friend or companion in the whole world

(being the common hangman), and because he believed, from the way in

which I had given my evidence, that I was an honest man, and would act

truly by him. He said that, being shunned by every one who knew his

calling, even by people of the lowest and most wretched grade, and

finding, when he joined the rioters, that the men he acted with had no

suspicion of it (which I believe is true enough, for a poor fool of an

old 'prentice of mine was one of them), he had kept his own counsel, up

to the time of his being taken and put in jail.'

'Very discreet of Mr Dennis,' observed Sir John with a slight yawn,

though still with the utmost affability, 'but--except for your admirable

and lucid manner of telling it, which is perfect--not very interesting

to me.'

'When,' pursued the locksmith, quite unabashed and wholly regardless of

these interruptions, 'when he was taken to the jail, he found that his

fellow-prisoner, in the same room, was a young man, Hugh by name, a

leader in the riots, who had been betrayed and given up by himself. From

something which fell from this unhappy creature in the course of the

angry words they had at meeting, he discovered that his mother had

suffered the death to which they both are now condemned.--The time is

very short, Sir John.'

The knight laid down his paper fan, replaced his cup upon the table at

his side, and, saving for the smile that lurked about his mouth, looked

at the locksmith with as much steadiness as the locksmith looked at him.

'They have been in prison now, a month. One conversation led to many

more; and the hangman soon found, from a comparison of time, and place,

and dates, that he had executed the sentence of the law upon this woman,

himself. She had been tempted by want--as so many people are--into the

easy crime of passing forged notes. She was young and handsome; and the

traders who employ men, women, and children in this traffic, looked

upon her as one who was well adapted for their business, and who

would probably go on without suspicion for a long time. But they were

mistaken; for she was stopped in the commission of her very first

offence, and died for it. She was of gipsy blood, Sir John--'

It might have been the effect of a passing cloud which obscured the sun,

and cast a shadow on his face; but the knight turned deadly pale. Still

he met the locksmith's eye, as before.

'She was of gipsy blood, Sir John,' repeated Gabriel, 'and had a high,

free spirit. This, and her good looks, and her lofty manner, interested

some gentlemen who were easily moved by dark eyes; and efforts were made

to save her. They might have been successful, if she would have given

them any clue to her history. But she never would, or did. There was

reason to suspect that she would make an attempt upon her life. A watch

was set upon her night and day; and from that time she never spoke

again--'

Sir John stretched out his hand towards his cup. The locksmith going on,

arrested it half-way.

--'Until she had but a minute to live. Then she broke silence, and said,

in a low firm voice which no one heard but this executioner, for all

other living creatures had retired and left her to her fate, "If I had

a dagger within these fingers and he was within my reach, I would strike

him dead before me, even now!" The man asked "Who?" She said, "The

father of her boy."'

Sir John drew back his outstretched hand, and seeing that the locksmith

paused, signed to him with easy politeness and without any new

appearance of emotion, to proceed.

'It was the first word she had ever spoken, from which it could be

understood that she had any relative on earth. "Was the child alive?" he

asked. "Yes." He asked her where it was, its name, and whether she had

any wish respecting it. She had but one, she said. It was that the boy

might live and grow, in utter ignorance of his father, so that no arts

might teach him to be gentle and forgiving. When he became a man,

she trusted to the God of their tribe to bring the father and the

son together, and revenge her through her child. He asked her other

questions, but she spoke no more. Indeed, he says, she scarcely said

this much, to him, but stood with her face turned upwards to the sky,

and never looked towards him once.'

Sir John took a pinch of snuff; glanced approvingly at an elegant little

sketch, entitled 'Nature,' on the wall; and raising his eyes to the

locksmith's face again, said, with an air of courtesy and patronage,

'You were observing, Mr Varden--'

'That she never,' returned the locksmith, who was not to be diverted by

any artifice from his firm manner, and his steady gaze, 'that she never

looked towards him once, Sir John; and so she died, and he forgot her.

But, some years afterwards, a man was sentenced to die the same death,

who was a gipsy too; a sunburnt, swarthy fellow, almost a wild man; and

while he lay in prison, under sentence, he, who had seen the hangman

more than once while he was free, cut an image of him on his stick, by

way of braving death, and showing those who attended on him, how little

he cared or thought about it. He gave this stick into his hands at

Tyburn, and told him then, that the woman I have spoken of had left her

own people to join a fine gentleman, and that, being deserted by him,

and cast off by her old friends, she had sworn within her own proud

breast, that whatever her misery might be, she would ask no help of any

human being. He told him that she had kept her word to the last; and

that, meeting even him in the streets--he had been fond of her once, it

seems--she had slipped from him by a trick, and he never saw her again,

until, being in one of the frequent crowds at Tyburn, with some of

his rough companions, he had been driven almost mad by seeing, in

the criminal under another name, whose death he had come to witness,

herself. Standing in the same place in which she had stood, he told

the hangman this, and told him, too, her real name, which only her own

people and the gentleman for whose sake she had left them, knew. That

name he will tell again, Sir John, to none but you.'

'To none but me!' exclaimed the knight, pausing in the act of raising

his cup to his lips with a perfectly steady hand, and curling up his

little finger for the better display of a brilliant ring with which it

was ornamented: 'but me!--My dear Mr Varden, how very preposterous, to

select me for his confidence! With you at his elbow, too, who are so

perfectly trustworthy!'

'Sir John, Sir John,' returned the locksmith, 'at twelve tomorrow, these

men die. Hear the few words I have to add, and do not hope to deceive

me; for though I am a plain man of humble station, and you are a

gentleman of rank and learning, the truth raises me to your level, and

I KNOW that you anticipate the disclosure with which I am about to end,

and that you believe this doomed man, Hugh, to be your son.'

'Nay,' said Sir John, bantering him with a gay air; 'the wild gentleman,

who died so suddenly, scarcely went as far as that, I think?'

'He did not,' returned the locksmith, 'for she had bound him by some

pledge, known only to these people, and which the worst among them

respect, not to tell your name: but, in a fantastic pattern on the

stick, he had carved some letters, and when the hangman asked it, he

bade him, especially if he should ever meet with her son in after life,

remember that place well.'

'What place?'

'Chester.'

The knight finished his cup of chocolate with an appearance of infinite

relish, and carefully wiped his lips upon his handkerchief.

'Sir John,' said the locksmith, 'this is all that has been told to me;

but since these two men have been left for death, they have conferred

together closely. See them, and hear what they can add. See this Dennis,

and learn from him what he has not trusted to me. If you, who hold the

clue to all, want corroboration (which you do not), the means are easy.'

'And to what,' said Sir John Chester, rising on his elbow, after

smoothing the pillow for its reception; 'my dear, good-natured,

estimable Mr Varden--with whom I cannot be angry if I would--to what

does all this tend?'

'I take you for a man, Sir John, and I suppose it tends to some pleading

of natural affection in your breast,' returned the locksmith. 'I suppose

to the straining of every nerve, and the exertion of all the influence

you have, or can make, in behalf of your miserable son, and the man

who has disclosed his existence to you. At the worst, I suppose to your

seeing your son, and awakening him to a sense of his crime and danger.

He has no such sense now. Think what his life must have been, when he

said in my hearing, that if I moved you to anything, it would be to

hastening his death, and ensuring his silence, if you had it in your

power!'

'And have you, my good Mr Varden,' said Sir John in a tone of mild

reproof, 'have you really lived to your present age, and remained so

very simple and credulous, as to approach a gentleman of established

character with such credentials as these, from desperate men in their

last extremity, catching at any straw? Oh dear! Oh fie, fie!'

The locksmith was going to interpose, but he stopped him:

'On any other subject, Mr Varden, I shall be delighted--I shall be

charmed--to converse with you, but I owe it to my own character not to

pursue this topic for another moment.'

'Think better of it, sir, when I am gone,' returned the locksmith;

'think better of it, sir. Although you have, thrice within as many

weeks, turned your lawful son, Mr Edward, from your door, you may have

time, you may have years to make your peace with HIM, Sir John: but that

twelve o'clock will soon be here, and soon be past for ever.'

'I thank you very much,' returned the knight, kissing his delicate hand

to the locksmith, 'for your guileless advice; and I only wish, my good

soul, although your simplicity is quite captivating, that you had a

little more worldly wisdom. I never so much regretted the arrival of my

hairdresser as I do at this moment. God bless you! Good morning! You'll

not forget my message to the ladies, Mr Varden? Peak, show Mr Varden to

the door.'

Gabriel said no more, but gave the knight a parting look, and left him.

As he quitted the room, Sir John's face changed; and the smile gave

place to a haggard and anxious expression, like that of a weary actor

jaded by the performance of a difficult part. He rose from his bed with

a heavy sigh, and wrapped himself in his morning-gown.

'So she kept her word,' he said, 'and was constant to her threat! I

would I had never seen that dark face of hers,--I might have read these

consequences in it, from the first. This affair would make a noise

abroad, if it rested on better evidence; but, as it is, and by not

joining the scattered links of the chain, I can afford to slight

it.--Extremely distressing to be the parent of such an uncouth creature!

Still, I gave him very good advice. I told him he would certainly be

hanged. I could have done no more if I had known of our relationship;

and there are a great many fathers who have never done as much for THEIR

natural children.--The hairdresser may come in, Peak!'

The hairdresser came in; and saw in Sir John Chester (whose

accommodating conscience was soon quieted by the numerous precedents

that occurred to him in support of his last observation), the same

imperturbable, fascinating, elegant gentleman he had seen yesterday, and

many yesterdays before.

Chapter 76

As the locksmith walked slowly away from Sir John Chester's chambers,

he lingered under the trees which shaded the path, almost hoping that

he might be summoned to return. He had turned back thrice, and still

loitered at the corner, when the clock struck twelve.

It was a solemn sound, and not merely for its reference to to-morrow;

for he knew that in that chime the murderer's knell was rung. He had

seen him pass along the crowded street, amidst the execration of the

throng; and marked his quivering lip, and trembling limbs; the ashy hue

upon his face, his clammy brow, the wild distraction of his eye--the

fear of death that swallowed up all other thoughts, and gnawed without

cessation at his heart and brain. He had marked the wandering look,

seeking for hope, and finding, turn where it would, despair. He had seen

the remorseful, pitiful, desolate creature, riding, with his coffin

by his side, to the gibbet. He knew that, to the last, he had been an

unyielding, obdurate man; that in the savage terror of his condition he

had hardened, rather than relented, to his wife and child; and that the

last words which had passed his white lips were curses on them as his

enemies.

Mr Haredale had determined to be there, and see it done. Nothing but

the evidence of his own senses could satisfy that gloomy thirst for

retribution which had been gathering upon him for so many years. The

locksmith knew this, and when the chimes had ceased to vibrate, hurried

away to meet him.

'For these two men,' he said, as he went, 'I can do no more. Heaven have

mercy on them!--Alas! I say I can do no more for them, but whom can I

help? Mary Rudge will have a home, and a firm friend when she most wants

one; but Barnaby--poor Barnaby--willing Barnaby--what aid can I render

him? There are many, many men of sense, God forgive me,' cried the

honest locksmith, stopping in a narrow count to pass his hand across his

eyes, 'I could better afford to lose than Barnaby. We have always been

good friends, but I never knew, till now, how much I loved the lad.'

There were not many in the great city who thought of Barnaby that day,

otherwise than as an actor in a show which was to take place to-morrow.

But if the whole population had had him in their minds, and had wished

his life to be spared, not one among them could have done so with a

purer zeal or greater singleness of heart than the good locksmith.

Barnaby was to die. There was no hope. It is not the least evil

attendant upon the frequent exhibition of this last dread punishment,

of Death, that it hardens the minds of those who deal it out, and makes

them, though they be amiable men in other respects, indifferent to, or

unconscious of, their great responsibility. The word had gone forth that

Barnaby was to die. It went forth, every month, for lighter crimes.

It was a thing so common, that very few were startled by the awful

sentence, or cared to question its propriety. Just then, too, when the

law had been so flagrantly outraged, its dignity must be asserted.

The symbol of its dignity,--stamped upon every page of the criminal

statute-book,--was the gallows; and Barnaby was to die.

They had tried to save him. The locksmith had carried petitions and

memorials to the fountain-head, with his own hands. But the well was not

one of mercy, and Barnaby was to die.

From the first his mother had never left him, save at night; and with

her beside him, he was as usual contented. On this last day, he was more

elated and more proud than he had been yet; and when she dropped the

book she had been reading to him aloud, and fell upon his neck, he

stopped in his busy task of folding a piece of crape about his hat,

and wondered at her anguish. Grip uttered a feeble croak, half in

encouragement, it seemed, and half in remonstrance, but he wanted heart

to sustain it, and lapsed abruptly into silence.

With them who stood upon the brink of the great gulf which none can see

beyond, Time, so soon to lose itself in vast Eternity, rolled on like a

mighty river, swollen and rapid as it nears the sea. It was morning but

now; they had sat and talked together in a dream; and here was evening.

The dreadful hour of separation, which even yesterday had seemed so

distant, was at hand.

They walked out into the courtyard, clinging to each other, but not

speaking. Barnaby knew that the jail was a dull, sad, miserable place,

and looked forward to to-morrow, as to a passage from it to something

bright and beautiful. He had a vague impression too, that he was

expected to be brave--that he was a man of great consequence, and that

the prison people would be glad to make him weep. He trod the ground

more firmly as he thought of this, and bade her take heart and cry no

more, and feel how steady his hand was. 'They call me silly, mother.

They shall see to-morrow!'

Dennis and Hugh were in the courtyard. Hugh came forth from his cell as

they did, stretching himself as though he had been sleeping. Dennis sat

upon a bench in a corner, with his knees and chin huddled together, and

rocked himself to and fro like a person in severe pain.

The mother and son remained on one side of the court, and these two men

upon the other. Hugh strode up and down, glancing fiercely every now and

then at the bright summer sky, and looking round, when he had done so,

at the walls.

'No reprieve, no reprieve! Nobody comes near us. There's only the night

left now!' moaned Dennis faintly, as he wrung his hands. 'Do you think

they'll reprieve me in the night, brother? I've known reprieves come

in the night, afore now. I've known 'em come as late as five, six, and

seven o'clock in the morning. Don't you think there's a good chance

yet,--don't you? Say you do. Say you do, young man,' whined the

miserable creature, with an imploring gesture towards Barnaby, 'or I

shall go mad!'

'Better be mad than sane, here,' said Hugh. 'GO mad.'

'But tell me what you think. Somebody tell me what he thinks!' cried

the wretched object,--so mean, and wretched, and despicable, that even

Pity's self might have turned away, at sight of such a being in the

likeness of a man--'isn't there a chance for me,--isn't there a good

chance for me? Isn't it likely they may be doing this to frighten me?

Don't you think it is? Oh!' he almost shrieked, as he wrung his hands,

'won't anybody give me comfort!'

'You ought to be the best, instead of the worst,' said Hugh, stopping

before him. 'Ha, ha, ha! See the hangman, when it comes home to him!'

'You don't know what it is,' cried Dennis, actually writhing as he

spoke: 'I do. That I should come to be worked off! I! I! That I should

come!'

'And why not?' said Hugh, as he thrust back his matted hair to get a

better view of his late associate. 'How often, before I knew your trade,

did I hear you talking of this as if it was a treat?'

'I an't unconsistent,' screamed the miserable creature; 'I'd talk so

again, if I was hangman. Some other man has got my old opinions at this

minute. That makes it worse. Somebody's longing to work me off. I know

by myself that somebody must be!'

'He'll soon have his longing,' said Hugh, resuming his walk. 'Think of

that, and be quiet.'

Although one of these men displayed, in his speech and bearing, the

most reckless hardihood; and the other, in his every word and action,

testified such an extreme of abject cowardice that it was humiliating

to see him; it would be difficult to say which of them would most have

repelled and shocked an observer. Hugh's was the dogged desperation of

a savage at the stake; the hangman was reduced to a condition little

better, if any, than that of a hound with the halter round his neck.

Yet, as Mr Dennis knew and could have told them, these were the two

commonest states of mind in persons brought to their pass. Such was the

wholesome growth of the seed sown by the law, that this kind of harvest

was usually looked for, as a matter of course.

In one respect they all agreed. The wandering and uncontrollable train

of thought, suggesting sudden recollections of things distant and long

forgotten and remote from each other--the vague restless craving for

something undefined, which nothing could satisfy--the swift flight of

the minutes, fusing themselves into hours, as if by enchantment--the

rapid coming of the solemn night--the shadow of death always upon them,

and yet so dim and faint, that objects the meanest and most trivial

started from the gloom beyond, and forced themselves upon the view--the

impossibility of holding the mind, even if they had been so disposed,

to penitence and preparation, or of keeping it to any point while one

hideous fascination tempted it away--these things were common to them

all, and varied only in their outward tokens.

'Fetch me the book I left within--upon your bed,' she said to Barnaby,

as the clock struck. 'Kiss me first.'

He looked in her face, and saw there, that the time was come. After a

long embrace, he tore himself away, and ran to bring it to her; bidding

her not stir till he came back. He soon returned, for a shriek recalled

him,--but she was gone.

He ran to the yard-gate, and looked through. They were carrying her

away. She had said her heart would break. It was better so.

'Don't you think,' whimpered Dennis, creeping up to him, as he stood

with his feet rooted to the ground, gazing at the blank walls--'don't

you think there's still a chance? It's a dreadful end; it's a terrible

end for a man like me. Don't you think there's a chance? I don't mean

for you, I mean for me. Don't let HIM hear us (meaning Hugh); 'he's so

desperate.'

Now then,' said the officer, who had been lounging in and out with his

hands in his pockets, and yawning as if he were in the last extremity

for some subject of interest: 'it's time to turn in, boys.'

'Not yet,' cried Dennis, 'not yet. Not for an hour yet.'

'I say,--your watch goes different from what it used to,' returned the

man. 'Once upon a time it was always too fast. It's got the other fault

now.'

'My friend,' cried the wretched creature, falling on his knees, 'my

dear friend--you always were my dear friend--there's some mistake. Some

letter has been mislaid, or some messenger has been stopped upon the

way. He may have fallen dead. I saw a man once, fall down dead in the

street, myself, and he had papers in his pocket. Send to inquire. Let

somebody go to inquire. They never will hang me. They never can.--Yes,

they will,' he cried, starting to his feet with a terrible scream.

'They'll hang me by a trick, and keep the pardon back. It's a plot

against me. I shall lose my life!' And uttering another yell, he fell in

a fit upon the ground.

'See the hangman when it comes home to him!' cried Hugh again, as they

bore him away--'Ha ha ha! Courage, bold Barnaby, what care we? Your

hand! They do well to put us out of the world, for if we got loose a

second time, we wouldn't let them off so easy, eh? Another shake! A man

can die but once. If you wake in the night, sing that out lustily, and

fall asleep again. Ha ha ha!'

Barnaby glanced once more through the grate into the empty yard;

and then watched Hugh as he strode to the steps leading to his

sleeping-cell. He heard him shout, and burst into a roar of laughter,

and saw him flourish his hat. Then he turned away himself, like one who

walked in his sleep; and, without any sense of fear or sorrow, lay down

on his pallet, listening for the clock to strike again.

Chapter 77

The time wore on. The noises in the streets became less frequent by

degrees, until silence was scarcely broken save by the bells in church

towers, marking the progress--softer and more stealthy while the city

slumbered--of that Great Watcher with the hoary head, who never sleeps

or rests. In the brief interval of darkness and repose which feverish

towns enjoy, all busy sounds were hushed; and those who awoke from

dreams lay listening in their beds, and longed for dawn, and wished the

dead of the night were past.

Into the street outside the jail's main wall, workmen came straggling at

this solemn hour, in groups of two or three, and meeting in the centre,

cast their tools upon the ground and spoke in whispers. Others soon

issued from the jail itself, bearing on their shoulders planks and

beams: these materials being all brought forth, the rest bestirred

themselves, and the dull sound of hammers began to echo through the

stillness.

Here and there among this knot of labourers, one, with a lantern or

a smoky link, stood by to light his fellows at their work; and by its

doubtful aid, some might be dimly seen taking up the pavement of the

road, while others held great upright posts, or fixed them in the holes

thus made for their reception. Some dragged slowly on, towards the rest,

an empty cart, which they brought rumbling from the prison-yard; while

others erected strong barriers across the street. All were busily

engaged. Their dusky figures moving to and fro, at that unusual hour,

so active and so silent, might have been taken for those of shadowy

creatures toiling at midnight on some ghostly unsubstantial work, which,

like themselves, would vanish with the first gleam of day, and leave but

morning mist and vapour.

While it was yet dark, a few lookers-on collected, who had plainly come

there for the purpose and intended to remain: even those who had to pass

the spot on their way to some other place, lingered, and lingered yet,

as though the attraction of that were irresistible. Meanwhile the noise

of saw and mallet went on briskly, mingled with the clattering of boards

on the stone pavement of the road, and sometimes with the workmen's

voices as they called to one another. Whenever the chimes of the

neighbouring church were heard--and that was every quarter of an hour--a

strange sensation, instantaneous and indescribable, but perfectly

obvious, seemed to pervade them all.

Gradually, a faint brightness appeared in the east, and the air, which

had been very warm all through the night, felt cool and chilly. Though

there was no daylight yet, the darkness was diminished, and the stars

looked pale. The prison, which had been a mere black mass with little

shape or form, put on its usual aspect; and ever and anon a solitary

watchman could be seen upon its roof, stopping to look down upon the

preparations in the street. This man, from forming, as it were, a part

of the jail, and knowing or being supposed to know all that was passing

within, became an object of as much interest, and was as eagerly looked

for, and as awfully pointed out, as if he had been a spirit.

By and by, the feeble light grew stronger, and the houses with their

signboards and inscriptions, stood plainly out, in the dull grey

morning. Heavy stage waggons crawled from the inn-yard opposite; and

travellers peeped out; and as they rolled sluggishly away, cast many

a backward look towards the jail. And now, the sun's first beams came

glancing into the street; and the night's work, which, in its various

stages and in the varied fancies of the lookers-on had taken a hundred

shapes, wore its own proper form--a scaffold, and a gibbet.

As the warmth of the cheerful day began to shed itself upon the scanty

crowd, the murmur of tongues was heard, shutters were thrown open,

and blinds drawn up, and those who had slept in rooms over against the

prison, where places to see the execution were let at high prices, rose

hastily from their beds. In some of the houses, people were busy taking

out the window-sashes for the better accommodation of spectators; in

others, the spectators were already seated, and beguiling the time with

cards, or drink, or jokes among themselves. Some had purchased seats

upon the house-tops, and were already crawling to their stations from

parapet and garret-window. Some were yet bargaining for good places, and

stood in them in a state of indecision: gazing at the slowly-swelling

crowd, and at the workmen as they rested listlessly against the

scaffold--affecting to listen with indifference to the proprietor's

eulogy of the commanding view his house afforded, and the surpassing

cheapness of his terms.

A fairer morning never shone. From the roofs and upper stories of these

buildings, the spires of city churches and the great cathedral dome were

visible, rising up beyond the prison, into the blue sky, and clad in the

colour of light summer clouds, and showing in the clear atmosphere their

every scrap of tracery and fretwork, and every niche and loophole. All

was brightness and promise, excepting in the street below, into which

(for it yet lay in shadow) the eye looked down as into a dark trench,

where, in the midst of so much life, and hope, and renewal of existence,

stood the terrible instrument of death. It seemed as if the very sun

forbore to look upon it.

But it was better, grim and sombre in the shade, than when, the day

being more advanced, it stood confessed in the full glare and glory of

the sun, with its black paint blistering, and its nooses dangling in the

light like loathsome garlands. It was better in the solitude and gloom

of midnight with a few forms clustering about it, than in the freshness

and the stir of morning: the centre of an eager crowd. It was better

haunting the street like a spectre, when men were in their beds, and

influencing perchance the city's dreams, than braving the broad day, and

thrusting its obscene presence upon their waking senses.

Five o'clock had struck--six--seven--and eight. Along the two main

streets at either end of the cross-way, a living stream had now set in,

rolling towards the marts of gain and business. Carts, coaches, waggons,

trucks, and barrows, forced a passage through the outskirts of the

throng, and clattered onward in the same direction. Some of these

which were public conveyances and had come from a short distance in the

country, stopped; and the driver pointed to the gibbet with his whip,

though he might have spared himself the pains, for the heads of all the

passengers were turned that way without his help, and the coach-windows

were stuck full of staring eyes. In some of the carts and waggons, women

might be seen, glancing fearfully at the same unsightly thing; and even

little children were held up above the people's heads to see what kind

of a toy a gallows was, and learn how men were hanged.

Two rioters were to die before the prison, who had been concerned in

the attack upon it; and one directly afterwards in Bloomsbury Square.

At nine o'clock, a strong body of military marched into the street,

and formed and lined a narrow passage into Holborn, which had been

indifferently kept all night by constables. Through this, another

cart was brought (the one already mentioned had been employed in the

construction of the scaffold), and wheeled up to the prison-gate. These

preparations made, the soldiers stood at ease; the officers lounged

to and fro, in the alley they had made, or talked together at the

scaffold's foot; and the concourse, which had been rapidly augmenting

for some hours, and still received additions every minute, waited with

an impatience which increased with every chime of St Sepulchre's clock,

for twelve at noon.

Up to this time they had been very quiet, comparatively silent, save

when the arrival of some new party at a window, hitherto unoccupied,

gave them something new to look at or to talk of. But, as the hour

approached, a buzz and hum arose, which, deepening every moment, soon

swelled into a roar, and seemed to fill the air. No words or even voices

could be distinguished in this clamour, nor did they speak much to each

other; though such as were better informed upon the topic than the rest,

would tell their neighbours, perhaps, that they might know the hangman

when he came out, by his being the shorter one: and that the man who

was to suffer with him was named Hugh: and that it was Barnaby Rudge who

would be hanged in Bloomsbury Square.

The hum grew, as the time drew near, so loud, that those who were at the

windows could not hear the church-clock strike, though it was close at

hand. Nor had they any need to hear it, either, for they could see it

in the people's faces. So surely as another quarter chimed, there was

a movement in the crowd--as if something had passed over it--as if the

light upon them had been changed--in which the fact was readable as on a

brazen dial, figured by a giant's hand.

Three quarters past eleven! The murmur now was deafening, yet every man

seemed mute. Look where you would among the crowd, you saw strained eyes

and lips compressed; it would have been difficult for the most vigilant

observer to point this way or that, and say that yonder man had cried

out. It were as easy to detect the motion of lips in a sea-shell.

Three quarters past eleven! Many spectators who had retired from the

windows, came back refreshed, as though their watch had just begun.

Those who had fallen asleep, roused themselves; and every person in the

crowd made one last effort to better his position--which caused a press

against the sturdy barriers that made them bend and yield like twigs.

The officers, who until now had kept together, fell into their several

positions, and gave the words of command. Swords were drawn, muskets

shouldered, and the bright steel winding its way among the crowd,

gleamed and glittered in the sun like a river. Along this shining path,

two men came hurrying on, leading a horse, which was speedily harnessed

to the cart at the prison-door. Then, a profound silence replaced the

tumult that had so long been gathering, and a breathless pause ensued.

Every window was now choked up with heads; the house-tops teemed with

people--clinging to chimneys, peering over gable-ends, and holding on

where the sudden loosening of any brick or stone would dash them down

into the street. The church tower, the church roof, the church yard,

the prison leads, the very water-spouts and lampposts--every inch of

room--swarmed with human life.

At the first stroke of twelve the prison-bell began to toll. Then the

roar--mingled now with cries of 'Hats off!' and 'Poor fellows!' and,

from some specks in the great concourse, with a shriek or groan--burst

forth again. It was terrible to see--if any one in that distraction of

excitement could have seen--the world of eager eyes, all strained upon

the scaffold and the beam.

The hollow murmuring was heard within the jail as plainly as without.

The three were brought forth into the yard, together, as it resounded

through the air. They knew its import well.

'D'ye hear?' cried Hugh, undaunted by the sound. 'They expect us!

I heard them gathering when I woke in the night, and turned over on

t'other side and fell asleep again. We shall see how they welcome the

hangman, now that it comes home to him. Ha, ha, ha!'

The Ordinary coming up at this moment, reproved him for his indecent

mirth, and advised him to alter his demeanour.

'And why, master?' said Hugh. 'Can I do better than bear it easily? YOU

bear it easily enough. Oh! never tell me,' he cried, as the other would

have spoken, 'for all your sad look and your solemn air, you think

little enough of it! They say you're the best maker of lobster salads in

London. Ha, ha! I've heard that, you see, before now. Is it a good

one, this morning--is your hand in? How does the breakfast look? I hope

there's enough, and to spare, for all this hungry company that'll sit

down to it, when the sight's over.'

'I fear,' observed the clergyman, shaking his head, 'that you are

incorrigible.'

'You're right. I am,' rejoined Hugh sternly. 'Be no hypocrite, master!

You make a merry-making of this, every month; let me be merry, too. If

you want a frightened fellow there's one that'll suit you. Try your hand

upon him.'

He pointed, as he spoke, to Dennis, who, with his legs trailing on the

ground, was held between two men; and who trembled so, that all his

joints and limbs seemed racked by spasms. Turning from this wretched

spectacle, he called to Barnaby, who stood apart.

'What cheer, Barnaby? Don't be downcast, lad. Leave that to HIM.'

'Bless you,' cried Barnaby, stepping lightly towards him, 'I'm not

frightened, Hugh. I'm quite happy. I wouldn't desire to live now,

if they'd let me. Look at me! Am I afraid to die? Will they see ME

tremble?'

Hugh gazed for a moment at his face, on which there was a strange,

unearthly smile; and at his eye, which sparkled brightly; and

interposing between him and the Ordinary, gruffly whispered to the

latter:

'I wouldn't say much to him, master, if I was you. He may spoil your

appetite for breakfast, though you ARE used to it.'

He was the only one of the three who had washed or trimmed himself

that morning. Neither of the others had done so, since their doom was

pronounced. He still wore the broken peacock's feathers in his hat; and

all his usual scraps of finery were carefully disposed about his person.

His kindling eye, his firm step, his proud and resolute bearing, might

have graced some lofty act of heroism; some voluntary sacrifice, born of

a noble cause and pure enthusiasm; rather than that felon's death.

But all these things increased his guilt. They were mere assumptions.

The law had declared it so, and so it must be. The good minister had

been greatly shocked, not a quarter of an hour before, at his parting

with Grip. For one in his condition, to fondle a bird!--The yard was

filled with people; bluff civic functionaries, officers of justice,

soldiers, the curious in such matters, and guests who had been bidden as

to a wedding. Hugh looked about him, nodded gloomily to some person

in authority, who indicated with his hand in what direction he was to

proceed; and clapping Barnaby on the shoulder, passed out with the gait

of a lion.

They entered a large room, so near to the scaffold that the voices of

those who stood about it, could be plainly heard: some beseeching

the javelin-men to take them out of the crowd: others crying to those

behind, to stand back, for they were pressed to death, and suffocating

for want of air.

In the middle of this chamber, two smiths, with hammers, stood beside an

anvil. Hugh walked straight up to them, and set his foot upon it with a

sound as though it had been struck by a heavy weapon. Then, with folded

arms, he stood to have his irons knocked off: scowling haughtily round,

as those who were present eyed him narrowly and whispered to each other.

It took so much time to drag Dennis in, that this ceremony was over with

Hugh, and nearly over with Barnaby, before he appeared. He no sooner

came into the place he knew so well, however, and among faces with which

he was so familiar, than he recovered strength and sense enough to clasp

his hands and make a last appeal.

'Gentlemen, good gentlemen,' cried the abject creature, grovelling down

upon his knees, and actually prostrating himself upon the stone floor:

'Governor, dear governor--honourable sheriffs--worthy gentlemen--have

mercy upon a wretched man that has served His Majesty, and the Law, and

Parliament, for so many years, and don't--don't let me die--because of a

mistake.'

'Dennis,' said the governor of the jail, 'you know what the course

is, and that the order came with the rest. You know that we could do

nothing, even if we would.'

'All I ask, sir,--all I want and beg, is time, to make it sure,' cried

the trembling wretch, looking wildly round for sympathy. 'The King and

Government can't know it's me; I'm sure they can't know it's me; or they

never would bring me to this dreadful slaughterhouse. They know my name,

but they don't know it's the same man. Stop my execution--for charity's

sake stop my execution, gentlemen--till they can be told that I've

been hangman here, nigh thirty year. Will no one go and tell them?' he

implored, clenching his hands and glaring round, and round, and round

again--'will no charitable person go and tell them!'

'Mr Akerman,' said a gentleman who stood by, after a moment's pause,

'since it may possibly produce in this unhappy man a better frame of

mind, even at this last minute, let me assure him that he was well known

to have been the hangman, when his sentence was considered.'

'--But perhaps they think on that account that the punishment's not so

great,' cried the criminal, shuffling towards this speaker on his knees,

and holding up his folded hands; 'whereas it's worse, it's worse a

hundred times, to me than any man. Let them know that, sir. Let them

know that. They've made it worse to me by giving me so much to do. Stop

my execution till they know that!'

The governor beckoned with his hand, and the two men, who had supported

him before, approached. He uttered a piercing cry:

'Wait! Wait. Only a moment--only one moment more! Give me a last chance

of reprieve. One of us three is to go to Bloomsbury Square. Let me be

the one. It may come in that time; it's sure to come. In the Lord's name

let me be sent to Bloomsbury Square. Don't hang me here. It's murder.'

They took him to the anvil: but even then he could be heard above the

clinking of the smiths' hammers, and the hoarse raging of the crowd,

crying that he knew of Hugh's birth--that his father was living, and

was a gentleman of influence and rank--that he had family secrets in his

possession--that he could tell nothing unless they gave him time, but

must die with them on his mind; and he continued to rave in this sort

until his voice failed him, and he sank down a mere heap of clothes

between the two attendants.

It was at this moment that the clock struck the first stroke of twelve,

and the bell began to toll. The various officers, with the two sheriffs

at their head, moved towards the door. All was ready when the last chime

came upon the ear.

They told Hugh this, and asked if he had anything to say.

'To say!' he cried. 'Not I. I'm ready.--Yes,' he added, as his eye fell

upon Barnaby, 'I have a word to say, too. Come hither, lad.'

There was, for the moment, something kind, and even tender, struggling

in his fierce aspect, as he wrung his poor companion by the hand.

'I'll say this,' he cried, looking firmly round, 'that if I had ten

lives to lose, and the loss of each would give me ten times the agony

of the hardest death, I'd lay them all down--ay, I would, though you

gentlemen may not believe it--to save this one. This one,' he added,

wringing his hand again, 'that will be lost through me.'

'Not through you,' said the idiot, mildly. 'Don't say that. You were

not to blame. You have always been very good to me.--Hugh, we shall know

what makes the stars shine, NOW!'

'I took him from her in a reckless mood, and didn't think what harm

would come of it,' said Hugh, laying his hand upon his head, and

speaking in a lower voice. 'I ask her pardon; and his.--Look here,' he

added roughly, in his former tone. 'You see this lad?'

They murmured 'Yes,' and seemed to wonder why he asked.

'That gentleman yonder--' pointing to the clergyman--'has often in the

last few days spoken to me of faith, and strong belief. You see what

I am--more brute than man, as I have been often told--but I had faith

enough to believe, and did believe as strongly as any of you gentlemen

can believe anything, that this one life would be spared. See what he

is!--Look at him!'

Barnaby had moved towards the door, and stood beckoning him to follow.

'If this was not faith, and strong belief!' cried Hugh, raising his

right arm aloft, and looking upward like a savage prophet whom the near

approach of Death had filled with inspiration, 'where are they! What

else should teach me--me, born as I was born, and reared as I have

been reared--to hope for any mercy in this hardened, cruel, unrelenting

place! Upon these human shambles, I, who never raised this hand in

prayer till now, call down the wrath of God! On that black tree, of

which I am the ripened fruit, I do invoke the curse of all its victims,

past, and present, and to come. On the head of that man, who, in his

conscience, owns me for his son, I leave the wish that he may never

sicken on his bed of down, but die a violent death as I do now, and have

the night-wind for his only mourner. To this I say, Amen, amen!'

His arm fell downward by his side; he turned; and moved towards them

with a steady step, the man he had been before.

'There is nothing more?' said the governor.

Hugh motioned Barnaby not to come near him (though without looking in

the direction where he stood) and answered, 'There is nothing more.'

'Move forward!'

'--Unless,' said Hugh, glancing hurriedly back,--'unless any person here

has a fancy for a dog; and not then, unless he means to use him well.

There's one, belongs to me, at the house I came from, and it wouldn't

be easy to find a better. He'll whine at first, but he'll soon get over

that.--You wonder that I think about a dog just now, he added, with a

kind of laugh. 'If any man deserved it of me half as well, I'd think of

HIM.'

He spoke no more, but moved onward in his place, with a careless air,

though listening at the same time to the Service for the Dead, with

something between sullen attention, and quickened curiosity. As soon as

he had passed the door, his miserable associate was carried out; and the

crowd beheld the rest.

Barnaby would have mounted the steps at the same time--indeed he would

have gone before them, but in both attempts he was restrained, as he

was to undergo the sentence elsewhere. In a few minutes the sheriffs

reappeared, the same procession was again formed, and they passed

through various rooms and passages to another door--that at which the

cart was waiting. He held down his head to avoid seeing what he knew his

eyes must otherwise encounter, and took his seat sorrowfully,--and yet

with something of a childish pride and pleasure,--in the vehicle. The

officers fell into their places at the sides, in front and in the rear;

the sheriffs' carriages rolled on; a guard of soldiers surrounded the

whole; and they moved slowly forward through the throng and pressure

toward Lord Mansfield's ruined house.

It was a sad sight--all the show, and strength, and glitter, assembled

round one helpless creature--and sadder yet to note, as he rode along,

how his wandering thoughts found strange encouragement in the crowded

windows and the concourse in the streets; and how, even then, he felt

the influence of the bright sky, and looked up, smiling, into its deep

unfathomable blue. But there had been many such sights since the riots

were over--some so moving in their nature, and so repulsive too, that

they were far more calculated to awaken pity for the sufferers, than

respect for that law whose strong arm seemed in more than one case to be

as wantonly stretched forth now that all was safe, as it had been basely

paralysed in time of danger.

Two cripples--both mere boys--one with a leg of wood, one who dragged

his twisted limbs along by the help of a crutch, were hanged in this

same Bloomsbury Square. As the cart was about to glide from under them,

it was observed that they stood with their faces from, not to, the house

they had assisted to despoil; and their misery was protracted that this

omission might be remedied. Another boy was hanged in Bow Street; other

young lads in various quarters of the town. Four wretched women, too,

were put to death. In a word, those who suffered as rioters were, for

the most part, the weakest, meanest, and most miserable among them. It

was a most exquisite satire upon the false religious cry which had led

to so much misery, that some of these people owned themselves to be

Catholics, and begged to be attended by their own priests.

One young man was hanged in Bishopsgate Street, whose aged grey-headed

father waited for him at the gallows, kissed him at its foot when he

arrived, and sat there, on the ground, till they took him down. They

would have given him the body of his child; but he had no hearse, no

coffin, nothing to remove it in, being too poor--and walked meekly away

beside the cart that took it back to prison, trying, as he went, to

touch its lifeless hand.

But the crowd had forgotten these matters, or cared little about them

if they lived in their memory: and while one great multitude fought

and hustled to get near the gibbet before Newgate, for a parting look,

another followed in the train of poor lost Barnaby, to swell the throng

that waited for him on the spot.

Chapter 78

On this same day, and about this very hour, Mr Willet the elder sat

smoking his pipe in a chamber at the Black Lion. Although it was hot

summer weather, Mr Willet sat close to the fire. He was in a state of

profound cogitation, with his own thoughts, and it was his custom

at such times to stew himself slowly, under the impression that that

process of cookery was favourable to the melting out of his ideas,

which, when he began to simmer, sometimes oozed forth so copiously as to

astonish even himself.

Mr Willet had been several thousand times comforted by his friends and

acquaintance, with the assurance that for the loss he had sustained in

the damage done to the Maypole, he could 'come upon the county.' But as

this phrase happened to bear an unfortunate resemblance to the popular

expression of 'coming on the parish,' it suggested to Mr Willet's mind

no more consolatory visions than pauperism on an extensive scale, and

ruin in a capacious aspect. Consequently, he had never failed to receive

the intelligence with a rueful shake of the head, or a dreary stare, and

had been always observed to appear much more melancholy after a visit of

condolence than at any other time in the whole four-and-twenty hours.

It chanced, however, that sitting over the fire on this particular

occasion--perhaps because he was, as it were, done to a turn; perhaps

because he was in an unusually bright state of mind; perhaps because

he had considered the subject so long; perhaps because of all these

favouring circumstances, taken together--it chanced that, sitting over

the fire on this particular occasion, Mr Willet did, afar off and in

the remotest depths of his intellect, perceive a kind of lurking hint or

faint suggestion, that out of the public purse there might issue funds

for the restoration of the Maypole to its former high place among the

taverns of the earth. And this dim ray of light did so diffuse itself

within him, and did so kindle up and shine, that at last he had it as

plainly and visibly before him as the blaze by which he sat; and, fully

persuaded that he was the first to make the discovery, and that he had

started, hunted down, fallen upon, and knocked on the head, a perfectly

original idea which had never presented itself to any other man, alive

or dead, he laid down his pipe, rubbed his hands, and chuckled audibly.

'Why, father!' cried Joe, entering at the moment, 'you're in spirits

to-day!'

'It's nothing partickler,' said Mr Willet, chuckling again. 'It's

nothing at all partickler, Joseph. Tell me something about the

Salwanners.' Having preferred this request, Mr Willet chuckled a third

time, and after these unusual demonstrations of levity, he put his pipe

in his mouth again.

'What shall I tell you, father?' asked Joe, laying his hand upon his

sire's shoulder, and looking down into his face. 'That I have come back,

poorer than a church mouse? You know that. That I have come back, maimed

and crippled? You know that.'

'It was took off,' muttered Mr Willet, with his eyes upon the fire, 'at

the defence of the Salwanners, in America, where the war is.'

'Quite right,' returned Joe, smiling, and leaning with his remaining

elbow on the back of his father's chair; 'the very subject I came to

speak to you about. A man with one arm, father, is not of much use in

the busy world.'

This was one of those vast propositions which Mr Willet had never

considered for an instant, and required time to 'tackle.' Wherefore he

made no answer.

'At all events,' said Joe, 'he can't pick and choose his means of

earning a livelihood, as another man may. He can't say "I will turn my

hand to this," or "I won't turn my hand to that," but must take what he

can do, and be thankful it's no worse.--What did you say?'

Mr Willet had been softly repeating to himself, in a musing tone, the

words 'defence of the Salwanners:' but he seemed embarrassed at having

been overheard, and answered 'Nothing.'

'Now look here, father.--Mr Edward has come to England from the West

Indies. When he was lost sight of (I ran away on the same day, father),

he made a voyage to one of the islands, where a school-friend of his

had settled; and, finding him, wasn't too proud to be employed on his

estate, and--and in short, got on well, and is prospering, and has come

over here on business of his own, and is going back again speedily. Our

returning nearly at the same time, and meeting in the course of the late

troubles, has been a good thing every way; for it has not only enabled

us to do old friends some service, but has opened a path in life for me

which I may tread without being a burden upon you. To be plain, father,

he can employ me; I have satisfied myself that I can be of real use to

him; and I am going to carry my one arm away with him, and to make the

most of it.

In the mind's eye of Mr Willet, the West Indies, and indeed all foreign

countries, were inhabited by savage nations, who were perpetually

burying pipes of peace, flourishing tomahawks, and puncturing strange

patterns in their bodies. He no sooner heard this announcement,

therefore, than he leaned back in his chair, took his pipe from his

lips, and stared at his son with as much dismay as if he already beheld

him tied to a stake, and tortured for the entertainment of a lively

population. In what form of expression his feelings would have found

a vent, it is impossible to say. Nor is it necessary: for, before a

syllable occurred to him, Dolly Varden came running into the room, in

tears, threw herself on Joe's breast without a word of explanation, and

clasped her white arms round his neck.

'Dolly!' cried Joe. 'Dolly!'

'Ay, call me that; call me that always,' exclaimed the locksmith's

little daughter; 'never speak coldly to me, never be distant, never

again reprove me for the follies I have long repented, or I shall die,

Joe.'

'I reprove you!' said Joe.

'Yes--for every kind and honest word you uttered, went to my heart. For

you, who have borne so much from me--for you, who owe your sufferings

and pain to my caprice--for you to be so kind--so noble to me, Joe--'

He could say nothing to her. Not a syllable. There was an odd sort of

eloquence in his one arm, which had crept round her waist: but his lips

were mute.

'If you had reminded me by a word--only by one short word,' sobbed

Dolly, clinging yet closer to him, 'how little I deserved that you

should treat me with so much forbearance; if you had exulted only for

one moment in your triumph, I could have borne it better.'

'Triumph!' repeated Joe, with a smile which seemed to say, 'I am a

pretty figure for that.'

'Yes, triumph,' she cried, with her whole heart and soul in her earnest

voice, and gushing tears; 'for it is one. I am glad to think and know

it is. I wouldn't be less humbled, dear--I wouldn't be without the

recollection of that last time we spoke together in this place--no, not

if I could recall the past, and make our parting, yesterday.'

Did ever lover look as Joe looked now!

'Dear Joe,' said Dolly, 'I always loved you--in my own heart I always

did, although I was so vain and giddy. I hoped you would come back that

night. I made quite sure you would. I prayed for it on my knees. Through

all these long, long years, I have never once forgotten you, or left off

hoping that this happy time might come.'

The eloquence of Joe's arm surpassed the most impassioned language; and

so did that of his lips--yet he said nothing, either.

'And now, at last,' cried Dolly, trembling with the fervour of her

speech, 'if you were sick, and shattered in your every limb; if you were

ailing, weak, and sorrowful; if, instead of being what you are, you were

in everybody's eyes but mine the wreck and ruin of a man; I would be

your wife, dear love, with greater pride and joy, than if you were the

stateliest lord in England!'

'What have I done,' cried Joe, 'what have I done to meet with this

reward?'

'You have taught me,' said Dolly, raising her pretty face to his, 'to

know myself, and your worth; to be something better than I was; to be

more deserving of your true and manly nature. In years to come, dear

Joe, you shall find that you have done so; for I will be, not only

now, when we are young and full of hope, but when we have grown old and

weary, your patient, gentle, never-tiring wife. I will never know a wish

or care beyond our home and you, and I will always study how to please

you with my best affection and my most devoted love. I will: indeed I

will!'

Joe could only repeat his former eloquence--but it was very much to the

purpose.

'They know of this, at home,' said Dolly. 'For your sake, I would leave

even them; but they know it, and are glad of it, and are as proud of you

as I am, and as full of gratitude.--You'll not come and see me as a poor

friend who knew me when I was a girl, will you, dear Joe?'

Well, well! It don't matter what Joe said in answer, but he said a great

deal; and Dolly said a great deal too: and he folded Dolly in his one

arm pretty tight, considering that it was but one; and Dolly made no

resistance: and if ever two people were happy in this world--which is

not an utterly miserable one, with all its faults--we may, with some

appearance of certainty, conclude that they were.

To say that during these proceedings Mr Willet the elder underwent

the greatest emotions of astonishment of which our common nature is

susceptible--to say that he was in a perfect paralysis of surprise, and

that he wandered into the most stupendous and theretofore unattainable

heights of complicated amazement--would be to shadow forth his state of

mind in the feeblest and lamest terms. If a roc, an eagle, a griffin, a

flying elephant, a winged sea-horse, had suddenly appeared, and, taking

him on its back, carried him bodily into the heart of the 'Salwanners,'

it would have been to him as an everyday occurrence, in comparison with

what he now beheld. To be sitting quietly by, seeing and hearing these

things; to be completely overlooked, unnoticed, and disregarded,

while his son and a young lady were talking to each other in the most

impassioned manner, kissing each other, and making themselves in

all respects perfectly at home; was a position so tremendous, so

inexplicable, so utterly beyond the widest range of his capacity of

comprehension, that he fell into a lethargy of wonder, and could no more

rouse himself than an enchanted sleeper in the first year of his fairy

lease, a century long.

'Father,' said Joe, presenting Dolly. 'You know who this is?'

Mr Willet looked first at her, then at his son, then back again at

Dolly, and then made an ineffectual effort to extract a whiff from his

pipe, which had gone out long ago.

'Say a word, father, if it's only "how d'ye do,"' urged Joe.

'Certainly, Joseph,' answered Mr Willet. 'Oh yes! Why not?'

'To be sure,' said Joe. 'Why not?'

'Ah!' replied his father. 'Why not?' and with this remark, which he

uttered in a low voice as though he were discussing some grave question

with himself, he used the little finger--if any of his fingers can

be said to have come under that denomination--of his right hand as a

tobacco-stopper, and was silent again.

And so he sat for half an hour at least, although Dolly, in the most

endearing of manners, hoped, a dozen times, that he was not angry with

her. So he sat for half an hour, quite motionless, and looking all

the while like nothing so much as a great Dutch Pin or Skittle. At the

expiration of that period, he suddenly, and without the least notice,

burst (to the great consternation of the young people) into a very loud

and very short laugh; and repeating, 'Certainly, Joseph. Oh yes! Why

not?' went out for a walk.

Chapter 79

Old John did not walk near the Golden Key, for between the Golden Key

and the Black Lion there lay a wilderness of streets--as everybody

knows who is acquainted with the relative bearings of Clerkenwell and

Whitechapel--and he was by no means famous for pedestrian exercises.

But the Golden Key lies in our way, though it was out of his; so to the

Golden Key this chapter goes.

The Golden Key itself, fair emblem of the locksmith's trade, had been

pulled down by the rioters, and roughly trampled under foot. But, now,

it was hoisted up again in all the glory of a new coat of paint,

and shewed more bravely even than in days of yore. Indeed the whole

house-front was spruce and trim, and so freshened up throughout, that if

there yet remained at large any of the rioters who had been concerned in

the attack upon it, the sight of the old, goodly, prosperous dwelling,

so revived, must have been to them as gall and wormwood.

The shutters of the shop were closed, however, and the window-blinds

above were all pulled down, and in place of its usual cheerful

appearance, the house had a look of sadness and an air of mourning;

which the neighbours, who in old days had often seen poor Barnaby go in

and out, were at no loss to understand. The door stood partly open;

but the locksmith's hammer was unheard; the cat sat moping on the ashy

forge; all was deserted, dark, and silent.

On the threshold of this door, Mr Haredale and Edward Chester met. The

younger man gave place; and both passing in with a familiar air, which

seemed to denote that they were tarrying there, or were well-accustomed

to go to and fro unquestioned, shut it behind them.

Entering the old back-parlour, and ascending the flight of stairs,

abrupt and steep, and quaintly fashioned as of old, they turned into

the best room; the pride of Mrs Varden's heart, and erst the scene of

Miggs's household labours.

'Varden brought the mother here last evening, he told me?' said Mr

Haredale.

'She is above-stairs now--in the room over here,' Edward rejoined. 'Her

grief, they say, is past all telling. I needn't add--for that you know

beforehand, sir--that the care, humanity, and sympathy of these good

people have no bounds.'

'I am sure of that. Heaven repay them for it, and for much more! Varden

is out?'

'He returned with your messenger, who arrived almost at the moment of

his coming home himself. He was out the whole night--but that of course

you know. He was with you the greater part of it?'

'He was. Without him, I should have lacked my right hand. He is an older

man than I; but nothing can conquer him.'

'The cheeriest, stoutest-hearted fellow in the world.'

'He has a right to be. He has a right to he. A better creature never

lived. He reaps what he has sown--no more.'

'It is not all men,' said Edward, after a moment's hesitation, 'who have

the happiness to do that.'

'More than you imagine,' returned Mr Haredale. 'We note the harvest more

than the seed-time. You do so in me.'

In truth his pale and haggard face, and gloomy bearing, had so far

influenced the remark, that Edward was, for the moment, at a loss to

answer him.

'Tut, tut,' said Mr Haredale, ''twas not very difficult to read a

thought so natural. But you are mistaken nevertheless. I have had my

share of sorrows--more than the common lot, perhaps, but I have borne

them ill. I have broken where I should have bent; and have mused and

brooded, when my spirit should have mixed with all God's great creation.

The men who learn endurance, are they who call the whole world, brother.

I have turned FROM the world, and I pay the penalty.'

Edward would have interposed, but he went on without giving him time.

'It is too late to evade it now. I sometimes think, that if I had

to live my life once more, I might amend this fault--not so much, I

discover when I search my mind, for the love of what is right, as for my

own sake. But even when I make these better resolutions, I instinctively

recoil from the idea of suffering again what I have undergone; and in

this circumstance I find the unwelcome assurance that I should still be

the same man, though I could cancel the past, and begin anew, with its

experience to guide me.'

'Nay, you make too sure of that,' said Edward.

'You think so,' Mr Haredale answered, 'and I am glad you do. I know

myself better, and therefore distrust myself more. Let us leave this

subject for another--not so far removed from it as it might, at first

sight, seem to be. Sir, you still love my niece, and she is still

attached to you.'

'I have that assurance from her own lips,' said Edward, 'and you know--I

am sure you know--that I would not exchange it for any blessing life

could yield me.'

'You are frank, honourable, and disinterested,' said Mr Haredale; 'you

have forced the conviction that you are so, even on my once-jaundiced

mind, and I believe you. Wait here till I come back.'

He left the room as he spoke; but soon returned with his niece. 'On that

first and only time,' he said, looking from the one to the other, 'when

we three stood together under her father's roof, I told you to quit it,

and charged you never to return.'

'It is the only circumstance arising out of our love,' observed Edward,

'that I have forgotten.'

'You own a name,' said Mr Haredale, 'I had deep reason to remember. I

was moved and goaded by recollections of personal wrong and injury, I

know, but, even now I cannot charge myself with having, then, or ever,

lost sight of a heartfelt desire for her true happiness; or with having

acted--however much I was mistaken--with any other impulse than the one

pure, single, earnest wish to be to her, as far as in my inferior nature

lay, the father she had lost.'

'Dear uncle,' cried Emma, 'I have known no parent but you. I have loved

the memory of others, but I have loved you all my life. Never was father

kinder to his child than you have been to me, without the interval of

one harsh hour, since I can first remember.'

'You speak too fondly,' he answered, 'and yet I cannot wish you were

less partial; for I have a pleasure in hearing those words, and shall

have in calling them to mind when we are far asunder, which nothing else

could give me. Bear with me for a moment longer, Edward, for she and I

have been together many years; and although I believe that in resigning

her to you I put the seal upon her future happiness, I find it needs an

effort.'

He pressed her tenderly to his bosom, and after a minute's pause,

resumed:

'I have done you wrong, sir, and I ask your forgiveness--in no common

phrase, or show of sorrow; but with earnestness and sincerity. In the

same spirit, I acknowledge to you both that the time has been when

I connived at treachery and falsehood--which if I did not perpetrate

myself, I still permitted--to rend you two asunder.'

'You judge yourself too harshly,' said Edward. 'Let these things rest.'

'They rise in judgment against me when I look back, and not now for

the first time,' he answered. 'I cannot part from you without your full

forgiveness; for busy life and I have little left in common now, and

I have regrets enough to carry into solitude, without addition to the

stock.'

'You bear a blessing from us both,' said Emma. 'Never mingle thoughts of

me--of me who owe you so much love and duty--with anything but undying

affection and gratitude for the past, and bright hopes for the future.'

'The future,' returned her uncle, with a melancholy smile, 'is a bright

word for you, and its image should be wreathed with cheerful hopes. Mine

is of another kind, but it will be one of peace, and free, I trust, from

care or passion. When you quit England I shall leave it too. There are

cloisters abroad; and now that the two great objects of my life are set

at rest, I know no better home. You droop at that, forgetting that I am

growing old, and that my course is nearly run. Well, we will speak of it

again--not once or twice, but many times; and you shall give me cheerful

counsel, Emma.'

'And you will take it?' asked his niece.

'I'll listen to it,' he answered, with a kiss, 'and it will have its

weight, be certain. What have I left to say? You have, of late, been

much together. It is better and more fitting that the circumstances

attendant on the past, which wrought your separation, and sowed between

you suspicion and distrust, should not be entered on by me.'

'Much, much better,' whispered Emma.

'I avow my share in them,' said Mr Haredale, 'though I held it, at the

time, in detestation. Let no man turn aside, ever so slightly, from the

broad path of honour, on the plausible pretence that he is justified by

the goodness of his end. All good ends can be worked out by good means.

Those that cannot, are bad; and may be counted so at once, and left

alone.'

He looked from her to Edward, and said in a gentler tone:

'In goods and fortune you are now nearly equal. I have been her faithful

steward, and to that remnant of a richer property which my brother left

her, I desire to add, in token of my love, a poor pittance, scarcely

worth the mention, for which I have no longer any need. I am glad you go

abroad. Let our ill-fated house remain the ruin it is. When you return,

after a few thriving years, you will command a better, and a more

fortunate one. We are friends?'

Edward took his extended hand, and grasped it heartily.

'You are neither slow nor cold in your response,' said Mr Haredale,

doing the like by him, 'and when I look upon you now, and know you, I

feel that I would choose you for her husband. Her father had a generous

nature, and you would have pleased him well. I give her to you in his

name, and with his blessing. If the world and I part in this act, we

part on happier terms than we have lived for many a day.'

He placed her in his arms, and would have left the room, but that he was

stopped in his passage to the door by a great noise at a distance, which

made them start and pause.

It was a loud shouting, mingled with boisterous acclamations, that rent

the very air. It drew nearer and nearer every moment, and approached

so rapidly, that, even while they listened, it burst into a deafening

confusion of sounds at the street corner.

'This must be stopped--quieted,' said Mr Haredale, hastily. 'We should

have foreseen this, and provided against it. I will go out to them at

once.'

But, before he could reach the door, and before Edward could catch up

his hat and follow him, they were again arrested by a loud shriek from

above-stairs: and the locksmith's wife, bursting in, and fairly running

into Mr Haredale's arms, cried out:

'She knows it all, dear sir!--she knows it all! We broke it out to her

by degrees, and she is quite prepared.' Having made this communication,

and furthermore thanked Heaven with great fervour and heartiness, the

good lady, according to the custom of matrons, on all occasions of

excitement, fainted away directly.

They ran to the window, drew up the sash, and looked into the crowded

street. Among a dense mob of persons, of whom not one was for an instant

still, the locksmith's ruddy face and burly form could be descried,

beating about as though he was struggling with a rough sea. Now, he was

carried back a score of yards, now onward nearly to the door, now

back again, now forced against the opposite houses, now against those

adjoining his own: now carried up a flight of steps, and greeted by the

outstretched hands of half a hundred men, while the whole tumultuous

concourse stretched their throats, and cheered with all their might.

Though he was really in a fair way to be torn to pieces in the general

enthusiasm, the locksmith, nothing discomposed, echoed their shouts till

he was as hoarse as they, and in a glow of joy and right good-humour,

waved his hat until the daylight shone between its brim and crown.

But in all the bandyings from hand to hand, and strivings to and fro,

and sweepings here and there, which--saving that he looked more jolly

and more radiant after every struggle--troubled his peace of mind no

more than if he had been a straw upon the water's surface, he never once

released his firm grasp of an arm, drawn tight through his. He sometimes

turned to clap this friend upon the back, or whisper in his ear a word

of staunch encouragement, or cheer him with a smile; but his great care

was to shield him from the pressure, and force a passage for him to the

Golden Key. Passive and timid, scared, pale, and wondering, and gazing

at the throng as if he were newly risen from the dead, and felt himself

a ghost among the living, Barnaby--not Barnaby in the spirit, but in

flesh and blood, with pulses, sinews, nerves, and beating heart, and

strong affections--clung to his stout old friend, and followed where he

led.

And thus, in course of time, they reached the door, held ready for their

entrance by no unwilling hands. Then slipping in, and shutting out

the crowd by main force, Gabriel stood between Mr Haredale and Edward

Chester, and Barnaby, rushing up the stairs, fell upon his knees beside

his mother's bed.

'Such is the blessed end, sir,' cried the panting locksmith, to Mr

Haredale, 'of the best day's work we ever did. The rogues! it's been

hard fighting to get away from 'em. I almost thought, once or twice,

they'd have been too much for us with their kindness!'

They had striven, all the previous day, to rescue Barnaby from his

impending fate. Failing in their attempts, in the first quarter to which

they addressed themselves, they renewed them in another. Failing there,

likewise, they began afresh at midnight; and made their way, not only to

the judge and jury who had tried him, but to men of influence at court,

to the young Prince of Wales, and even to the ante-chamber of the King

himself. Successful, at last, in awakening an interest in his favour,

and an inclination to inquire more dispassionately into his case, they

had had an interview with the minister, in his bed, so late as eight

o'clock that morning. The result of a searching inquiry (in which

they, who had known the poor fellow from his childhood, did other good

service, besides bringing it about) was, that between eleven and twelve

o'clock, a free pardon to Barnaby Rudge was made out and signed, and

entrusted to a horse-soldier for instant conveyance to the place of

execution. This courier reached the spot just as the cart appeared in

sight; and Barnaby being carried back to jail, Mr Haredale, assured that

all was safe, had gone straight from Bloomsbury Square to the Golden

Key, leaving to Gabriel the grateful task of bringing him home in

triumph.

'I needn't say,' observed the locksmith, when he had shaken hands with

all the males in the house, and hugged all the females, five-and-forty

times, at least, 'that, except among ourselves, I didn't want to make a

triumph of it. But, directly we got into the street we were known, and

this hubbub began. Of the two,' he added, as he wiped his crimson face,

'and after experience of both, I think I'd rather be taken out of my

house by a crowd of enemies, than escorted home by a mob of friends!'

It was plain enough, however, that this was mere talk on Gabriel's part,

and that the whole proceeding afforded him the keenest delight; for

the people continuing to make a great noise without, and to cheer as if

their voices were in the freshest order, and good for a fortnight, he

sent upstairs for Grip (who had come home at his master's back, and had

acknowledged the favours of the multitude by drawing blood from every

finger that came within his reach), and with the bird upon his arm

presented himself at the first-floor window, and waved his hat again

until it dangled by a shred, between his finger and thumb. This

demonstration having been received with appropriate shouts, and silence

being in some degree restored, he thanked them for their sympathy; and

taking the liberty to inform them that there was a sick person in the

house, proposed that they should give three cheers for King George,

three more for Old England, and three more for nothing particular, as

a closing ceremony. The crowd assenting, substituted Gabriel Varden

for the nothing particular; and giving him one over, for good measure,

dispersed in high good-humour.

What congratulations were exchanged among the inmates at the Golden

Key, when they were left alone; what an overflowing of joy and happiness

there was among them; how incapable it was of expression in Barnaby's

own person; and how he went wildly from one to another, until he became

so far tranquillised, as to stretch himself on the ground beside his

mother's couch and fall into a deep sleep; are matters that need not be

told. And it is well they happened to be of this class, for they would

be very hard to tell, were their narration ever so indispensable.

Before leaving this bright picture, it may be well to glance at a dark

and very different one which was presented to only a few eyes, that same

night.

The scene was a churchyard; the time, midnight; the persons, Edward

Chester, a clergyman, a grave-digger, and the four bearers of a homely

coffin. They stood about a grave which had been newly dug, and one of

the bearers held up a dim lantern,--the only light there--which shed

its feeble ray upon the book of prayer. He placed it for a moment on the

coffin, when he and his companions were about to lower it down. There

was no inscription on the lid.

The mould fell solemnly upon the last house of this nameless man; and

the rattling dust left a dismal echo even in the accustomed ears of

those who had borne it to its resting-place. The grave was filled in to

the top, and trodden down. They all left the spot together.

'You never saw him, living?' asked the clergyman, of Edward.

'Often, years ago; not knowing him for my brother.'

'Never since?'

'Never. Yesterday, he steadily refused to see me. It was urged upon him,

many times, at my desire.'

'Still he refused? That was hardened and unnatural.'

'Do you think so?'

'I infer that you do not?'

'You are right. We hear the world wonder, every day, at monsters of

ingratitude. Did it never occur to you that it often looks for monsters

of affection, as though they were things of course?'

They had reached the gate by this time, and bidding each other good

night, departed on their separate ways.

Chapter 80

That afternoon, when he had slept off his fatigue; had shaved, and

washed, and dressed, and freshened himself from top to toe; when he had

dined, comforted himself with a pipe, an extra Toby, a nap in the great

arm-chair, and a quiet chat with Mrs Varden on everything that had

happened, was happening, or about to happen, within the sphere of their

domestic concern; the locksmith sat himself down at the tea-table in

the little back-parlour: the rosiest, cosiest, merriest, heartiest,

best-contented old buck, in Great Britain or out of it.

There he sat, with his beaming eye on Mrs V., and his shining face

suffused with gladness, and his capacious waistcoat smiling in every

wrinkle, and his jovial humour peeping from under the table in the very

plumpness of his legs; a sight to turn the vinegar of misanthropy into

purest milk of human kindness. There he sat, watching his wife as she

decorated the room with flowers for the greater honour of Dolly and

Joseph Willet, who had gone out walking, and for whom the tea-kettle

had been singing gaily on the hob full twenty minutes, chirping as

never kettle chirped before; for whom the best service of real undoubted

china, patterned with divers round-faced mandarins holding up broad

umbrellas, was now displayed in all its glory; to tempt whose

appetites a clear, transparent, juicy ham, garnished with cool green

lettuce-leaves and fragrant cucumber, reposed upon a shady table,

covered with a snow-white cloth; for whose delight, preserves and jams,

crisp cakes and other pastry, short to eat, with cunning twists, and

cottage loaves, and rolls of bread both white and brown, were all set

forth in rich profusion; in whose youth Mrs V. herself had grown quite

young, and stood there in a gown of red and white: symmetrical in

figure, buxom in bodice, ruddy in cheek and lip, faultless in ankle,

laughing in face and mood, in all respects delicious to behold--there

sat the locksmith among all and every these delights, the sun that shone

upon them all: the centre of the system: the source of light, heat,

life, and frank enjoyment in the bright household world.

And when had Dolly ever been the Dolly of that afternoon? To see how she

came in, arm-in-arm with Joe; and how she made an effort not to blush or

seem at all confused; and how she made believe she didn't care to sit on

his side of the table; and how she coaxed the locksmith in a whisper not

to joke; and how her colour came and went in a little restless flutter

of happiness, which made her do everything wrong, and yet so charmingly

wrong that it was better than right!--why, the locksmith could have

looked on at this (as he mentioned to Mrs Varden when they retired for

the night) for four-and-twenty hours at a stretch, and never wished it

done.

The recollections, too, with which they made merry over that long

protracted tea! The glee with which the locksmith asked Joe if he

remembered that stormy night at the Maypole when he first asked after

Dolly--the laugh they all had, about that night when she was going out

to the party in the sedan-chair--the unmerciful manner in which they

rallied Mrs Varden about putting those flowers outside that very

window--the difficulty Mrs Varden found in joining the laugh against

herself, at first, and the extraordinary perception she had of the joke

when she overcame it--the confidential statements of Joe concerning the

precise day and hour when he was first conscious of being fond of Dolly,

and Dolly's blushing admissions, half volunteered and half extorted, as

to the time from which she dated the discovery that she 'didn't mind'

Joe--here was an exhaustless fund of mirth and conversation.

Then, there was a great deal to be said regarding Mrs Varden's doubts,

and motherly alarms, and shrewd suspicions; and it appeared that from

Mrs Varden's penetration and extreme sagacity nothing had ever been

hidden. She had known it all along. She had seen it from the first. She

had always predicted it. She had been aware of it before the principals.

She had said within herself (for she remembered the exact words) 'that

young Willet is certainly looking after our Dolly, and I must look

after HIM.' Accordingly, she had looked after him, and had observed many

little circumstances (all of which she named) so exceedingly minute that

nobody else could make anything out of them even now; and had, it

seemed from first to last, displayed the most unbounded tact and most

consummate generalship.

Of course the night when Joe WOULD ride homeward by the side of the

chaise, and when Mrs Varden WOULD insist upon his going back again,

was not forgotten--nor the night when Dolly fainted on his name being

mentioned--nor the times upon times when Mrs Varden, ever watchful and

prudent, had found her pining in her own chamber. In short, nothing was

forgotten; and everything by some means or other brought them back to

the conclusion, that that was the happiest hour in all their lives;

consequently, that everything must have occurred for the best, and

nothing could be suggested which would have made it better.

While they were in the full glow of such discourse as this, there came a

startling knock at the door, opening from the street into the workshop,

which had been kept closed all day that the house might be more quiet.

Joe, as in duty bound, would hear of nobody but himself going to open

it; and accordingly left the room for that purpose.

It would have been odd enough, certainly, if Joe had forgotten the way

to this door; and even if he had, as it was a pretty large one and stood

straight before him, he could not easily have missed it. But Dolly,

perhaps because she was in the flutter of spirits before mentioned, or

perhaps because she thought he would not be able to open it with his one

arm--she could have had no other reason--hurried out after him; and they

stopped so long in the passage--no doubt owing to Joe's entreaties

that she would not expose herself to the draught of July air which must

infallibly come rushing in on this same door being opened--that the

knock was repeated, in a yet more startling manner than before.

'Is anybody going to open that door?' cried the locksmith. 'Or shall I

come?'

Upon that, Dolly went running back into the parlour, all dimples and

blushes; and Joe opened it with a mighty noise, and other superfluous

demonstrations of being in a violent hurry.

'Well,' said the locksmith, when he reappeared: 'what is it? eh Joe?

what are you laughing at?'

'Nothing, sir. It's coming in.'

'Who's coming in? what's coming in?' Mrs Varden, as much at a loss as

her husband, could only shake her head in answer to his inquiring look:

so, the locksmith wheeled his chair round to command a better view of

the room-door, and stared at it with his eyes wide open, and a mingled

expression of curiosity and wonder shining in his jolly face.

Instead of some person or persons straightway appearing, divers

remarkable sounds were heard, first in the workshop and afterwards

in the little dark passage between it and the parlour, as though some

unwieldy chest or heavy piece of furniture were being brought in, by an

amount of human strength inadequate to the task. At length after much

struggling and humping, and bruising of the wall on both sides, the

door was forced open as by a battering-ram; and the locksmith, steadily

regarding what appeared beyond, smote his thigh, elevated his eyebrows,

opened his mouth, and cried in a loud voice expressive of the utmost

consternation:

'Damme, if it an't Miggs come back!'

The young damsel whom he named no sooner heard these words, than

deserting a small boy and a very large box by which she was accompanied,

and advancing with such precipitation that her bonnet flew off her head,

burst into the room, clasped her hands (in which she held a pair of

pattens, one in each), raised her eyes devotedly to the ceiling, and

shed a flood of tears.

'The old story!' cried the locksmith, looking at her in inexpressible

desperation. 'She was born to be a damper, this young woman! nothing can

prevent it!'

'Ho master, ho mim!' cried Miggs, 'can I constrain my feelings in these

here once agin united moments! Ho Mr Warsen, here's blessedness

among relations, sir! Here's forgivenesses of injuries, here's

amicablenesses!'

The locksmith looked from his wife to Dolly, and from Dolly to Joe, and

from Joe to Miggs, with his eyebrows still elevated and his mouth still

open. When his eyes got back to Miggs, they rested on her; fascinated.

'To think,' cried Miggs with hysterical joy, 'that Mr Joe, and dear

Miss Dolly, has raly come together after all as has been said and done

contrairy! To see them two a-settin' along with him and her, so pleasant

and in all respects so affable and mild; and me not knowing of it, and

not being in the ways to make no preparations for their teas. Ho what a

cutting thing it is, and yet what sweet sensations is awoke within me!'

Either in clasping her hands again, or in an ecstasy of pious joy, Miss

Miggs clinked her pattens after the manner of a pair of cymbals, at this

juncture; and then resumed, in the softest accents:

'And did my missis think--ho goodness, did she think--as her own Miggs,

which supported her under so many trials, and understood her natur'

when them as intended well but acted rough, went so deep into her

feelings--did she think as her own Miggs would ever leave her? Did she

think as Miggs, though she was but a servant, and knowed that servitudes

was no inheritances, would forgit that she was the humble instruments

as always made it comfortable between them two when they fell out,

and always told master of the meekness and forgiveness of her blessed

dispositions! Did she think as Miggs had no attachments! Did she think

that wages was her only object!'

To none of these interrogatories, whereof every one was more

pathetically delivered than the last, did Mrs Varden answer one word:

but Miggs, not at all abashed by this circumstance, turned to the

small boy in attendance--her eldest nephew--son of her own married

sister--born in Golden Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, and bred in the

very shadow of the second bell-handle on the right-hand door-post--and

with a plentiful use of her pocket-handkerchief, addressed herself to

him: requesting that on his return home he would console his parents for

the loss of her, his aunt, by delivering to them a faithful statement

of his having left her in the bosom of that family, with which, as his

aforesaid parents well knew, her best affections were incorporated; that

he would remind them that nothing less than her imperious sense of duty,

and devoted attachment to her old master and missis, likewise Miss Dolly

and young Mr Joe, should ever have induced her to decline that pressing

invitation which they, his parents, had, as he could testify, given her,

to lodge and board with them, free of all cost and charge, for evermore;

lastly, that he would help her with her box upstairs, and then repair

straight home, bearing her blessing and her strong injunctions to mingle

in his prayers a supplication that he might in course of time grow up

a locksmith, or a Mr Joe, and have Mrs Vardens and Miss Dollys for his

relations and friends.

Having brought this admonition to an end--upon which, to say the truth,

the young gentleman for whose benefit it was designed, bestowed little

or no heed, having to all appearance his faculties absorbed in the

contemplation of the sweetmeats,--Miss Miggs signified to the company in

general that they were not to be uneasy, for she would soon return; and,

with her nephew's aid, prepared to bear her wardrobe up the staircase.

'My dear,' said the locksmith to his wife. 'Do you desire this?'

'I desire it!' she answered. 'I am astonished--I am amazed--at her

audacity. Let her leave the house this moment.'

Miggs, hearing this, let her end of the box fall heavily to the floor,

gave a very loud sniff, crossed her arms, screwed down the corners of

her mouth, and cried, in an ascending scale, 'Ho, good gracious!' three

distinct times.

'You hear what your mistress says, my love,' remarked the locksmith.

'You had better go, I think. Stay; take this with you, for the sake of

old service.'

Miss Miggs clutched the bank-note he took from his pocket-book and held

out to her; deposited it in a small, red leather purse; put the purse

in her pocket (displaying, as she did so, a considerable portion of some

under-garment, made of flannel, and more black cotton stocking than is

commonly seen in public); and, tossing her head, as she looked at Mrs

Varden, repeated--

'Ho, good gracious!'

'I think you said that once before, my dear,' observed the locksmith.

'Times is changed, is they, mim!' cried Miggs, bridling; 'you can spare

me now, can you? You can keep 'em down without me? You're not in wants

of any one to scold, or throw the blame upon, no longer, an't you, mim?

I'm glad to find you've grown so independent. I wish you joy, I'm sure!'

With that she dropped a curtsey, and keeping her head erect, her ear

towards Mrs Varden, and her eye on the rest of the company, as she

alluded to them in her remarks, proceeded:

'I'm quite delighted, I'm sure, to find sich independency, feeling sorry

though, at the same time, mim, that you should have been forced into

submissions when you couldn't help yourself--he he he! It must be great

vexations, 'specially considering how ill you always spoke of Mr Joe--to

have him for a son-in-law at last; and I wonder Miss Dolly can put

up with him, either, after being off and on for so many years with a

coachmaker. But I HAVE heerd say, that the coachmaker thought twice

about it--he he he!--and that he told a young man as was a frind of his,

that he hoped he knowed better than to be drawed into that; though she

and all the family DID pull uncommon strong!'

Here she paused for a reply, and receiving none, went on as before.

'I HAVE heerd say, mim, that the illnesses of some ladies was all

pretensions, and that they could faint away, stone dead, whenever they

had the inclinations so to do. Of course I never see sich cases with my

own eyes--ho no! He he he! Nor master neither--ho no! He he he! I HAVE

heerd the neighbours make remark as some one as they was acquainted

with, was a poor good-natur'd mean-spirited creetur, as went out

fishing for a wife one day, and caught a Tartar. Of course I never to my

knowledge see the poor person himself. Nor did you neither, mim--ho no.

I wonder who it can be--don't you, mim? No doubt you do, mim. Ho yes. He

he he!'

Again Miggs paused for a reply; and none being offered, was so oppressed

with teeming spite and spleen, that she seemed like to burst.

'I'm glad Miss Dolly can laugh,' cried Miggs with a feeble titter. 'I

like to see folks a-laughing--so do you, mim, don't you? You was always

glad to see people in spirits, wasn't you, mim? And you always did your

best to keep 'em cheerful, didn't you, mim? Though there an't such a

great deal to laugh at now either; is there, mim? It an't so much of a

catch, after looking out so sharp ever since she was a little chit, and

costing such a deal in dress and show, to get a poor, common soldier,

with one arm, is it, mim? He he! I wouldn't have a husband with one arm,

anyways. I would have two arms. I would have two arms, if it was me,

though instead of hands they'd only got hooks at the end, like our

dustman!'

Miss Miggs was about to add, and had, indeed, begun to add, that,

taking them in the abstract, dustmen were far more eligible matches than

soldiers, though, to be sure, when people were past choosing they must

take the best they could get, and think themselves well off too; but her

vexation and chagrin being of that internally bitter sort which finds no

relief in words, and is aggravated to madness by want of contradiction,

she could hold out no longer, and burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

In this extremity she fell on the unlucky nephew, tooth and nail, and

plucking a handful of hair from his head, demanded to know how long she

was to stand there to be insulted, and whether or no he meant to help

her to carry out the box again, and if he took a pleasure in hearing his

family reviled: with other inquiries of that nature; at which disgrace

and provocation, the small boy, who had been all this time gradually

lashed into rebellion by the sight of unattainable pastry, walked off

indignant, leaving his aunt and the box to follow at their leisure.

Somehow or other, by dint of pushing and pulling, they did attain the

street at last; where Miss Miggs, all blowzed with the exertion of

getting there, and with her sobs and tears, sat down upon her property

to rest and grieve, until she could ensnare some other youth to help her

home.

'It's a thing to laugh at, Martha, not to care for,' whispered the

locksmith, as he followed his wife to the window, and good-humouredly

dried her eyes. 'What does it matter? You had seen your fault before.

Come! Bring up Toby again, my dear; Dolly shall sing us a song; and

we'll be all the merrier for this interruption!'

Chapter 81

Another month had passed, and the end of August had nearly come, when Mr

Haredale stood alone in the mail-coach office at Bristol. Although but a

few weeks had intervened since his conversation with Edward Chester and

his niece, in the locksmith's house, and he had made no change, in the

mean time, in his accustomed style of dress, his appearance was greatly

altered. He looked much older, and more care-worn. Agitation and anxiety

of mind scatter wrinkles and grey hairs with no unsparing hand; but

deeper traces follow on the silent uprooting of old habits, and severing

of dear, familiar ties. The affections may not be so easily wounded as

the passions, but their hurts are deeper, and more lasting. He was now a

solitary man, and the heart within him was dreary and lonesome.

He was not the less alone for having spent so many years in seclusion

and retirement. This was no better preparation than a round of social

cheerfulness: perhaps it even increased the keenness of his sensibility.

He had been so dependent upon her for companionship and love; she had

come to be so much a part and parcel of his existence; they had had so

many cares and thoughts in common, which no one else had shared; that

losing her was beginning life anew, and being required to summon up the

hope and elasticity of youth, amid the doubts, distrusts, and weakened

energies of age.

The effort he had made to part from her with seeming cheerfulness and

hope--and they had parted only yesterday--left him the more depressed.

With these feelings, he was about to revisit London for the last time,

and look once more upon the walls of their old home, before turning his

back upon it, for ever.

The journey was a very different one, in those days, from what the

present generation find it; but it came to an end, as the longest

journey will, and he stood again in the streets of the metropolis. He

lay at the inn where the coach stopped, and resolved, before he went

to bed, that he would make his arrival known to no one; would spend but

another night in London; and would spare himself the pang of parting,

even with the honest locksmith.

Such conditions of the mind as that to which he was a prey when he lay

down to rest, are favourable to the growth of disordered fancies, and

uneasy visions. He knew this, even in the horror with which he started

from his first sleep, and threw up the window to dispel it by the

presence of some object, beyond the room, which had not been, as it

were, the witness of his dream. But it was not a new terror of the

night; it had been present to him before, in many shapes; it had haunted

him in bygone times, and visited his pillow again and again. If it had

been but an ugly object, a childish spectre, haunting his sleep, its

return, in its old form, might have awakened a momentary sensation of

fear, which, almost in the act of waking, would have passed away. This

disquiet, however, lingered about him, and would yield to nothing. When

he closed his eyes again, he felt it hovering near; as he slowly sunk

into a slumber, he was conscious of its gathering strength and purpose,

and gradually assuming its recent shape; when he sprang up from his bed,

the same phantom vanished from his heated brain, and left him filled

with a dread against which reason and waking thought were powerless.

The sun was up, before he could shake it off. He rose late, but not

refreshed, and remained within doors all that day. He had a fancy for

paying his last visit to the old spot in the evening, for he had been

accustomed to walk there at that season, and desired to see it under the

aspect that was most familiar to him. At such an hour as would afford

him time to reach it a little before sunset, he left the inn, and turned

into the busy street.

He had not gone far, and was thoughtfully making his way among the noisy

crowd, when he felt a hand upon his shoulder, and, turning, recognised

one of the waiters from the inn, who begged his pardon, but he had left

his sword behind him.

'Why have you brought it to me?' he asked, stretching out his hand, and

yet not taking it from the man, but looking at him in a disturbed and

agitated manner.

The man was sorry to have disobliged him, and would carry it back again.

The gentleman had said that he was going a little way into the country,

and that he might not return until late. The roads were not very safe

for single travellers after dark; and, since the riots, gentlemen had

been more careful than ever, not to trust themselves unarmed in lonely

places. 'We thought you were a stranger, sir,' he added, 'and that you

might believe our roads to be better than they are; but perhaps you know

them well, and carry fire-arms--'

He took the sword, and putting it up at his side, thanked the man, and

resumed his walk.

It was long remembered that he did this in a manner so strange, and

with such a trembling hand, that the messenger stood looking after his

retreating figure, doubtful whether he ought not to follow, and watch

him. It was long remembered that he had been heard pacing his bedroom in

the dead of the night; that the attendants had mentioned to each other

in the morning, how fevered and how pale he looked; and that when this

man went back to the inn, he told a fellow-servant that what he had

observed in this short interview lay very heavy on his mind, and that he

feared the gentleman intended to destroy himself, and would never come

back alive.

With a half-consciousness that his manner had attracted the man's

attention (remembering the expression of his face when they parted),

Mr Haredale quickened his steps; and arriving at a stand of coaches,

bargained with the driver of the best to carry him so far on his road as

the point where the footway struck across the fields, and to await his

return at a house of entertainment which was within a stone's-throw of

that place. Arriving there in due course, he alighted and pursued his

way on foot.

He passed so near the Maypole, that he could see its smoke rising from

among the trees, while a flock of pigeons--some of its old inhabitants,

doubtless--sailed gaily home to roost, between him and the unclouded

sky. 'The old house will brighten up now,' he said, as he looked towards

it, 'and there will be a merry fireside beneath its ivied roof. It is

some comfort to know that everything will not be blighted hereabouts. I

shall be glad to have one picture of life and cheerfulness to turn to,

in my mind!'

He resumed his walk, and bent his steps towards the Warren. It was a

clear, calm, silent evening, with hardly a breath of wind to stir the

leaves, or any sound to break the stillness of the time, but drowsy

sheep-bells tinkling in the distance, and, at intervals, the far-off

lowing of cattle, or bark of village dogs. The sky was radiant with

the softened glory of sunset; and on the earth, and in the air, a deep

repose prevailed. At such an hour, he arrived at the deserted mansion

which had been his home so long, and looked for the last time upon its

blackened walls.

The ashes of the commonest fire are melancholy things, for in them there

is an image of death and ruin,--of something that has been bright, and

is but dull, cold, dreary dust,--with which our nature forces us to

sympathise. How much more sad the crumbled embers of a home: the casting

down of that great altar, where the worst among us sometimes perform

the worship of the heart; and where the best have offered up such

sacrifices, and done such deeds of heroism, as, chronicled, would put

the proudest temples of old Time, with all their vaunting annals, to the

blush!

He roused himself from a long train of meditation, and walked slowly

round the house. It was by this time almost dark.

He had nearly made the circuit of the building, when he uttered a

half-suppressed exclamation, started, and stood still. Reclining, in an

easy attitude, with his back against a tree, and contemplating the ruin

with an expression of pleasure,--a pleasure so keen that it overcame his

habitual indolence and command of feature, and displayed itself utterly

free from all restraint or reserve,--before him, on his own ground,

and triumphing then, as he had triumphed in every misfortune and

disappointment of his life, stood the man whose presence, of all

mankind, in any place, and least of all in that, he could the least

endure.

Although his blood so rose against this man, and his wrath so stirred

within him, that he could have struck him dead, he put such fierce

constraint upon himself that he passed him without a word or look. Yes,

and he would have gone on, and not turned, though to resist the Devil

who poured such hot temptation in his brain, required an effort scarcely

to be achieved, if this man had not himself summoned him to stop: and

that, with an assumed compassion in his voice which drove him well-nigh

mad, and in an instant routed all the self-command it had been

anguish--acute, poignant anguish--to sustain.

All consideration, reflection, mercy, forbearance; everything by which

a goaded man can curb his rage and passion; fled from him as he turned

back. And yet he said, slowly and quite calmly--far more calmly than he

had ever spoken to him before:

'Why have you called to me?'

'To remark,' said Sir John Chester with his wonted composure, 'what an

odd chance it is, that we should meet here!'

'It IS a strange chance.'

'Strange? The most remarkable and singular thing in the world. I never

ride in the evening; I have not done so for years. The whim seized me,

quite unaccountably, in the middle of last night.--How very picturesque

this is!'--He pointed, as he spoke, to the dismantled house, and raised

his glass to his eye.

'You praise your own work very freely.'

Sir John let fall his glass; inclined his face towards him with an air

of the most courteous inquiry; and slightly shook his head as though he

were remarking to himself, 'I fear this animal is going mad!'

'I say you praise your own work very freely,' repeated Mr Haredale.

'Work!' echoed Sir John, looking smilingly round. 'Mine!--I beg your

pardon, I really beg your pardon--'

'Why, you see,' said Mr Haredale, 'those walls. You see those tottering

gables. You see on every side where fire and smoke have raged. You see

the destruction that has been wanton here. Do you not?'

'My good friend,' returned the knight, gently checking his impatience

with his hand, 'of course I do. I see everything you speak of, when you

stand aside, and do not interpose yourself between the view and me. I

am very sorry for you. If I had not had the pleasure to meet you here,

I think I should have written to tell you so. But you don't bear it as

well as I had expected--excuse me--no, you don't indeed.'

He pulled out his snuff-box, and addressing him with the superior air of

a man who, by reason of his higher nature, has a right to read a moral

lesson to another, continued:

'For you are a philosopher, you know--one of that stern and rigid school

who are far above the weaknesses of mankind in general. You are removed,

a long way, from the frailties of the crowd. You contemplate them from a

height, and rail at them with a most impressive bitterness. I have heard

you.'

--'And shall again,' said Mr Haredale.

'Thank you,' returned the other. 'Shall we walk as we talk? The damp

falls rather heavily. Well,--as you please. But I grieve to say that I

can spare you only a very few moments.'

'I would,' said Mr Haredale, 'you had spared me none. I would, with

all my soul, you had been in Paradise (if such a monstrous lie could be

enacted), rather than here to-night.'

'Nay,' returned the other--'really--you do yourself injustice. You are a

rough companion, but I would not go so far to avoid you.'

'Listen to me,' said Mr Haredale. 'Listen to me.'

'While you rail?' inquired Sir John.

'While I deliver your infamy. You urged and stimulated to do your work

a fit agent, but one who in his nature--in the very essence of his

being--is a traitor, and who has been false to you (despite the sympathy

you two should have together) as he has been to all others. With hints,

and looks, and crafty words, which told again are nothing, you set on

Gashford to this work--this work before us now. With these same hints,

and looks, and crafty words, which told again are nothing, you urged

him on to gratify the deadly hate he owes me--I have earned it, I thank

Heaven--by the abduction and dishonour of my niece. You did. I see

denial in your looks,' he cried, abruptly pointing in his face, and

stepping back, 'and denial is a lie!'

He had his hand upon his sword; but the knight, with a contemptuous

smile, replied to him as coldly as before.

'You will take notice, sir--if you can discriminate sufficiently--that I

have taken the trouble to deny nothing. Your discernment is hardly fine

enough for the perusal of faces, not of a kind as coarse as your speech;

nor has it ever been, that I remember; or, in one face that I could

name, you would have read indifference, not to say disgust, somewhat

sooner than you did. I speak of a long time ago,--but you understand

me.'

'Disguise it as you will, you mean denial. Denial explicit or reserved,

expressed or left to be inferred, is still a lie. You say you don't

deny. Do you admit?'

'You yourself,' returned Sir John, suffering the current of his

speech to flow as smoothly as if it had been stemmed by no one word of

interruption, 'publicly proclaimed the character of the gentleman in

question (I think it was in Westminster Hall) in terms which relieve me

from the necessity of making any further allusion to him. You may

have been warranted; you may not have been; I can't say. Assuming the

gentleman to be what you described, and to have made to you or any other

person any statements that may have happened to suggest themselves to

him, for the sake of his own security, or for the sake of money, or for

his own amusement, or for any other consideration,--I have nothing to

say of him, except that his extremely degrading situation appears to me

to be shared with his employers. You are so very plain yourself, that

you will excuse a little freedom in me, I am sure.'

'Attend to me again, Sir John but once,' cried Mr Haredale; 'in your

every look, and word, and gesture, you tell me this was not your act. I

tell you that it was, and that you tampered with the man I speak of, and

with your wretched son (whom God forgive!) to do this deed. You talk of

degradation and character. You told me once that you had purchased the

absence of the poor idiot and his mother, when (as I have discovered

since, and then suspected) you had gone to tempt them, and had found

them flown. To you I traced the insinuation that I alone reaped any

harvest from my brother's death; and all the foul attacks and whispered

calumnies that followed in its train. In every action of my life, from

that first hope which you converted into grief and desolation, you have

stood, like an adverse fate, between me and peace. In all, you have ever

been the same cold-blooded, hollow, false, unworthy villain. For the

second time, and for the last, I cast these charges in your teeth, and

spurn you from me as I would a faithless dog!'

With that he raised his arm, and struck him on the breast so that he

staggered. Sir John, the instant he recovered, drew his sword, threw

away the scabbard and his hat, and running on his adversary made a

desperate lunge at his heart, which, but that his guard was quick and

true, would have stretched him dead upon the grass.

In the act of striking him, the torrent of his opponent's rage had

reached a stop. He parried his rapid thrusts, without returning them,

and called to him, with a frantic kind of terror in his face, to keep

back.

'Not to-night! not to-night!' he cried. 'In God's name, not tonight!'

Seeing that he lowered his weapon, and that he would not thrust in turn,

Sir John lowered his.

'Not to-night!' his adversary cried. 'Be warned in time!'

'You told me--it must have been in a sort of inspiration--' said Sir

John, quite deliberately, though now he dropped his mask, and showed his

hatred in his face, 'that this was the last time. Be assured it is! Did

you believe our last meeting was forgotten? Did you believe that your

every word and look was not to be accounted for, and was not well

remembered? Do you believe that I have waited your time, or you mine?

What kind of man is he who entered, with all his sickening cant of

honesty and truth, into a bond with me to prevent a marriage he affected

to dislike, and when I had redeemed my part to the spirit and the

letter, skulked from his, and brought the match about in his own time,

to rid himself of a burden he had grown tired of, and cast a spurious

lustre on his house?'

'I have acted,' cried Mr Haredale, 'with honour and in good faith. I do

so now. Do not force me to renew this duel to-night!'

'You said my "wretched" son, I think?' said Sir John, with a smile.

'Poor fool! The dupe of such a shallow knave--trapped into marriage by

such an uncle and by such a niece--he well deserves your pity. But he

is no longer a son of mine: you are welcome to the prize your craft has

made, sir.'

'Once more,' cried his opponent, wildly stamping on the ground,

'although you tear me from my better angel, I implore you not to come

within the reach of my sword to-night. Oh! why were you here at all! Why

have we met! To-morrow would have cast us far apart for ever!'

'That being the case,' returned Sir John, without the least emotion, 'it

is very fortunate we have met to-night. Haredale, I have always despised

you, as you know, but I have given you credit for a species of brute

courage. For the honour of my judgment, which I had thought a good one,

I am sorry to find you a coward.'

Not another word was spoken on either side. They crossed swords, though

it was now quite dusk, and attacked each other fiercely. They were

well matched, and each was thoroughly skilled in the management of his

weapon.

After a few seconds they grew hotter and more furious, and pressing on

each other inflicted and received several slight wounds. It was directly

after receiving one of these in his arm, that Mr Haredale, making a

keener thrust as he felt the warm blood spirting out, plunged his sword

through his opponent's body to the hilt.

Their eyes met, and were on each other as he drew it out. He put his

arm about the dying man, who repulsed him, feebly, and dropped upon the

turf. Raising himself upon his hands, he gazed at him for an instant,

with scorn and hatred in his look; but, seeming to remember, even then,

that this expression would distort his features after death, he tried

to smile, and, faintly moving his right hand, as if to hide his bloody

linen in his vest, fell back dead--the phantom of last night.

Chapter the Last

A parting glance at such of the actors in this little history as it has

not, in the course of its events, dismissed, will bring it to an end.

Mr Haredale fled that night. Before pursuit could be begun, indeed

before Sir John was traced or missed, he had left the kingdom. Repairing

straight to a religious establishment, known throughout Europe for the

rigour and severity of its discipline, and for the merciless penitence

it exacted from those who sought its shelter as a refuge from the world,

he took the vows which thenceforth shut him out from nature and

his kind, and after a few remorseful years was buried in its gloomy

cloisters.

Two days elapsed before the body of Sir John was found. As soon as

it was recognised and carried home, the faithful valet, true to his

master's creed, eloped with all the cash and movables he could lay his

hands on, and started as a finished gentleman upon his own account. In

this career he met with great success, and would certainly have married

an heiress in the end, but for an unlucky check which led to his

premature decease. He sank under a contagious disorder, very prevalent

at that time, and vulgarly termed the jail fever.

Lord George Gordon, remaining in his prison in the Tower until Monday

the fifth of February in the following year, was on that day solemnly

tried at Westminster for High Treason. Of this crime he was, after a

patient investigation, declared Not Guilty; upon the ground that there

was no proof of his having called the multitude together with any

traitorous or unlawful intentions. Yet so many people were there, still,

to whom those riots taught no lesson of reproof or moderation, that a

public subscription was set on foot in Scotland to defray the cost of

his defence.

For seven years afterwards he remained, at the strong intercession of

his friends, comparatively quiet; saving that he, every now and then,

took occasion to display his zeal for the Protestant faith in some

extravagant proceeding which was the delight of its enemies; and saving,

besides, that he was formally excommunicated by the Archbishop of

Canterbury, for refusing to appear as a witness in the Ecclesiastical

Court when cited for that purpose. In the year 1788 he was stimulated by

some new insanity to write and publish an injurious pamphlet, reflecting

on the Queen of France, in very violent terms. Being indicted for the

libel, and (after various strange demonstrations in court) found guilty,

he fled into Holland in place of appearing to receive sentence: from

whence, as the quiet burgomasters of Amsterdam had no relish for his

company, he was sent home again with all speed. Arriving in the month of

July at Harwich, and going thence to Birmingham, he made in the latter

place, in August, a public profession of the Jewish religion; and

figured there as a Jew until he was arrested, and brought back to London

to receive the sentence he had evaded. By virtue of this sentence he

was, in the month of December, cast into Newgate for five years and ten

months, and required besides to pay a large fine, and to furnish heavy

securities for his future good behaviour.

After addressing, in the midsummer of the following year, an appeal to

the commiseration of the National Assembly of France, which the English

minister refused to sanction, he composed himself to undergo his full

term of punishment; and suffering his beard to grow nearly to his waist,

and conforming in all respects to the ceremonies of his new religion, he

applied himself to the study of history, and occasionally to the art

of painting, in which, in his younger days, he had shown some skill.

Deserted by his former friends, and treated in all respects like the

worst criminal in the jail, he lingered on, quite cheerful and resigned,

until the 1st of November 1793, when he died in his cell, being then

only three-and-forty years of age.

Many men with fewer sympathies for the distressed and needy, with less

abilities and harder hearts, have made a shining figure and left a

brilliant fame. He had his mourners. The prisoners bemoaned his loss,

and missed him; for though his means were not large, his charity was

great, and in bestowing alms among them he considered the necessities of

all alike, and knew no distinction of sect or creed. There are wise men

in the highways of the world who may learn something, even from this

poor crazy lord who died in Newgate.

To the last, he was truly served by bluff John Grueby. John was at his

side before he had been four-and-twenty hours in the Tower, and never

left him until he died. He had one other constant attendant, in the

person of a beautiful Jewish girl; who attached herself to him

from feelings half religious, half romantic, but whose virtuous and

disinterested character appears to have been beyond the censure even of

the most censorious.

Gashford deserted him, of course. He subsisted for a time upon his

traffic in his master's secrets; and, this trade failing when the stock

was quite exhausted, procured an appointment in the honourable corps

of spies and eavesdroppers employed by the government. As one of these

wretched underlings, he did his drudgery, sometimes abroad, sometimes at

home, and long endured the various miseries of such a station. Ten or a

dozen years ago--not more--a meagre, wan old man, diseased and miserably

poor, was found dead in his bed at an obscure inn in the Borough, where

he was quite unknown. He had taken poison. There was no clue to his

name; but it was discovered from certain entries in a pocket-book he

carried, that he had been secretary to Lord George Gordon in the time of

the famous riots.

Many months after the re-establishment of peace and order, and even when

it had ceased to be the town-talk, that every military officer, kept at

free quarters by the City during the late alarms, had cost for his board

and lodging four pounds four per day, and every private soldier two and

twopence halfpenny; many months after even this engrossing topic was

forgotten, and the United Bulldogs were to a man all killed, imprisoned,

or transported, Mr Simon Tappertit, being removed from a hospital

to prison, and thence to his place of trial, was discharged by

proclamation, on two wooden legs. Shorn of his graceful limbs, and

brought down from his high estate to circumstances of utter destitution,

and the deepest misery, he made shift to stump back to his old master,

and beg for some relief. By the locksmith's advice and aid, he was

established in business as a shoeblack, and opened shop under an archway

near the Horse Guards. This being a central quarter, he quickly made a

very large connection; and on levee days, was sometimes known to have

as many as twenty half-pay officers waiting their turn for polishing.

Indeed his trade increased to that extent, that in course of time he

entertained no less than two apprentices, besides taking for his wife

the widow of an eminent bone and rag collector, formerly of Millbank.

With this lady (who assisted in the business) he lived in great domestic

happiness, only chequered by those little storms which serve to clear

the atmosphere of wedlock, and brighten its horizon. In some of these

gusts of bad weather, Mr Tappertit would, in the assertion of his

prerogative, so far forget himself, as to correct his lady with a brush,

or boot, or shoe; while she (but only in extreme cases) would retaliate

by taking off his legs, and leaving him exposed to the derision of those

urchins who delight in mischief.

Miss Miggs, baffled in all her schemes, matrimonial and otherwise, and

cast upon a thankless, undeserving world, turned very sharp and sour;

and did at length become so acid, and did so pinch and slap and tweak

the hair and noses of the youth of Golden Lion Court, that she was by

one consent expelled that sanctuary, and desired to bless some other

spot of earth, in preference. It chanced at that moment, that the

justices of the peace for Middlesex proclaimed by public placard that

they stood in need of a female turnkey for the County Bridewell, and

appointed a day and hour for the inspection of candidates. Miss Miggs

attending at the time appointed, was instantly chosen and selected from

one hundred and twenty-four competitors, and at once promoted to

the office; which she held until her decease, more than thirty years

afterwards, remaining single all that time. It was observed of this lady

that while she was inflexible and grim to all her female flock, she was

particularly so to those who could establish any claim to beauty: and

it was often remarked as a proof of her indomitable virtue and severe

chastity, that to such as had been frail she showed no mercy; always

falling upon them on the slightest occasion, or on no occasion at all,

with the fullest measure of her wrath. Among other useful inventions

which she practised upon this class of offenders and bequeathed to

posterity, was the art of inflicting an exquisitely vicious poke or dig

with the wards of a key in the small of the back, near the spine. She

likewise originated a mode of treading by accident (in pattens) on

such as had small feet; also very remarkable for its ingenuity, and

previously quite unknown.

It was not very long, you may be sure, before Joe Willet and Dolly

Varden were made husband and wife, and with a handsome sum in bank (for

the locksmith could afford to give his daughter a good dowry), reopened

the Maypole. It was not very long, you may be sure, before a red-faced

little boy was seen staggering about the Maypole passage, and kicking up

his heels on the green before the door. It was not very long, counting

by years, before there was a red-faced little girl, another red-faced

little boy, and a whole troop of girls and boys: so that, go to Chigwell

when you would, there would surely be seen, either in the village

street, or on the green, or frolicking in the farm-yard--for it was a

farm now, as well as a tavern--more small Joes and small Dollys than

could be easily counted. It was not a very long time before these

appearances ensued; but it WAS a VERY long time before Joe looked five

years older, or Dolly either, or the locksmith either, or his wife

either: for cheerfulness and content are great beautifiers, and are

famous preservers of youthful looks, depend upon it.

It was a long time, too, before there was such a country inn as the

Maypole, in all England: indeed it is a great question whether there has

ever been such another to this hour, or ever will be. It was a long time

too--for Never, as the proverb says, is a long day--before they forgot

to have an interest in wounded soldiers at the Maypole, or before Joe

omitted to refresh them, for the sake of his old campaign; or before

the serjeant left off looking in there, now and then; or before they

fatigued themselves, or each other, by talking on these occasions of

battles and sieges, and hard weather and hard service, and a thousand

things belonging to a soldier's life. As to the great silver snuff-box

which the King sent Joe with his own hand, because of his conduct in the

Riots, what guest ever went to the Maypole without putting finger and

thumb into that box, and taking a great pinch, though he had never taken

a pinch of snuff before, and almost sneezed himself into convulsions

even then? As to the purple-faced vintner, where is the man who lived in

those times and never saw HIM at the Maypole: to all appearance as much

at home in the best room, as if he lived there? And as to the feastings

and christenings, and revellings at Christmas, and celebrations of

birthdays, wedding-days, and all manner of days, both at the Maypole and

the Golden Key,--if they are not notorious, what facts are?

Mr Willet the elder, having been by some extraordinary means possessed

with the idea that Joe wanted to be married, and that it would be well

for him, his father, to retire into private life, and enable him to live

in comfort, took up his abode in a small cottage at Chigwell; where

they widened and enlarged the fireplace for him, hung up the boiler,

and furthermore planted in the little garden outside the front-door, a

fictitious Maypole; so that he was quite at home directly. To this, his

new habitation, Tom Cobb, Phil Parkes, and Solomon Daisy went regularly

every night: and in the chimney-corner, they all four quaffed, and

smoked, and prosed, and dozed, as they had done of old. It being

accidentally discovered after a short time that Mr Willet still appeared

to consider himself a landlord by profession, Joe provided him with

a slate, upon which the old man regularly scored up vast accounts for

meat, drink, and tobacco. As he grew older this passion increased upon

him; and it became his delight to chalk against the name of each of his

cronies a sum of enormous magnitude, and impossible to be paid: and such

was his secret joy in these entries, that he would be perpetually seen

going behind the door to look at them, and coming forth again, suffused

with the liveliest satisfaction.

He never recovered the surprise the Rioters had given him, and remained

in the same mental condition down to the last moment of his life. It was

like to have been brought to a speedy termination by the first sight of

his first grandchild, which appeared to fill him with the belief that

some alarming miracle had happened to Joe. Being promptly blooded,

however, by a skilful surgeon, he rallied; and although the doctors

all agreed, on his being attacked with symptoms of apoplexy six months

afterwards, that he ought to die, and took it very ill that he did

not, he remained alive--possibly on account of his constitutional

slowness--for nearly seven years more, when he was one morning found

speechless in his bed. He lay in this state, free from all tokens

of uneasiness, for a whole week, when he was suddenly restored to

consciousness by hearing the nurse whisper in his son's ear that he was

going. 'I'm a-going, Joseph,' said Mr Willet, turning round upon the

instant, 'to the Salwanners'--and immediately gave up the ghost.

He left a large sum of money behind him; even more than he was supposed

to have been worth, although the neighbours, according to the custom of

mankind in calculating the wealth that other people ought to have saved,

had estimated his property in good round numbers. Joe inherited the

whole; so that he became a man of great consequence in those parts, and

was perfectly independent.

Some time elapsed before Barnaby got the better of the shock he had

sustained, or regained his old health and gaiety. But he recovered

by degrees: and although he could never separate his condemnation and

escape from the idea of a terrific dream, he became, in other respects,

more rational. Dating from the time of his recovery, he had a better

memory and greater steadiness of purpose; but a dark cloud overhung his

whole previous existence, and never cleared away.

He was not the less happy for this, for his love of freedom and interest

in all that moved or grew, or had its being in the elements, remained

to him unimpaired. He lived with his mother on the Maypole farm, tending

the poultry and the cattle, working in a garden of his own, and helping

everywhere. He was known to every bird and beast about the place, and

had a name for every one. Never was there a lighter-hearted husbandman,

a creature more popular with young and old, a blither or more happy soul

than Barnaby; and though he was free to ramble where he would, he never

quitted Her, but was for evermore her stay and comfort.

It was remarkable that although he had that dim sense of the past, he

sought out Hugh's dog, and took him under his care; and that he never

could be tempted into London. When the Riots were many years old,

and Edward and his wife came back to England with a family almost as

numerous as Dolly's, and one day appeared at the Maypole porch, he knew

them instantly, and wept and leaped for joy. But neither to visit them,

nor on any other pretence, no matter how full of promise and enjoyment,

could he be persuaded to set foot in the streets: nor did he ever

conquer this repugnance or look upon the town again.

Grip soon recovered his looks, and became as glossy and sleek as ever.

But he was profoundly silent. Whether he had forgotten the art of Polite

Conversation in Newgate, or had made a vow in those troubled times to

forego, for a period, the display of his accomplishments, is matter of

uncertainty; but certain it is that for a whole year he never indulged

in any other sound than a grave, decorous croak. At the expiration of

that term, the morning being very bright and sunny, he was heard to

address himself to the horses in the stable, upon the subject of the

Kettle, so often mentioned in these pages; and before the witness who

overheard him could run into the house with the intelligence, and add

to it upon his solemn affirmation the statement that he had heard him

laugh, the bird himself advanced with fantastic steps to the very door

of the bar, and there cried, 'I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil!'

with extraordinary rapture.

From that period (although he was supposed to be much affected by the

death of Mr Willet senior), he constantly practised and improved himself

in the vulgar tongue; and, as he was a mere infant for a raven when

Barnaby was grey, he has very probably gone on talking to the present

time.