DAVID COPPERFIELD

By Charles Dickens

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO

THE HON. Mr. AND Mrs. RICHARD WATSON,

OF ROCKINGHAM, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

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PREFACE TO 1850 EDITION

I do not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from this Book, in

the first sensations of having finished it, to refer to it with the

composure which this formal heading would seem to require. My interest

in it, is so recent and strong; and my mind is so divided between

pleasure and regret--pleasure in the achievement of a long design,

regret in the separation from many companions--that I am in danger of

wearying the reader whom I love, with personal confidences, and private

emotions.

Besides which, all that I could say of the Story, to any purpose, I have

endeavoured to say in it.

It would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know, how sorrowfully

the pen is laid down at the close of a two-years' imaginative task; or

how an Author feels as if he were dismissing some portion of himself

into the shadowy world, when a crowd of the creatures of his brain

are going from him for ever. Yet, I have nothing else to tell; unless,

indeed, I were to confess (which might be of less moment still) that no

one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I have

believed it in the writing.

Instead of looking back, therefore, I will look forward. I cannot close

this Volume more agreeably to myself, than with a hopeful glance towards

the time when I shall again put forth my two green leaves once a month,

and with a faithful remembrance of the genial sun and showers that have

fallen on these leaves of David Copperfield, and made me happy.

London, October, 1850.

PREFACE TO THE CHARLES DICKENS EDITION

I REMARKED in the original Preface to this Book, that I did not find it

easy to get sufficiently far away from it, in the first sensations of

having finished it, to refer to it with the composure which this formal

heading would seem to require. My interest in it was so recent and

strong, and my mind was so divided between pleasure and regret--pleasure

in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many

companions--that I was in danger of wearying the reader with personal

confidences and private emotions.

Besides which, all that I could have said of the Story to any purpose, I

had endeavoured to say in it.

It would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know how sorrowfully the

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were to confess (which might be of less moment still), that no one can

ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I believed it in

the writing.

So true are these avowals at the present day, that I can now only take

the reader into one confidence more. Of all my books, I like this the

best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child

of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I

love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a

favourite child. And his name is

DAVID COPPERFIELD.

1869

THE PERSONAL HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE OF DAVID COPPERFIELD THE YOUNGER

CHAPTER 1. I AM BORN

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that

station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my

life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have

been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night.

It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry,

simultaneously.

In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by

the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighbourhood who had taken a

lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility

of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be

unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and

spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to

all unlucky infants of either gender, born towards the small hours on a

Friday night.

I need say nothing here, on the first head, because nothing can show

better than my history whether that prediction was verified or falsified

by the result. On the second branch of the question, I will only remark,

that unless I ran through that part of my inheritance while I was still

a baby, I have not come into it yet. But I do not at all complain of

having been kept out of this property; and if anybody else should be in

the present enjoyment of it, he is heartily welcome to keep it.

I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the

newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas. Whether sea-going

people were short of money about that time, or were short of faith and

preferred cork jackets, I don't know; all I know is, that there was but

one solitary bidding, and that was from an attorney connected with the

bill-broking business, who offered two pounds in cash, and the balance

in sherry, but declined to be guaranteed from drowning on any higher

bargain. Consequently the advertisement was withdrawn at a dead

loss--for as to sherry, my poor dear mother's own sherry was in the

market then--and ten years afterwards, the caul was put up in a raffle

down in our part of the country, to fifty members at half-a-crown a

head, the winner to spend five shillings. I was present myself, and I

remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of

myself being disposed of in that way. The caul was won, I recollect, by

an old lady with a hand-basket, who, very reluctantly, produced from it

the stipulated five shillings, all in halfpence, and twopence halfpenny

short--as it took an immense time and a great waste of arithmetic, to

endeavour without any effect to prove to her. It is a fact which will

be long remembered as remarkable down there, that she was never drowned,

but died triumphantly in bed, at ninety-two. I have understood that it

was, to the last, her proudest boast, that she never had been on the

water in her life, except upon a bridge; and that over her tea (to which

she was extremely partial) she, to the last, expressed her indignation

at the impiety of mariners and others, who had the presumption to go

'meandering' about the world. It was in vain to represent to her

that some conveniences, tea perhaps included, resulted from this

objectionable practice. She always returned, with greater emphasis and

with an instinctive knowledge of the strength of her objection, 'Let us

have no meandering.'

Not to meander myself, at present, I will go back to my birth.

I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, or 'there by', as they say in

Scotland. I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon

the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it. There is

something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw

me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have

of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the

churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it

lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour

was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house

were--almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes--bolted and locked

against it.

An aunt of my father's, and consequently a great-aunt of mine, of whom

I shall have more to relate by and by, was the principal magnate of our

family. Miss Trotwood, or Miss Betsey, as my poor mother always called

her, when she sufficiently overcame her dread of this formidable

personage to mention her at all (which was seldom), had been married

to a husband younger than herself, who was very handsome, except in the

sense of the homely adage, 'handsome is, that handsome does'--for he

was strongly suspected of having beaten Miss Betsey, and even of having

once, on a disputed question of supplies, made some hasty but determined

arrangements to throw her out of a two pair of stairs' window. These

evidences of an incompatibility of temper induced Miss Betsey to pay him

off, and effect a separation by mutual consent. He went to India with

his capital, and there, according to a wild legend in our family, he was

once seen riding on an elephant, in company with a Baboon; but I think

it must have been a Baboo--or a Begum. Anyhow, from India tidings of his

death reached home, within ten years. How they affected my aunt, nobody

knew; for immediately upon the separation, she took her maiden name

again, bought a cottage in a hamlet on the sea-coast a long way off,

established herself there as a single woman with one servant, and

was understood to live secluded, ever afterwards, in an inflexible

retirement.

My father had once been a favourite of hers, I believe; but she was

mortally affronted by his marriage, on the ground that my mother was 'a

wax doll'. She had never seen my mother, but she knew her to be not

yet twenty. My father and Miss Betsey never met again. He was double

my mother's age when he married, and of but a delicate constitution. He

died a year afterwards, and, as I have said, six months before I came

into the world.

This was the state of matters, on the afternoon of, what I may be

excused for calling, that eventful and important Friday. I can make no

claim therefore to have known, at that time, how matters stood; or to

have any remembrance, founded on the evidence of my own senses, of what

follows.

My mother was sitting by the fire, but poorly in health, and very low in

spirits, looking at it through her tears, and desponding heavily about

herself and the fatherless little stranger, who was already welcomed by

some grosses of prophetic pins, in a drawer upstairs, to a world not at

all excited on the subject of his arrival; my mother, I say, was sitting

by the fire, that bright, windy March afternoon, very timid and sad, and

very doubtful of ever coming alive out of the trial that was before her,

when, lifting her eyes as she dried them, to the window opposite, she

saw a strange lady coming up the garden.

MY mother had a sure foreboding at the second glance, that it was

Miss Betsey. The setting sun was glowing on the strange lady, over the

garden-fence, and she came walking up to the door with a fell rigidity

of figure and composure of countenance that could have belonged to

nobody else.

When she reached the house, she gave another proof of her identity.

My father had often hinted that she seldom conducted herself like any

ordinary Christian; and now, instead of ringing the bell, she came and

looked in at that identical window, pressing the end of her nose against

the glass to that extent, that my poor dear mother used to say it became

perfectly flat and white in a moment.

She gave my mother such a turn, that I have always been convinced I am

indebted to Miss Betsey for having been born on a Friday.

My mother had left her chair in her agitation, and gone behind it in

the corner. Miss Betsey, looking round the room, slowly and inquiringly,

began on the other side, and carried her eyes on, like a Saracen's Head

in a Dutch clock, until they reached my mother. Then she made a frown

and a gesture to my mother, like one who was accustomed to be obeyed, to

come and open the door. My mother went.

'Mrs. David Copperfield, I think,' said Miss Betsey; the emphasis

referring, perhaps, to my mother's mourning weeds, and her condition.

'Yes,' said my mother, faintly.

'Miss Trotwood,' said the visitor. 'You have heard of her, I dare say?'

My mother answered she had had that pleasure. And she had a disagreeable

consciousness of not appearing to imply that it had been an overpowering

pleasure.

'Now you see her,' said Miss Betsey. My mother bent her head, and begged

her to walk in.

They went into the parlour my mother had come from, the fire in the best

room on the other side of the passage not being lighted--not having

been lighted, indeed, since my father's funeral; and when they were both

seated, and Miss Betsey said nothing, my mother, after vainly trying to

restrain herself, began to cry. 'Oh tut, tut, tut!' said Miss Betsey, in

a hurry. 'Don't do that! Come, come!'

My mother couldn't help it notwithstanding, so she cried until she had

had her cry out.

'Take off your cap, child,' said Miss Betsey, 'and let me see you.'

MY mother was too much afraid of her to refuse compliance with this odd

request, if she had any disposition to do so. Therefore she did as she

was told, and did it with such nervous hands that her hair (which was

luxuriant and beautiful) fell all about her face.

'Why, bless my heart!' exclaimed Miss Betsey. 'You are a very Baby!'

My mother was, no doubt, unusually youthful in appearance even for her

years; she hung her head, as if it were her fault, poor thing, and said,

sobbing, that indeed she was afraid she was but a childish widow, and

would be but a childish mother if she lived. In a short pause which

ensued, she had a fancy that she felt Miss Betsey touch her hair, and

that with no ungentle hand; but, looking at her, in her timid hope, she

found that lady sitting with the skirt of her dress tucked up, her hands

folded on one knee, and her feet upon the fender, frowning at the fire.

'In the name of Heaven,' said Miss Betsey, suddenly, 'why Rookery?'

'Do you mean the house, ma'am?' asked my mother.

'Why Rookery?' said Miss Betsey. 'Cookery would have been more to the

purpose, if you had had any practical ideas of life, either of you.'

'The name was Mr. Copperfield's choice,' returned my mother. 'When he

bought the house, he liked to think that there were rooks about it.'

The evening wind made such a disturbance just now, among some tall old

elm-trees at the bottom of the garden, that neither my mother nor Miss

Betsey could forbear glancing that way. As the elms bent to one another,

like giants who were whispering secrets, and after a few seconds of such

repose, fell into a violent flurry, tossing their wild arms about, as if

their late confidences were really too wicked for their peace of mind,

some weatherbeaten ragged old rooks'-nests, burdening their higher

branches, swung like wrecks upon a stormy sea.

'Where are the birds?' asked Miss Betsey.

'The--?' My mother had been thinking of something else.

'The rooks--what has become of them?' asked Miss Betsey.

'There have not been any since we have lived here,' said my mother. 'We

thought--Mr. Copperfield thought--it was quite a large rookery; but

the nests were very old ones, and the birds have deserted them a long

while.'

'David Copperfield all over!' cried Miss Betsey. 'David Copperfield from

head to foot! Calls a house a rookery when there's not a rook near it,

and takes the birds on trust, because he sees the nests!'

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned my mother, 'is dead, and if you dare to

speak unkindly of him to me--'

My poor dear mother, I suppose, had some momentary intention of

committing an assault and battery upon my aunt, who could easily have

settled her with one hand, even if my mother had been in far better

training for such an encounter than she was that evening. But it passed

with the action of rising from her chair; and she sat down again very

meekly, and fainted.

When she came to herself, or when Miss Betsey had restored her,

whichever it was, she found the latter standing at the window. The

twilight was by this time shading down into darkness; and dimly as they

saw each other, they could not have done that without the aid of the

fire.

'Well?' said Miss Betsey, coming back to her chair, as if she had only

been taking a casual look at the prospect; 'and when do you expect--'

'I am all in a tremble,' faltered my mother. 'I don't know what's the

matter. I shall die, I am sure!'

'No, no, no,' said Miss Betsey. 'Have some tea.'

'Oh dear me, dear me, do you think it will do me any good?' cried my

mother in a helpless manner.

'Of course it will,' said Miss Betsey. 'It's nothing but fancy. What do

you call your girl?'

'I don't know that it will be a girl, yet, ma'am,' said my mother

innocently.

'Bless the Baby!' exclaimed Miss Betsey, unconsciously quoting the

second sentiment of the pincushion in the drawer upstairs, but

applying it to my mother instead of me, 'I don't mean that. I mean your

servant-girl.'

'Peggotty,' said my mother.

'Peggotty!' repeated Miss Betsey, with some indignation. 'Do you mean to

say, child, that any human being has gone into a Christian church,

and got herself named Peggotty?' 'It's her surname,' said my mother,

faintly. 'Mr. Copperfield called her by it, because her Christian name

was the same as mine.'

'Here! Peggotty!' cried Miss Betsey, opening the parlour door. 'Tea.

Your mistress is a little unwell. Don't dawdle.'

Having issued this mandate with as much potentiality as if she had been

a recognized authority in the house ever since it had been a house,

and having looked out to confront the amazed Peggotty coming along the

passage with a candle at the sound of a strange voice, Miss Betsey shut

the door again, and sat down as before: with her feet on the fender, the

skirt of her dress tucked up, and her hands folded on one knee.

'You were speaking about its being a girl,' said Miss Betsey. 'I have no

doubt it will be a girl. I have a presentiment that it must be a girl.

Now child, from the moment of the birth of this girl--'

'Perhaps boy,' my mother took the liberty of putting in.

'I tell you I have a presentiment that it must be a girl,' returned Miss

Betsey. 'Don't contradict. From the moment of this girl's birth, child,

I intend to be her friend. I intend to be her godmother, and I beg

you'll call her Betsey Trotwood Copperfield. There must be no mistakes

in life with THIS Betsey Trotwood. There must be no trifling with HER

affections, poor dear. She must be well brought up, and well guarded

from reposing any foolish confidences where they are not deserved. I

must make that MY care.'

There was a twitch of Miss Betsey's head, after each of these sentences,

as if her own old wrongs were working within her, and she repressed any

plainer reference to them by strong constraint. So my mother suspected,

at least, as she observed her by the low glimmer of the fire: too

much scared by Miss Betsey, too uneasy in herself, and too subdued and

bewildered altogether, to observe anything very clearly, or to know what

to say.

'And was David good to you, child?' asked Miss Betsey, when she had been

silent for a little while, and these motions of her head had gradually

ceased. 'Were you comfortable together?'

'We were very happy,' said my mother. 'Mr. Copperfield was only too good

to me.'

'What, he spoilt you, I suppose?' returned Miss Betsey.

'For being quite alone and dependent on myself in this rough world

again, yes, I fear he did indeed,' sobbed my mother.

'Well! Don't cry!' said Miss Betsey. 'You were not equally matched,

child--if any two people can be equally matched--and so I asked the

question. You were an orphan, weren't you?' 'Yes.'

'And a governess?'

'I was nursery-governess in a family where Mr. Copperfield came to

visit. Mr. Copperfield was very kind to me, and took a great deal of

notice of me, and paid me a good deal of attention, and at last proposed

to me. And I accepted him. And so we were married,' said my mother

simply.

'Ha! Poor Baby!' mused Miss Betsey, with her frown still bent upon the

fire. 'Do you know anything?'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' faltered my mother.

'About keeping house, for instance,' said Miss Betsey.

'Not much, I fear,' returned my mother. 'Not so much as I could wish.

But Mr. Copperfield was teaching me--'

('Much he knew about it himself!') said Miss Betsey in a parenthesis.

--'And I hope I should have improved, being very anxious to learn, and

he very patient to teach me, if the great misfortune of his death'--my

mother broke down again here, and could get no farther.

'Well, well!' said Miss Betsey. --'I kept my housekeeping-book

regularly, and balanced it with Mr. Copperfield every night,' cried my

mother in another burst of distress, and breaking down again.

'Well, well!' said Miss Betsey. 'Don't cry any more.' --'And I am

sure we never had a word of difference respecting it, except when Mr.

Copperfield objected to my threes and fives being too much like each

other, or to my putting curly tails to my sevens and nines,' resumed my

mother in another burst, and breaking down again.

'You'll make yourself ill,' said Miss Betsey, 'and you know that will

not be good either for you or for my god-daughter. Come! You mustn't do

it!'

This argument had some share in quieting my mother, though her

increasing indisposition had a larger one. There was an interval of

silence, only broken by Miss Betsey's occasionally ejaculating 'Ha!' as

she sat with her feet upon the fender.

'David had bought an annuity for himself with his money, I know,' said

she, by and by. 'What did he do for you?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said my mother, answering with some difficulty, 'was

so considerate and good as to secure the reversion of a part of it to

me.'

'How much?' asked Miss Betsey.

'A hundred and five pounds a year,' said my mother.

'He might have done worse,' said my aunt.

The word was appropriate to the moment. My mother was so much worse

that Peggotty, coming in with the teaboard and candles, and seeing at a

glance how ill she was,--as Miss Betsey might have done sooner if there

had been light enough,--conveyed her upstairs to her own room with all

speed; and immediately dispatched Ham Peggotty, her nephew, who had been

for some days past secreted in the house, unknown to my mother, as a

special messenger in case of emergency, to fetch the nurse and doctor.

Those allied powers were considerably astonished, when they arrived

within a few minutes of each other, to find an unknown lady of

portentous appearance, sitting before the fire, with her bonnet tied

over her left arm, stopping her ears with jewellers' cotton. Peggotty

knowing nothing about her, and my mother saying nothing about her,

she was quite a mystery in the parlour; and the fact of her having a

magazine of jewellers' cotton in her pocket, and sticking the article

in her ears in that way, did not detract from the solemnity of her

presence.

The doctor having been upstairs and come down again, and having

satisfied himself, I suppose, that there was a probability of this

unknown lady and himself having to sit there, face to face, for some

hours, laid himself out to be polite and social. He was the meekest of

his sex, the mildest of little men. He sidled in and out of a room, to

take up the less space. He walked as softly as the Ghost in Hamlet,

and more slowly. He carried his head on one side, partly in modest

depreciation of himself, partly in modest propitiation of everybody

else. It is nothing to say that he hadn't a word to throw at a dog. He

couldn't have thrown a word at a mad dog. He might have offered him one

gently, or half a one, or a fragment of one; for he spoke as slowly as

he walked; but he wouldn't have been rude to him, and he couldn't have

been quick with him, for any earthly consideration.

Mr. Chillip, looking mildly at my aunt with his head on one side, and

making her a little bow, said, in allusion to the jewellers' cotton, as

he softly touched his left ear:

'Some local irritation, ma'am?'

'What!' replied my aunt, pulling the cotton out of one ear like a cork.

Mr. Chillip was so alarmed by her abruptness--as he told my mother

afterwards--that it was a mercy he didn't lose his presence of mind. But

he repeated sweetly:

'Some local irritation, ma'am?'

'Nonsense!' replied my aunt, and corked herself again, at one blow.

Mr. Chillip could do nothing after this, but sit and look at her feebly,

as she sat and looked at the fire, until he was called upstairs again.

After some quarter of an hour's absence, he returned.

'Well?' said my aunt, taking the cotton out of the ear nearest to him.

'Well, ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'we are--we are progressing slowly,

ma'am.'

'Ba--a--ah!' said my aunt, with a perfect shake on the contemptuous

interjection. And corked herself as before.

Really--really--as Mr. Chillip told my mother, he was almost shocked;

speaking in a professional point of view alone, he was almost shocked.

But he sat and looked at her, notwithstanding, for nearly two hours,

as she sat looking at the fire, until he was again called out. After

another absence, he again returned.

'Well?' said my aunt, taking out the cotton on that side again.

'Well, ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'we are--we are progressing slowly,

ma'am.'

'Ya--a--ah!' said my aunt. With such a snarl at him, that Mr. Chillip

absolutely could not bear it. It was really calculated to break his

spirit, he said afterwards. He preferred to go and sit upon the stairs,

in the dark and a strong draught, until he was again sent for.

Ham Peggotty, who went to the national school, and was a very dragon at

his catechism, and who may therefore be regarded as a credible witness,

reported next day, that happening to peep in at the parlour-door an hour

after this, he was instantly descried by Miss Betsey, then walking to

and fro in a state of agitation, and pounced upon before he could make

his escape. That there were now occasional sounds of feet and voices

overhead which he inferred the cotton did not exclude, from the

circumstance of his evidently being clutched by the lady as a victim on

whom to expend her superabundant agitation when the sounds were loudest.

That, marching him constantly up and down by the collar (as if he had

been taking too much laudanum), she, at those times, shook him, rumpled

his hair, made light of his linen, stopped his ears as if she confounded

them with her own, and otherwise tousled and maltreated him. This was

in part confirmed by his aunt, who saw him at half past twelve o'clock,

soon after his release, and affirmed that he was then as red as I was.

The mild Mr. Chillip could not possibly bear malice at such a time, if

at any time. He sidled into the parlour as soon as he was at liberty,

and said to my aunt in his meekest manner:

'Well, ma'am, I am happy to congratulate you.'

'What upon?' said my aunt, sharply.

Mr. Chillip was fluttered again, by the extreme severity of my aunt's

manner; so he made her a little bow and gave her a little smile, to

mollify her.

'Mercy on the man, what's he doing!' cried my aunt, impatiently. 'Can't

he speak?'

'Be calm, my dear ma'am,' said Mr. Chillip, in his softest accents.

'There is no longer any occasion for uneasiness, ma'am. Be calm.'

It has since been considered almost a miracle that my aunt didn't shake

him, and shake what he had to say, out of him. She only shook her own

head at him, but in a way that made him quail.

'Well, ma'am,' resumed Mr. Chillip, as soon as he had courage, 'I am

happy to congratulate you. All is now over, ma'am, and well over.'

During the five minutes or so that Mr. Chillip devoted to the delivery

of this oration, my aunt eyed him narrowly.

'How is she?' said my aunt, folding her arms with her bonnet still tied

on one of them.

'Well, ma'am, she will soon be quite comfortable, I hope,' returned Mr.

Chillip. 'Quite as comfortable as we can expect a young mother to be,

under these melancholy domestic circumstances. There cannot be any

objection to your seeing her presently, ma'am. It may do her good.'

'And SHE. How is SHE?' said my aunt, sharply.

Mr. Chillip laid his head a little more on one side, and looked at my

aunt like an amiable bird.

'The baby,' said my aunt. 'How is she?'

'Ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'I apprehended you had known. It's a

boy.'

My aunt said never a word, but took her bonnet by the strings, in the

manner of a sling, aimed a blow at Mr. Chillip's head with it, put it on

bent, walked out, and never came back. She vanished like a discontented

fairy; or like one of those supernatural beings, whom it was popularly

supposed I was entitled to see; and never came back any more.

No. I lay in my basket, and my mother lay in her bed; but Betsey

Trotwood Copperfield was for ever in the land of dreams and shadows, the

tremendous region whence I had so lately travelled; and the light upon

the window of our room shone out upon the earthly bourne of all such

travellers, and the mound above the ashes and the dust that once was he,

without whom I had never been.

CHAPTER 2. I OBSERVE

The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look

far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty

hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty with no shape at all, and eyes so

dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face,

and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't

peck her in preference to apples.

I believe I can remember these two at a little distance apart, dwarfed

to my sight by stooping down or kneeling on the floor, and I going

unsteadily from the one to the other. I have an impression on my mind

which I cannot distinguish from actual remembrance, of the touch of

Peggotty's forefinger as she used to hold it out to me, and of its being

roughened by needlework, like a pocket nutmeg-grater.

This may be fancy, though I think the memory of most of us can go

farther back into such times than many of us suppose; just as I believe

the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite

wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most

grown men who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety

be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it; the

rather, as I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness,

and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an

inheritance they have preserved from their childhood.

I might have a misgiving that I am 'meandering' in stopping to say this,

but that it brings me to remark that I build these conclusions, in part

upon my own experience of myself; and if it should appear from

anything I may set down in this narrative that I was a child of close

observation, or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood, I

undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics.

Looking back, as I was saying, into the blank of my infancy, the first

objects I can remember as standing out by themselves from a confusion of

things, are my mother and Peggotty. What else do I remember? Let me see.

There comes out of the cloud, our house--not new to me, but quite

familiar, in its earliest remembrance. On the ground-floor is Peggotty's

kitchen, opening into a back yard; with a pigeon-house on a pole, in

the centre, without any pigeons in it; a great dog-kennel in a corner,

without any dog; and a quantity of fowls that look terribly tall to me,

walking about, in a menacing and ferocious manner. There is one cock who

gets upon a post to crow, and seems to take particular notice of me as

I look at him through the kitchen window, who makes me shiver, he is so

fierce. Of the geese outside the side-gate who come waddling after

me with their long necks stretched out when I go that way, I dream at

night: as a man environed by wild beasts might dream of lions.

Here is a long passage--what an enormous perspective I make of

it!--leading from Peggotty's kitchen to the front door. A dark

store-room opens out of it, and that is a place to be run past at

night; for I don't know what may be among those tubs and jars and old

tea-chests, when there is nobody in there with a dimly-burning light,

letting a mouldy air come out of the door, in which there is the smell

of soap, pickles, pepper, candles, and coffee, all at one whiff. Then

there are the two parlours: the parlour in which we sit of an evening,

my mother and I and Peggotty--for Peggotty is quite our companion, when

her work is done and we are alone--and the best parlour where we sit

on a Sunday; grandly, but not so comfortably. There is something of a

doleful air about that room to me, for Peggotty has told me--I don't

know when, but apparently ages ago--about my father's funeral, and the

company having their black cloaks put on. One Sunday night my mother

reads to Peggotty and me in there, how Lazarus was raised up from the

dead. And I am so frightened that they are afterwards obliged to take me

out of bed, and show me the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom window,

with the dead all lying in their graves at rest, below the solemn moon.

There is nothing half so green that I know anywhere, as the grass of

that churchyard; nothing half so shady as its trees; nothing half so

quiet as its tombstones. The sheep are feeding there, when I kneel up,

early in the morning, in my little bed in a closet within my mother's

room, to look out at it; and I see the red light shining on the

sun-dial, and think within myself, 'Is the sun-dial glad, I wonder, that

it can tell the time again?'

Here is our pew in the church. What a high-backed pew! With a window

near it, out of which our house can be seen, and IS seen many times

during the morning's service, by Peggotty, who likes to make herself

as sure as she can that it's not being robbed, or is not in flames. But

though Peggotty's eye wanders, she is much offended if mine does,

and frowns to me, as I stand upon the seat, that I am to look at the

clergyman. But I can't always look at him--I know him without that white

thing on, and I am afraid of his wondering why I stare so, and perhaps

stopping the service to inquire--and what am I to do? It's a dreadful

thing to gape, but I must do something. I look at my mother, but she

pretends not to see me. I look at a boy in the aisle, and he makes faces

at me. I look at the sunlight coming in at the open door through

the porch, and there I see a stray sheep--I don't mean a sinner, but

mutton--half making up his mind to come into the church. I feel that

if I looked at him any longer, I might be tempted to say something out

loud; and what would become of me then! I look up at the monumental

tablets on the wall, and try to think of Mr. Bodgers late of this

parish, and what the feelings of Mrs. Bodgers must have been, when

affliction sore, long time Mr. Bodgers bore, and physicians were in

vain. I wonder whether they called in Mr. Chillip, and he was in vain;

and if so, how he likes to be reminded of it once a week. I look from

Mr. Chillip, in his Sunday neckcloth, to the pulpit; and think what a

good place it would be to play in, and what a castle it would make, with

another boy coming up the stairs to attack it, and having the velvet

cushion with the tassels thrown down on his head. In time my eyes

gradually shut up; and, from seeming to hear the clergyman singing a

drowsy song in the heat, I hear nothing, until I fall off the seat with

a crash, and am taken out, more dead than alive, by Peggotty.

And now I see the outside of our house, with the latticed

bedroom-windows standing open to let in the sweet-smelling air, and the

ragged old rooks'-nests still dangling in the elm-trees at the bottom

of the front garden. Now I am in the garden at the back, beyond the

yard where the empty pigeon-house and dog-kennel are--a very preserve

of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and

padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than

fruit has ever been since, in any other garden, and where my

mother gathers some in a basket, while I stand by, bolting furtive

gooseberries, and trying to look unmoved. A great wind rises, and the

summer is gone in a moment. We are playing in the winter twilight,

dancing about the parlour. When my mother is out of breath and rests

herself in an elbow-chair, I watch her winding her bright curls round

her fingers, and straitening her waist, and nobody knows better than I

do that she likes to look so well, and is proud of being so pretty.

That is among my very earliest impressions. That, and a sense that we

were both a little afraid of Peggotty, and submitted ourselves in most

things to her direction, were among the first opinions--if they may be

so called--that I ever derived from what I saw.

Peggotty and I were sitting one night by the parlour fire, alone. I

had been reading to Peggotty about crocodiles. I must have read very

perspicuously, or the poor soul must have been deeply interested, for I

remember she had a cloudy impression, after I had done, that they were

a sort of vegetable. I was tired of reading, and dead sleepy; but

having leave, as a high treat, to sit up until my mother came home from

spending the evening at a neighbour's, I would rather have died upon

my post (of course) than have gone to bed. I had reached that stage of

sleepiness when Peggotty seemed to swell and grow immensely large.

I propped my eyelids open with my two forefingers, and looked

perseveringly at her as she sat at work; at the little bit of wax-candle

she kept for her thread--how old it looked, being so wrinkled in

all directions!--at the little house with a thatched roof, where the

yard-measure lived; at her work-box with a sliding lid, with a view of

St. Paul's Cathedral (with a pink dome) painted on the top; at the brass

thimble on her finger; at herself, whom I thought lovely. I felt so

sleepy, that I knew if I lost sight of anything for a moment, I was

gone.

'Peggotty,' says I, suddenly, 'were you ever married?'

'Lord, Master Davy,' replied Peggotty. 'What's put marriage in your

head?'

She answered with such a start, that it quite awoke me. And then she

stopped in her work, and looked at me, with her needle drawn out to its

thread's length.

'But WERE you ever married, Peggotty?' says I. 'You are a very handsome

woman, an't you?'

I thought her in a different style from my mother, certainly; but of

another school of beauty, I considered her a perfect example. There

was a red velvet footstool in the best parlour, on which my mother

had painted a nosegay. The ground-work of that stool, and Peggotty's

complexion appeared to me to be one and the same thing. The stool was

smooth, and Peggotty was rough, but that made no difference.

'Me handsome, Davy!' said Peggotty. 'Lawk, no, my dear! But what put

marriage in your head?'

'I don't know!--You mustn't marry more than one person at a time, may

you, Peggotty?'

'Certainly not,' says Peggotty, with the promptest decision.

'But if you marry a person, and the person dies, why then you may marry

another person, mayn't you, Peggotty?'

'YOU MAY,' says Peggotty, 'if you choose, my dear. That's a matter of

opinion.'

'But what is your opinion, Peggotty?' said I.

I asked her, and looked curiously at her, because she looked so

curiously at me.

'My opinion is,' said Peggotty, taking her eyes from me, after a little

indecision and going on with her work, 'that I never was married myself,

Master Davy, and that I don't expect to be. That's all I know about the

subject.'

'You an't cross, I suppose, Peggotty, are you?' said I, after sitting

quiet for a minute.

I really thought she was, she had been so short with me; but I was quite

mistaken: for she laid aside her work (which was a stocking of her own),

and opening her arms wide, took my curly head within them, and gave it

a good squeeze. I know it was a good squeeze, because, being very plump,

whenever she made any little exertion after she was dressed, some of the

buttons on the back of her gown flew off. And I recollect two bursting

to the opposite side of the parlour, while she was hugging me.

'Now let me hear some more about the Crorkindills,' said Peggotty, who

was not quite right in the name yet, 'for I an't heard half enough.'

I couldn't quite understand why Peggotty looked so queer, or why she

was so ready to go back to the crocodiles. However, we returned to those

monsters, with fresh wakefulness on my part, and we left their eggs in

the sand for the sun to hatch; and we ran away from them, and baffled

them by constantly turning, which they were unable to do quickly, on

account of their unwieldy make; and we went into the water after them,

as natives, and put sharp pieces of timber down their throats; and in

short we ran the whole crocodile gauntlet. I did, at least; but I had

my doubts of Peggotty, who was thoughtfully sticking her needle into

various parts of her face and arms, all the time.

We had exhausted the crocodiles, and begun with the alligators, when

the garden-bell rang. We went out to the door; and there was my mother,

looking unusually pretty, I thought, and with her a gentleman with

beautiful black hair and whiskers, who had walked home with us from

church last Sunday.

As my mother stooped down on the threshold to take me in her arms and

kiss me, the gentleman said I was a more highly privileged little fellow

than a monarch--or something like that; for my later understanding

comes, I am sensible, to my aid here.

'What does that mean?' I asked him, over her shoulder.

He patted me on the head; but somehow, I didn't like him or his deep

voice, and I was jealous that his hand should touch my mother's in

touching me--which it did. I put it away, as well as I could.

'Oh, Davy!' remonstrated my mother.

'Dear boy!' said the gentleman. 'I cannot wonder at his devotion!'

I never saw such a beautiful colour on my mother's face before. She

gently chid me for being rude; and, keeping me close to her shawl,

turned to thank the gentleman for taking so much trouble as to bring her

home. She put out her hand to him as she spoke, and, as he met it with

his own, she glanced, I thought, at me.

'Let us say "good night", my fine boy,' said the gentleman, when he had

bent his head--I saw him!--over my mother's little glove.

'Good night!' said I.

'Come! Let us be the best friends in the world!' said the gentleman,

laughing. 'Shake hands!'

My right hand was in my mother's left, so I gave him the other.

'Why, that's the Wrong hand, Davy!' laughed the gentleman.

MY mother drew my right hand forward, but I was resolved, for my former

reason, not to give it him, and I did not. I gave him the other, and he

shook it heartily, and said I was a brave fellow, and went away.

At this minute I see him turn round in the garden, and give us a last

look with his ill-omened black eyes, before the door was shut.

Peggotty, who had not said a word or moved a finger, secured the

fastenings instantly, and we all went into the parlour. My mother,

contrary to her usual habit, instead of coming to the elbow-chair by the

fire, remained at the other end of the room, and sat singing to herself.

--'Hope you have had a pleasant evening, ma'am,' said Peggotty, standing

as stiff as a barrel in the centre of the room, with a candlestick in

her hand.

'Much obliged to you, Peggotty,' returned my mother, in a cheerful

voice, 'I have had a VERY pleasant evening.'

'A stranger or so makes an agreeable change,' suggested Peggotty.

'A very agreeable change, indeed,' returned my mother.

Peggotty continuing to stand motionless in the middle of the room, and

my mother resuming her singing, I fell asleep, though I was not so sound

asleep but that I could hear voices, without hearing what they said.

When I half awoke from this uncomfortable doze, I found Peggotty and my

mother both in tears, and both talking.

'Not such a one as this, Mr. Copperfield wouldn't have liked,' said

Peggotty. 'That I say, and that I swear!'

'Good Heavens!' cried my mother, 'you'll drive me mad! Was ever any

poor girl so ill-used by her servants as I am! Why do I do myself

the injustice of calling myself a girl? Have I never been married,

Peggotty?'

'God knows you have, ma'am,' returned Peggotty. 'Then, how can you

dare,' said my mother--'you know I don't mean how can you dare,

Peggotty, but how can you have the heart--to make me so uncomfortable

and say such bitter things to me, when you are well aware that I

haven't, out of this place, a single friend to turn to?'

'The more's the reason,' returned Peggotty, 'for saying that it won't

do. No! That it won't do. No! No price could make it do. No!'--I thought

Peggotty would have thrown the candlestick away, she was so emphatic

with it.

'How can you be so aggravating,' said my mother, shedding more tears

than before, 'as to talk in such an unjust manner! How can you go on as

if it was all settled and arranged, Peggotty, when I tell you over

and over again, you cruel thing, that beyond the commonest civilities

nothing has passed! You talk of admiration. What am I to do? If people

are so silly as to indulge the sentiment, is it my fault? What am I to

do, I ask you? Would you wish me to shave my head and black my face, or

disfigure myself with a burn, or a scald, or something of that sort? I

dare say you would, Peggotty. I dare say you'd quite enjoy it.'

Peggotty seemed to take this aspersion very much to heart, I thought.

'And my dear boy,' cried my mother, coming to the elbow-chair in which

I was, and caressing me, 'my own little Davy! Is it to be hinted to me

that I am wanting in affection for my precious treasure, the dearest

little fellow that ever was!'

'Nobody never went and hinted no such a thing,' said Peggotty.

'You did, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'You know you did. What else

was it possible to infer from what you said, you unkind creature,

when you know as well as I do, that on his account only last quarter I

wouldn't buy myself a new parasol, though that old green one is frayed

the whole way up, and the fringe is perfectly mangy? You know it is,

Peggotty. You can't deny it.' Then, turning affectionately to me, with

her cheek against mine, 'Am I a naughty mama to you, Davy? Am I a nasty,

cruel, selfish, bad mama? Say I am, my child; say "yes", dear boy, and

Peggotty will love you; and Peggotty's love is a great deal better than

mine, Davy. I don't love you at all, do I?'

At this, we all fell a-crying together. I think I was the loudest of

the party, but I am sure we were all sincere about it. I was quite

heart-broken myself, and am afraid that in the first transports of

wounded tenderness I called Peggotty a 'Beast'. That honest creature was

in deep affliction, I remember, and must have become quite buttonless

on the occasion; for a little volley of those explosives went off,

when, after having made it up with my mother, she kneeled down by the

elbow-chair, and made it up with me.

We went to bed greatly dejected. My sobs kept waking me, for a long

time; and when one very strong sob quite hoisted me up in bed, I found

my mother sitting on the coverlet, and leaning over me. I fell asleep in

her arms, after that, and slept soundly.

Whether it was the following Sunday when I saw the gentleman again,

or whether there was any greater lapse of time before he reappeared,

I cannot recall. I don't profess to be clear about dates. But there he

was, in church, and he walked home with us afterwards. He came in, too,

to look at a famous geranium we had, in the parlour-window. It did not

appear to me that he took much notice of it, but before he went he asked

my mother to give him a bit of the blossom. She begged him to choose it

for himself, but he refused to do that--I could not understand why--so

she plucked it for him, and gave it into his hand. He said he would

never, never part with it any more; and I thought he must be quite a

fool not to know that it would fall to pieces in a day or two.

Peggotty began to be less with us, of an evening, than she had always

been. My mother deferred to her very much--more than usual, it occurred

to me--and we were all three excellent friends; still we were different

from what we used to be, and were not so comfortable among ourselves.

Sometimes I fancied that Peggotty perhaps objected to my mother's

wearing all the pretty dresses she had in her drawers, or to her

going so often to visit at that neighbour's; but I couldn't, to my

satisfaction, make out how it was.

Gradually, I became used to seeing the gentleman with the black

whiskers. I liked him no better than at first, and had the same uneasy

jealousy of him; but if I had any reason for it beyond a child's

instinctive dislike, and a general idea that Peggotty and I could make

much of my mother without any help, it certainly was not THE reason that

I might have found if I had been older. No such thing came into my mind,

or near it. I could observe, in little pieces, as it were; but as to

making a net of a number of these pieces, and catching anybody in it,

that was, as yet, beyond me.

One autumn morning I was with my mother in the front garden, when Mr.

Murdstone--I knew him by that name now--came by, on horseback. He reined

up his horse to salute my mother, and said he was going to Lowestoft to

see some friends who were there with a yacht, and merrily proposed to

take me on the saddle before him if I would like the ride.

The air was so clear and pleasant, and the horse seemed to like the

idea of the ride so much himself, as he stood snorting and pawing at the

garden-gate, that I had a great desire to go. So I was sent upstairs

to Peggotty to be made spruce; and in the meantime Mr. Murdstone

dismounted, and, with his horse's bridle drawn over his arm, walked

slowly up and down on the outer side of the sweetbriar fence, while my

mother walked slowly up and down on the inner to keep him company. I

recollect Peggotty and I peeping out at them from my little window; I

recollect how closely they seemed to be examining the sweetbriar between

them, as they strolled along; and how, from being in a perfectly angelic

temper, Peggotty turned cross in a moment, and brushed my hair the wrong

way, excessively hard.

Mr. Murdstone and I were soon off, and trotting along on the green turf

by the side of the road. He held me quite easily with one arm, and I

don't think I was restless usually; but I could not make up my mind to

sit in front of him without turning my head sometimes, and looking up in

his face. He had that kind of shallow black eye--I want a better word to

express an eye that has no depth in it to be looked into--which, when

it is abstracted, seems from some peculiarity of light to be disfigured,

for a moment at a time, by a cast. Several times when I glanced at him,

I observed that appearance with a sort of awe, and wondered what he

was thinking about so closely. His hair and whiskers were blacker and

thicker, looked at so near, than even I had given them credit for being.

A squareness about the lower part of his face, and the dotted indication

of the strong black beard he shaved close every day, reminded me of

the wax-work that had travelled into our neighbourhood some half-a-year

before. This, his regular eyebrows, and the rich white, and black, and

brown, of his complexion--confound his complexion, and his memory!--made

me think him, in spite of my misgivings, a very handsome man. I have no

doubt that my poor dear mother thought him so too.

We went to an hotel by the sea, where two gentlemen were smoking cigars

in a room by themselves. Each of them was lying on at least four chairs,

and had a large rough jacket on. In a corner was a heap of coats and

boat-cloaks, and a flag, all bundled up together.

They both rolled on to their feet in an untidy sort of manner, when we

came in, and said, 'Halloa, Murdstone! We thought you were dead!'

'Not yet,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'And who's this shaver?' said one of the gentlemen, taking hold of me.

'That's Davy,' returned Mr. Murdstone.

'Davy who?' said the gentleman. 'Jones?'

'Copperfield,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'What! Bewitching Mrs. Copperfield's encumbrance?' cried the gentleman.

'The pretty little widow?'

'Quinion,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'take care, if you please. Somebody's

sharp.'

'Who is?' asked the gentleman, laughing. I looked up, quickly; being

curious to know.

'Only Brooks of Sheffield,' said Mr. Murdstone.

I was quite relieved to find that it was only Brooks of Sheffield; for,

at first, I really thought it was I.

There seemed to be something very comical in the reputation of Mr.

Brooks of Sheffield, for both the gentlemen laughed heartily when he

was mentioned, and Mr. Murdstone was a good deal amused also. After some

laughing, the gentleman whom he had called Quinion, said:

'And what is the opinion of Brooks of Sheffield, in reference to the

projected business?'

'Why, I don't know that Brooks understands much about it at present,'

replied Mr. Murdstone; 'but he is not generally favourable, I believe.'

There was more laughter at this, and Mr. Quinion said he would ring the

bell for some sherry in which to drink to Brooks. This he did; and when

the wine came, he made me have a little, with a biscuit, and, before

I drank it, stand up and say, 'Confusion to Brooks of Sheffield!' The

toast was received with great applause, and such hearty laughter that

it made me laugh too; at which they laughed the more. In short, we quite

enjoyed ourselves.

We walked about on the cliff after that, and sat on the grass, and

looked at things through a telescope--I could make out nothing myself

when it was put to my eye, but I pretended I could--and then we came

back to the hotel to an early dinner. All the time we were out, the two

gentlemen smoked incessantly--which, I thought, if I might judge from

the smell of their rough coats, they must have been doing, ever since

the coats had first come home from the tailor's. I must not forget that

we went on board the yacht, where they all three descended into the

cabin, and were busy with some papers. I saw them quite hard at work,

when I looked down through the open skylight. They left me, during this

time, with a very nice man with a very large head of red hair and a very

small shiny hat upon it, who had got a cross-barred shirt or waistcoat

on, with 'Skylark' in capital letters across the chest. I thought it was

his name; and that as he lived on board ship and hadn't a street door

to put his name on, he put it there instead; but when I called him Mr.

Skylark, he said it meant the vessel.

I observed all day that Mr. Murdstone was graver and steadier than the

two gentlemen. They were very gay and careless. They joked freely with

one another, but seldom with him. It appeared to me that he was

more clever and cold than they were, and that they regarded him with

something of my own feeling. I remarked that, once or twice when Mr.

Quinion was talking, he looked at Mr. Murdstone sideways, as if to make

sure of his not being displeased; and that once when Mr. Passnidge (the

other gentleman) was in high spirits, he trod upon his foot, and gave

him a secret caution with his eyes, to observe Mr. Murdstone, who was

sitting stern and silent. Nor do I recollect that Mr. Murdstone laughed

at all that day, except at the Sheffield joke--and that, by the by, was

his own.

We went home early in the evening. It was a very fine evening, and my

mother and he had another stroll by the sweetbriar, while I was sent in

to get my tea. When he was gone, my mother asked me all about the day I

had had, and what they had said and done. I mentioned what they had said

about her, and she laughed, and told me they were impudent fellows who

talked nonsense--but I knew it pleased her. I knew it quite as well as

I know it now. I took the opportunity of asking if she was at all

acquainted with Mr. Brooks of Sheffield, but she answered No, only she

supposed he must be a manufacturer in the knife and fork way.

Can I say of her face--altered as I have reason to remember it, perished

as I know it is--that it is gone, when here it comes before me at this

instant, as distinct as any face that I may choose to look on in a

crowded street? Can I say of her innocent and girlish beauty, that it

faded, and was no more, when its breath falls on my cheek now, as it

fell that night? Can I say she ever changed, when my remembrance brings

her back to life, thus only; and, truer to its loving youth than I have

been, or man ever is, still holds fast what it cherished then?

I write of her just as she was when I had gone to bed after this talk,

and she came to bid me good night. She kneeled down playfully by the

side of the bed, and laying her chin upon her hands, and laughing, said:

'What was it they said, Davy? Tell me again. I can't believe it.'

'"Bewitching--"' I began.

My mother put her hands upon my lips to stop me.

'It was never bewitching,' she said, laughing. 'It never could have been

bewitching, Davy. Now I know it wasn't!'

'Yes, it was. "Bewitching Mrs. Copperfield",' I repeated stoutly. 'And,

"pretty."'

'No, no, it was never pretty. Not pretty,' interposed my mother, laying

her fingers on my lips again.

'Yes it was. "Pretty little widow."'

'What foolish, impudent creatures!' cried my mother, laughing and

covering her face. 'What ridiculous men! An't they? Davy dear--'

'Well, Ma.'

'Don't tell Peggotty; she might be angry with them. I am dreadfully

angry with them myself; but I would rather Peggotty didn't know.'

I promised, of course; and we kissed one another over and over again,

and I soon fell fast asleep.

It seems to me, at this distance of time, as if it were the next day

when Peggotty broached the striking and adventurous proposition I am

about to mention; but it was probably about two months afterwards.

We were sitting as before, one evening (when my mother was out as

before), in company with the stocking and the yard-measure, and the bit

of wax, and the box with St. Paul's on the lid, and the crocodile book,

when Peggotty, after looking at me several times, and opening her mouth

as if she were going to speak, without doing it--which I thought was

merely gaping, or I should have been rather alarmed--said coaxingly:

'Master Davy, how should you like to go along with me and spend a

fortnight at my brother's at Yarmouth? Wouldn't that be a treat?'

'Is your brother an agreeable man, Peggotty?' I inquired, provisionally.

'Oh, what an agreeable man he is!' cried Peggotty, holding up her hands.

'Then there's the sea; and the boats and ships; and the fishermen; and

the beach; and Am to play with--'

Peggotty meant her nephew Ham, mentioned in my first chapter; but she

spoke of him as a morsel of English Grammar.

I was flushed by her summary of delights, and replied that it would

indeed be a treat, but what would my mother say?

'Why then I'll as good as bet a guinea,' said Peggotty, intent upon my

face, 'that she'll let us go. I'll ask her, if you like, as soon as ever

she comes home. There now!'

'But what's she to do while we're away?' said I, putting my small elbows

on the table to argue the point. 'She can't live by herself.'

If Peggotty were looking for a hole, all of a sudden, in the heel of

that stocking, it must have been a very little one indeed, and not worth

darning.

'I say! Peggotty! She can't live by herself, you know.'

'Oh, bless you!' said Peggotty, looking at me again at last. 'Don't

you know? She's going to stay for a fortnight with Mrs. Grayper. Mrs.

Grayper's going to have a lot of company.'

Oh! If that was it, I was quite ready to go. I waited, in the utmost

impatience, until my mother came home from Mrs. Grayper's (for it was

that identical neighbour), to ascertain if we could get leave to carry

out this great idea. Without being nearly so much surprised as I had

expected, my mother entered into it readily; and it was all arranged

that night, and my board and lodging during the visit were to be paid

for.

The day soon came for our going. It was such an early day that it came

soon, even to me, who was in a fever of expectation, and half afraid

that an earthquake or a fiery mountain, or some other great convulsion

of nature, might interpose to stop the expedition. We were to go in a

carrier's cart, which departed in the morning after breakfast. I would

have given any money to have been allowed to wrap myself up over-night,

and sleep in my hat and boots.

It touches me nearly now, although I tell it lightly, to recollect how

eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what

I did leave for ever.

I am glad to recollect that when the carrier's cart was at the gate, and

my mother stood there kissing me, a grateful fondness for her and for

the old place I had never turned my back upon before, made me cry. I am

glad to know that my mother cried too, and that I felt her heart beat

against mine.

I am glad to recollect that when the carrier began to move, my mother

ran out at the gate, and called to him to stop, that she might kiss me

once more. I am glad to dwell upon the earnestness and love with which

she lifted up her face to mine, and did so.

As we left her standing in the road, Mr. Murdstone came up to where

she was, and seemed to expostulate with her for being so moved. I was

looking back round the awning of the cart, and wondered what business

it was of his. Peggotty, who was also looking back on the other side,

seemed anything but satisfied; as the face she brought back in the cart

denoted.

I sat looking at Peggotty for some time, in a reverie on this

supposititious case: whether, if she were employed to lose me like the

boy in the fairy tale, I should be able to track my way home again by

the buttons she would shed.

CHAPTER 3. I HAVE A CHANGE

The carrier's horse was the laziest horse in the world, I should hope,

and shuffled along, with his head down, as if he liked to keep people

waiting to whom the packages were directed. I fancied, indeed, that he

sometimes chuckled audibly over this reflection, but the carrier said

he was only troubled with a cough. The carrier had a way of keeping his

head down, like his horse, and of drooping sleepily forward as he drove,

with one of his arms on each of his knees. I say 'drove', but it struck

me that the cart would have gone to Yarmouth quite as well without him,

for the horse did all that; and as to conversation, he had no idea of it

but whistling.

Peggotty had a basket of refreshments on her knee, which would have

lasted us out handsomely, if we had been going to London by the same

conveyance. We ate a good deal, and slept a good deal. Peggotty always

went to sleep with her chin upon the handle of the basket, her hold of

which never relaxed; and I could not have believed unless I had heard

her do it, that one defenceless woman could have snored so much.

We made so many deviations up and down lanes, and were such a long time

delivering a bedstead at a public-house, and calling at other places,

that I was quite tired, and very glad, when we saw Yarmouth. It looked

rather spongy and soppy, I thought, as I carried my eye over the great

dull waste that lay across the river; and I could not help wondering, if

the world were really as round as my geography book said, how any

part of it came to be so flat. But I reflected that Yarmouth might be

situated at one of the poles; which would account for it.

As we drew a little nearer, and saw the whole adjacent prospect lying a

straight low line under the sky, I hinted to Peggotty that a mound or so

might have improved it; and also that if the land had been a little more

separated from the sea, and the town and the tide had not been quite

so much mixed up, like toast and water, it would have been nicer. But

Peggotty said, with greater emphasis than usual, that we must take

things as we found them, and that, for her part, she was proud to call

herself a Yarmouth Bloater.

When we got into the street (which was strange enough to me) and smelt

the fish, and pitch, and oakum, and tar, and saw the sailors walking

about, and the carts jingling up and down over the stones, I felt that I

had done so busy a place an injustice; and said as much to Peggotty, who

heard my expressions of delight with great complacency, and told me it

was well known (I suppose to those who had the good fortune to be born

Bloaters) that Yarmouth was, upon the whole, the finest place in the

universe.

'Here's my Am!' screamed Peggotty, 'growed out of knowledge!'

He was waiting for us, in fact, at the public-house; and asked me how I

found myself, like an old acquaintance. I did not feel, at first, that

I knew him as well as he knew me, because he had never come to our house

since the night I was born, and naturally he had the advantage of me.

But our intimacy was much advanced by his taking me on his back to carry

me home. He was, now, a huge, strong fellow of six feet high, broad in

proportion, and round-shouldered; but with a simpering boy's face and

curly light hair that gave him quite a sheepish look. He was dressed in

a canvas jacket, and a pair of such very stiff trousers that they

would have stood quite as well alone, without any legs in them. And you

couldn't so properly have said he wore a hat, as that he was covered in

a-top, like an old building, with something pitchy.

Ham carrying me on his back and a small box of ours under his arm,

and Peggotty carrying another small box of ours, we turned down lanes

bestrewn with bits of chips and little hillocks of sand, and went

past gas-works, rope-walks, boat-builders' yards, shipwrights' yards,

ship-breakers' yards, caulkers' yards, riggers' lofts, smiths' forges,

and a great litter of such places, until we came out upon the dull waste

I had already seen at a distance; when Ham said,

'Yon's our house, Mas'r Davy!'

I looked in all directions, as far as I could stare over the wilderness,

and away at the sea, and away at the river, but no house could I make

out. There was a black barge, or some other kind of superannuated boat,

not far off, high and dry on the ground, with an iron funnel sticking

out of it for a chimney and smoking very cosily; but nothing else in the

way of a habitation that was visible to me.

'That's not it?' said I. 'That ship-looking thing?'

'That's it, Mas'r Davy,' returned Ham.

If it had been Aladdin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could

not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it. There

was a delightful door cut in the side, and it was roofed in, and there

were little windows in it; but the wonderful charm of it was, that

it was a real boat which had no doubt been upon the water hundreds of

times, and which had never been intended to be lived in, on dry land.

That was the captivation of it to me. If it had ever been meant to be

lived in, I might have thought it small, or inconvenient, or lonely; but

never having been designed for any such use, it became a perfect abode.

It was beautifully clean inside, and as tidy as possible. There was a

table, and a Dutch clock, and a chest of drawers, and on the chest of

drawers there was a tea-tray with a painting on it of a lady with a

parasol, taking a walk with a military-looking child who was trundling a

hoop. The tray was kept from tumbling down, by a bible; and the tray, if

it had tumbled down, would have smashed a quantity of cups and saucers

and a teapot that were grouped around the book. On the walls there were

some common coloured pictures, framed and glazed, of scripture subjects;

such as I have never seen since in the hands of pedlars, without seeing

the whole interior of Peggotty's brother's house again, at one view.

Abraham in red going to sacrifice Isaac in blue, and Daniel in yellow

cast into a den of green lions, were the most prominent of these. Over

the little mantelshelf, was a picture of the 'Sarah Jane' lugger, built

at Sunderland, with a real little wooden stern stuck on to it; a work of

art, combining composition with carpentry, which I considered to be one

of the most enviable possessions that the world could afford. There

were some hooks in the beams of the ceiling, the use of which I did not

divine then; and some lockers and boxes and conveniences of that sort,

which served for seats and eked out the chairs.

All this I saw in the first glance after I crossed the

threshold--child-like, according to my theory--and then Peggotty opened

a little door and showed me my bedroom. It was the completest and most

desirable bedroom ever seen--in the stern of the vessel; with a little

window, where the rudder used to go through; a little looking-glass,

just the right height for me, nailed against the wall, and framed with

oyster-shells; a little bed, which there was just room enough to get

into; and a nosegay of seaweed in a blue mug on the table. The walls

were whitewashed as white as milk, and the patchwork counterpane made my

eyes quite ache with its brightness. One thing I particularly noticed

in this delightful house, was the smell of fish; which was so searching,

that when I took out my pocket-handkerchief to wipe my nose, I found it

smelt exactly as if it had wrapped up a lobster. On my imparting this

discovery in confidence to Peggotty, she informed me that her brother

dealt in lobsters, crabs, and crawfish; and I afterwards found that a

heap of these creatures, in a state of wonderful conglomeration with one

another, and never leaving off pinching whatever they laid hold of,

were usually to be found in a little wooden outhouse where the pots and

kettles were kept.

We were welcomed by a very civil woman in a white apron, whom I had seen

curtseying at the door when I was on Ham's back, about a quarter of a

mile off. Likewise by a most beautiful little girl (or I thought her so)

with a necklace of blue beads on, who wouldn't let me kiss her when I

offered to, but ran away and hid herself. By and by, when we had dined

in a sumptuous manner off boiled dabs, melted butter, and potatoes, with

a chop for me, a hairy man with a very good-natured face came home. As

he called Peggotty 'Lass', and gave her a hearty smack on the cheek, I

had no doubt, from the general propriety of her conduct, that he was her

brother; and so he turned out--being presently introduced to me as Mr.

Peggotty, the master of the house.

'Glad to see you, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'You'll find us rough, sir,

but you'll find us ready.'

I thanked him, and replied that I was sure I should be happy in such a

delightful place.

'How's your Ma, sir?' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Did you leave her pretty

jolly?'

I gave Mr. Peggotty to understand that she was as jolly as I could wish,

and that she desired her compliments--which was a polite fiction on my

part.

'I'm much obleeged to her, I'm sure,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Well, sir,

if you can make out here, fur a fortnut, 'long wi' her,' nodding at his

sister, 'and Ham, and little Em'ly, we shall be proud of your company.'

Having done the honours of his house in this hospitable manner, Mr.

Peggotty went out to wash himself in a kettleful of hot water, remarking

that 'cold would never get his muck off'. He soon returned, greatly

improved in appearance; but so rubicund, that I couldn't help

thinking his face had this in common with the lobsters, crabs, and

crawfish,--that it went into the hot water very black, and came out very

red.

After tea, when the door was shut and all was made snug (the nights

being cold and misty now), it seemed to me the most delicious retreat

that the imagination of man could conceive. To hear the wind getting

up out at sea, to know that the fog was creeping over the desolate flat

outside, and to look at the fire, and think that there was no house near

but this one, and this one a boat, was like enchantment. Little Em'ly

had overcome her shyness, and was sitting by my side upon the lowest and

least of the lockers, which was just large enough for us two, and just

fitted into the chimney corner. Mrs. Peggotty with the white apron, was

knitting on the opposite side of the fire. Peggotty at her needlework

was as much at home with St. Paul's and the bit of wax-candle, as if

they had never known any other roof. Ham, who had been giving me my

first lesson in all-fours, was trying to recollect a scheme of telling

fortunes with the dirty cards, and was printing off fishy impressions of

his thumb on all the cards he turned. Mr. Peggotty was smoking his pipe.

I felt it was a time for conversation and confidence.

'Mr. Peggotty!' says I.

'Sir,' says he.

'Did you give your son the name of Ham, because you lived in a sort of

ark?'

Mr. Peggotty seemed to think it a deep idea, but answered:

'No, sir. I never giv him no name.'

'Who gave him that name, then?' said I, putting question number two of

the catechism to Mr. Peggotty.

'Why, sir, his father giv it him,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'I thought you were his father!'

'My brother Joe was his father,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Dead, Mr. Peggotty?' I hinted, after a respectful pause.

'Drowndead,' said Mr. Peggotty.

I was very much surprised that Mr. Peggotty was not Ham's father, and

began to wonder whether I was mistaken about his relationship to anybody

else there. I was so curious to know, that I made up my mind to have it

out with Mr. Peggotty.

'Little Em'ly,' I said, glancing at her. 'She is your daughter, isn't

she, Mr. Peggotty?'

'No, sir. My brother-in-law, Tom, was her father.'

I couldn't help it. '--Dead, Mr. Peggotty?' I hinted, after another

respectful silence.

'Drowndead,' said Mr. Peggotty.

I felt the difficulty of resuming the subject, but had not got to the

bottom of it yet, and must get to the bottom somehow. So I said:

'Haven't you ANY children, Mr. Peggotty?'

'No, master,' he answered with a short laugh. 'I'm a bacheldore.'

'A bachelor!' I said, astonished. 'Why, who's that, Mr. Peggotty?'

pointing to the person in the apron who was knitting.

'That's Missis Gummidge,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Gummidge, Mr. Peggotty?'

But at this point Peggotty--I mean my own peculiar Peggotty--made such

impressive motions to me not to ask any more questions, that I could

only sit and look at all the silent company, until it was time to go to

bed. Then, in the privacy of my own little cabin, she informed me that

Ham and Em'ly were an orphan nephew and niece, whom my host had

at different times adopted in their childhood, when they were left

destitute: and that Mrs. Gummidge was the widow of his partner in

a boat, who had died very poor. He was but a poor man himself, said

Peggotty, but as good as gold and as true as steel--those were her

similes. The only subject, she informed me, on which he ever showed a

violent temper or swore an oath, was this generosity of his; and if it

were ever referred to, by any one of them, he struck the table a heavy

blow with his right hand (had split it on one such occasion), and swore

a dreadful oath that he would be 'Gormed' if he didn't cut and run

for good, if it was ever mentioned again. It appeared, in answer to

my inquiries, that nobody had the least idea of the etymology of this

terrible verb passive to be gormed; but that they all regarded it as

constituting a most solemn imprecation.

I was very sensible of my entertainer's goodness, and listened to the

women's going to bed in another little crib like mine at the opposite

end of the boat, and to him and Ham hanging up two hammocks for

themselves on the hooks I had noticed in the roof, in a very luxurious

state of mind, enhanced by my being sleepy. As slumber gradually stole

upon me, I heard the wind howling out at sea and coming on across the

flat so fiercely, that I had a lazy apprehension of the great deep

rising in the night. But I bethought myself that I was in a boat, after

all; and that a man like Mr. Peggotty was not a bad person to have on

board if anything did happen.

Nothing happened, however, worse than morning. Almost as soon as it

shone upon the oyster-shell frame of my mirror I was out of bed, and out

with little Em'ly, picking up stones upon the beach.

'You're quite a sailor, I suppose?' I said to Em'ly. I don't know that I

supposed anything of the kind, but I felt it an act of gallantry to

say something; and a shining sail close to us made such a pretty little

image of itself, at the moment, in her bright eye, that it came into my

head to say this.

'No,' replied Em'ly, shaking her head, 'I'm afraid of the sea.'

'Afraid!' I said, with a becoming air of boldness, and looking very big

at the mighty ocean. 'I an't!'

'Ah! but it's cruel,' said Em'ly. 'I have seen it very cruel to some of

our men. I have seen it tear a boat as big as our house, all to pieces.'

'I hope it wasn't the boat that--'

'That father was drownded in?' said Em'ly. 'No. Not that one, I never

see that boat.'

'Nor him?' I asked her.

Little Em'ly shook her head. 'Not to remember!'

Here was a coincidence! I immediately went into an explanation how I had

never seen my own father; and how my mother and I had always lived

by ourselves in the happiest state imaginable, and lived so then, and

always meant to live so; and how my father's grave was in the churchyard

near our house, and shaded by a tree, beneath the boughs of which I had

walked and heard the birds sing many a pleasant morning. But there were

some differences between Em'ly's orphanhood and mine, it appeared. She

had lost her mother before her father; and where her father's grave was

no one knew, except that it was somewhere in the depths of the sea.

'Besides,' said Em'ly, as she looked about for shells and pebbles, 'your

father was a gentleman and your mother is a lady; and my father was a

fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my uncle Dan is

a fisherman.'

'Dan is Mr. Peggotty, is he?' said I.

'Uncle Dan--yonder,' answered Em'ly, nodding at the boat-house.

'Yes. I mean him. He must be very good, I should think?'

'Good?' said Em'ly. 'If I was ever to be a lady, I'd give him a sky-blue

coat with diamond buttons, nankeen trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a

cocked hat, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money.'

I said I had no doubt that Mr. Peggotty well deserved these treasures.

I must acknowledge that I felt it difficult to picture him quite at his

ease in the raiment proposed for him by his grateful little niece, and

that I was particularly doubtful of the policy of the cocked hat; but I

kept these sentiments to myself.

Little Em'ly had stopped and looked up at the sky in her enumeration

of these articles, as if they were a glorious vision. We went on again,

picking up shells and pebbles.

'You would like to be a lady?' I said.

Emily looked at me, and laughed and nodded 'yes'.

'I should like it very much. We would all be gentlefolks together, then.

Me, and uncle, and Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge. We wouldn't mind then, when

there comes stormy weather.---Not for our own sakes, I mean. We would

for the poor fishermen's, to be sure, and we'd help 'em with money when

they come to any hurt.' This seemed to me to be a very satisfactory and

therefore not at all improbable picture. I expressed my pleasure in the

contemplation of it, and little Em'ly was emboldened to say, shyly,

'Don't you think you are afraid of the sea, now?'

It was quiet enough to reassure me, but I have no doubt if I had seen a

moderately large wave come tumbling in, I should have taken to my heels,

with an awful recollection of her drowned relations. However, I said

'No,' and I added, 'You don't seem to be either, though you say you

are,'--for she was walking much too near the brink of a sort of old

jetty or wooden causeway we had strolled upon, and I was afraid of her

falling over.

'I'm not afraid in this way,' said little Em'ly. 'But I wake when it

blows, and tremble to think of Uncle Dan and Ham and believe I hear 'em

crying out for help. That's why I should like so much to be a lady. But

I'm not afraid in this way. Not a bit. Look here!'

She started from my side, and ran along a jagged timber which protruded

from the place we stood upon, and overhung the deep water at some

height, without the least defence. The incident is so impressed on my

remembrance, that if I were a draughtsman I could draw its form here,

I dare say, accurately as it was that day, and little Em'ly springing

forward to her destruction (as it appeared to me), with a look that I

have never forgotten, directed far out to sea.

The light, bold, fluttering little figure turned and came back safe

to me, and I soon laughed at my fears, and at the cry I had uttered;

fruitlessly in any case, for there was no one near. But there have been

times since, in my manhood, many times there have been, when I have

thought, Is it possible, among the possibilities of hidden things, that

in the sudden rashness of the child and her wild look so far off, there

was any merciful attraction of her into danger, any tempting her towards

him permitted on the part of her dead father, that her life might have

a chance of ending that day? There has been a time since when I have

wondered whether, if the life before her could have been revealed to me

at a glance, and so revealed as that a child could fully comprehend it,

and if her preservation could have depended on a motion of my hand, I

ought to have held it up to save her. There has been a time since--I do

not say it lasted long, but it has been--when I have asked myself the

question, would it have been better for little Em'ly to have had the

waters close above her head that morning in my sight; and when I have

answered Yes, it would have been.

This may be premature. I have set it down too soon, perhaps. But let it

stand.

We strolled a long way, and loaded ourselves with things that we thought

curious, and put some stranded starfish carefully back into the water--I

hardly know enough of the race at this moment to be quite certain

whether they had reason to feel obliged to us for doing so, or the

reverse--and then made our way home to Mr. Peggotty's dwelling. We

stopped under the lee of the lobster-outhouse to exchange an innocent

kiss, and went in to breakfast glowing with health and pleasure.

'Like two young mavishes,' Mr. Peggotty said. I knew this meant, in our

local dialect, like two young thrushes, and received it as a compliment.

Of course I was in love with little Em'ly. I am sure I loved that

baby quite as truly, quite as tenderly, with greater purity and more

disinterestedness, than can enter into the best love of a later time

of life, high and ennobling as it is. I am sure my fancy raised up

something round that blue-eyed mite of a child, which etherealized,

and made a very angel of her. If, any sunny forenoon, she had spread

a little pair of wings and flown away before my eyes, I don't think I

should have regarded it as much more than I had had reason to expect.

We used to walk about that dim old flat at Yarmouth in a loving manner,

hours and hours. The days sported by us, as if Time had not grown up

himself yet, but were a child too, and always at play. I told Em'ly

I adored her, and that unless she confessed she adored me I should be

reduced to the necessity of killing myself with a sword. She said she

did, and I have no doubt she did.

As to any sense of inequality, or youthfulness, or other difficulty

in our way, little Em'ly and I had no such trouble, because we had no

future. We made no more provision for growing older, than we did for

growing younger. We were the admiration of Mrs. Gummidge and Peggotty,

who used to whisper of an evening when we sat, lovingly, on our little

locker side by side, 'Lor! wasn't it beautiful!' Mr. Peggotty smiled at

us from behind his pipe, and Ham grinned all the evening and did nothing

else. They had something of the sort of pleasure in us, I suppose, that

they might have had in a pretty toy, or a pocket model of the Colosseum.

I soon found out that Mrs. Gummidge did not always make herself so

agreeable as she might have been expected to do, under the circumstances

of her residence with Mr. Peggotty. Mrs. Gummidge's was rather a fretful

disposition, and she whimpered more sometimes than was comfortable for

other parties in so small an establishment. I was very sorry for

her; but there were moments when it would have been more agreeable, I

thought, if Mrs. Gummidge had had a convenient apartment of her own to

retire to, and had stopped there until her spirits revived.

Mr. Peggotty went occasionally to a public-house called The Willing

Mind. I discovered this, by his being out on the second or third evening

of our visit, and by Mrs. Gummidge's looking up at the Dutch clock,

between eight and nine, and saying he was there, and that, what was

more, she had known in the morning he would go there.

Mrs. Gummidge had been in a low state all day, and had burst into tears

in the forenoon, when the fire smoked. 'I am a lone lorn creetur',' were

Mrs. Gummidge's words, when that unpleasant occurrence took place, 'and

everythink goes contrary with me.'

'Oh, it'll soon leave off,' said Peggotty--I again mean our

Peggotty--'and besides, you know, it's not more disagreeable to you than

to us.'

'I feel it more,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

It was a very cold day, with cutting blasts of wind. Mrs. Gummidge's

peculiar corner of the fireside seemed to me to be the warmest and

snuggest in the place, as her chair was certainly the easiest, but it

didn't suit her that day at all. She was constantly complaining of the

cold, and of its occasioning a visitation in her back which she called

'the creeps'. At last she shed tears on that subject, and said again

that she was 'a lone lorn creetur' and everythink went contrary with

her'.

'It is certainly very cold,' said Peggotty. 'Everybody must feel it so.'

'I feel it more than other people,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

So at dinner; when Mrs. Gummidge was always helped immediately after me,

to whom the preference was given as a visitor of distinction. The

fish were small and bony, and the potatoes were a little burnt. We all

acknowledged that we felt this something of a disappointment; but Mrs.

Gummidge said she felt it more than we did, and shed tears again, and

made that former declaration with great bitterness.

Accordingly, when Mr. Peggotty came home about nine o'clock, this

unfortunate Mrs. Gummidge was knitting in her corner, in a very wretched

and miserable condition. Peggotty had been working cheerfully. Ham had

been patching up a great pair of waterboots; and I, with little Em'ly

by my side, had been reading to them. Mrs. Gummidge had never made any

other remark than a forlorn sigh, and had never raised her eyes since

tea.

'Well, Mates,' said Mr. Peggotty, taking his seat, 'and how are you?'

We all said something, or looked something, to welcome him, except Mrs.

Gummidge, who only shook her head over her knitting.

'What's amiss?' said Mr. Peggotty, with a clap of his hands. 'Cheer up,

old Mawther!' (Mr. Peggotty meant old girl.)

Mrs. Gummidge did not appear to be able to cheer up. She took out an old

black silk handkerchief and wiped her eyes; but instead of putting it

in her pocket, kept it out, and wiped them again, and still kept it out,

ready for use.

'What's amiss, dame?' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Nothing,' returned Mrs. Gummidge. 'You've come from The Willing Mind,

Dan'l?'

'Why yes, I've took a short spell at The Willing Mind tonight,' said Mr.

Peggotty.

'I'm sorry I should drive you there,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

'Drive! I don't want no driving,' returned Mr. Peggotty with an honest

laugh. 'I only go too ready.'

'Very ready,' said Mrs. Gummidge, shaking her head, and wiping her eyes.

'Yes, yes, very ready. I am sorry it should be along of me that you're

so ready.'

'Along o' you! It an't along o' you!' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Don't ye

believe a bit on it.'

'Yes, yes, it is,' cried Mrs. Gummidge. 'I know what I am. I know that I

am a lone lorn creetur', and not only that everythink goes contrary with

me, but that I go contrary with everybody. Yes, yes. I feel more than

other people do, and I show it more. It's my misfortun'.'

I really couldn't help thinking, as I sat taking in all this, that the

misfortune extended to some other members of that family besides Mrs.

Gummidge. But Mr. Peggotty made no such retort, only answering with

another entreaty to Mrs. Gummidge to cheer up.

'I an't what I could wish myself to be,' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'I am far

from it. I know what I am. My troubles has made me contrary. I feel my

troubles, and they make me contrary. I wish I didn't feel 'em, but I

do. I wish I could be hardened to 'em, but I an't. I make the house

uncomfortable. I don't wonder at it. I've made your sister so all day,

and Master Davy.'

Here I was suddenly melted, and roared out, 'No, you haven't, Mrs.

Gummidge,' in great mental distress.

'It's far from right that I should do it,' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'It an't

a fit return. I had better go into the house and die. I am a lone lorn

creetur', and had much better not make myself contrary here. If thinks

must go contrary with me, and I must go contrary myself, let me go

contrary in my parish. Dan'l, I'd better go into the house, and die and

be a riddance!'

Mrs. Gummidge retired with these words, and betook herself to bed. When

she was gone, Mr. Peggotty, who had not exhibited a trace of any feeling

but the profoundest sympathy, looked round upon us, and nodding his head

with a lively expression of that sentiment still animating his face,

said in a whisper:

'She's been thinking of the old 'un!'

I did not quite understand what old one Mrs. Gummidge was supposed to

have fixed her mind upon, until Peggotty, on seeing me to bed, explained

that it was the late Mr. Gummidge; and that her brother always took that

for a received truth on such occasions, and that it always had a moving

effect upon him. Some time after he was in his hammock that night, I

heard him myself repeat to Ham, 'Poor thing! She's been thinking of the

old 'un!' And whenever Mrs. Gummidge was overcome in a similar manner

during the remainder of our stay (which happened some few times), he

always said the same thing in extenuation of the circumstance, and

always with the tenderest commiseration.

So the fortnight slipped away, varied by nothing but the variation of

the tide, which altered Mr. Peggotty's times of going out and coming in,

and altered Ham's engagements also. When the latter was unemployed, he

sometimes walked with us to show us the boats and ships, and once

or twice he took us for a row. I don't know why one slight set of

impressions should be more particularly associated with a place than

another, though I believe this obtains with most people, in reference

especially to the associations of their childhood. I never hear the

name, or read the name, of Yarmouth, but I am reminded of a certain

Sunday morning on the beach, the bells ringing for church, little Em'ly

leaning on my shoulder, Ham lazily dropping stones into the water, and

the sun, away at sea, just breaking through the heavy mist, and showing

us the ships, like their own shadows.

At last the day came for going home. I bore up against the separation

from Mr. Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge, but my agony of mind at leaving

little Em'ly was piercing. We went arm-in-arm to the public-house where

the carrier put up, and I promised, on the road, to write to her. (I

redeemed that promise afterwards, in characters larger than those in

which apartments are usually announced in manuscript, as being to let.)

We were greatly overcome at parting; and if ever, in my life, I have had

a void made in my heart, I had one made that day.

Now, all the time I had been on my visit, I had been ungrateful to my

home again, and had thought little or nothing about it. But I was no

sooner turned towards it, than my reproachful young conscience seemed

to point that way with a ready finger; and I felt, all the more for the

sinking of my spirits, that it was my nest, and that my mother was my

comforter and friend.

This gained upon me as we went along; so that the nearer we drew, the

more familiar the objects became that we passed, the more excited I was

to get there, and to run into her arms. But Peggotty, instead of sharing

in those transports, tried to check them (though very kindly), and

looked confused and out of sorts.

Blunderstone Rookery would come, however, in spite of her, when the

carrier's horse pleased--and did. How well I recollect it, on a cold

grey afternoon, with a dull sky, threatening rain!

The door opened, and I looked, half laughing and half crying in my

pleasant agitation, for my mother. It was not she, but a strange

servant.

'Why, Peggotty!' I said, ruefully, 'isn't she come home?'

'Yes, yes, Master Davy,' said Peggotty. 'She's come home. Wait a bit,

Master Davy, and I'll--I'll tell you something.'

Between her agitation, and her natural awkwardness in getting out of the

cart, Peggotty was making a most extraordinary festoon of herself, but

I felt too blank and strange to tell her so. When she had got down, she

took me by the hand; led me, wondering, into the kitchen; and shut the

door.

'Peggotty!' said I, quite frightened. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing's the matter, bless you, Master Davy dear!' she answered,

assuming an air of sprightliness.

'Something's the matter, I'm sure. Where's mama?'

'Where's mama, Master Davy?' repeated Peggotty.

'Yes. Why hasn't she come out to the gate, and what have we come in here

for? Oh, Peggotty!' My eyes were full, and I felt as if I were going to

tumble down.

'Bless the precious boy!' cried Peggotty, taking hold of me. 'What is

it? Speak, my pet!'

'Not dead, too! Oh, she's not dead, Peggotty?'

Peggotty cried out No! with an astonishing volume of voice; and then sat

down, and began to pant, and said I had given her a turn.

I gave her a hug to take away the turn, or to give her another turn

in the right direction, and then stood before her, looking at her in

anxious inquiry.

'You see, dear, I should have told you before now,' said Peggotty,

'but I hadn't an opportunity. I ought to have made it, perhaps, but

I couldn't azackly'--that was always the substitute for exactly, in

Peggotty's militia of words--'bring my mind to it.'

'Go on, Peggotty,' said I, more frightened than before.

'Master Davy,' said Peggotty, untying her bonnet with a shaking hand,

and speaking in a breathless sort of way. 'What do you think? You have

got a Pa!'

I trembled, and turned white. Something--I don't know what, or

how--connected with the grave in the churchyard, and the raising of the

dead, seemed to strike me like an unwholesome wind.

'A new one,' said Peggotty.

'A new one?' I repeated.

Peggotty gave a gasp, as if she were swallowing something that was very

hard, and, putting out her hand, said:

'Come and see him.'

'I don't want to see him.' --'And your mama,' said Peggotty.

I ceased to draw back, and we went straight to the best parlour, where

she left me. On one side of the fire, sat my mother; on the other, Mr.

Murdstone. My mother dropped her work, and arose hurriedly, but timidly

I thought.

'Now, Clara my dear,' said Mr. Murdstone. 'Recollect! control yourself,

always control yourself! Davy boy, how do you do?'

I gave him my hand. After a moment of suspense, I went and kissed my

mother: she kissed me, patted me gently on the shoulder, and sat down

again to her work. I could not look at her, I could not look at him,

I knew quite well that he was looking at us both; and I turned to the

window and looked out there, at some shrubs that were drooping their

heads in the cold.

As soon as I could creep away, I crept upstairs. My old dear bedroom was

changed, and I was to lie a long way off. I rambled downstairs to find

anything that was like itself, so altered it all seemed; and roamed into

the yard. I very soon started back from there, for the empty dog-kennel

was filled up with a great dog--deep mouthed and black-haired like

Him--and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprang out to get at

me.

CHAPTER 4. I FALL INTO DISGRACE

If the room to which my bed was removed were a sentient thing that could

give evidence, I might appeal to it at this day--who sleeps there now,

I wonder!--to bear witness for me what a heavy heart I carried to it.

I went up there, hearing the dog in the yard bark after me all the way

while I climbed the stairs; and, looking as blank and strange upon the

room as the room looked upon me, sat down with my small hands crossed,

and thought.

I thought of the oddest things. Of the shape of the room, of the

cracks in the ceiling, of the paper on the walls, of the flaws in

the window-glass making ripples and dimples on the prospect, of the

washing-stand being rickety on its three legs, and having a discontented

something about it, which reminded me of Mrs. Gummidge under the

influence of the old one. I was crying all the time, but, except that I

was conscious of being cold and dejected, I am sure I never thought

why I cried. At last in my desolation I began to consider that I was

dreadfully in love with little Em'ly, and had been torn away from her to

come here where no one seemed to want me, or to care about me, half as

much as she did. This made such a very miserable piece of business of

it, that I rolled myself up in a corner of the counterpane, and cried

myself to sleep.

I was awoke by somebody saying 'Here he is!' and uncovering my hot head.

My mother and Peggotty had come to look for me, and it was one of them

who had done it.

'Davy,' said my mother. 'What's the matter?'

I thought it was very strange that she should ask me, and answered,

'Nothing.' I turned over on my face, I recollect, to hide my trembling

lip, which answered her with greater truth. 'Davy,' said my mother.

'Davy, my child!'

I dare say no words she could have uttered would have affected me

so much, then, as her calling me her child. I hid my tears in the

bedclothes, and pressed her from me with my hand, when she would have

raised me up.

'This is your doing, Peggotty, you cruel thing!' said my mother. 'I have

no doubt at all about it. How can you reconcile it to your conscience,

I wonder, to prejudice my own boy against me, or against anybody who is

dear to me? What do you mean by it, Peggotty?'

Poor Peggotty lifted up her hands and eyes, and only answered, in a

sort of paraphrase of the grace I usually repeated after dinner, 'Lord

forgive you, Mrs. Copperfield, and for what you have said this minute,

may you never be truly sorry!'

'It's enough to distract me,' cried my mother. 'In my honeymoon, too,

when my most inveterate enemy might relent, one would think, and not

envy me a little peace of mind and happiness. Davy, you naughty boy!

Peggotty, you savage creature! Oh, dear me!' cried my mother, turning

from one of us to the other, in her pettish wilful manner, 'what a

troublesome world this is, when one has the most right to expect it to

be as agreeable as possible!'

I felt the touch of a hand that I knew was neither hers nor Peggotty's,

and slipped to my feet at the bed-side. It was Mr. Murdstone's hand, and

he kept it on my arm as he said:

'What's this? Clara, my love, have you forgotten?--Firmness, my dear!'

'I am very sorry, Edward,' said my mother. 'I meant to be very good, but

I am so uncomfortable.'

'Indeed!' he answered. 'That's a bad hearing, so soon, Clara.'

'I say it's very hard I should be made so now,' returned my mother,

pouting; 'and it is--very hard--isn't it?'

He drew her to him, whispered in her ear, and kissed her. I knew as

well, when I saw my mother's head lean down upon his shoulder, and her

arm touch his neck--I knew as well that he could mould her pliant nature

into any form he chose, as I know, now, that he did it.

'Go you below, my love,' said Mr. Murdstone. 'David and I will come

down, together. My friend,' turning a darkening face on Peggotty, when

he had watched my mother out, and dismissed her with a nod and a smile;

'do you know your mistress's name?'

'She has been my mistress a long time, sir,' answered Peggotty, 'I ought

to know it.' 'That's true,' he answered. 'But I thought I heard you, as

I came upstairs, address her by a name that is not hers. She has taken

mine, you know. Will you remember that?'

Peggotty, with some uneasy glances at me, curtseyed herself out of the

room without replying; seeing, I suppose, that she was expected to go,

and had no excuse for remaining. When we two were left alone, he shut

the door, and sitting on a chair, and holding me standing before him,

looked steadily into my eyes. I felt my own attracted, no less steadily,

to his. As I recall our being opposed thus, face to face, I seem again

to hear my heart beat fast and high.

'David,' he said, making his lips thin, by pressing them together, 'if I

have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do?'

'I don't know.'

'I beat him.'

I had answered in a kind of breathless whisper, but I felt, in my

silence, that my breath was shorter now.

'I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, "I'll conquer that

fellow"; and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I should do

it. What is that upon your face?'

'Dirt,' I said.

He knew it was the mark of tears as well as I. But if he had asked the

question twenty times, each time with twenty blows, I believe my baby

heart would have burst before I would have told him so.

'You have a good deal of intelligence for a little fellow,' he said,

with a grave smile that belonged to him, 'and you understood me very

well, I see. Wash that face, sir, and come down with me.'

He pointed to the washing-stand, which I had made out to be like Mrs.

Gummidge, and motioned me with his head to obey him directly. I had

little doubt then, and I have less doubt now, that he would have knocked

me down without the least compunction, if I had hesitated.

'Clara, my dear,' he said, when I had done his bidding, and he walked me

into the parlour, with his hand still on my arm; 'you will not be made

uncomfortable any more, I hope. We shall soon improve our youthful

humours.'

God help me, I might have been improved for my whole life, I might have

been made another creature perhaps, for life, by a kind word at that

season. A word of encouragement and explanation, of pity for my childish

ignorance, of welcome home, of reassurance to me that it was home, might

have made me dutiful to him in my heart henceforth, instead of in my

hypocritical outside, and might have made me respect instead of hate

him. I thought my mother was sorry to see me standing in the room so

scared and strange, and that, presently, when I stole to a chair, she

followed me with her eyes more sorrowfully still--missing, perhaps, some

freedom in my childish tread--but the word was not spoken, and the time

for it was gone.

We dined alone, we three together. He seemed to be very fond of my

mother--I am afraid I liked him none the better for that--and she was

very fond of him. I gathered from what they said, that an elder sister

of his was coming to stay with them, and that she was expected that

evening. I am not certain whether I found out then, or afterwards, that,

without being actively concerned in any business, he had some share in,

or some annual charge upon the profits of, a wine-merchant's house

in London, with which his family had been connected from his

great-grandfather's time, and in which his sister had a similar

interest; but I may mention it in this place, whether or no.

After dinner, when we were sitting by the fire, and I was meditating an

escape to Peggotty without having the hardihood to slip away, lest

it should offend the master of the house, a coach drove up to the

garden-gate and he went out to receive the visitor. My mother followed

him. I was timidly following her, when she turned round at the parlour

door, in the dusk, and taking me in her embrace as she had been used to

do, whispered me to love my new father and be obedient to him. She did

this hurriedly and secretly, as if it were wrong, but tenderly; and,

putting out her hand behind her, held mine in it, until we came near

to where he was standing in the garden, where she let mine go, and drew

hers through his arm.

It was Miss Murdstone who was arrived, and a gloomy-looking lady she

was; dark, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and

voice; and with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose,

as if, being disabled by the wrongs of her sex from wearing whiskers,

she had carried them to that account. She brought with her two

uncompromising hard black boxes, with her initials on the lids in hard

brass nails. When she paid the coachman she took her money out of a hard

steel purse, and she kept the purse in a very jail of a bag which hung

upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bite. I had never, at

that time, seen such a metallic lady altogether as Miss Murdstone was.

She was brought into the parlour with many tokens of welcome, and there

formally recognized my mother as a new and near relation. Then she

looked at me, and said:

'Is that your boy, sister-in-law?'

My mother acknowledged me.

'Generally speaking,' said Miss Murdstone, 'I don't like boys. How d'ye

do, boy?'

Under these encouraging circumstances, I replied that I was very well,

and that I hoped she was the same; with such an indifferent grace, that

Miss Murdstone disposed of me in two words:

'Wants manner!'

Having uttered which, with great distinctness, she begged the favour of

being shown to her room, which became to me from that time forth a place

of awe and dread, wherein the two black boxes were never seen open or

known to be left unlocked, and where (for I peeped in once or twice when

she was out) numerous little steel fetters and rivets, with which Miss

Murdstone embellished herself when she was dressed, generally hung upon

the looking-glass in formidable array.

As well as I could make out, she had come for good, and had no intention

of ever going again. She began to 'help' my mother next morning, and was

in and out of the store-closet all day, putting things to rights, and

making havoc in the old arrangements. Almost the first remarkable thing

I observed in Miss Murdstone was, her being constantly haunted by

a suspicion that the servants had a man secreted somewhere on the

premises. Under the influence of this delusion, she dived into the

coal-cellar at the most untimely hours, and scarcely ever opened the

door of a dark cupboard without clapping it to again, in the belief that

she had got him.

Though there was nothing very airy about Miss Murdstone, she was a

perfect Lark in point of getting up. She was up (and, as I believe

to this hour, looking for that man) before anybody in the house was

stirring. Peggotty gave it as her opinion that she even slept with one

eye open; but I could not concur in this idea; for I tried it myself

after hearing the suggestion thrown out, and found it couldn't be done.

On the very first morning after her arrival she was up and ringing her

bell at cock-crow. When my mother came down to breakfast and was going

to make the tea, Miss Murdstone gave her a kind of peck on the cheek,

which was her nearest approach to a kiss, and said:

'Now, Clara, my dear, I am come here, you know, to relieve you of all

the trouble I can. You're much too pretty and thoughtless'--my mother

blushed but laughed, and seemed not to dislike this character--'to have

any duties imposed upon you that can be undertaken by me. If you'll be

so good as give me your keys, my dear, I'll attend to all this sort of

thing in future.'

From that time, Miss Murdstone kept the keys in her own little jail all

day, and under her pillow all night, and my mother had no more to do

with them than I had.

My mother did not suffer her authority to pass from her without a shadow

of protest. One night when Miss Murdstone had been developing certain

household plans to her brother, of which he signified his approbation,

my mother suddenly began to cry, and said she thought she might have

been consulted.

'Clara!' said Mr. Murdstone sternly. 'Clara! I wonder at you.'

'Oh, it's very well to say you wonder, Edward!' cried my mother, 'and

it's very well for you to talk about firmness, but you wouldn't like it

yourself.'

Firmness, I may observe, was the grand quality on which both Mr. and

Miss Murdstone took their stand. However I might have expressed

my comprehension of it at that time, if I had been called upon, I

nevertheless did clearly comprehend in my own way, that it was another

name for tyranny; and for a certain gloomy, arrogant, devil's humour,

that was in them both. The creed, as I should state it now, was this.

Mr. Murdstone was firm; nobody in his world was to be so firm as Mr.

Murdstone; nobody else in his world was to be firm at all, for everybody

was to be bent to his firmness. Miss Murdstone was an exception.

She might be firm, but only by relationship, and in an inferior and

tributary degree. My mother was another exception. She might be firm,

and must be; but only in bearing their firmness, and firmly believing

there was no other firmness upon earth.

'It's very hard,' said my mother, 'that in my own house--'

'My own house?' repeated Mr. Murdstone. 'Clara!'

'OUR own house, I mean,' faltered my mother, evidently frightened--'I

hope you must know what I mean, Edward--it's very hard that in YOUR own

house I may not have a word to say about domestic matters. I am sure

I managed very well before we were married. There's evidence,' said my

mother, sobbing; 'ask Peggotty if I didn't do very well when I wasn't

interfered with!'

'Edward,' said Miss Murdstone, 'let there be an end of this. I go

tomorrow.'

'Jane Murdstone,' said her brother, 'be silent! How dare you to

insinuate that you don't know my character better than your words

imply?'

'I am sure,' my poor mother went on, at a grievous disadvantage, and

with many tears, 'I don't want anybody to go. I should be very

miserable and unhappy if anybody was to go. I don't ask much. I am not

unreasonable. I only want to be consulted sometimes. I am very much

obliged to anybody who assists me, and I only want to be consulted as a

mere form, sometimes. I thought you were pleased, once, with my being a

little inexperienced and girlish, Edward--I am sure you said so--but you

seem to hate me for it now, you are so severe.'

'Edward,' said Miss Murdstone, again, 'let there be an end of this. I go

tomorrow.'

'Jane Murdstone,' thundered Mr. Murdstone. 'Will you be silent? How dare

you?'

Miss Murdstone made a jail-delivery of her pocket-handkerchief, and held

it before her eyes.

'Clara,' he continued, looking at my mother, 'you surprise me! You

astound me! Yes, I had a satisfaction in the thought of marrying

an inexperienced and artless person, and forming her character, and

infusing into it some amount of that firmness and decision of which

it stood in need. But when Jane Murdstone is kind enough to come to my

assistance in this endeavour, and to assume, for my sake, a condition

something like a housekeeper's, and when she meets with a base return--'

'Oh, pray, pray, Edward,' cried my mother, 'don't accuse me of being

ungrateful. I am sure I am not ungrateful. No one ever said I was

before. I have many faults, but not that. Oh, don't, my dear!'

'When Jane Murdstone meets, I say,' he went on, after waiting until my

mother was silent, 'with a base return, that feeling of mine is chilled

and altered.'

'Don't, my love, say that!' implored my mother very piteously.

'Oh, don't, Edward! I can't bear to hear it. Whatever I am, I am

affectionate. I know I am affectionate. I wouldn't say it, if I

wasn't sure that I am. Ask Peggotty. I am sure she'll tell you I'm

affectionate.'

'There is no extent of mere weakness, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone in

reply, 'that can have the least weight with me. You lose breath.'

'Pray let us be friends,' said my mother, 'I couldn't live under

coldness or unkindness. I am so sorry. I have a great many defects, I

know, and it's very good of you, Edward, with your strength of mind, to

endeavour to correct them for me. Jane, I don't object to anything. I

should be quite broken-hearted if you thought of leaving--' My mother

was too much overcome to go on.

'Jane Murdstone,' said Mr. Murdstone to his sister, 'any harsh words

between us are, I hope, uncommon. It is not my fault that so unusual an

occurrence has taken place tonight. I was betrayed into it by another.

Nor is it your fault. You were betrayed into it by another. Let us both

try to forget it. And as this,' he added, after these magnanimous words,

'is not a fit scene for the boy--David, go to bed!'

I could hardly find the door, through the tears that stood in my eyes.

I was so sorry for my mother's distress; but I groped my way out, and

groped my way up to my room in the dark, without even having the heart

to say good night to Peggotty, or to get a candle from her. When her

coming up to look for me, an hour or so afterwards, awoke me, she said

that my mother had gone to bed poorly, and that Mr. and Miss Murdstone

were sitting alone.

Going down next morning rather earlier than usual, I paused outside the

parlour door, on hearing my mother's voice. She was very earnestly and

humbly entreating Miss Murdstone's pardon, which that lady granted, and

a perfect reconciliation took place. I never knew my mother afterwards

to give an opinion on any matter, without first appealing to Miss

Murdstone, or without having first ascertained by some sure means, what

Miss Murdstone's opinion was; and I never saw Miss Murdstone, when out

of temper (she was infirm that way), move her hand towards her bag as

if she were going to take out the keys and offer to resign them to my

mother, without seeing that my mother was in a terrible fright.

The gloomy taint that was in the Murdstone blood, darkened the Murdstone

religion, which was austere and wrathful. I have thought, since,

that its assuming that character was a necessary consequence of Mr.

Murdstone's firmness, which wouldn't allow him to let anybody off from

the utmost weight of the severest penalties he could find any excuse

for. Be this as it may, I well remember the tremendous visages with

which we used to go to church, and the changed air of the place. Again,

the dreaded Sunday comes round, and I file into the old pew first, like

a guarded captive brought to a condemned service. Again, Miss Murdstone,

in a black velvet gown, that looks as if it had been made out of a pall,

follows close upon me; then my mother; then her husband. There is no

Peggotty now, as in the old time. Again, I listen to Miss Murdstone

mumbling the responses, and emphasizing all the dread words with a cruel

relish. Again, I see her dark eyes roll round the church when she says

'miserable sinners', as if she were calling all the congregation names.

Again, I catch rare glimpses of my mother, moving her lips timidly

between the two, with one of them muttering at each ear like low

thunder. Again, I wonder with a sudden fear whether it is likely that

our good old clergyman can be wrong, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone right,

and that all the angels in Heaven can be destroying angels. Again, if I

move a finger or relax a muscle of my face, Miss Murdstone pokes me with

her prayer-book, and makes my side ache.

Yes, and again, as we walk home, I note some neighbours looking at my

mother and at me, and whispering. Again, as the three go on arm-in-arm,

and I linger behind alone, I follow some of those looks, and wonder if

my mother's step be really not so light as I have seen it, and if the

gaiety of her beauty be really almost worried away. Again, I wonder

whether any of the neighbours call to mind, as I do, how we used to

walk home together, she and I; and I wonder stupidly about that, all the

dreary dismal day.

There had been some talk on occasions of my going to boarding-school.

Mr. and Miss Murdstone had originated it, and my mother had of course

agreed with them. Nothing, however, was concluded on the subject yet.

In the meantime, I learnt lessons at home. Shall I ever forget those

lessons! They were presided over nominally by my mother, but really by

Mr. Murdstone and his sister, who were always present, and found them

a favourable occasion for giving my mother lessons in that miscalled

firmness, which was the bane of both our lives. I believe I was kept

at home for that purpose. I had been apt enough to learn, and willing

enough, when my mother and I had lived alone together. I can faintly

remember learning the alphabet at her knee. To this day, when I look

upon the fat black letters in the primer, the puzzling novelty of their

shapes, and the easy good-nature of O and Q and S, seem to present

themselves again before me as they used to do. But they recall no

feeling of disgust or reluctance. On the contrary, I seem to have walked

along a path of flowers as far as the crocodile-book, and to have been

cheered by the gentleness of my mother's voice and manner all the

way. But these solemn lessons which succeeded those, I remember as the

death-blow of my peace, and a grievous daily drudgery and misery. They

were very long, very numerous, very hard--perfectly unintelligible,

some of them, to me--and I was generally as much bewildered by them as I

believe my poor mother was herself.

Let me remember how it used to be, and bring one morning back again.

I come into the second-best parlour after breakfast, with my books,

and an exercise-book, and a slate. My mother is ready for me at her

writing-desk, but not half so ready as Mr. Murdstone in his easy-chair

by the window (though he pretends to be reading a book), or as Miss

Murdstone, sitting near my mother stringing steel beads. The very sight

of these two has such an influence over me, that I begin to feel the

words I have been at infinite pains to get into my head, all sliding

away, and going I don't know where. I wonder where they do go, by the

by?

I hand the first book to my mother. Perhaps it is a grammar, perhaps a

history, or geography. I take a last drowning look at the page as I give

it into her hand, and start off aloud at a racing pace while I have

got it fresh. I trip over a word. Mr. Murdstone looks up. I trip

over another word. Miss Murdstone looks up. I redden, tumble over

half-a-dozen words, and stop. I think my mother would show me the book

if she dared, but she does not dare, and she says softly:

'Oh, Davy, Davy!'

'Now, Clara,' says Mr. Murdstone, 'be firm with the boy. Don't say, "Oh,

Davy, Davy!" That's childish. He knows his lesson, or he does not know

it.'

'He does NOT know it,' Miss Murdstone interposes awfully.

'I am really afraid he does not,' says my mother.

'Then, you see, Clara,' returns Miss Murdstone, 'you should just give

him the book back, and make him know it.'

'Yes, certainly,' says my mother; 'that is what I intend to do, my dear

Jane. Now, Davy, try once more, and don't be stupid.'

I obey the first clause of the injunction by trying once more, but am

not so successful with the second, for I am very stupid. I tumble down

before I get to the old place, at a point where I was all right before,

and stop to think. But I can't think about the lesson. I think of the

number of yards of net in Miss Murdstone's cap, or of the price of Mr.

Murdstone's dressing-gown, or any such ridiculous problem that I have

no business with, and don't want to have anything at all to do with. Mr.

Murdstone makes a movement of impatience which I have been expecting

for a long time. Miss Murdstone does the same. My mother glances

submissively at them, shuts the book, and lays it by as an arrear to be

worked out when my other tasks are done.

There is a pile of these arrears very soon, and it swells like a rolling

snowball. The bigger it gets, the more stupid I get. The case is so

hopeless, and I feel that I am wallowing in such a bog of nonsense, that

I give up all idea of getting out, and abandon myself to my fate. The

despairing way in which my mother and I look at each other, as I blunder

on, is truly melancholy. But the greatest effect in these miserable

lessons is when my mother (thinking nobody is observing her) tries

to give me the cue by the motion of her lips. At that instant, Miss

Murdstone, who has been lying in wait for nothing else all along, says

in a deep warning voice:

'Clara!'

My mother starts, colours, and smiles faintly. Mr. Murdstone comes out

of his chair, takes the book, throws it at me or boxes my ears with it,

and turns me out of the room by the shoulders.

Even when the lessons are done, the worst is yet to happen, in the shape

of an appalling sum. This is invented for me, and delivered to me orally

by Mr. Murdstone, and begins, 'If I go into a cheesemonger's shop, and

buy five thousand double-Gloucester cheeses at fourpence-halfpenny each,

present payment'--at which I see Miss Murdstone secretly overjoyed.

I pore over these cheeses without any result or enlightenment until

dinner-time, when, having made a Mulatto of myself by getting the dirt

of the slate into the pores of my skin, I have a slice of bread to help

me out with the cheeses, and am considered in disgrace for the rest of

the evening.

It seems to me, at this distance of time, as if my unfortunate studies

generally took this course. I could have done very well if I had been

without the Murdstones; but the influence of the Murdstones upon me was

like the fascination of two snakes on a wretched young bird. Even when

I did get through the morning with tolerable credit, there was not

much gained but dinner; for Miss Murdstone never could endure to see me

untasked, and if I rashly made any show of being unemployed, called her

brother's attention to me by saying, 'Clara, my dear, there's nothing

like work--give your boy an exercise'; which caused me to be clapped

down to some new labour, there and then. As to any recreation with other

children of my age, I had very little of that; for the gloomy theology

of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers

(though there WAS a child once set in the midst of the Disciples), and

held that they contaminated one another.

The natural result of this treatment, continued, I suppose, for some six

months or more, was to make me sullen, dull, and dogged. I was not

made the less so by my sense of being daily more and more shut out and

alienated from my mother. I believe I should have been almost stupefied

but for one circumstance.

It was this. My father had left a small collection of books in a little

room upstairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which

nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room,

Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the

Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came

out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and

my hope of something beyond that place and time,--they, and the Arabian

Nights, and the Tales of the Genii,--and did me no harm; for whatever

harm was in some of them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it. It

is astonishing to me now, how I found time, in the midst of my porings

and blunderings over heavier themes, to read those books as I did. It

is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my

small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my

favourite characters in them--as I did--and by putting Mr. and Miss

Murdstone into all the bad ones--which I did too. I have been Tom Jones

(a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have

sustained my own idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch, I

verily believe. I had a greedy relish for a few volumes of Voyages and

Travels--I forget what, now--that were on those shelves; and for days

and days I can remember to have gone about my region of our house,

armed with the centre-piece out of an old set of boot-trees--the perfect

realization of Captain Somebody, of the Royal British Navy, in danger of

being beset by savages, and resolved to sell his life at a great price.

The Captain never lost dignity, from having his ears boxed with the

Latin Grammar. I did; but the Captain was a Captain and a hero, in

despite of all the grammars of all the languages in the world, dead or

alive.

This was my only and my constant comfort. When I think of it, the

picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play

in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life.

Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every

foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind,

connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in

them. I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have

watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself

upon the wicket-gate; and I know that Commodore Trunnion held that club

with Mr. Pickle, in the parlour of our little village alehouse.

The reader now understands, as well as I do, what I was when I came to

that point of my youthful history to which I am now coming again.

One morning when I went into the parlour with my books, I found my

mother looking anxious, Miss Murdstone looking firm, and Mr. Murdstone

binding something round the bottom of a cane--a lithe and limber cane,

which he left off binding when I came in, and poised and switched in the

air.

'I tell you, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'I have been often flogged

myself.'

'To be sure; of course,' said Miss Murdstone.

'Certainly, my dear Jane,' faltered my mother, meekly. 'But--but do you

think it did Edward good?'

'Do you think it did Edward harm, Clara?' asked Mr. Murdstone, gravely.

'That's the point,' said his sister.

To this my mother returned, 'Certainly, my dear Jane,' and said no more.

I felt apprehensive that I was personally interested in this dialogue,

and sought Mr. Murdstone's eye as it lighted on mine.

'Now, David,' he said--and I saw that cast again as he said it--'you

must be far more careful today than usual.' He gave the cane another

poise, and another switch; and having finished his preparation of it,

laid it down beside him, with an impressive look, and took up his book.

This was a good freshener to my presence of mind, as a beginning. I felt

the words of my lessons slipping off, not one by one, or line by line,

but by the entire page; I tried to lay hold of them; but they seemed,

if I may so express it, to have put skates on, and to skim away from me

with a smoothness there was no checking.

We began badly, and went on worse. I had come in with an idea of

distinguishing myself rather, conceiving that I was very well prepared;

but it turned out to be quite a mistake. Book after book was added to

the heap of failures, Miss Murdstone being firmly watchful of us all the

time. And when we came at last to the five thousand cheeses (canes he

made it that day, I remember), my mother burst out crying.

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, in her warning voice.

'I am not quite well, my dear Jane, I think,' said my mother.

I saw him wink, solemnly, at his sister, as he rose and said, taking up

the cane:

'Why, Jane, we can hardly expect Clara to bear, with perfect firmness,

the worry and torment that David has occasioned her today. That would be

stoical. Clara is greatly strengthened and improved, but we can hardly

expect so much from her. David, you and I will go upstairs, boy.'

As he took me out at the door, my mother ran towards us. Miss Murdstone

said, 'Clara! are you a perfect fool?' and interfered. I saw my mother

stop her ears then, and I heard her crying.

He walked me up to my room slowly and gravely--I am certain he had a

delight in that formal parade of executing justice--and when we got

there, suddenly twisted my head under his arm.

'Mr. Murdstone! Sir!' I cried to him. 'Don't! Pray don't beat me! I have

tried to learn, sir, but I can't learn while you and Miss Murdstone are

by. I can't indeed!'

'Can't you, indeed, David?' he said. 'We'll try that.'

He had my head as in a vice, but I twined round him somehow, and stopped

him for a moment, entreating him not to beat me. It was only a moment

that I stopped him, for he cut me heavily an instant afterwards, and in

the same instant I caught the hand with which he held me in my mouth,

between my teeth, and bit it through. It sets my teeth on edge to think

of it.

He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death. Above all the

noise we made, I heard them running up the stairs, and crying out--I

heard my mother crying out--and Peggotty. Then he was gone; and the

door was locked outside; and I was lying, fevered and hot, and torn, and

sore, and raging in my puny way, upon the floor.

How well I recollect, when I became quiet, what an unnatural stillness

seemed to reign through the whole house! How well I remember, when my

smart and passion began to cool, how wicked I began to feel!

I sat listening for a long while, but there was not a sound. I crawled

up from the floor, and saw my face in the glass, so swollen, red, and

ugly that it almost frightened me. My stripes were sore and stiff, and

made me cry afresh, when I moved; but they were nothing to the guilt I

felt. It lay heavier on my breast than if I had been a most atrocious

criminal, I dare say.

It had begun to grow dark, and I had shut the window (I had been lying,

for the most part, with my head upon the sill, by turns crying, dozing,

and looking listlessly out), when the key was turned, and Miss Murdstone

came in with some bread and meat, and milk. These she put down upon the

table without a word, glaring at me the while with exemplary firmness,

and then retired, locking the door after her.

Long after it was dark I sat there, wondering whether anybody else would

come. When this appeared improbable for that night, I undressed, and

went to bed; and, there, I began to wonder fearfully what would be done

to me. Whether it was a criminal act that I had committed? Whether I

should be taken into custody, and sent to prison? Whether I was at all

in danger of being hanged?

I never shall forget the waking, next morning; the being cheerful and

fresh for the first moment, and then the being weighed down by the stale

and dismal oppression of remembrance. Miss Murdstone reappeared before

I was out of bed; told me, in so many words, that I was free to walk in

the garden for half an hour and no longer; and retired, leaving the door

open, that I might avail myself of that permission.

I did so, and did so every morning of my imprisonment, which lasted five

days. If I could have seen my mother alone, I should have gone down on

my knees to her and besought her forgiveness; but I saw no one, Miss

Murdstone excepted, during the whole time--except at evening prayers in

the parlour; to which I was escorted by Miss Murdstone after everybody

else was placed; where I was stationed, a young outlaw, all alone by

myself near the door; and whence I was solemnly conducted by my jailer,

before any one arose from the devotional posture. I only observed that

my mother was as far off from me as she could be, and kept her face

another way so that I never saw it; and that Mr. Murdstone's hand was

bound up in a large linen wrapper.

The length of those five days I can convey no idea of to any one. They

occupy the place of years in my remembrance. The way in which I listened

to all the incidents of the house that made themselves audible to me;

the ringing of bells, the opening and shutting of doors, the murmuring

of voices, the footsteps on the stairs; to any laughing, whistling, or

singing, outside, which seemed more dismal than anything else to me in

my solitude and disgrace--the uncertain pace of the hours, especially

at night, when I would wake thinking it was morning, and find that the

family were not yet gone to bed, and that all the length of night had

yet to come--the depressed dreams and nightmares I had--the return of

day, noon, afternoon, evening, when the boys played in the churchyard,

and I watched them from a distance within the room, being ashamed to

show myself at the window lest they should know I was a prisoner--the

strange sensation of never hearing myself speak--the fleeting intervals

of something like cheerfulness, which came with eating and drinking,

and went away with it--the setting in of rain one evening, with a fresh

smell, and its coming down faster and faster between me and the church,

until it and gathering night seemed to quench me in gloom, and fear, and

remorse--all this appears to have gone round and round for years instead

of days, it is so vividly and strongly stamped on my remembrance. On the

last night of my restraint, I was awakened by hearing my own name spoken

in a whisper. I started up in bed, and putting out my arms in the dark,

said:

'Is that you, Peggotty?'

There was no immediate answer, but presently I heard my name again, in a

tone so very mysterious and awful, that I think I should have gone into

a fit, if it had not occurred to me that it must have come through the

keyhole.

I groped my way to the door, and putting my own lips to the keyhole,

whispered: 'Is that you, Peggotty dear?'

'Yes, my own precious Davy,' she replied. 'Be as soft as a mouse, or the

Cat'll hear us.'

I understood this to mean Miss Murdstone, and was sensible of the

urgency of the case; her room being close by.

'How's mama, dear Peggotty? Is she very angry with me?'

I could hear Peggotty crying softly on her side of the keyhole, as I was

doing on mine, before she answered. 'No. Not very.'

'What is going to be done with me, Peggotty dear? Do you know?'

'School. Near London,' was Peggotty's answer. I was obliged to get her

to repeat it, for she spoke it the first time quite down my throat,

in consequence of my having forgotten to take my mouth away from the

keyhole and put my ear there; and though her words tickled me a good

deal, I didn't hear them.

'When, Peggotty?'

'Tomorrow.'

'Is that the reason why Miss Murdstone took the clothes out of my

drawers?' which she had done, though I have forgotten to mention it.

'Yes,' said Peggotty. 'Box.'

'Shan't I see mama?'

'Yes,' said Peggotty. 'Morning.'

Then Peggotty fitted her mouth close to the keyhole, and delivered these

words through it with as much feeling and earnestness as a keyhole

has ever been the medium of communicating, I will venture to assert:

shooting in each broken little sentence in a convulsive little burst of

its own.

'Davy, dear. If I ain't been azackly as intimate with you. Lately, as I

used to be. It ain't because I don't love you. Just as well and more, my

pretty poppet. It's because I thought it better for you. And for someone

else besides. Davy, my darling, are you listening? Can you hear?'

'Ye-ye-ye-yes, Peggotty!' I sobbed.

'My own!' said Peggotty, with infinite compassion. 'What I want to say,

is. That you must never forget me. For I'll never forget you. And I'll

take as much care of your mama, Davy. As ever I took of you. And I won't

leave her. The day may come when she'll be glad to lay her poor head.

On her stupid, cross old Peggotty's arm again. And I'll write to you,

my dear. Though I ain't no scholar. And I'll--I'll--' Peggotty fell to

kissing the keyhole, as she couldn't kiss me.

'Thank you, dear Peggotty!' said I. 'Oh, thank you! Thank you! Will you

promise me one thing, Peggotty? Will you write and tell Mr. Peggotty and

little Em'ly, and Mrs. Gummidge and Ham, that I am not so bad as they

might suppose, and that I sent 'em all my love--especially to little

Em'ly? Will you, if you please, Peggotty?'

The kind soul promised, and we both of us kissed the keyhole with the

greatest affection--I patted it with my hand, I recollect, as if it had

been her honest face--and parted. From that night there grew up in my

breast a feeling for Peggotty which I cannot very well define. She did

not replace my mother; no one could do that; but she came into a vacancy

in my heart, which closed upon her, and I felt towards her something

I have never felt for any other human being. It was a sort of comical

affection, too; and yet if she had died, I cannot think what I should

have done, or how I should have acted out the tragedy it would have been

to me.

In the morning Miss Murdstone appeared as usual, and told me I was going

to school; which was not altogether such news to me as she supposed. She

also informed me that when I was dressed, I was to come downstairs into

the parlour, and have my breakfast. There, I found my mother, very pale

and with red eyes: into whose arms I ran, and begged her pardon from my

suffering soul.

'Oh, Davy!' she said. 'That you could hurt anyone I love! Try to be

better, pray to be better! I forgive you; but I am so grieved, Davy,

that you should have such bad passions in your heart.'

They had persuaded her that I was a wicked fellow, and she was more

sorry for that than for my going away. I felt it sorely. I tried to eat

my parting breakfast, but my tears dropped upon my bread-and-butter,

and trickled into my tea. I saw my mother look at me sometimes, and then

glance at the watchful Miss Murdstone, and than look down, or look away.

'Master Copperfield's box there!' said Miss Murdstone, when wheels were

heard at the gate.

I looked for Peggotty, but it was not she; neither she nor Mr. Murdstone

appeared. My former acquaintance, the carrier, was at the door. The box

was taken out to his cart, and lifted in.

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, in her warning note.

'Ready, my dear Jane,' returned my mother. 'Good-bye, Davy. You are

going for your own good. Good-bye, my child. You will come home in the

holidays, and be a better boy.'

'Clara!' Miss Murdstone repeated.

'Certainly, my dear Jane,' replied my mother, who was holding me. 'I

forgive you, my dear boy. God bless you!'

'Clara!' Miss Murdstone repeated.

Miss Murdstone was good enough to take me out to the cart, and to say on

the way that she hoped I would repent, before I came to a bad end; and

then I got into the cart, and the lazy horse walked off with it.

CHAPTER 5. I AM SENT AWAY FROM HOME

We might have gone about half a mile, and my pocket-handkerchief was

quite wet through, when the carrier stopped short. Looking out to

ascertain for what, I saw, to MY amazement, Peggotty burst from a hedge

and climb into the cart. She took me in both her arms, and squeezed me

to her stays until the pressure on my nose was extremely painful, though

I never thought of that till afterwards when I found it very tender. Not

a single word did Peggotty speak. Releasing one of her arms, she put

it down in her pocket to the elbow, and brought out some paper bags of

cakes which she crammed into my pockets, and a purse which she put into

my hand, but not one word did she say. After another and a final squeeze

with both arms, she got down from the cart and ran away; and, my belief

is, and has always been, without a solitary button on her gown. I

picked up one, of several that were rolling about, and treasured it as a

keepsake for a long time.

The carrier looked at me, as if to inquire if she were coming back. I

shook my head, and said I thought not. 'Then come up,' said the carrier

to the lazy horse; who came up accordingly.

Having by this time cried as much as I possibly could, I began to think

it was of no use crying any more, especially as neither Roderick Random,

nor that Captain in the Royal British Navy, had ever cried, that I

could remember, in trying situations. The carrier, seeing me in this

resolution, proposed that my pocket-handkerchief should be spread upon

the horse's back to dry. I thanked him, and assented; and particularly

small it looked, under those circumstances.

I had now leisure to examine the purse. It was a stiff leather purse,

with a snap, and had three bright shillings in it, which Peggotty had

evidently polished up with whitening, for my greater delight. But its

most precious contents were two half-crowns folded together in a bit

of paper, on which was written, in my mother's hand, 'For Davy. With my

love.' I was so overcome by this, that I asked the carrier to be so good

as to reach me my pocket-handkerchief again; but he said he thought I

had better do without it, and I thought I really had, so I wiped my eyes

on my sleeve and stopped myself.

For good, too; though, in consequence of my previous emotions, I was

still occasionally seized with a stormy sob. After we had jogged on for

some little time, I asked the carrier if he was going all the way.

'All the way where?' inquired the carrier.

'There,' I said.

'Where's there?' inquired the carrier.

'Near London,' I said.

'Why that horse,' said the carrier, jerking the rein to point him out,

'would be deader than pork afore he got over half the ground.'

'Are you only going to Yarmouth then?' I asked.

'That's about it,' said the carrier. 'And there I shall take you to the

stage-cutch, and the stage-cutch that'll take you to--wherever it is.'

As this was a great deal for the carrier (whose name was Mr. Barkis)

to say--he being, as I observed in a former chapter, of a phlegmatic

temperament, and not at all conversational--I offered him a cake as a

mark of attention, which he ate at one gulp, exactly like an elephant,

and which made no more impression on his big face than it would have

done on an elephant's.

'Did SHE make 'em, now?' said Mr. Barkis, always leaning forward, in his

slouching way, on the footboard of the cart with an arm on each knee.

'Peggotty, do you mean, sir?'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis. 'Her.'

'Yes. She makes all our pastry, and does all our cooking.'

'Do she though?' said Mr. Barkis. He made up his mouth as if to whistle,

but he didn't whistle. He sat looking at the horse's ears, as if he saw

something new there; and sat so, for a considerable time. By and by, he

said:

'No sweethearts, I b'lieve?'

'Sweetmeats did you say, Mr. Barkis?' For I thought he wanted

something else to eat, and had pointedly alluded to that description of

refreshment.

'Hearts,' said Mr. Barkis. 'Sweet hearts; no person walks with her!'

'With Peggotty?'

'Ah!' he said. 'Her.'

'Oh, no. She never had a sweetheart.'

'Didn't she, though!' said Mr. Barkis.

Again he made up his mouth to whistle, and again he didn't whistle, but

sat looking at the horse's ears.

'So she makes,' said Mr. Barkis, after a long interval of reflection,

'all the apple parsties, and doos all the cooking, do she?'

I replied that such was the fact.

'Well. I'll tell you what,' said Mr. Barkis. 'P'raps you might be

writin' to her?'

'I shall certainly write to her,' I rejoined.

'Ah!' he said, slowly turning his eyes towards me. 'Well! If you was

writin' to her, p'raps you'd recollect to say that Barkis was willin';

would you?'

'That Barkis is willing,' I repeated, innocently. 'Is that all the

message?'

'Ye-es,' he said, considering. 'Ye-es. Barkis is willin'.'

'But you will be at Blunderstone again tomorrow, Mr. Barkis,' I said,

faltering a little at the idea of my being far away from it then, and

could give your own message so much better.'

As he repudiated this suggestion, however, with a jerk of his head,

and once more confirmed his previous request by saying, with profound

gravity, 'Barkis is willin'. That's the message,' I readily undertook

its transmission. While I was waiting for the coach in the hotel

at Yarmouth that very afternoon, I procured a sheet of paper and

an inkstand, and wrote a note to Peggotty, which ran thus: 'My dear

Peggotty. I have come here safe. Barkis is willing. My love to mama.

Yours affectionately. P.S. He says he particularly wants you to

know--BARKIS IS WILLING.'

When I had taken this commission on myself prospectively, Mr. Barkis

relapsed into perfect silence; and I, feeling quite worn out by all that

had happened lately, lay down on a sack in the cart and fell asleep. I

slept soundly until we got to Yarmouth; which was so entirely new

and strange to me in the inn-yard to which we drove, that I at once

abandoned a latent hope I had had of meeting with some of Mr. Peggotty's

family there, perhaps even with little Em'ly herself.

The coach was in the yard, shining very much all over, but without any

horses to it as yet; and it looked in that state as if nothing was

more unlikely than its ever going to London. I was thinking this, and

wondering what would ultimately become of my box, which Mr. Barkis had

put down on the yard-pavement by the pole (he having driven up the yard

to turn his cart), and also what would ultimately become of me, when a

lady looked out of a bow-window where some fowls and joints of meat were

hanging up, and said:

'Is that the little gentleman from Blunderstone?'

'Yes, ma'am,' I said.

'What name?' inquired the lady.

'Copperfield, ma'am,' I said.

'That won't do,' returned the lady. 'Nobody's dinner is paid for here,

in that name.'

'Is it Murdstone, ma'am?' I said.

'If you're Master Murdstone,' said the lady, 'why do you go and give

another name, first?'

I explained to the lady how it was, who than rang a bell, and called

out, 'William! show the coffee-room!' upon which a waiter came running

out of a kitchen on the opposite side of the yard to show it, and seemed

a good deal surprised when he was only to show it to me.

It was a large long room with some large maps in it. I doubt if I could

have felt much stranger if the maps had been real foreign countries, and

I cast away in the middle of them. I felt it was taking a liberty to

sit down, with my cap in my hand, on the corner of the chair nearest the

door; and when the waiter laid a cloth on purpose for me, and put a set

of castors on it, I think I must have turned red all over with modesty.

He brought me some chops, and vegetables, and took the covers off in

such a bouncing manner that I was afraid I must have given him some

offence. But he greatly relieved my mind by putting a chair for me at

the table, and saying, very affably, 'Now, six-foot! come on!'

I thanked him, and took my seat at the board; but found it extremely

difficult to handle my knife and fork with anything like dexterity,

or to avoid splashing myself with the gravy, while he was standing

opposite, staring so hard, and making me blush in the most dreadful

manner every time I caught his eye. After watching me into the second

chop, he said:

'There's half a pint of ale for you. Will you have it now?'

I thanked him and said, 'Yes.' Upon which he poured it out of a jug

into a large tumbler, and held it up against the light, and made it look

beautiful.

'My eye!' he said. 'It seems a good deal, don't it?'

'It does seem a good deal,' I answered with a smile. For it was quite

delightful to me, to find him so pleasant. He was a twinkling-eyed,

pimple-faced man, with his hair standing upright all over his head; and

as he stood with one arm a-kimbo, holding up the glass to the light with

the other hand, he looked quite friendly.

'There was a gentleman here, yesterday,' he said--'a stout gentleman, by

the name of Topsawyer--perhaps you know him?'

'No,' I said, 'I don't think--'

'In breeches and gaiters, broad-brimmed hat, grey coat, speckled

choker,' said the waiter.

'No,' I said bashfully, 'I haven't the pleasure--'

'He came in here,' said the waiter, looking at the light through the

tumbler, 'ordered a glass of this ale--WOULD order it--I told him

not--drank it, and fell dead. It was too old for him. It oughtn't to be

drawn; that's the fact.'

I was very much shocked to hear of this melancholy accident, and said I

thought I had better have some water.

'Why you see,' said the waiter, still looking at the light through the

tumbler, with one of his eyes shut up, 'our people don't like things

being ordered and left. It offends 'em. But I'll drink it, if you like.

I'm used to it, and use is everything. I don't think it'll hurt me, if I

throw my head back, and take it off quick. Shall I?'

I replied that he would much oblige me by drinking it, if he thought

he could do it safely, but by no means otherwise. When he did throw his

head back, and take it off quick, I had a horrible fear, I confess,

of seeing him meet the fate of the lamented Mr. Topsawyer, and fall

lifeless on the carpet. But it didn't hurt him. On the contrary, I

thought he seemed the fresher for it.

'What have we got here?' he said, putting a fork into my dish. 'Not

chops?'

'Chops,' I said.

'Lord bless my soul!' he exclaimed, 'I didn't know they were chops. Why,

a chop's the very thing to take off the bad effects of that beer! Ain't

it lucky?'

So he took a chop by the bone in one hand, and a potato in the other,

and ate away with a very good appetite, to my extreme satisfaction.

He afterwards took another chop, and another potato; and after that,

another chop and another potato. When we had done, he brought me a

pudding, and having set it before me, seemed to ruminate, and to become

absent in his mind for some moments.

'How's the pie?' he said, rousing himself.

'It's a pudding,' I made answer.

'Pudding!' he exclaimed. 'Why, bless me, so it is! What!' looking at it

nearer. 'You don't mean to say it's a batter-pudding!'

'Yes, it is indeed.'

'Why, a batter-pudding,' he said, taking up a table-spoon, 'is my

favourite pudding! Ain't that lucky? Come on, little 'un, and let's see

who'll get most.'

The waiter certainly got most. He entreated me more than once to come in

and win, but what with his table-spoon to my tea-spoon, his dispatch to

my dispatch, and his appetite to my appetite, I was left far behind at

the first mouthful, and had no chance with him. I never saw anyone enjoy

a pudding so much, I think; and he laughed, when it was all gone, as if

his enjoyment of it lasted still.

Finding him so very friendly and companionable, it was then that I asked

for the pen and ink and paper, to write to Peggotty. He not only brought

it immediately, but was good enough to look over me while I wrote the

letter. When I had finished it, he asked me where I was going to school.

I said, 'Near London,' which was all I knew.

'Oh! my eye!' he said, looking very low-spirited, 'I am sorry for that.'

'Why?' I asked him.

'Oh, Lord!' he said, shaking his head, 'that's the school where they

broke the boy's ribs--two ribs--a little boy he was. I should say he

was--let me see--how old are you, about?'

I told him between eight and nine.

'That's just his age,' he said. 'He was eight years and six months old

when they broke his first rib; eight years and eight months old when

they broke his second, and did for him.'

I could not disguise from myself, or from the waiter, that this was an

uncomfortable coincidence, and inquired how it was done. His answer was

not cheering to my spirits, for it consisted of two dismal words, 'With

whopping.'

The blowing of the coach-horn in the yard was a seasonable diversion,

which made me get up and hesitatingly inquire, in the mingled pride and

diffidence of having a purse (which I took out of my pocket), if there

were anything to pay.

'There's a sheet of letter-paper,' he returned. 'Did you ever buy a

sheet of letter-paper?'

I could not remember that I ever had.

'It's dear,' he said, 'on account of the duty. Threepence. That's

the way we're taxed in this country. There's nothing else, except the

waiter. Never mind the ink. I lose by that.'

'What should you--what should I--how much ought I to--what would it be

right to pay the waiter, if you please?' I stammered, blushing.

'If I hadn't a family, and that family hadn't the cowpock,' said the

waiter, 'I wouldn't take a sixpence. If I didn't support a aged pairint,

and a lovely sister,'--here the waiter was greatly agitated--'I wouldn't

take a farthing. If I had a good place, and was treated well here, I

should beg acceptance of a trifle, instead of taking of it. But I live

on broken wittles--and I sleep on the coals'--here the waiter burst into

tears.

I was very much concerned for his misfortunes, and felt that any

recognition short of ninepence would be mere brutality and hardness of

heart. Therefore I gave him one of my three bright shillings, which he

received with much humility and veneration, and spun up with his thumb,

directly afterwards, to try the goodness of.

It was a little disconcerting to me, to find, when I was being helped

up behind the coach, that I was supposed to have eaten all the dinner

without any assistance. I discovered this, from overhearing the lady in

the bow-window say to the guard, 'Take care of that child, George, or

he'll burst!' and from observing that the women-servants who were about

the place came out to look and giggle at me as a young phenomenon. My

unfortunate friend the waiter, who had quite recovered his spirits, did

not appear to be disturbed by this, but joined in the general admiration

without being at all confused. If I had any doubt of him, I suppose

this half awakened it; but I am inclined to believe that with the simple

confidence of a child, and the natural reliance of a child upon superior

years (qualities I am very sorry any children should prematurely change

for worldly wisdom), I had no serious mistrust of him on the whole, even

then.

I felt it rather hard, I must own, to be made, without deserving it, the

subject of jokes between the coachman and guard as to the coach drawing

heavy behind, on account of my sitting there, and as to the greater

expediency of my travelling by waggon. The story of my supposed appetite

getting wind among the outside passengers, they were merry upon it

likewise; and asked me whether I was going to be paid for, at school,

as two brothers or three, and whether I was contracted for, or went upon

the regular terms; with other pleasant questions. But the worst of

it was, that I knew I should be ashamed to eat anything, when an

opportunity offered, and that, after a rather light dinner, I should

remain hungry all night--for I had left my cakes behind, at the hotel,

in my hurry. My apprehensions were realized. When we stopped for supper

I couldn't muster courage to take any, though I should have liked it

very much, but sat by the fire and said I didn't want anything. This did

not save me from more jokes, either; for a husky-voiced gentleman with

a rough face, who had been eating out of a sandwich-box nearly all the

way, except when he had been drinking out of a bottle, said I was like

a boa-constrictor who took enough at one meal to last him a long time;

after which, he actually brought a rash out upon himself with boiled

beef.

We had started from Yarmouth at three o'clock in the afternoon, and we

were due in London about eight next morning. It was Mid-summer weather,

and the evening was very pleasant. When we passed through a village, I

pictured to myself what the insides of the houses were like, and what

the inhabitants were about; and when boys came running after us, and

got up behind and swung there for a little way, I wondered whether their

fathers were alive, and whether they Were happy at home. I had plenty to

think of, therefore, besides my mind running continually on the kind

of place I was going to--which was an awful speculation. Sometimes, I

remember, I resigned myself to thoughts of home and Peggotty; and to

endeavouring, in a confused blind way, to recall how I had felt, and

what sort of boy I used to be, before I bit Mr. Murdstone: which I

couldn't satisfy myself about by any means, I seemed to have bitten him

in such a remote antiquity.

The night was not so pleasant as the evening, for it got chilly; and

being put between two gentlemen (the rough-faced one and another) to

prevent my tumbling off the coach, I was nearly smothered by their

falling asleep, and completely blocking me up. They squeezed me so hard

sometimes, that I could not help crying out, 'Oh! If you please!'--which

they didn't like at all, because it woke them. Opposite me was an

elderly lady in a great fur cloak, who looked in the dark more like a

haystack than a lady, she was wrapped up to such a degree. This lady had

a basket with her, and she hadn't known what to do with it, for a long

time, until she found that on account of my legs being short, it could

go underneath me. It cramped and hurt me so, that it made me perfectly

miserable; but if I moved in the least, and made a glass that was in the

basket rattle against something else (as it was sure to do), she gave

me the cruellest poke with her foot, and said, 'Come, don't YOU fidget.

YOUR bones are young enough, I'm sure!'

At last the sun rose, and then my companions seemed to sleep easier.

The difficulties under which they had laboured all night, and which had

found utterance in the most terrific gasps and snorts, are not to be

conceived. As the sun got higher, their sleep became lighter, and so

they gradually one by one awoke. I recollect being very much surprised

by the feint everybody made, then, of not having been to sleep at all,

and by the uncommon indignation with which everyone repelled the

charge. I labour under the same kind of astonishment to this day, having

invariably observed that of all human weaknesses, the one to which our

common nature is the least disposed to confess (I cannot imagine why) is

the weakness of having gone to sleep in a coach.

What an amazing place London was to me when I saw it in the distance,

and how I believed all the adventures of all my favourite heroes to be

constantly enacting and re-enacting there, and how I vaguely made it

out in my own mind to be fuller of wonders and wickedness than all the

cities of the earth, I need not stop here to relate. We approached it by

degrees, and got, in due time, to the inn in the Whitechapel district,

for which we were bound. I forget whether it was the Blue Bull, or the

Blue Boar; but I know it was the Blue Something, and that its likeness

was painted up on the back of the coach.

The guard's eye lighted on me as he was getting down, and he said at the

booking-office door:

'Is there anybody here for a yoongster booked in the name of Murdstone,

from Bloonderstone, Sooffolk, to be left till called for?'

Nobody answered.

'Try Copperfield, if you please, sir,' said I, looking helplessly down.

'Is there anybody here for a yoongster, booked in the name of Murdstone,

from Bloonderstone, Sooffolk, but owning to the name of Copperfield, to

be left till called for?' said the guard. 'Come! IS there anybody?'

No. There was nobody. I looked anxiously around; but the inquiry made no

impression on any of the bystanders, if I except a man in gaiters, with

one eye, who suggested that they had better put a brass collar round my

neck, and tie me up in the stable.

A ladder was brought, and I got down after the lady, who was like a

haystack: not daring to stir, until her basket was removed. The coach

was clear of passengers by that time, the luggage was very soon cleared

out, the horses had been taken out before the luggage, and now the coach

itself was wheeled and backed off by some hostlers, out of the way.

Still, nobody appeared, to claim the dusty youngster from Blunderstone,

Suffolk.

More solitary than Robinson Crusoe, who had nobody to look at him

and see that he was solitary, I went into the booking-office, and, by

invitation of the clerk on duty, passed behind the counter, and sat down

on the scale at which they weighed the luggage. Here, as I sat looking

at the parcels, packages, and books, and inhaling the smell of stables

(ever since associated with that morning), a procession of most

tremendous considerations began to march through my mind. Supposing

nobody should ever fetch me, how long would they consent to keep me

there? Would they keep me long enough to spend seven shillings? Should I

sleep at night in one of those wooden bins, with the other luggage,

and wash myself at the pump in the yard in the morning; or should I

be turned out every night, and expected to come again to be left till

called for, when the office opened next day? Supposing there was no

mistake in the case, and Mr. Murdstone had devised this plan to get rid

of me, what should I do? If they allowed me to remain there until my

seven shillings were spent, I couldn't hope to remain there when I began

to starve. That would obviously be inconvenient and unpleasant to the

customers, besides entailing on the Blue Whatever-it-was, the risk of

funeral expenses. If I started off at once, and tried to walk back home,

how could I ever find my way, how could I ever hope to walk so far, how

could I make sure of anyone but Peggotty, even if I got back? If I

found out the nearest proper authorities, and offered myself to go for a

soldier, or a sailor, I was such a little fellow that it was most likely

they wouldn't take me in. These thoughts, and a hundred other such

thoughts, turned me burning hot, and made me giddy with apprehension and

dismay. I was in the height of my fever when a man entered and whispered

to the clerk, who presently slanted me off the scale, and pushed me over

to him, as if I were weighed, bought, delivered, and paid for.

As I went out of the office, hand in hand with this new acquaintance,

I stole a look at him. He was a gaunt, sallow young man, with hollow

cheeks, and a chin almost as black as Mr. Murdstone's; but there the

likeness ended, for his whiskers were shaved off, and his hair, instead

of being glossy, was rusty and dry. He was dressed in a suit of black

clothes which were rather rusty and dry too, and rather short in the

sleeves and legs; and he had a white neck-kerchief on, that was not

over-clean. I did not, and do not, suppose that this neck-kerchief was

all the linen he wore, but it was all he showed or gave any hint of.

'You're the new boy?' he said. 'Yes, sir,' I said.

I supposed I was. I didn't know.

'I'm one of the masters at Salem House,' he said.

I made him a bow and felt very much overawed. I was so ashamed to allude

to a commonplace thing like my box, to a scholar and a master at Salem

House, that we had gone some little distance from the yard before I had

the hardihood to mention it. We turned back, on my humbly insinuating

that it might be useful to me hereafter; and he told the clerk that the

carrier had instructions to call for it at noon.

'If you please, sir,' I said, when we had accomplished about the same

distance as before, 'is it far?'

'It's down by Blackheath,' he said.

'Is that far, sir?' I diffidently asked.

'It's a good step,' he said. 'We shall go by the stage-coach. It's about

six miles.'

I was so faint and tired, that the idea of holding out for six miles

more, was too much for me. I took heart to tell him that I had had

nothing all night, and that if he would allow me to buy something to

eat, I should be very much obliged to him. He appeared surprised at

this--I see him stop and look at me now--and after considering for a few

moments, said he wanted to call on an old person who lived not far off,

and that the best way would be for me to buy some bread, or whatever I

liked best that was wholesome, and make my breakfast at her house, where

we could get some milk.

Accordingly we looked in at a baker's window, and after I had made a

series of proposals to buy everything that was bilious in the shop, and

he had rejected them one by one, we decided in favour of a nice little

loaf of brown bread, which cost me threepence. Then, at a grocer's shop,

we bought an egg and a slice of streaky bacon; which still left what

I thought a good deal of change, out of the second of the bright

shillings, and made me consider London a very cheap place. These

provisions laid in, we went on through a great noise and uproar that

confused my weary head beyond description, and over a bridge which, no

doubt, was London Bridge (indeed I think he told me so, but I was half

asleep), until we came to the poor person's house, which was a part of

some alms-houses, as I knew by their look, and by an inscription on a

stone over the gate which said they were established for twenty-five

poor women.

The Master at Salem House lifted the latch of one of a number of little

black doors that were all alike, and had each a little diamond-paned

window on one side, and another little diamond--paned window above; and

we went into the little house of one of these poor old women, who was

blowing a fire to make a little saucepan boil. On seeing the master

enter, the old woman stopped with the bellows on her knee, and said

something that I thought sounded like 'My Charley!' but on seeing me

come in too, she got up, and rubbing her hands made a confused sort of

half curtsey.

'Can you cook this young gentleman's breakfast for him, if you please?'

said the Master at Salem House.

'Can I?' said the old woman. 'Yes can I, sure!'

'How's Mrs. Fibbitson today?' said the Master, looking at another old

woman in a large chair by the fire, who was such a bundle of clothes

that I feel grateful to this hour for not having sat upon her by

mistake.

'Ah, she's poorly,' said the first old woman. 'It's one of her bad days.

If the fire was to go out, through any accident, I verily believe she'd

go out too, and never come to life again.'

As they looked at her, I looked at her also. Although it was a warm day,

she seemed to think of nothing but the fire. I fancied she was jealous

even of the saucepan on it; and I have reason to know that she took its

impressment into the service of boiling my egg and broiling my bacon, in

dudgeon; for I saw her, with my own discomfited eyes, shake her fist at

me once, when those culinary operations were going on, and no one else

was looking. The sun streamed in at the little window, but she sat with

her own back and the back of the large chair towards it, screening the

fire as if she were sedulously keeping IT warm, instead of it keeping

her warm, and watching it in a most distrustful manner. The completion

of the preparations for my breakfast, by relieving the fire, gave her

such extreme joy that she laughed aloud--and a very unmelodious laugh

she had, I must say.

I sat down to my brown loaf, my egg, and my rasher of bacon, with a

basin of milk besides, and made a most delicious meal. While I was yet

in the full enjoyment of it, the old woman of the house said to the

Master:

'Have you got your flute with you?'

'Yes,' he returned.

'Have a blow at it,' said the old woman, coaxingly. 'Do!'

The Master, upon this, put his hand underneath the skirts of his coat,

and brought out his flute in three pieces, which he screwed together,

and began immediately to play. My impression is, after many years of

consideration, that there never can have been anybody in the world who

played worse. He made the most dismal sounds I have ever heard produced

by any means, natural or artificial. I don't know what the tunes

were--if there were such things in the performance at all, which I

doubt--but the influence of the strain upon me was, first, to make me

think of all my sorrows until I could hardly keep my tears back; then to

take away my appetite; and lastly, to make me so sleepy that I couldn't

keep my eyes open. They begin to close again, and I begin to nod, as the

recollection rises fresh upon me. Once more the little room, with its

open corner cupboard, and its square-backed chairs, and its angular

little staircase leading to the room above, and its three peacock's

feathers displayed over the mantelpiece--I remember wondering when I

first went in, what that peacock would have thought if he had known what

his finery was doomed to come to--fades from before me, and I nod, and

sleep. The flute becomes inaudible, the wheels of the coach are heard

instead, and I am on my journey. The coach jolts, I wake with a start,

and the flute has come back again, and the Master at Salem House is

sitting with his legs crossed, playing it dolefully, while the old woman

of the house looks on delighted. She fades in her turn, and he fades,

and all fades, and there is no flute, no Master, no Salem House, no

David Copperfield, no anything but heavy sleep.

I dreamed, I thought, that once while he was blowing into this dismal

flute, the old woman of the house, who had gone nearer and nearer to him

in her ecstatic admiration, leaned over the back of his chair and gave

him an affectionate squeeze round the neck, which stopped his playing

for a moment. I was in the middle state between sleeping and waking,

either then or immediately afterwards; for, as he resumed--it was a real

fact that he had stopped playing--I saw and heard the same old woman ask

Mrs. Fibbitson if it wasn't delicious (meaning the flute), to which Mrs.

Fibbitson replied, 'Ay, ay! yes!' and nodded at the fire: to which, I am

persuaded, she gave the credit of the whole performance.

When I seemed to have been dozing a long while, the Master at Salem

House unscrewed his flute into the three pieces, put them up as before,

and took me away. We found the coach very near at hand, and got upon the

roof; but I was so dead sleepy, that when we stopped on the road to take

up somebody else, they put me inside where there were no passengers, and

where I slept profoundly, until I found the coach going at a footpace up

a steep hill among green leaves. Presently, it stopped, and had come to

its destination.

A short walk brought us--I mean the Master and me--to Salem House, which

was enclosed with a high brick wall, and looked very dull. Over a door

in this wall was a board with SALEM HOUSE upon it; and through a grating

in this door we were surveyed when we rang the bell by a surly face,

which I found, on the door being opened, belonged to a stout man with a

bull-neck, a wooden leg, overhanging temples, and his hair cut close all

round his head.

'The new boy,' said the Master.

The man with the wooden leg eyed me all over--it didn't take long, for

there was not much of me--and locked the gate behind us, and took out

the key. We were going up to the house, among some dark heavy trees,

when he called after my conductor. 'Hallo!'

We looked back, and he was standing at the door of a little lodge, where

he lived, with a pair of boots in his hand.

'Here! The cobbler's been,' he said, 'since you've been out, Mr. Mell,

and he says he can't mend 'em any more. He says there ain't a bit of the

original boot left, and he wonders you expect it.'

With these words he threw the boots towards Mr. Mell, who went back a

few paces to pick them up, and looked at them (very disconsolately,

I was afraid), as we went on together. I observed then, for the first

time, that the boots he had on were a good deal the worse for wear, and

that his stocking was just breaking out in one place, like a bud.

Salem House was a square brick building with wings; of a bare and

unfurnished appearance. All about it was so very quiet, that I said to

Mr. Mell I supposed the boys were out; but he seemed surprised at my

not knowing that it was holiday-time. That all the boys were at their

several homes. That Mr. Creakle, the proprietor, was down by the

sea-side with Mrs. and Miss Creakle; and that I was sent in holiday-time

as a punishment for my misdoing, all of which he explained to me as we

went along.

I gazed upon the schoolroom into which he took me, as the most forlorn

and desolate place I had ever seen. I see it now. A long room with three

long rows of desks, and six of forms, and bristling all round with pegs

for hats and slates. Scraps of old copy-books and exercises litter the

dirty floor. Some silkworms' houses, made of the same materials, are

scattered over the desks. Two miserable little white mice, left behind

by their owner, are running up and down in a fusty castle made of

pasteboard and wire, looking in all the corners with their red eyes

for anything to eat. A bird, in a cage very little bigger than himself,

makes a mournful rattle now and then in hopping on his perch, two inches

high, or dropping from it; but neither sings nor chirps. There is a

strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet

apples wanting air, and rotten books. There could not well be more ink

splashed about it, if it had been roofless from its first construction,

and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed, and blown ink through the

varying seasons of the year.

Mr. Mell having left me while he took his irreparable boots upstairs, I

went softly to the upper end of the room, observing all this as I crept

along. Suddenly I came upon a pasteboard placard, beautifully written,

which was lying on the desk, and bore these words: 'TAKE CARE OF HIM. HE

BITES.'

I got upon the desk immediately, apprehensive of at least a great dog

underneath. But, though I looked all round with anxious eyes, I could

see nothing of him. I was still engaged in peering about, when Mr. Mell

came back, and asked me what I did up there?

'I beg your pardon, sir,' says I, 'if you please, I'm looking for the

dog.'

'Dog?' he says. 'What dog?'

'Isn't it a dog, sir?'

'Isn't what a dog?'

'That's to be taken care of, sir; that bites.'

'No, Copperfield,' says he, gravely, 'that's not a dog. That's a boy.

My instructions are, Copperfield, to put this placard on your back. I am

sorry to make such a beginning with you, but I must do it.' With that he

took me down, and tied the placard, which was neatly constructed for

the purpose, on my shoulders like a knapsack; and wherever I went,

afterwards, I had the consolation of carrying it.

What I suffered from that placard, nobody can imagine. Whether it was

possible for people to see me or not, I always fancied that somebody was

reading it. It was no relief to turn round and find nobody; for wherever

my back was, there I imagined somebody always to be. That cruel man with

the wooden leg aggravated my sufferings. He was in authority; and if he

ever saw me leaning against a tree, or a wall, or the house, he roared

out from his lodge door in a stupendous voice, 'Hallo, you sir! You

Copperfield! Show that badge conspicuous, or I'll report you!' The

playground was a bare gravelled yard, open to all the back of the house

and the offices; and I knew that the servants read it, and the butcher

read it, and the baker read it; that everybody, in a word, who came

backwards and forwards to the house, of a morning when I was ordered to

walk there, read that I was to be taken care of, for I bit, I recollect

that I positively began to have a dread of myself, as a kind of wild boy

who did bite.

There was an old door in this playground, on which the boys had a

custom of carving their names. It was completely covered with such

inscriptions. In my dread of the end of the vacation and their coming

back, I could not read a boy's name, without inquiring in what tone and

with what emphasis HE would read, 'Take care of him. He bites.' There

was one boy--a certain J. Steerforth--who cut his name very deep and

very often, who, I conceived, would read it in a rather strong voice,

and afterwards pull my hair. There was another boy, one Tommy Traddles,

who I dreaded would make game of it, and pretend to be dreadfully

frightened of me. There was a third, George Demple, who I fancied would

sing it. I have looked, a little shrinking creature, at that door, until

the owners of all the names--there were five-and-forty of them in the

school then, Mr. Mell said--seemed to send me to Coventry by general

acclamation, and to cry out, each in his own way, 'Take care of him. He

bites!'

It was the same with the places at the desks and forms. It was the same

with the groves of deserted bedsteads I peeped at, on my way to, and

when I was in, my own bed. I remember dreaming night after night, of

being with my mother as she used to be, or of going to a party at Mr.

Peggotty's, or of travelling outside the stage-coach, or of dining again

with my unfortunate friend the waiter, and in all these circumstances

making people scream and stare, by the unhappy disclosure that I had

nothing on but my little night-shirt, and that placard.

In the monotony of my life, and in my constant apprehension of the

re-opening of the school, it was such an insupportable affliction! I had

long tasks every day to do with Mr. Mell; but I did them, there being

no Mr. and Miss Murdstone here, and got through them without disgrace.

Before, and after them, I walked about--supervised, as I have mentioned,

by the man with the wooden leg. How vividly I call to mind the damp

about the house, the green cracked flagstones in the court, an old leaky

water-butt, and the discoloured trunks of some of the grim trees, which

seemed to have dripped more in the rain than other trees, and to have

blown less in the sun! At one we dined, Mr. Mell and I, at the upper end

of a long bare dining-room, full of deal tables, and smelling of fat.

Then, we had more tasks until tea, which Mr. Mell drank out of a blue

teacup, and I out of a tin pot. All day long, and until seven or eight

in the evening, Mr. Mell, at his own detached desk in the schoolroom,

worked hard with pen, ink, ruler, books, and writing-paper, making out

the bills (as I found) for last half-year. When he had put up his things

for the night he took out his flute, and blew at it, until I almost

thought he would gradually blow his whole being into the large hole at

the top, and ooze away at the keys.

I picture my small self in the dimly-lighted rooms, sitting with my

head upon my hand, listening to the doleful performance of Mr. Mell,

and conning tomorrow's lessons. I picture myself with my books shut up,

still listening to the doleful performance of Mr. Mell, and listening

through it to what used to be at home, and to the blowing of the wind

on Yarmouth flats, and feeling very sad and solitary. I picture myself

going up to bed, among the unused rooms, and sitting on my bed-side

crying for a comfortable word from Peggotty. I picture myself coming

downstairs in the morning, and looking through a long ghastly gash of a

staircase window at the school-bell hanging on the top of an out-house

with a weathercock above it; and dreading the time when it shall ring J.

Steerforth and the rest to work: which is only second, in my foreboding

apprehensions, to the time when the man with the wooden leg shall unlock

the rusty gate to give admission to the awful Mr. Creakle. I cannot

think I was a very dangerous character in any of these aspects, but in

all of them I carried the same warning on my back.

Mr. Mell never said much to me, but he was never harsh to me. I suppose

we were company to each other, without talking. I forgot to mention that

he would talk to himself sometimes, and grin, and clench his fist, and

grind his teeth, and pull his hair in an unaccountable manner. But he

had these peculiarities: and at first they frightened me, though I soon

got used to them.

CHAPTER 6. I ENLARGE MY CIRCLE OF ACQUAINTANCE

I HAD led this life about a month, when the man with the wooden leg

began to stump about with a mop and a bucket of water, from which I

inferred that preparations were making to receive Mr. Creakle and the

boys. I was not mistaken; for the mop came into the schoolroom before

long, and turned out Mr. Mell and me, who lived where we could, and got

on how we could, for some days, during which we were always in the way

of two or three young women, who had rarely shown themselves before, and

were so continually in the midst of dust that I sneezed almost as much

as if Salem House had been a great snuff-box.

One day I was informed by Mr. Mell that Mr. Creakle would be home that

evening. In the evening, after tea, I heard that he was come. Before

bedtime, I was fetched by the man with the wooden leg to appear before

him.

Mr. Creakle's part of the house was a good deal more comfortable than

ours, and he had a snug bit of garden that looked pleasant after the

dusty playground, which was such a desert in miniature, that I thought

no one but a camel, or a dromedary, could have felt at home in it. It

seemed to me a bold thing even to take notice that the passage looked

comfortable, as I went on my way, trembling, to Mr. Creakle's presence:

which so abashed me, when I was ushered into it, that I hardly saw

Mrs. Creakle or Miss Creakle (who were both there, in the parlour), or

anything but Mr. Creakle, a stout gentleman with a bunch of watch-chain

and seals, in an arm-chair, with a tumbler and bottle beside him.

'So!' said Mr. Creakle. 'This is the young gentleman whose teeth are to

be filed! Turn him round.'

The wooden-legged man turned me about so as to exhibit the placard; and

having afforded time for a full survey of it, turned me about again,

with my face to Mr. Creakle, and posted himself at Mr. Creakle's side.

Mr. Creakle's face was fiery, and his eyes were small, and deep in his

head; he had thick veins in his forehead, a little nose, and a large

chin. He was bald on the top of his head; and had some thin wet-looking

hair that was just turning grey, brushed across each temple, so that

the two sides interlaced on his forehead. But the circumstance about

him which impressed me most, was, that he had no voice, but spoke in a

whisper. The exertion this cost him, or the consciousness of talking in

that feeble way, made his angry face so much more angry, and his thick

veins so much thicker, when he spoke, that I am not surprised, on

looking back, at this peculiarity striking me as his chief one. 'Now,'

said Mr. Creakle. 'What's the report of this boy?'

'There's nothing against him yet,' returned the man with the wooden leg.

'There has been no opportunity.'

I thought Mr. Creakle was disappointed. I thought Mrs. and Miss Creakle

(at whom I now glanced for the first time, and who were, both, thin and

quiet) were not disappointed.

'Come here, sir!' said Mr. Creakle, beckoning to me.

'Come here!' said the man with the wooden leg, repeating the gesture.

'I have the happiness of knowing your father-in-law,' whispered Mr.

Creakle, taking me by the ear; 'and a worthy man he is, and a man of

a strong character. He knows me, and I know him. Do YOU know me? Hey?'

said Mr. Creakle, pinching my ear with ferocious playfulness.

'Not yet, sir,' I said, flinching with the pain.

'Not yet? Hey?' repeated Mr. Creakle. 'But you will soon. Hey?'

'You will soon. Hey?' repeated the man with the wooden leg. I afterwards

found that he generally acted, with his strong voice, as Mr. Creakle's

interpreter to the boys.

I was very much frightened, and said, I hoped so, if he pleased. I felt,

all this while, as if my ear were blazing; he pinched it so hard.

'I'll tell you what I am,' whispered Mr. Creakle, letting it go at last,

with a screw at parting that brought the water into my eyes. 'I'm a

Tartar.'

'A Tartar,' said the man with the wooden leg.

'When I say I'll do a thing, I do it,' said Mr. Creakle; 'and when I say

I will have a thing done, I will have it done.'

'--Will have a thing done, I will have it done,' repeated the man with

the wooden leg.

'I am a determined character,' said Mr. Creakle. 'That's what I am. I

do my duty. That's what I do. My flesh and blood'--he looked at Mrs.

Creakle as he said this--'when it rises against me, is not my flesh

and blood. I discard it. Has that fellow'--to the man with the wooden

leg--'been here again?'

'No,' was the answer.

'No,' said Mr. Creakle. 'He knows better. He knows me. Let him keep

away. I say let him keep away,' said Mr. Creakle, striking his hand upon

the table, and looking at Mrs. Creakle, 'for he knows me. Now you have

begun to know me too, my young friend, and you may go. Take him away.'

I was very glad to be ordered away, for Mrs. and Miss Creakle were both

wiping their eyes, and I felt as uncomfortable for them as I did for

myself. But I had a petition on my mind which concerned me so nearly,

that I couldn't help saying, though I wondered at my own courage:

'If you please, sir--'

Mr. Creakle whispered, 'Hah! What's this?' and bent his eyes upon me, as

if he would have burnt me up with them.

'If you please, sir,' I faltered, 'if I might be allowed (I am very

sorry indeed, sir, for what I did) to take this writing off, before the

boys come back--'

Whether Mr. Creakle was in earnest, or whether he only did it to

frighten me, I don't know, but he made a burst out of his chair, before

which I precipitately retreated, without waiting for the escort Of the

man with the wooden leg, and never once stopped until I reached my own

bedroom, where, finding I was not pursued, I went to bed, as it was

time, and lay quaking, for a couple of hours.

Next morning Mr. Sharp came back. Mr. Sharp was the first master, and

superior to Mr. Mell. Mr. Mell took his meals with the boys, but

Mr. Sharp dined and supped at Mr. Creakle's table. He was a limp,

delicate-looking gentleman, I thought, with a good deal of nose, and a

way of carrying his head on one side, as if it were a little too heavy

for him. His hair was very smooth and wavy; but I was informed by the

very first boy who came back that it was a wig (a second-hand one HE

said), and that Mr. Sharp went out every Saturday afternoon to get it

curled.

It was no other than Tommy Traddles who gave me this piece of

intelligence. He was the first boy who returned. He introduced himself

by informing me that I should find his name on the right-hand corner of

the gate, over the top-bolt; upon that I said, 'Traddles?' to which he

replied, 'The same,' and then he asked me for a full account of myself

and family.

It was a happy circumstance for me that Traddles came back first. He

enjoyed my placard so much, that he saved me from the embarrassment of

either disclosure or concealment, by presenting me to every other boy

who came back, great or small, immediately on his arrival, in this form

of introduction, 'Look here! Here's a game!' Happily, too, the greater

part of the boys came back low-spirited, and were not so boisterous at

my expense as I had expected. Some of them certainly did dance about me

like wild Indians, and the greater part could not resist the temptation

of pretending that I was a dog, and patting and soothing me, lest I

should bite, and saying, 'Lie down, sir!' and calling me Towzer. This

was naturally confusing, among so many strangers, and cost me some

tears, but on the whole it was much better than I had anticipated.

I was not considered as being formally received into the school,

however, until J. Steerforth arrived. Before this boy, who was

reputed to be a great scholar, and was very good-looking, and at least

half-a-dozen years my senior, I was carried as before a magistrate. He

inquired, under a shed in the playground, into the particulars of my

punishment, and was pleased to express his opinion that it was 'a jolly

shame'; for which I became bound to him ever afterwards.

'What money have you got, Copperfield?' he said, walking aside with

me when he had disposed of my affair in these terms. I told him seven

shillings.

'You had better give it to me to take care of,' he said. 'At least, you

can if you like. You needn't if you don't like.'

I hastened to comply with his friendly suggestion, and opening

Peggotty's purse, turned it upside down into his hand.

'Do you want to spend anything now?' he asked me.

'No thank you,' I replied.

'You can, if you like, you know,' said Steerforth. 'Say the word.'

'No, thank you, sir,' I repeated.

'Perhaps you'd like to spend a couple of shillings or so, in a bottle of

currant wine by and by, up in the bedroom?' said Steerforth. 'You belong

to my bedroom, I find.'

It certainly had not occurred to me before, but I said, Yes, I should

like that.

'Very good,' said Steerforth. 'You'll be glad to spend another shilling

or so, in almond cakes, I dare say?'

I said, Yes, I should like that, too.

'And another shilling or so in biscuits, and another in fruit, eh?' said

Steerforth. 'I say, young Copperfield, you're going it!'

I smiled because he smiled, but I was a little troubled in my mind, too.

'Well!' said Steerforth. 'We must make it stretch as far as we can;

that's all. I'll do the best in my power for you. I can go out when I

like, and I'll smuggle the prog in.' With these words he put the money

in his pocket, and kindly told me not to make myself uneasy; he would

take care it should be all right. He was as good as his word, if that

were all right which I had a secret misgiving was nearly all wrong--for

I feared it was a waste of my mother's two half-crowns--though I had

preserved the piece of paper they were wrapped in: which was a precious

saving. When we went upstairs to bed, he produced the whole seven

shillings' worth, and laid it out on my bed in the moonlight, saying:

'There you are, young Copperfield, and a royal spread you've got.'

I couldn't think of doing the honours of the feast, at my time of life,

while he was by; my hand shook at the very thought of it. I begged him

to do me the favour of presiding; and my request being seconded by the

other boys who were in that room, he acceded to it, and sat upon my

pillow, handing round the viands--with perfect fairness, I must say--and

dispensing the currant wine in a little glass without a foot, which was

his own property. As to me, I sat on his left hand, and the rest were

grouped about us, on the nearest beds and on the floor.

How well I recollect our sitting there, talking in whispers; or their

talking, and my respectfully listening, I ought rather to say; the

moonlight falling a little way into the room, through the window,

painting a pale window on the floor, and the greater part of us in

shadow, except when Steerforth dipped a match into a phosphorus-box,

when he wanted to look for anything on the board, and shed a blue glare

over us that was gone directly! A certain mysterious feeling, consequent

on the darkness, the secrecy of the revel, and the whisper in which

everything was said, steals over me again, and I listen to all they tell

me with a vague feeling of solemnity and awe, which makes me glad that

they are all so near, and frightens me (though I feign to laugh) when

Traddles pretends to see a ghost in the corner.

I heard all kinds of things about the school and all belonging to it.

I heard that Mr. Creakle had not preferred his claim to being a Tartar

without reason; that he was the sternest and most severe of masters;

that he laid about him, right and left, every day of his life, charging

in among the boys like a trooper, and slashing away, unmercifully. That

he knew nothing himself, but the art of slashing, being more ignorant

(J. Steerforth said) than the lowest boy in the school; that he had

been, a good many years ago, a small hop-dealer in the Borough, and had

taken to the schooling business after being bankrupt in hops, and making

away with Mrs. Creakle's money. With a good deal more of that sort,

which I wondered how they knew.

I heard that the man with the wooden leg, whose name was Tungay, was an

obstinate barbarian who had formerly assisted in the hop business, but

had come into the scholastic line with Mr. Creakle, in consequence,

as was supposed among the boys, of his having broken his leg in Mr.

Creakle's service, and having done a deal of dishonest work for him,

and knowing his secrets. I heard that with the single exception of Mr.

Creakle, Tungay considered the whole establishment, masters and boys,

as his natural enemies, and that the only delight of his life was to be

sour and malicious. I heard that Mr. Creakle had a son, who had not been

Tungay's friend, and who, assisting in the school, had once held some

remonstrance with his father on an occasion when its discipline was very

cruelly exercised, and was supposed, besides, to have protested against

his father's usage of his mother. I heard that Mr. Creakle had turned

him out of doors, in consequence; and that Mrs. and Miss Creakle had

been in a sad way, ever since.

But the greatest wonder that I heard of Mr. Creakle was, there being one

boy in the school on whom he never ventured to lay a hand, and that

boy being J. Steerforth. Steerforth himself confirmed this when it was

stated, and said that he should like to begin to see him do it. On being

asked by a mild boy (not me) how he would proceed if he did begin to see

him do it, he dipped a match into his phosphorus-box on purpose to shed

a glare over his reply, and said he would commence by knocking him down

with a blow on the forehead from the seven-and-sixpenny ink-bottle

that was always on the mantelpiece. We sat in the dark for some time,

breathless.

I heard that Mr. Sharp and Mr. Mell were both supposed to be wretchedly

paid; and that when there was hot and cold meat for dinner at Mr.

Creakle's table, Mr. Sharp was always expected to say he preferred cold;

which was again corroborated by J. Steerforth, the only parlour-boarder.

I heard that Mr. Sharp's wig didn't fit him; and that he needn't be so

'bounceable'--somebody else said 'bumptious'--about it, because his own

red hair was very plainly to be seen behind.

I heard that one boy, who was a coal-merchant's son, came as a set-off

against the coal-bill, and was called, on that account, 'Exchange or

Barter'--a name selected from the arithmetic book as expressing this

arrangement. I heard that the table beer was a robbery of parents, and

the pudding an imposition. I heard that Miss Creakle was regarded by the

school in general as being in love with Steerforth; and I am sure, as I

sat in the dark, thinking of his nice voice, and his fine face, and his

easy manner, and his curling hair, I thought it very likely. I heard

that Mr. Mell was not a bad sort of fellow, but hadn't a sixpence to

bless himself with; and that there was no doubt that old Mrs. Mell, his

mother, was as poor as job. I thought of my breakfast then, and what had

sounded like 'My Charley!' but I was, I am glad to remember, as mute as

a mouse about it.

The hearing of all this, and a good deal more, outlasted the banquet

some time. The greater part of the guests had gone to bed as soon as the

eating and drinking were over; and we, who had remained whispering and

listening half-undressed, at last betook ourselves to bed, too.

'Good night, young Copperfield,' said Steerforth. 'I'll take care of

you.' 'You're very kind,' I gratefully returned. 'I am very much obliged

to you.'

'You haven't got a sister, have you?' said Steerforth, yawning.

'No,' I answered.

'That's a pity,' said Steerforth. 'If you had had one, I should think

she would have been a pretty, timid, little, bright-eyed sort of girl. I

should have liked to know her. Good night, young Copperfield.'

'Good night, sir,' I replied.

I thought of him very much after I went to bed, and raised myself,

I recollect, to look at him where he lay in the moonlight, with his

handsome face turned up, and his head reclining easily on his arm. He

was a person of great power in my eyes; that was, of course, the reason

of my mind running on him. No veiled future dimly glanced upon him in

the moonbeams. There was no shadowy picture of his footsteps, in the

garden that I dreamed of walking in all night.

CHAPTER 7. MY 'FIRST HALF' AT SALEM HOUSE

School began in earnest next day. A profound impression was made

upon me, I remember, by the roar of voices in the schoolroom suddenly

becoming hushed as death when Mr. Creakle entered after breakfast, and

stood in the doorway looking round upon us like a giant in a story-book

surveying his captives.

Tungay stood at Mr. Creakle's elbow. He had no occasion, I thought,

to cry out 'Silence!' so ferociously, for the boys were all struck

speechless and motionless.

Mr. Creakle was seen to speak, and Tungay was heard, to this effect.

'Now, boys, this is a new half. Take care what you're about, in this new

half. Come fresh up to the lessons, I advise you, for I come fresh up

to the punishment. I won't flinch. It will be of no use your rubbing

yourselves; you won't rub the marks out that I shall give you. Now get

to work, every boy!'

When this dreadful exordium was over, and Tungay had stumped out again,

Mr. Creakle came to where I sat, and told me that if I were famous for

biting, he was famous for biting, too. He then showed me the cane, and

asked me what I thought of THAT, for a tooth? Was it a sharp tooth, hey?

Was it a double tooth, hey? Had it a deep prong, hey? Did it bite, hey?

Did it bite? At every question he gave me a fleshy cut with it that made

me writhe; so I was very soon made free of Salem House (as Steerforth

said), and was very soon in tears also.

Not that I mean to say these were special marks of distinction,

which only I received. On the contrary, a large majority of the boys

(especially the smaller ones) were visited with similar instances

of notice, as Mr. Creakle made the round of the schoolroom. Half the

establishment was writhing and crying, before the day's work began; and

how much of it had writhed and cried before the day's work was over, I

am really afraid to recollect, lest I should seem to exaggerate.

I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his

profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at

the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite. I am

confident that he couldn't resist a chubby boy, especially; that there

was a fascination in such a subject, which made him restless in his

mind, until he had scored and marked him for the day. I was chubby

myself, and ought to know. I am sure when I think of the fellow now, my

blood rises against him with the disinterested indignation I should

feel if I could have known all about him without having ever been in his

power; but it rises hotly, because I know him to have been an incapable

brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held,

than to be Lord High Admiral, or Commander-in-Chief--in either of

which capacities it is probable that he would have done infinitely less

mischief.

Miserable little propitiators of a remorseless Idol, how abject we were

to him! What a launch in life I think it now, on looking back, to be so

mean and servile to a man of such parts and pretensions!

Here I sit at the desk again, watching his eye--humbly watching his eye,

as he rules a ciphering-book for another victim whose hands have just

been flattened by that identical ruler, and who is trying to wipe the

sting out with a pocket-handkerchief. I have plenty to do. I don't watch

his eye in idleness, but because I am morbidly attracted to it, in a

dread desire to know what he will do next, and whether it will be my

turn to suffer, or somebody else's. A lane of small boys beyond me, with

the same interest in his eye, watch it too. I think he knows it,

though he pretends he don't. He makes dreadful mouths as he rules the

ciphering-book; and now he throws his eye sideways down our lane, and we

all droop over our books and tremble. A moment afterwards we are again

eyeing him. An unhappy culprit, found guilty of imperfect exercise,

approaches at his command. The culprit falters excuses, and professes a

determination to do better tomorrow. Mr. Creakle cuts a joke before he

beats him, and we laugh at it,--miserable little dogs, we laugh, with

our visages as white as ashes, and our hearts sinking into our boots.

Here I sit at the desk again, on a drowsy summer afternoon. A buzz and

hum go up around me, as if the boys were so many bluebottles. A cloggy

sensation of the lukewarm fat of meat is upon me (we dined an hour or

two ago), and my head is as heavy as so much lead. I would give the

world to go to sleep. I sit with my eye on Mr. Creakle, blinking at him

like a young owl; when sleep overpowers me for a minute, he still looms

through my slumber, ruling those ciphering-books, until he softly comes

behind me and wakes me to plainer perception of him, with a red ridge

across my back.

Here I am in the playground, with my eye still fascinated by him, though

I can't see him. The window at a little distance from which I know he is

having his dinner, stands for him, and I eye that instead. If he shows

his face near it, mine assumes an imploring and submissive expression.

If he looks out through the glass, the boldest boy (Steerforth excepted)

stops in the middle of a shout or yell, and becomes contemplative. One

day, Traddles (the most unfortunate boy in the world) breaks that window

accidentally, with a ball. I shudder at this moment with the tremendous

sensation of seeing it done, and feeling that the ball has bounded on to

Mr. Creakle's sacred head.

Poor Traddles! In a tight sky-blue suit that made his arms and legs like

German sausages, or roly-poly puddings, he was the merriest and most

miserable of all the boys. He was always being caned--I think he was

caned every day that half-year, except one holiday Monday when he was

only ruler'd on both hands--and was always going to write to his uncle

about it, and never did. After laying his head on the desk for a little

while, he would cheer up, somehow, begin to laugh again, and draw

skeletons all over his slate, before his eyes were dry. I used at first

to wonder what comfort Traddles found in drawing skeletons; and for some

time looked upon him as a sort of hermit, who reminded himself by those

symbols of mortality that caning couldn't last for ever. But I believe

he only did it because they were easy, and didn't want any features.

He was very honourable, Traddles was, and held it as a solemn duty

in the boys to stand by one another. He suffered for this on several

occasions; and particularly once, when Steerforth laughed in church,

and the Beadle thought it was Traddles, and took him out. I see him now,

going away in custody, despised by the congregation. He never said

who was the real offender, though he smarted for it next day, and was

imprisoned so many hours that he came forth with a whole churchyard-full

of skeletons swarming all over his Latin Dictionary. But he had his

reward. Steerforth said there was nothing of the sneak in Traddles, and

we all felt that to be the highest praise. For my part, I could have

gone through a good deal (though I was much less brave than Traddles,

and nothing like so old) to have won such a recompense.

To see Steerforth walk to church before us, arm-in-arm with Miss

Creakle, was one of the great sights of my life. I didn't think Miss

Creakle equal to little Em'ly in point of beauty, and I didn't love

her (I didn't dare); but I thought her a young lady of extraordinary

attractions, and in point of gentility not to be surpassed. When

Steerforth, in white trousers, carried her parasol for her, I felt proud

to know him; and believed that she could not choose but adore him with

all her heart. Mr. Sharp and Mr. Mell were both notable personages in my

eyes; but Steerforth was to them what the sun was to two stars.

Steerforth continued his protection of me, and proved a very useful

friend; since nobody dared to annoy one whom he honoured with his

countenance. He couldn't--or at all events he didn't--defend me from Mr.

Creakle, who was very severe with me; but whenever I had been treated

worse than usual, he always told me that I wanted a little of his pluck,

and that he wouldn't have stood it himself; which I felt he intended

for encouragement, and considered to be very kind of him. There was one

advantage, and only one that I know of, in Mr. Creakle's severity. He

found my placard in his way when he came up or down behind the form on

which I sat, and wanted to make a cut at me in passing; for this reason

it was soon taken off, and I saw it no more.

An accidental circumstance cemented the intimacy between Steerforth

and me, in a manner that inspired me with great pride and satisfaction,

though it sometimes led to inconvenience. It happened on one occasion,

when he was doing me the honour of talking to me in the playground, that

I hazarded the observation that something or somebody--I forget what

now--was like something or somebody in Peregrine Pickle. He said nothing

at the time; but when I was going to bed at night, asked me if I had got

that book?

I told him no, and explained how it was that I had read it, and all

those other books of which I have made mention.

'And do you recollect them?' Steerforth said.

'Oh yes,' I replied; I had a good memory, and I believed I recollected

them very well.

'Then I tell you what, young Copperfield,' said Steerforth, 'you

shall tell 'em to me. I can't get to sleep very early at night, and I

generally wake rather early in the morning. We'll go over 'em one after

another. We'll make some regular Arabian Nights of it.'

I felt extremely flattered by this arrangement, and we commenced

carrying it into execution that very evening. What ravages I committed

on my favourite authors in the course of my interpretation of them, I am

not in a condition to say, and should be very unwilling to know; but

I had a profound faith in them, and I had, to the best of my belief,

a simple, earnest manner of narrating what I did narrate; and these

qualities went a long way.

The drawback was, that I was often sleepy at night, or out of spirits

and indisposed to resume the story; and then it was rather hard work,

and it must be done; for to disappoint or to displease Steerforth was of

course out of the question. In the morning, too, when I felt weary, and

should have enjoyed another hour's repose very much, it was a tiresome

thing to be roused, like the Sultana Scheherazade, and forced into a

long story before the getting-up bell rang; but Steerforth was resolute;

and as he explained to me, in return, my sums and exercises, and

anything in my tasks that was too hard for me, I was no loser by the

transaction. Let me do myself justice, however. I was moved by no

interested or selfish motive, nor was I moved by fear of him. I admired

and loved him, and his approval was return enough. It was so precious to

me that I look back on these trifles, now, with an aching heart.

Steerforth was considerate, too; and showed his consideration, in

one particular instance, in an unflinching manner that was a little

tantalizing, I suspect, to poor Traddles and the rest. Peggotty's

promised letter--what a comfortable letter it was!--arrived before

'the half' was many weeks old; and with it a cake in a perfect nest

of oranges, and two bottles of cowslip wine. This treasure, as in duty

bound, I laid at the feet of Steerforth, and begged him to dispense.

'Now, I'll tell you what, young Copperfield,' said he: 'the wine shall

be kept to wet your whistle when you are story-telling.'

I blushed at the idea, and begged him, in my modesty, not to think of

it. But he said he had observed I was sometimes hoarse--a little roopy

was his exact expression--and it should be, every drop, devoted to the

purpose he had mentioned. Accordingly, it was locked up in his box, and

drawn off by himself in a phial, and administered to me through a

piece of quill in the cork, when I was supposed to be in want of a

restorative. Sometimes, to make it a more sovereign specific, he was so

kind as to squeeze orange juice into it, or to stir it up with ginger,

or dissolve a peppermint drop in it; and although I cannot assert that

the flavour was improved by these experiments, or that it was exactly

the compound one would have chosen for a stomachic, the last thing at

night and the first thing in the morning, I drank it gratefully and was

very sensible of his attention.

We seem, to me, to have been months over Peregrine, and months more over

the other stories. The institution never flagged for want of a story, I

am certain; and the wine lasted out almost as well as the matter. Poor

Traddles--I never think of that boy but with a strange disposition to

laugh, and with tears in my eyes--was a sort of chorus, in general;

and affected to be convulsed with mirth at the comic parts, and to be

overcome with fear when there was any passage of an alarming character

in the narrative. This rather put me out, very often. It was a great

jest of his, I recollect, to pretend that he couldn't keep his teeth

from chattering, whenever mention was made of an Alguazill in connexion

with the adventures of Gil Blas; and I remember that when Gil Blas met

the captain of the robbers in Madrid, this unlucky joker counterfeited

such an ague of terror, that he was overheard by Mr. Creakle, who

was prowling about the passage, and handsomely flogged for disorderly

conduct in the bedroom. Whatever I had within me that was romantic and

dreamy, was encouraged by so much story-telling in the dark; and in that

respect the pursuit may not have been very profitable to me. But the

being cherished as a kind of plaything in my room, and the consciousness

that this accomplishment of mine was bruited about among the boys, and

attracted a good deal of notice to me though I was the youngest there,

stimulated me to exertion. In a school carried on by sheer cruelty,

whether it is presided over by a dunce or not, there is not likely to

be much learnt. I believe our boys were, generally, as ignorant a set

as any schoolboys in existence; they were too much troubled and knocked

about to learn; they could no more do that to advantage, than any one

can do anything to advantage in a life of constant misfortune, torment,

and worry. But my little vanity, and Steerforth's help, urged me on

somehow; and without saving me from much, if anything, in the way of

punishment, made me, for the time I was there, an exception to the

general body, insomuch that I did steadily pick up some crumbs of

knowledge.

In this I was much assisted by Mr. Mell, who had a liking for me that

I am grateful to remember. It always gave me pain to observe that

Steerforth treated him with systematic disparagement, and seldom lost

an occasion of wounding his feelings, or inducing others to do so.

This troubled me the more for a long time, because I had soon told

Steerforth, from whom I could no more keep such a secret, than I could

keep a cake or any other tangible possession, about the two old women

Mr. Mell had taken me to see; and I was always afraid that Steerforth

would let it out, and twit him with it.

We little thought, any one of us, I dare say, when I ate my breakfast

that first morning, and went to sleep under the shadow of the peacock's

feathers to the sound of the flute, what consequences would come of the

introduction into those alms-houses of my insignificant person. But the

visit had its unforeseen consequences; and of a serious sort, too, in

their way.

One day when Mr. Creakle kept the house from indisposition, which

naturally diffused a lively joy through the school, there was a good

deal of noise in the course of the morning's work. The great relief and

satisfaction experienced by the boys made them difficult to manage; and

though the dreaded Tungay brought his wooden leg in twice or thrice, and

took notes of the principal offenders' names, no great impression was

made by it, as they were pretty sure of getting into trouble tomorrow,

do what they would, and thought it wise, no doubt, to enjoy themselves

today.

It was, properly, a half-holiday; being Saturday. But as the noise in

the playground would have disturbed Mr. Creakle, and the weather was

not favourable for going out walking, we were ordered into school in the

afternoon, and set some lighter tasks than usual, which were made for

the occasion. It was the day of the week on which Mr. Sharp went out to

get his wig curled; so Mr. Mell, who always did the drudgery, whatever

it was, kept school by himself. If I could associate the idea of a bull

or a bear with anyone so mild as Mr. Mell, I should think of him, in

connexion with that afternoon when the uproar was at its height, as of

one of those animals, baited by a thousand dogs. I recall him bending

his aching head, supported on his bony hand, over the book on his desk,

and wretchedly endeavouring to get on with his tiresome work, amidst an

uproar that might have made the Speaker of the House of Commons giddy.

Boys started in and out of their places, playing at puss in the corner

with other boys; there were laughing boys, singing boys, talking boys,

dancing boys, howling boys; boys shuffled with their feet, boys whirled

about him, grinning, making faces, mimicking him behind his back and

before his eyes; mimicking his poverty, his boots, his coat, his mother,

everything belonging to him that they should have had consideration for.

'Silence!' cried Mr. Mell, suddenly rising up, and striking his desk

with the book. 'What does this mean! It's impossible to bear it. It's

maddening. How can you do it to me, boys?'

It was my book that he struck his desk with; and as I stood beside him,

following his eye as it glanced round the room, I saw the boys all stop,

some suddenly surprised, some half afraid, and some sorry perhaps.

Steerforth's place was at the bottom of the school, at the opposite end

of the long room. He was lounging with his back against the wall, and

his hands in his pockets, and looked at Mr. Mell with his mouth shut up

as if he were whistling, when Mr. Mell looked at him.

'Silence, Mr. Steerforth!' said Mr. Mell.

'Silence yourself,' said Steerforth, turning red. 'Whom are you talking

to?'

'Sit down,' said Mr. Mell.

'Sit down yourself,' said Steerforth, 'and mind your business.'

There was a titter, and some applause; but Mr. Mell was so white, that

silence immediately succeeded; and one boy, who had darted out behind

him to imitate his mother again, changed his mind, and pretended to want

a pen mended.

'If you think, Steerforth,' said Mr. Mell, 'that I am not acquainted

with the power you can establish over any mind here'--he laid his hand,

without considering what he did (as I supposed), upon my head--'or that

I have not observed you, within a few minutes, urging your juniors on to

every sort of outrage against me, you are mistaken.'

'I don't give myself the trouble of thinking at all about you,' said

Steerforth, coolly; 'so I'm not mistaken, as it happens.'

'And when you make use of your position of favouritism here, sir,'

pursued Mr. Mell, with his lip trembling very much, 'to insult a

gentleman--'

'A what?--where is he?' said Steerforth.

Here somebody cried out, 'Shame, J. Steerforth! Too bad!' It was

Traddles; whom Mr. Mell instantly discomfited by bidding him hold his

tongue. --'To insult one who is not fortunate in life, sir, and who

never gave you the least offence, and the many reasons for not insulting

whom you are old enough and wise enough to understand,' said Mr. Mell,

with his lips trembling more and more, 'you commit a mean and base

action. You can sit down or stand up as you please, sir. Copperfield, go

on.'

'Young Copperfield,' said Steerforth, coming forward up the room,

'stop a bit. I tell you what, Mr. Mell, once for all. When you take the

liberty of calling me mean or base, or anything of that sort, you are

an impudent beggar. You are always a beggar, you know; but when you do

that, you are an impudent beggar.'

I am not clear whether he was going to strike Mr. Mell, or Mr. Mell was

going to strike him, or there was any such intention on either side.

I saw a rigidity come upon the whole school as if they had been turned

into stone, and found Mr. Creakle in the midst of us, with Tungay at his

side, and Mrs. and Miss Creakle looking in at the door as if they were

frightened. Mr. Mell, with his elbows on his desk and his face in his

hands, sat, for some moments, quite still.

'Mr. Mell,' said Mr. Creakle, shaking him by the arm; and his whisper

was so audible now, that Tungay felt it unnecessary to repeat his words;

'you have not forgotten yourself, I hope?'

'No, sir, no,' returned the Master, showing his face, and shaking his

head, and rubbing his hands in great agitation. 'No, sir. No. I have

remembered myself, I--no, Mr. Creakle, I have not forgotten myself, I--I

have remembered myself, sir. I--I--could wish you had remembered me a

little sooner, Mr. Creakle. It--it--would have been more kind, sir, more

just, sir. It would have saved me something, sir.'

Mr. Creakle, looking hard at Mr. Mell, put his hand on Tungay's

shoulder, and got his feet upon the form close by, and sat upon the

desk. After still looking hard at Mr. Mell from his throne, as he

shook his head, and rubbed his hands, and remained in the same state of

agitation, Mr. Creakle turned to Steerforth, and said:

'Now, sir, as he don't condescend to tell me, what is this?'

Steerforth evaded the question for a little while; looking in scorn and

anger on his opponent, and remaining silent. I could not help thinking

even in that interval, I remember, what a noble fellow he was in

appearance, and how homely and plain Mr. Mell looked opposed to him.

'What did he mean by talking about favourites, then?' said Steerforth at

length.

'Favourites?' repeated Mr. Creakle, with the veins in his forehead

swelling quickly. 'Who talked about favourites?'

'He did,' said Steerforth.

'And pray, what did you mean by that, sir?' demanded Mr. Creakle,

turning angrily on his assistant.

'I meant, Mr. Creakle,' he returned in a low voice, 'as I said; that

no pupil had a right to avail himself of his position of favouritism to

degrade me.'

'To degrade YOU?' said Mr. Creakle. 'My stars! But give me leave to ask

you, Mr. What's-your-name'; and here Mr. Creakle folded his arms, cane

and all, upon his chest, and made such a knot of his brows that his

little eyes were hardly visible below them; 'whether, when you talk

about favourites, you showed proper respect to me? To me, sir,' said Mr.

Creakle, darting his head at him suddenly, and drawing it back again,

'the principal of this establishment, and your employer.'

'It was not judicious, sir, I am willing to admit,' said Mr. Mell. 'I

should not have done so, if I had been cool.'

Here Steerforth struck in.

'Then he said I was mean, and then he said I was base, and then I called

him a beggar. If I had been cool, perhaps I shouldn't have called him a

beggar. But I did, and I am ready to take the consequences of it.'

Without considering, perhaps, whether there were any consequences to

be taken, I felt quite in a glow at this gallant speech. It made an

impression on the boys too, for there was a low stir among them, though

no one spoke a word.

'I am surprised, Steerforth--although your candour does you honour,'

said Mr. Creakle, 'does you honour, certainly--I am surprised,

Steerforth, I must say, that you should attach such an epithet to any

person employed and paid in Salem House, sir.'

Steerforth gave a short laugh.

'That's not an answer, sir,' said Mr. Creakle, 'to my remark. I expect

more than that from you, Steerforth.'

If Mr. Mell looked homely, in my eyes, before the handsome boy, it would

be quite impossible to say how homely Mr. Creakle looked. 'Let him deny

it,' said Steerforth.

'Deny that he is a beggar, Steerforth?' cried Mr. Creakle. 'Why, where

does he go a-begging?'

'If he is not a beggar himself, his near relation's one,' said

Steerforth. 'It's all the same.'

He glanced at me, and Mr. Mell's hand gently patted me upon the

shoulder. I looked up with a flush upon my face and remorse in my heart,

but Mr. Mell's eyes were fixed on Steerforth. He continued to pat me

kindly on the shoulder, but he looked at him.

'Since you expect me, Mr. Creakle, to justify myself,' said Steerforth,

'and to say what I mean,--what I have to say is, that his mother lives

on charity in an alms-house.'

Mr. Mell still looked at him, and still patted me kindly on the

shoulder, and said to himself, in a whisper, if I heard right: 'Yes, I

thought so.'

Mr. Creakle turned to his assistant, with a severe frown and laboured

politeness:

'Now, you hear what this gentleman says, Mr. Mell. Have the goodness, if

you please, to set him right before the assembled school.'

'He is right, sir, without correction,' returned Mr. Mell, in the midst

of a dead silence; 'what he has said is true.'

'Be so good then as declare publicly, will you,' said Mr. Creakle,

putting his head on one side, and rolling his eyes round the school,

'whether it ever came to my knowledge until this moment?'

'I believe not directly,' he returned.

'Why, you know not,' said Mr. Creakle. 'Don't you, man?'

'I apprehend you never supposed my worldly circumstances to be very

good,' replied the assistant. 'You know what my position is, and always

has been, here.'

'I apprehend, if you come to that,' said Mr. Creakle, with his veins

swelling again bigger than ever, 'that you've been in a wrong position

altogether, and mistook this for a charity school. Mr. Mell, we'll part,

if you please. The sooner the better.'

'There is no time,' answered Mr. Mell, rising, 'like the present.'

'Sir, to you!' said Mr. Creakle.

'I take my leave of you, Mr. Creakle, and all of you,' said Mr. Mell,

glancing round the room, and again patting me gently on the shoulders.

'James Steerforth, the best wish I can leave you is that you may come to

be ashamed of what you have done today. At present I would prefer to see

you anything rather than a friend, to me, or to anyone in whom I feel an

interest.'

Once more he laid his hand upon my shoulder; and then taking his

flute and a few books from his desk, and leaving the key in it for his

successor, he went out of the school, with his property under his arm.

Mr. Creakle then made a speech, through Tungay, in which he thanked

Steerforth for asserting (though perhaps too warmly) the independence

and respectability of Salem House; and which he wound up by shaking

hands with Steerforth, while we gave three cheers--I did not quite know

what for, but I supposed for Steerforth, and so joined in them ardently,

though I felt miserable. Mr. Creakle then caned Tommy Traddles for

being discovered in tears, instead of cheers, on account of Mr. Mell's

departure; and went back to his sofa, or his bed, or wherever he had

come from.

We were left to ourselves now, and looked very blank, I recollect, on

one another. For myself, I felt so much self-reproach and contrition for

my part in what had happened, that nothing would have enabled me to keep

back my tears but the fear that Steerforth, who often looked at me, I

saw, might think it unfriendly--or, I should rather say, considering our

relative ages, and the feeling with which I regarded him, undutiful--if

I showed the emotion which distressed me. He was very angry with

Traddles, and said he was glad he had caught it.

Poor Traddles, who had passed the stage of lying with his head upon the

desk, and was relieving himself as usual with a burst of skeletons, said

he didn't care. Mr. Mell was ill-used.

'Who has ill-used him, you girl?' said Steerforth.

'Why, you have,' returned Traddles.

'What have I done?' said Steerforth.

'What have you done?' retorted Traddles. 'Hurt his feelings, and lost

him his situation.'

'His feelings?' repeated Steerforth disdainfully. 'His feelings will

soon get the better of it, I'll be bound. His feelings are not like

yours, Miss Traddles. As to his situation--which was a precious one,

wasn't it?--do you suppose I am not going to write home, and take care

that he gets some money? Polly?'

We thought this intention very noble in Steerforth, whose mother was

a widow, and rich, and would do almost anything, it was said, that he

asked her. We were all extremely glad to see Traddles so put down,

and exalted Steerforth to the skies: especially when he told us, as he

condescended to do, that what he had done had been done expressly for

us, and for our cause; and that he had conferred a great boon upon us

by unselfishly doing it. But I must say that when I was going on with a

story in the dark that night, Mr. Mell's old flute seemed more than once

to sound mournfully in my ears; and that when at last Steerforth was

tired, and I lay down in my bed, I fancied it playing so sorrowfully

somewhere, that I was quite wretched.

I soon forgot him in the contemplation of Steerforth, who, in an easy

amateur way, and without any book (he seemed to me to know everything by

heart), took some of his classes until a new master was found. The new

master came from a grammar school; and before he entered on his duties,

dined in the parlour one day, to be introduced to Steerforth. Steerforth

approved of him highly, and told us he was a Brick. Without exactly

understanding what learned distinction was meant by this, I respected

him greatly for it, and had no doubt whatever of his superior knowledge:

though he never took the pains with me--not that I was anybody--that Mr.

Mell had taken.

There was only one other event in this half-year, out of the daily

school-life, that made an impression upon me which still survives. It

survives for many reasons.

One afternoon, when we were all harassed into a state of dire confusion,

and Mr. Creakle was laying about him dreadfully, Tungay came in, and

called out in his usual strong way: 'Visitors for Copperfield!'

A few words were interchanged between him and Mr. Creakle, as, who the

visitors were, and what room they were to be shown into; and then I, who

had, according to custom, stood up on the announcement being made, and

felt quite faint with astonishment, was told to go by the back stairs

and get a clean frill on, before I repaired to the dining-room. These

orders I obeyed, in such a flutter and hurry of my young spirits as

I had never known before; and when I got to the parlour door, and the

thought came into my head that it might be my mother--I had only thought

of Mr. or Miss Murdstone until then--I drew back my hand from the lock,

and stopped to have a sob before I went in.

At first I saw nobody; but feeling a pressure against the door, I looked

round it, and there, to my amazement, were Mr. Peggotty and Ham, ducking

at me with their hats, and squeezing one another against the wall. I

could not help laughing; but it was much more in the pleasure of seeing

them, than at the appearance they made. We shook hands in a very

cordial way; and I laughed and laughed, until I pulled out my

pocket-handkerchief and wiped my eyes.

Mr. Peggotty (who never shut his mouth once, I remember, during the

visit) showed great concern when he saw me do this, and nudged Ham to

say something.

'Cheer up, Mas'r Davy bor'!' said Ham, in his simpering way. 'Why, how

you have growed!'

'Am I grown?' I said, drying my eyes. I was not crying at anything

in particular that I know of; but somehow it made me cry, to see old

friends.

'Growed, Mas'r Davy bor'? Ain't he growed!' said Ham.

'Ain't he growed!' said Mr. Peggotty.

They made me laugh again by laughing at each other, and then we all

three laughed until I was in danger of crying again.

'Do you know how mama is, Mr. Peggotty?' I said. 'And how my dear, dear,

old Peggotty is?'

'Oncommon,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'And little Em'ly, and Mrs. Gummidge?'

'On--common,' said Mr. Peggotty.

There was a silence. Mr. Peggotty, to relieve it, took two prodigious

lobsters, and an enormous crab, and a large canvas bag of shrimps, out

of his pockets, and piled them up in Ham's arms.

'You see,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'knowing as you was partial to a little

relish with your wittles when you was along with us, we took the

liberty. The old Mawther biled 'em, she did. Mrs. Gummidge biled 'em.

Yes,' said Mr. Peggotty, slowly, who I thought appeared to stick to the

subject on account of having no other subject ready, 'Mrs. Gummidge, I

do assure you, she biled 'em.'

I expressed my thanks; and Mr. Peggotty, after looking at Ham, who stood

smiling sheepishly over the shellfish, without making any attempt to

help him, said:

'We come, you see, the wind and tide making in our favour, in one of our

Yarmouth lugs to Gravesen'. My sister she wrote to me the name of this

here place, and wrote to me as if ever I chanced to come to Gravesen',

I was to come over and inquire for Mas'r Davy and give her dooty,

humbly wishing him well and reporting of the fam'ly as they was oncommon

toe-be-sure. Little Em'ly, you see, she'll write to my sister when I go

back, as I see you and as you was similarly oncommon, and so we make it

quite a merry-go-rounder.'

I was obliged to consider a little before I understood what Mr. Peggotty

meant by this figure, expressive of a complete circle of intelligence. I

then thanked him heartily; and said, with a consciousness of reddening,

that I supposed little Em'ly was altered too, since we used to pick up

shells and pebbles on the beach?

'She's getting to be a woman, that's wot she's getting to be,' said Mr.

Peggotty. 'Ask HIM.' He meant Ham, who beamed with delight and assent

over the bag of shrimps.

'Her pretty face!' said Mr. Peggotty, with his own shining like a light.

'Her learning!' said Ham.

'Her writing!' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Why it's as black as jet! And so

large it is, you might see it anywheres.'

It was perfectly delightful to behold with what enthusiasm Mr. Peggotty

became inspired when he thought of his little favourite. He stands

before me again, his bluff hairy face irradiating with a joyful love and

pride, for which I can find no description. His honest eyes fire up, and

sparkle, as if their depths were stirred by something bright. His broad

chest heaves with pleasure. His strong loose hands clench themselves,

in his earnestness; and he emphasizes what he says with a right arm that

shows, in my pigmy view, like a sledge-hammer.

Ham was quite as earnest as he. I dare say they would have said much

more about her, if they had not been abashed by the unexpected coming in

of Steerforth, who, seeing me in a corner speaking with two strangers,

stopped in a song he was singing, and said: 'I didn't know you were

here, young Copperfield!' (for it was not the usual visiting room) and

crossed by us on his way out.

I am not sure whether it was in the pride of having such a friend as

Steerforth, or in the desire to explain to him how I came to have such a

friend as Mr. Peggotty, that I called to him as he was going away. But I

said, modestly--Good Heaven, how it all comes back to me this long time

afterwards--!

'Don't go, Steerforth, if you please. These are two Yarmouth

boatmen--very kind, good people--who are relations of my nurse, and have

come from Gravesend to see me.'

'Aye, aye?' said Steerforth, returning. 'I am glad to see them. How are

you both?'

There was an ease in his manner--a gay and light manner it was, but not

swaggering--which I still believe to have borne a kind of enchantment

with it. I still believe him, in virtue of this carriage, his animal

spirits, his delightful voice, his handsome face and figure, and, for

aught I know, of some inborn power of attraction besides (which I think

a few people possess), to have carried a spell with him to which it was

a natural weakness to yield, and which not many persons could withstand.

I could not but see how pleased they were with him, and how they seemed

to open their hearts to him in a moment.

'You must let them know at home, if you please, Mr. Peggotty,' I said,

'when that letter is sent, that Mr. Steerforth is very kind to me, and

that I don't know what I should ever do here without him.'

'Nonsense!' said Steerforth, laughing. 'You mustn't tell them anything

of the sort.'

'And if Mr. Steerforth ever comes into Norfolk or Suffolk, Mr.

Peggotty,' I said, 'while I am there, you may depend upon it I shall

bring him to Yarmouth, if he will let me, to see your house. You never

saw such a good house, Steerforth. It's made out of a boat!'

'Made out of a boat, is it?' said Steerforth. 'It's the right sort of a

house for such a thorough-built boatman.'

'So 'tis, sir, so 'tis, sir,' said Ham, grinning. 'You're right, young

gen'l'm'n! Mas'r Davy bor', gen'l'm'n's right. A thorough-built boatman!

Hor, hor! That's what he is, too!'

Mr. Peggotty was no less pleased than his nephew, though his modesty

forbade him to claim a personal compliment so vociferously.

'Well, sir,' he said, bowing and chuckling, and tucking in the ends

of his neckerchief at his breast: 'I thankee, sir, I thankee! I do my

endeavours in my line of life, sir.'

'The best of men can do no more, Mr. Peggotty,' said Steerforth. He had

got his name already.

'I'll pound it, it's wot you do yourself, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty,

shaking his head, 'and wot you do well--right well! I thankee, sir. I'm

obleeged to you, sir, for your welcoming manner of me. I'm rough, sir,

but I'm ready--least ways, I hope I'm ready, you unnerstand. My house

ain't much for to see, sir, but it's hearty at your service if ever you

should come along with Mas'r Davy to see it. I'm a reg'lar Dodman,

I am,' said Mr. Peggotty, by which he meant snail, and this was in

allusion to his being slow to go, for he had attempted to go after every

sentence, and had somehow or other come back again; 'but I wish you both

well, and I wish you happy!'

Ham echoed this sentiment, and we parted with them in the heartiest

manner. I was almost tempted that evening to tell Steerforth about

pretty little Em'ly, but I was too timid of mentioning her name, and

too much afraid of his laughing at me. I remember that I thought a good

deal, and in an uneasy sort of way, about Mr. Peggotty having said that

she was getting on to be a woman; but I decided that was nonsense.

We transported the shellfish, or the 'relish' as Mr. Peggotty had

modestly called it, up into our room unobserved, and made a great supper

that evening. But Traddles couldn't get happily out of it. He was too

unfortunate even to come through a supper like anybody else. He was

taken ill in the night--quite prostrate he was--in consequence of Crab;

and after being drugged with black draughts and blue pills, to an extent

which Demple (whose father was a doctor) said was enough to undermine

a horse's constitution, received a caning and six chapters of Greek

Testament for refusing to confess.

The rest of the half-year is a jumble in my recollection of the daily

strife and struggle of our lives; of the waning summer and the changing

season; of the frosty mornings when we were rung out of bed, and the

cold, cold smell of the dark nights when we were rung into bed again; of

the evening schoolroom dimly lighted and indifferently warmed, and the

morning schoolroom which was nothing but a great shivering-machine; of

the alternation of boiled beef with roast beef, and boiled mutton with

roast mutton; of clods of bread-and-butter, dog's-eared lesson-books,

cracked slates, tear-blotted copy-books, canings, rulerings,

hair-cuttings, rainy Sundays, suet-puddings, and a dirty atmosphere of

ink, surrounding all.

I well remember though, how the distant idea of the holidays, after

seeming for an immense time to be a stationary speck, began to come

towards us, and to grow and grow. How from counting months, we came to

weeks, and then to days; and how I then began to be afraid that I should

not be sent for and when I learnt from Steerforth that I had been sent

for, and was certainly to go home, had dim forebodings that I might

break my leg first. How the breaking-up day changed its place fast, at

last, from the week after next to next week, this week, the day after

tomorrow, tomorrow, today, tonight--when I was inside the Yarmouth mail,

and going home.

I had many a broken sleep inside the Yarmouth mail, and many an

incoherent dream of all these things. But when I awoke at intervals, the

ground outside the window was not the playground of Salem House, and the

sound in my ears was not the sound of Mr. Creakle giving it to Traddles,

but the sound of the coachman touching up the horses.

CHAPTER 8. MY HOLIDAYS. ESPECIALLY ONE HAPPY AFTERNOON

When we arrived before day at the inn where the mail stopped, which was

not the inn where my friend the waiter lived, I was shown up to a nice

little bedroom, with DOLPHIN painted on the door. Very cold I was, I

know, notwithstanding the hot tea they had given me before a large fire

downstairs; and very glad I was to turn into the Dolphin's bed, pull the

Dolphin's blankets round my head, and go to sleep.

Mr. Barkis the carrier was to call for me in the morning at nine

o'clock. I got up at eight, a little giddy from the shortness of my

night's rest, and was ready for him before the appointed time. He

received me exactly as if not five minutes had elapsed since we were

last together, and I had only been into the hotel to get change for

sixpence, or something of that sort.

As soon as I and my box were in the cart, and the carrier seated, the

lazy horse walked away with us all at his accustomed pace.

'You look very well, Mr. Barkis,' I said, thinking he would like to know

it.

Mr. Barkis rubbed his cheek with his cuff, and then looked at his cuff

as if he expected to find some of the bloom upon it; but made no other

acknowledgement of the compliment.

'I gave your message, Mr. Barkis,' I said: 'I wrote to Peggotty.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis.

Mr. Barkis seemed gruff, and answered drily.

'Wasn't it right, Mr. Barkis?' I asked, after a little hesitation.

'Why, no,' said Mr. Barkis.

'Not the message?'

'The message was right enough, perhaps,' said Mr. Barkis; 'but it come

to an end there.'

Not understanding what he meant, I repeated inquisitively: 'Came to an

end, Mr. Barkis?'

'Nothing come of it,' he explained, looking at me sideways. 'No answer.'

'There was an answer expected, was there, Mr. Barkis?' said I, opening

my eyes. For this was a new light to me.

'When a man says he's willin',' said Mr. Barkis, turning his glance

slowly on me again, 'it's as much as to say, that man's a-waitin' for a

answer.'

'Well, Mr. Barkis?'

'Well,' said Mr. Barkis, carrying his eyes back to his horse's ears;

'that man's been a-waitin' for a answer ever since.'

'Have you told her so, Mr. Barkis?'

'No--no,' growled Mr. Barkis, reflecting about it. 'I ain't got no call

to go and tell her so. I never said six words to her myself, I ain't

a-goin' to tell her so.'

'Would you like me to do it, Mr. Barkis?' said I, doubtfully. 'You might

tell her, if you would,' said Mr. Barkis, with another slow look at me,

'that Barkis was a-waitin' for a answer. Says you--what name is it?'

'Her name?'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis, with a nod of his head.

'Peggotty.'

'Chrisen name? Or nat'ral name?' said Mr. Barkis.

'Oh, it's not her Christian name. Her Christian name is Clara.'

'Is it though?' said Mr. Barkis.

He seemed to find an immense fund of reflection in this circumstance,

and sat pondering and inwardly whistling for some time.

'Well!' he resumed at length. 'Says you, "Peggotty! Barkis is waitin'

for a answer." Says she, perhaps, "Answer to what?" Says you, "To what I

told you." "What is that?" says she. "Barkis is willin'," says you.'

This extremely artful suggestion Mr. Barkis accompanied with a nudge

of his elbow that gave me quite a stitch in my side. After that, he

slouched over his horse in his usual manner; and made no other reference

to the subject except, half an hour afterwards, taking a piece of chalk

from his pocket, and writing up, inside the tilt of the cart, 'Clara

Peggotty'--apparently as a private memorandum.

Ah, what a strange feeling it was to be going home when it was not home,

and to find that every object I looked at, reminded me of the happy old

home, which was like a dream I could never dream again! The days when my

mother and I and Peggotty were all in all to one another, and there was

no one to come between us, rose up before me so sorrowfully on the road,

that I am not sure I was glad to be there--not sure but that I would

rather have remained away, and forgotten it in Steerforth's company. But

there I was; and soon I was at our house, where the bare old elm-trees

wrung their many hands in the bleak wintry air, and shreds of the old

rooks'-nests drifted away upon the wind.

The carrier put my box down at the garden-gate, and left me. I walked

along the path towards the house, glancing at the windows, and fearing

at every step to see Mr. Murdstone or Miss Murdstone lowering out of

one of them. No face appeared, however; and being come to the house, and

knowing how to open the door, before dark, without knocking, I went in

with a quiet, timid step.

God knows how infantine the memory may have been, that was awakened

within me by the sound of my mother's voice in the old parlour, when I

set foot in the hall. She was singing in a low tone. I think I must have

lain in her arms, and heard her singing so to me when I was but a baby.

The strain was new to me, and yet it was so old that it filled my heart

brim-full; like a friend come back from a long absence.

I believed, from the solitary and thoughtful way in which my mother

murmured her song, that she was alone. And I went softly into the room.

She was sitting by the fire, suckling an infant, whose tiny hand she

held against her neck. Her eyes were looking down upon its face, and she

sat singing to it. I was so far right, that she had no other companion.

I spoke to her, and she started, and cried out. But seeing me, she

called me her dear Davy, her own boy! and coming half across the room

to meet me, kneeled down upon the ground and kissed me, and laid my head

down on her bosom near the little creature that was nestling there, and

put its hand to my lips.

I wish I had died. I wish I had died then, with that feeling in my

heart! I should have been more fit for Heaven than I ever have been

since.

'He is your brother,' said my mother, fondling me. 'Davy, my pretty boy!

My poor child!' Then she kissed me more and more, and clasped me round

the neck. This she was doing when Peggotty came running in, and bounced

down on the ground beside us, and went mad about us both for a quarter

of an hour.

It seemed that I had not been expected so soon, the carrier being much

before his usual time. It seemed, too, that Mr. and Miss Murdstone had

gone out upon a visit in the neighbourhood, and would not return before

night. I had never hoped for this. I had never thought it possible that

we three could be together undisturbed, once more; and I felt, for the

time, as if the old days were come back.

We dined together by the fireside. Peggotty was in attendance to wait

upon us, but my mother wouldn't let her do it, and made her dine with

us. I had my own old plate, with a brown view of a man-of-war in full

sail upon it, which Peggotty had hoarded somewhere all the time I

had been away, and would not have had broken, she said, for a hundred

pounds. I had my own old mug with David on it, and my own old little

knife and fork that wouldn't cut.

While we were at table, I thought it a favourable occasion to tell

Peggotty about Mr. Barkis, who, before I had finished what I had to tell

her, began to laugh, and throw her apron over her face.

'Peggotty,' said my mother. 'What's the matter?'

Peggotty only laughed the more, and held her apron tight over her face

when my mother tried to pull it away, and sat as if her head were in a

bag.

'What are you doing, you stupid creature?' said my mother, laughing.

'Oh, drat the man!' cried Peggotty. 'He wants to marry me.'

'It would be a very good match for you; wouldn't it?' said my mother.

'Oh! I don't know,' said Peggotty. 'Don't ask me. I wouldn't have him if

he was made of gold. Nor I wouldn't have anybody.'

'Then, why don't you tell him so, you ridiculous thing?' said my mother.

'Tell him so,' retorted Peggotty, looking out of her apron. 'He has

never said a word to me about it. He knows better. If he was to make so

bold as say a word to me, I should slap his face.'

Her own was as red as ever I saw it, or any other face, I think; but she

only covered it again, for a few moments at a time, when she was taken

with a violent fit of laughter; and after two or three of those attacks,

went on with her dinner.

I remarked that my mother, though she smiled when Peggotty looked at

her, became more serious and thoughtful. I had seen at first that she

was changed. Her face was very pretty still, but it looked careworn, and

too delicate; and her hand was so thin and white that it seemed to me

to be almost transparent. But the change to which I now refer was

superadded to this: it was in her manner, which became anxious and

fluttered. At last she said, putting out her hand, and laying it

affectionately on the hand of her old servant,

'Peggotty, dear, you are not going to be married?'

'Me, ma'am?' returned Peggotty, staring. 'Lord bless you, no!'

'Not just yet?' said my mother, tenderly.

'Never!' cried Peggotty.

My mother took her hand, and said:

'Don't leave me, Peggotty. Stay with me. It will not be for long,

perhaps. What should I ever do without you!'

'Me leave you, my precious!' cried Peggotty. 'Not for all the world and

his wife. Why, what's put that in your silly little head?'--For Peggotty

had been used of old to talk to my mother sometimes like a child.

But my mother made no answer, except to thank her, and Peggotty went

running on in her own fashion.

'Me leave you? I think I see myself. Peggotty go away from you? I should

like to catch her at it! No, no, no,' said Peggotty, shaking her head,

and folding her arms; 'not she, my dear. It isn't that there ain't some

Cats that would be well enough pleased if she did, but they sha'n't be

pleased. They shall be aggravated. I'll stay with you till I am a cross

cranky old woman. And when I'm too deaf, and too lame, and too blind,

and too mumbly for want of teeth, to be of any use at all, even to be

found fault with, than I shall go to my Davy, and ask him to take me

in.'

'And, Peggotty,' says I, 'I shall be glad to see you, and I'll make you

as welcome as a queen.'

'Bless your dear heart!' cried Peggotty. 'I know you will!' And she

kissed me beforehand, in grateful acknowledgement of my hospitality.

After that, she covered her head up with her apron again and had another

laugh about Mr. Barkis. After that, she took the baby out of its little

cradle, and nursed it. After that, she cleared the dinner table;

after that, came in with another cap on, and her work-box, and the

yard-measure, and the bit of wax-candle, all just the same as ever.

We sat round the fire, and talked delightfully. I told them what a hard

master Mr. Creakle was, and they pitied me very much. I told them what a

fine fellow Steerforth was, and what a patron of mine, and Peggotty said

she would walk a score of miles to see him. I took the little baby in

my arms when it was awake, and nursed it lovingly. When it was asleep

again, I crept close to my mother's side according to my old custom,

broken now a long time, and sat with my arms embracing her waist, and my

little red cheek on her shoulder, and once more felt her beautiful

hair drooping over me--like an angel's wing as I used to think, I

recollect--and was very happy indeed.

While I sat thus, looking at the fire, and seeing pictures in the

red-hot coals, I almost believed that I had never been away; that Mr.

and Miss Murdstone were such pictures, and would vanish when the fire

got low; and that there was nothing real in all that I remembered, save

my mother, Peggotty, and I.

Peggotty darned away at a stocking as long as she could see, and then

sat with it drawn on her left hand like a glove, and her needle in her

right, ready to take another stitch whenever there was a blaze. I cannot

conceive whose stockings they can have been that Peggotty was always

darning, or where such an unfailing supply of stockings in want of

darning can have come from. From my earliest infancy she seems to have

been always employed in that class of needlework, and never by any

chance in any other.

'I wonder,' said Peggotty, who was sometimes seized with a fit of

wondering on some most unexpected topic, 'what's become of Davy's

great-aunt?' 'Lor, Peggotty!' observed my mother, rousing herself from a

reverie, 'what nonsense you talk!'

'Well, but I really do wonder, ma'am,' said Peggotty.

'What can have put such a person in your head?' inquired my mother. 'Is

there nobody else in the world to come there?'

'I don't know how it is,' said Peggotty, 'unless it's on account of

being stupid, but my head never can pick and choose its people. They

come and they go, and they don't come and they don't go, just as they

like. I wonder what's become of her?'

'How absurd you are, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'One would suppose

you wanted a second visit from her.'

'Lord forbid!' cried Peggotty.

'Well then, don't talk about such uncomfortable things, there's a good

soul,' said my mother. 'Miss Betsey is shut up in her cottage by the

sea, no doubt, and will remain there. At all events, she is not likely

ever to trouble us again.'

'No!' mused Peggotty. 'No, that ain't likely at all.---I wonder, if she

was to die, whether she'd leave Davy anything?'

'Good gracious me, Peggotty,' returned my mother, 'what a nonsensical

woman you are! when you know that she took offence at the poor dear

boy's ever being born at all.'

'I suppose she wouldn't be inclined to forgive him now,' hinted

Peggotty.

'Why should she be inclined to forgive him now?' said my mother, rather

sharply.

'Now that he's got a brother, I mean,' said Peggotty.

MY mother immediately began to cry, and wondered how Peggotty dared to

say such a thing.

'As if this poor little innocent in its cradle had ever done any harm to

you or anybody else, you jealous thing!' said she. 'You had much better

go and marry Mr. Barkis, the carrier. Why don't you?'

'I should make Miss Murdstone happy, if I was to,' said Peggotty.

'What a bad disposition you have, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'You

are as jealous of Miss Murdstone as it is possible for a ridiculous

creature to be. You want to keep the keys yourself, and give out all the

things, I suppose? I shouldn't be surprised if you did. When you know

that she only does it out of kindness and the best intentions! You know

she does, Peggotty--you know it well.'

Peggotty muttered something to the effect of 'Bother the best

intentions!' and something else to the effect that there was a little

too much of the best intentions going on.

'I know what you mean, you cross thing,' said my mother. 'I understand

you, Peggotty, perfectly. You know I do, and I wonder you don't colour

up like fire. But one point at a time. Miss Murdstone is the point now,

Peggotty, and you sha'n't escape from it. Haven't you heard her

say, over and over again, that she thinks I am too thoughtless and

too--a--a--'

'Pretty,' suggested Peggotty.

'Well,' returned my mother, half laughing, 'and if she is so silly as to

say so, can I be blamed for it?'

'No one says you can,' said Peggotty.

'No, I should hope not, indeed!' returned my mother. 'Haven't you heard

her say, over and over again, that on this account she wished to spare

me a great deal of trouble, which she thinks I am not suited for, and

which I really don't know myself that I AM suited for; and isn't she up

early and late, and going to and fro continually--and doesn't she do

all sorts of things, and grope into all sorts of places, coal-holes and

pantries and I don't know where, that can't be very agreeable--and do

you mean to insinuate that there is not a sort of devotion in that?'

'I don't insinuate at all,' said Peggotty.

'You do, Peggotty,' returned my mother. 'You never do anything else,

except your work. You are always insinuating. You revel in it. And when

you talk of Mr. Murdstone's good intentions--'

'I never talked of 'em,' said Peggotty.

'No, Peggotty,' returned my mother, 'but you insinuated. That's what I

told you just now. That's the worst of you. You WILL insinuate. I said,

at the moment, that I understood you, and you see I did. When you talk

of Mr. Murdstone's good intentions, and pretend to slight them (for I

don't believe you really do, in your heart, Peggotty), you must be as

well convinced as I am how good they are, and how they actuate him in

everything. If he seems to have been at all stern with a certain person,

Peggotty--you understand, and so I am sure does Davy, that I am not

alluding to anybody present--it is solely because he is satisfied that

it is for a certain person's benefit. He naturally loves a certain

person, on my account; and acts solely for a certain person's good. He

is better able to judge of it than I am; for I very well know that I am

a weak, light, girlish creature, and that he is a firm, grave, serious

man. And he takes,' said my mother, with the tears which were engendered

in her affectionate nature, stealing down her face, 'he takes great

pains with me; and I ought to be very thankful to him, and very

submissive to him even in my thoughts; and when I am not, Peggotty, I

worry and condemn myself, and feel doubtful of my own heart, and don't

know what to do.'

Peggotty sat with her chin on the foot of the stocking, looking silently

at the fire.

'There, Peggotty,' said my mother, changing her tone, 'don't let us fall

out with one another, for I couldn't bear it. You are my true friend, I

know, if I have any in the world. When I call you a ridiculous creature,

or a vexatious thing, or anything of that sort, Peggotty, I only mean

that you are my true friend, and always have been, ever since the night

when Mr. Copperfield first brought me home here, and you came out to the

gate to meet me.'

Peggotty was not slow to respond, and ratify the treaty of friendship by

giving me one of her best hugs. I think I had some glimpses of the real

character of this conversation at the time; but I am sure, now, that

the good creature originated it, and took her part in it, merely that

my mother might comfort herself with the little contradictory summary in

which she had indulged. The design was efficacious; for I remember that

my mother seemed more at ease during the rest of the evening, and that

Peggotty observed her less.

When we had had our tea, and the ashes were thrown up, and the candles

snuffed, I read Peggotty a chapter out of the Crocodile Book, in

remembrance of old times--she took it out of her pocket: I don't know

whether she had kept it there ever since--and then we talked about Salem

House, which brought me round again to Steerforth, who was my great

subject. We were very happy; and that evening, as the last of its race,

and destined evermore to close that volume of my life, will never pass

out of my memory.

It was almost ten o'clock before we heard the sound of wheels. We all

got up then; and my mother said hurriedly that, as it was so late, and

Mr. and Miss Murdstone approved of early hours for young people, perhaps

I had better go to bed. I kissed her, and went upstairs with my candle

directly, before they came in. It appeared to my childish fancy, as I

ascended to the bedroom where I had been imprisoned, that they brought

a cold blast of air into the house which blew away the old familiar

feeling like a feather.

I felt uncomfortable about going down to breakfast in the morning, as

I had never set eyes on Mr. Murdstone since the day when I committed my

memorable offence. However, as it must be done, I went down, after two

or three false starts half-way, and as many runs back on tiptoe to my

own room, and presented myself in the parlour.

He was standing before the fire with his back to it, while Miss

Murdstone made the tea. He looked at me steadily as I entered, but made

no sign of recognition whatever. I went up to him, after a moment of

confusion, and said: 'I beg your pardon, sir. I am very sorry for what I

did, and I hope you will forgive me.'

'I am glad to hear you are sorry, David,' he replied.

The hand he gave me was the hand I had bitten. I could not restrain my

eye from resting for an instant on a red spot upon it; but it was not so

red as I turned, when I met that sinister expression in his face.

'How do you do, ma'am?' I said to Miss Murdstone.

'Ah, dear me!' sighed Miss Murdstone, giving me the tea-caddy scoop

instead of her fingers. 'How long are the holidays?'

'A month, ma'am.'

'Counting from when?'

'From today, ma'am.'

'Oh!' said Miss Murdstone. 'Then here's one day off.'

She kept a calendar of the holidays in this way, and every morning

checked a day off in exactly the same manner. She did it gloomily until

she came to ten, but when she got into two figures she became more

hopeful, and, as the time advanced, even jocular.

It was on this very first day that I had the misfortune to throw her,

though she was not subject to such weakness in general, into a state of

violent consternation. I came into the room where she and my mother

were sitting; and the baby (who was only a few weeks old) being on

my mother's lap, I took it very carefully in my arms. Suddenly Miss

Murdstone gave such a scream that I all but dropped it.

'My dear Jane!' cried my mother.

'Good heavens, Clara, do you see?' exclaimed Miss Murdstone.

'See what, my dear Jane?' said my mother; 'where?'

'He's got it!' cried Miss Murdstone. 'The boy has got the baby!'

She was limp with horror; but stiffened herself to make a dart at me,

and take it out of my arms. Then, she turned faint; and was so very

ill that they were obliged to give her cherry brandy. I was solemnly

interdicted by her, on her recovery, from touching my brother any more

on any pretence whatever; and my poor mother, who, I could see, wished

otherwise, meekly confirmed the interdict, by saying: 'No doubt you are

right, my dear Jane.'

On another occasion, when we three were together, this same dear

baby--it was truly dear to me, for our mother's sake--was the innocent

occasion of Miss Murdstone's going into a passion. My mother, who had

been looking at its eyes as it lay upon her lap, said:

'Davy! come here!' and looked at mine.

I saw Miss Murdstone lay her beads down.

'I declare,' said my mother, gently, 'they are exactly alike. I suppose

they are mine. I think they are the colour of mine. But they are

wonderfully alike.'

'What are you talking about, Clara?' said Miss Murdstone.

'My dear Jane,' faltered my mother, a little abashed by the harsh tone

of this inquiry, 'I find that the baby's eyes and Davy's are exactly

alike.'

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, rising angrily, 'you are a positive fool

sometimes.'

'My dear Jane,' remonstrated my mother.

'A positive fool,' said Miss Murdstone. 'Who else could compare my

brother's baby with your boy? They are not at all alike. They are

exactly unlike. They are utterly dissimilar in all respects. I hope

they will ever remain so. I will not sit here, and hear such comparisons

made.' With that she stalked out, and made the door bang after her.

In short, I was not a favourite with Miss Murdstone. In short, I was not

a favourite there with anybody, not even with myself; for those who did

like me could not show it, and those who did not, showed it so plainly

that I had a sensitive consciousness of always appearing constrained,

boorish, and dull.

I felt that I made them as uncomfortable as they made me. If I came into

the room where they were, and they were talking together and my mother

seemed cheerful, an anxious cloud would steal over her face from the

moment of my entrance. If Mr. Murdstone were in his best humour, I

checked him. If Miss Murdstone were in her worst, I intensified it. I

had perception enough to know that my mother was the victim always; that

she was afraid to speak to me or to be kind to me, lest she should

give them some offence by her manner of doing so, and receive a

lecture afterwards; that she was not only ceaselessly afraid of her own

offending, but of my offending, and uneasily watched their looks if I

only moved. Therefore I resolved to keep myself as much out of their way

as I could; and many a wintry hour did I hear the church clock strike,

when I was sitting in my cheerless bedroom, wrapped in my little

great-coat, poring over a book.

In the evening, sometimes, I went and sat with Peggotty in the kitchen.

There I was comfortable, and not afraid of being myself. But neither of

these resources was approved of in the parlour. The tormenting humour

which was dominant there stopped them both. I was still held to be

necessary to my poor mother's training, and, as one of her trials, could

not be suffered to absent myself.

'David,' said Mr. Murdstone, one day after dinner when I was going to

leave the room as usual; 'I am sorry to observe that you are of a sullen

disposition.'

'As sulky as a bear!' said Miss Murdstone.

I stood still, and hung my head.

'Now, David,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'a sullen obdurate disposition is, of

all tempers, the worst.'

'And the boy's is, of all such dispositions that ever I have seen,'

remarked his sister, 'the most confirmed and stubborn. I think, my dear

Clara, even you must observe it?'

'I beg your pardon, my dear Jane,' said my mother, 'but are you quite

sure--I am certain you'll excuse me, my dear Jane--that you understand

Davy?'

'I should be somewhat ashamed of myself, Clara,' returned Miss

Murdstone, 'if I could not understand the boy, or any boy. I don't

profess to be profound; but I do lay claim to common sense.'

'No doubt, my dear Jane,' returned my mother, 'your understanding is

very vigorous--'

'Oh dear, no! Pray don't say that, Clara,' interposed Miss Murdstone,

angrily.

'But I am sure it is,' resumed my mother; 'and everybody knows it is. I

profit so much by it myself, in many ways--at least I ought to--that no

one can be more convinced of it than myself; and therefore I speak with

great diffidence, my dear Jane, I assure you.'

'We'll say I don't understand the boy, Clara,' returned Miss Murdstone,

arranging the little fetters on her wrists. 'We'll agree, if you please,

that I don't understand him at all. He is much too deep for me. But

perhaps my brother's penetration may enable him to have some insight

into his character. And I believe my brother was speaking on the subject

when we--not very decently--interrupted him.'

'I think, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone, in a low grave voice, 'that there

may be better and more dispassionate judges of such a question than

you.'

'Edward,' replied my mother, timidly, 'you are a far better judge of all

questions than I pretend to be. Both you and Jane are. I only said--'

'You only said something weak and inconsiderate,' he replied. 'Try not

to do it again, my dear Clara, and keep a watch upon yourself.'

MY mother's lips moved, as if she answered 'Yes, my dear Edward,' but

she said nothing aloud.

'I was sorry, David, I remarked,' said Mr. Murdstone, turning his head

and his eyes stiffly towards me, 'to observe that you are of a sullen

disposition. This is not a character that I can suffer to develop itself

beneath my eyes without an effort at improvement. You must endeavour,

sir, to change it. We must endeavour to change it for you.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' I faltered. 'I have never meant to be sullen

since I came back.'

'Don't take refuge in a lie, sir!' he returned so fiercely, that I saw

my mother involuntarily put out her trembling hand as if to interpose

between us. 'You have withdrawn yourself in your sullenness to your own

room. You have kept your own room when you ought to have been here. You

know now, once for all, that I require you to be here, and not there.

Further, that I require you to bring obedience here. You know me, David.

I will have it done.'

Miss Murdstone gave a hoarse chuckle.

'I will have a respectful, prompt, and ready bearing towards myself,' he

continued, 'and towards Jane Murdstone, and towards your mother. I will

not have this room shunned as if it were infected, at the pleasure of a

child. Sit down.'

He ordered me like a dog, and I obeyed like a dog.

'One thing more,' he said. 'I observe that you have an attachment to low

and common company. You are not to associate with servants. The

kitchen will not improve you, in the many respects in which you need

improvement. Of the woman who abets you, I say nothing--since you,

Clara,' addressing my mother in a lower voice, 'from old associations

and long-established fancies, have a weakness respecting her which is

not yet overcome.'

'A most unaccountable delusion it is!' cried Miss Murdstone.

'I only say,' he resumed, addressing me, 'that I disapprove of your

preferring such company as Mistress Peggotty, and that it is to be

abandoned. Now, David, you understand me, and you know what will be the

consequence if you fail to obey me to the letter.'

I knew well--better perhaps than he thought, as far as my poor mother

was concerned--and I obeyed him to the letter. I retreated to my own

room no more; I took refuge with Peggotty no more; but sat wearily in

the parlour day after day, looking forward to night, and bedtime.

What irksome constraint I underwent, sitting in the same attitude hours

upon hours, afraid to move an arm or a leg lest Miss Murdstone should

complain (as she did on the least pretence) of my restlessness, and

afraid to move an eye lest she should light on some look of dislike

or scrutiny that would find new cause for complaint in mine! What

intolerable dulness to sit listening to the ticking of the clock; and

watching Miss Murdstone's little shiny steel beads as she strung them;

and wondering whether she would ever be married, and if so, to what

sort of unhappy man; and counting the divisions in the moulding of the

chimney-piece; and wandering away, with my eyes, to the ceiling, among

the curls and corkscrews in the paper on the wall!

What walks I took alone, down muddy lanes, in the bad winter weather,

carrying that parlour, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone in it, everywhere: a

monstrous load that I was obliged to bear, a daymare that there was

no possibility of breaking in, a weight that brooded on my wits, and

blunted them!

What meals I had in silence and embarrassment, always feeling that there

were a knife and fork too many, and that mine; an appetite too many, and

that mine; a plate and chair too many, and those mine; a somebody too

many, and that I!

What evenings, when the candles came, and I was expected to employ

myself, but, not daring to read an entertaining book, pored over some

hard-headed, harder-hearted treatise on arithmetic; when the tables of

weights and measures set themselves to tunes, as 'Rule Britannia', or

'Away with Melancholy'; when they wouldn't stand still to be learnt, but

would go threading my grandmother's needle through my unfortunate head,

in at one ear and out at the other! What yawns and dozes I lapsed into,

in spite of all my care; what starts I came out of concealed sleeps

with; what answers I never got, to little observations that I rarely

made; what a blank space I seemed, which everybody overlooked, and

yet was in everybody's way; what a heavy relief it was to hear Miss

Murdstone hail the first stroke of nine at night, and order me to bed!

Thus the holidays lagged away, until the morning came when Miss

Murdstone said: 'Here's the last day off!' and gave me the closing cup

of tea of the vacation.

I was not sorry to go. I had lapsed into a stupid state; but I was

recovering a little and looking forward to Steerforth, albeit Mr.

Creakle loomed behind him. Again Mr. Barkis appeared at the gate, and

again Miss Murdstone in her warning voice, said: 'Clara!' when my mother

bent over me, to bid me farewell.

I kissed her, and my baby brother, and was very sorry then; but not

sorry to go away, for the gulf between us was there, and the parting was

there, every day. And it is not so much the embrace she gave me, that

lives in my mind, though it was as fervent as could be, as what followed

the embrace.

I was in the carrier's cart when I heard her calling to me. I looked

out, and she stood at the garden-gate alone, holding her baby up in her

arms for me to see. It was cold still weather; and not a hair of her

head, nor a fold of her dress, was stirred, as she looked intently at

me, holding up her child.

So I lost her. So I saw her afterwards, in my sleep at school--a silent

presence near my bed--looking at me with the same intent face--holding

up her baby in her arms.

CHAPTER 9. I HAVE A MEMORABLE BIRTHDAY

I PASS over all that happened at school, until the anniversary of my

birthday came round in March. Except that Steerforth was more to be

admired than ever, I remember nothing. He was going away at the end of

the half-year, if not sooner, and was more spirited and independent than

before in my eyes, and therefore more engaging than before; but beyond

this I remember nothing. The great remembrance by which that time is

marked in my mind, seems to have swallowed up all lesser recollections,

and to exist alone.

It is even difficult for me to believe that there was a gap of full

two months between my return to Salem House and the arrival of that

birthday. I can only understand that the fact was so, because I know it

must have been so; otherwise I should feel convinced that there was no

interval, and that the one occasion trod upon the other's heels.

How well I recollect the kind of day it was! I smell the fog that hung

about the place; I see the hoar frost, ghostly, through it; I feel my

rimy hair fall clammy on my cheek; I look along the dim perspective of

the schoolroom, with a sputtering candle here and there to light up the

foggy morning, and the breath of the boys wreathing and smoking in the

raw cold as they blow upon their fingers, and tap their feet upon the

floor. It was after breakfast, and we had been summoned in from the

playground, when Mr. Sharp entered and said:

'David Copperfield is to go into the parlour.'

I expected a hamper from Peggotty, and brightened at the order. Some

of the boys about me put in their claim not to be forgotten in the

distribution of the good things, as I got out of my seat with great

alacrity.

'Don't hurry, David,' said Mr. Sharp. 'There's time enough, my boy,

don't hurry.'

I might have been surprised by the feeling tone in which he spoke, if I

had given it a thought; but I gave it none until afterwards. I hurried

away to the parlour; and there I found Mr. Creakle, sitting at his

breakfast with the cane and a newspaper before him, and Mrs. Creakle

with an opened letter in her hand. But no hamper.

'David Copperfield,' said Mrs. Creakle, leading me to a sofa, and

sitting down beside me. 'I want to speak to you very particularly. I

have something to tell you, my child.'

Mr. Creakle, at whom of course I looked, shook his head without looking

at me, and stopped up a sigh with a very large piece of buttered toast.

'You are too young to know how the world changes every day,' said Mrs.

Creakle, 'and how the people in it pass away. But we all have to learn

it, David; some of us when we are young, some of us when we are old,

some of us at all times of our lives.'

I looked at her earnestly.

'When you came away from home at the end of the vacation,' said Mrs.

Creakle, after a pause, 'were they all well?' After another pause, 'Was

your mama well?'

I trembled without distinctly knowing why, and still looked at her

earnestly, making no attempt to answer.

'Because,' said she, 'I grieve to tell you that I hear this morning your

mama is very ill.'

A mist rose between Mrs. Creakle and me, and her figure seemed to move

in it for an instant. Then I felt the burning tears run down my face,

and it was steady again.

'She is very dangerously ill,' she added.

I knew all now.

'She is dead.'

There was no need to tell me so. I had already broken out into a

desolate cry, and felt an orphan in the wide world.

She was very kind to me. She kept me there all day, and left me alone

sometimes; and I cried, and wore myself to sleep, and awoke and

cried again. When I could cry no more, I began to think; and then the

oppression on my breast was heaviest, and my grief a dull pain that

there was no ease for.

And yet my thoughts were idle; not intent on the calamity that weighed

upon my heart, but idly loitering near it. I thought of our house shut

up and hushed. I thought of the little baby, who, Mrs. Creakle said, had

been pining away for some time, and who, they believed, would die too. I

thought of my father's grave in the churchyard, by our house, and of my

mother lying there beneath the tree I knew so well. I stood upon a chair

when I was left alone, and looked into the glass to see how red my eyes

were, and how sorrowful my face. I considered, after some hours were

gone, if my tears were really hard to flow now, as they seemed to be,

what, in connexion with my loss, it would affect me most to think

of when I drew near home--for I was going home to the funeral. I am

sensible of having felt that a dignity attached to me among the rest of

the boys, and that I was important in my affliction.

If ever child were stricken with sincere grief, I was. But I remember

that this importance was a kind of satisfaction to me, when I walked in

the playground that afternoon while the boys were in school. When I

saw them glancing at me out of the windows, as they went up to their

classes, I felt distinguished, and looked more melancholy, and walked

slower. When school was over, and they came out and spoke to me, I felt

it rather good in myself not to be proud to any of them, and to take

exactly the same notice of them all, as before.

I was to go home next night; not by the mail, but by the heavy

night-coach, which was called the Farmer, and was principally used by

country-people travelling short intermediate distances upon the road. We

had no story-telling that evening, and Traddles insisted on lending me

his pillow. I don't know what good he thought it would do me, for I

had one of my own: but it was all he had to lend, poor fellow, except a

sheet of letter-paper full of skeletons; and that he gave me at parting,

as a soother of my sorrows and a contribution to my peace of mind.

I left Salem House upon the morrow afternoon. I little thought then that

I left it, never to return. We travelled very slowly all night, and

did not get into Yarmouth before nine or ten o'clock in the morning. I

looked out for Mr. Barkis, but he was not there; and instead of him a

fat, short-winded, merry-looking, little old man in black, with rusty

little bunches of ribbons at the knees of his breeches, black stockings,

and a broad-brimmed hat, came puffing up to the coach window, and said:

'Master Copperfield?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Will you come with me, young sir, if you please,' he said, opening the

door, 'and I shall have the pleasure of taking you home.'

I put my hand in his, wondering who he was, and we walked away to a

shop in a narrow street, on which was written OMER, DRAPER, TAILOR,

HABERDASHER, FUNERAL FURNISHER, &c. It was a close and stifling little

shop; full of all sorts of clothing, made and unmade, including

one window full of beaver-hats and bonnets. We went into a little

back-parlour behind the shop, where we found three young women at work

on a quantity of black materials, which were heaped upon the table,

and little bits and cuttings of which were littered all over the floor.

There was a good fire in the room, and a breathless smell of warm black

crape--I did not know what the smell was then, but I know now.

The three young women, who appeared to be very industrious and

comfortable, raised their heads to look at me, and then went on with

their work. Stitch, stitch, stitch. At the same time there came from

a workshop across a little yard outside the window, a regular sound

of hammering that kept a kind of tune: RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat,

RAT--tat-tat, without any variation.

'Well,' said my conductor to one of the three young women. 'How do you

get on, Minnie?'

'We shall be ready by the trying-on time,' she replied gaily, without

looking up. 'Don't you be afraid, father.'

Mr. Omer took off his broad-brimmed hat, and sat down and panted. He was

so fat that he was obliged to pant some time before he could say:

'That's right.'

'Father!' said Minnie, playfully. 'What a porpoise you do grow!'

'Well, I don't know how it is, my dear,' he replied, considering about

it. 'I am rather so.'

'You are such a comfortable man, you see,' said Minnie. 'You take things

so easy.'

'No use taking 'em otherwise, my dear,' said Mr. Omer.

'No, indeed,' returned his daughter. 'We are all pretty gay here, thank

Heaven! Ain't we, father?'

'I hope so, my dear,' said Mr. Omer. 'As I have got my breath now, I

think I'll measure this young scholar. Would you walk into the shop,

Master Copperfield?'

I preceded Mr. Omer, in compliance with his request; and after showing

me a roll of cloth which he said was extra super, and too good mourning

for anything short of parents, he took my various dimensions, and put

them down in a book. While he was recording them he called my attention

to his stock in trade, and to certain fashions which he said had 'just

come up', and to certain other fashions which he said had 'just gone

out'.

'And by that sort of thing we very often lose a little mint of money,'

said Mr. Omer. 'But fashions are like human beings. They come in, nobody

knows when, why, or how; and they go out, nobody knows when, why, or

how. Everything is like life, in my opinion, if you look at it in that

point of view.'

I was too sorrowful to discuss the question, which would possibly have

been beyond me under any circumstances; and Mr. Omer took me back into

the parlour, breathing with some difficulty on the way.

He then called down a little break-neck range of steps behind a door:

'Bring up that tea and bread-and-butter!' which, after some time,

during which I sat looking about me and thinking, and listening to the

stitching in the room and the tune that was being hammered across the

yard, appeared on a tray, and turned out to be for me.

'I have been acquainted with you,' said Mr. Omer, after watching me

for some minutes, during which I had not made much impression on the

breakfast, for the black things destroyed my appetite, 'I have been

acquainted with you a long time, my young friend.'

'Have you, sir?'

'All your life,' said Mr. Omer. 'I may say before it. I knew your

father before you. He was five foot nine and a half, and he lays in

five-and-twen-ty foot of ground.'

'RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat,' across the yard.

'He lays in five and twen-ty foot of ground, if he lays in a fraction,'

said Mr. Omer, pleasantly. 'It was either his request or her direction,

I forget which.'

'Do you know how my little brother is, sir?' I inquired.

Mr. Omer shook his head.

'RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat, RAT--tat-tat.'

'He is in his mother's arms,' said he.

'Oh, poor little fellow! Is he dead?'

'Don't mind it more than you can help,' said Mr. Omer. 'Yes. The baby's

dead.'

My wounds broke out afresh at this intelligence. I left the

scarcely-tasted breakfast, and went and rested my head on another table,

in a corner of the little room, which Minnie hastily cleared, lest I

should spot the mourning that was lying there with my tears. She was

a pretty, good-natured girl, and put my hair away from my eyes with a

soft, kind touch; but she was very cheerful at having nearly finished

her work and being in good time, and was so different from me!

Presently the tune left off, and a good-looking young fellow came across

the yard into the room. He had a hammer in his hand, and his mouth was

full of little nails, which he was obliged to take out before he could

speak.

'Well, Joram!' said Mr. Omer. 'How do you get on?'

'All right,' said Joram. 'Done, sir.'

Minnie coloured a little, and the other two girls smiled at one another.

'What! you were at it by candle-light last night, when I was at the

club, then? Were you?' said Mr. Omer, shutting up one eye.

'Yes,' said Joram. 'As you said we could make a little trip of it, and

go over together, if it was done, Minnie and me--and you.'

'Oh! I thought you were going to leave me out altogether,' said Mr.

Omer, laughing till he coughed.

'--As you was so good as to say that,' resumed the young man, 'why I

turned to with a will, you see. Will you give me your opinion of it?'

'I will,' said Mr. Omer, rising. 'My dear'; and he stopped and turned to

me: 'would you like to see your--'

'No, father,' Minnie interposed.

'I thought it might be agreeable, my dear,' said Mr. Omer. 'But perhaps

you're right.'

I can't say how I knew it was my dear, dear mother's coffin that they

went to look at. I had never heard one making; I had never seen one that

I know of.--but it came into my mind what the noise was, while it was

going on; and when the young man entered, I am sure I knew what he had

been doing.

The work being now finished, the two girls, whose names I had not heard,

brushed the shreds and threads from their dresses, and went into the

shop to put that to rights, and wait for customers. Minnie stayed behind

to fold up what they had made, and pack it in two baskets. This she did

upon her knees, humming a lively little tune the while. Joram, who I had

no doubt was her lover, came in and stole a kiss from her while she was

busy (he didn't appear to mind me, at all), and said her father was gone

for the chaise, and he must make haste and get himself ready. Then he

went out again; and then she put her thimble and scissors in her pocket,

and stuck a needle threaded with black thread neatly in the bosom of her

gown, and put on her outer clothing smartly, at a little glass behind

the door, in which I saw the reflection of her pleased face.

All this I observed, sitting at the table in the corner with my head

leaning on my hand, and my thoughts running on very different things.

The chaise soon came round to the front of the shop, and the baskets

being put in first, I was put in next, and those three followed. I

remember it as a kind of half chaise-cart, half pianoforte-van, painted

of a sombre colour, and drawn by a black horse with a long tail. There

was plenty of room for us all.

I do not think I have ever experienced so strange a feeling in my life

(I am wiser now, perhaps) as that of being with them, remembering how

they had been employed, and seeing them enjoy the ride. I was not angry

with them; I was more afraid of them, as if I were cast away among

creatures with whom I had no community of nature. They were very

cheerful. The old man sat in front to drive, and the two young people

sat behind him, and whenever he spoke to them leaned forward, the one on

one side of his chubby face and the other on the other, and made a great

deal of him. They would have talked to me too, but I held back, and

moped in my corner; scared by their love-making and hilarity, though

it was far from boisterous, and almost wondering that no judgement came

upon them for their hardness of heart.

So, when they stopped to bait the horse, and ate and drank and enjoyed

themselves, I could touch nothing that they touched, but kept my fast

unbroken. So, when we reached home, I dropped out of the chaise behind,

as quickly as possible, that I might not be in their company before

those solemn windows, looking blindly on me like closed eyes once

bright. And oh, how little need I had had to think what would move me to

tears when I came back--seeing the window of my mother's room, and next

it that which, in the better time, was mine!

I was in Peggotty's arms before I got to the door, and she took me into

the house. Her grief burst out when she first saw me; but she controlled

it soon, and spoke in whispers, and walked softly, as if the dead could

be disturbed. She had not been in bed, I found, for a long time. She

sat up at night still, and watched. As long as her poor dear pretty was

above the ground, she said, she would never desert her.

Mr. Murdstone took no heed of me when I went into the parlour where he

was, but sat by the fireside, weeping silently, and pondering in his

elbow-chair. Miss Murdstone, who was busy at her writing-desk, which

was covered with letters and papers, gave me her cold finger-nails, and

asked me, in an iron whisper, if I had been measured for my mourning.

I said: 'Yes.'

'And your shirts,' said Miss Murdstone; 'have you brought 'em home?'

'Yes, ma'am. I have brought home all my clothes.'

This was all the consolation that her firmness administered to me. I do

not doubt that she had a choice pleasure in exhibiting what she called

her self-command, and her firmness, and her strength of mind, and

her common sense, and the whole diabolical catalogue of her unamiable

qualities, on such an occasion. She was particularly proud of her turn

for business; and she showed it now in reducing everything to pen and

ink, and being moved by nothing. All the rest of that day, and from

morning to night afterwards, she sat at that desk, scratching composedly

with a hard pen, speaking in the same imperturbable whisper to

everybody; never relaxing a muscle of her face, or softening a tone of

her voice, or appearing with an atom of her dress astray.

Her brother took a book sometimes, but never read it that I saw. He

would open it and look at it as if he were reading, but would remain for

a whole hour without turning the leaf, and then put it down and walk to

and fro in the room. I used to sit with folded hands watching him, and

counting his footsteps, hour after hour. He very seldom spoke to her,

and never to me. He seemed to be the only restless thing, except the

clocks, in the whole motionless house.

In these days before the funeral, I saw but little of Peggotty, except

that, in passing up or down stairs, I always found her close to the room

where my mother and her baby lay, and except that she came to me every

night, and sat by my bed's head while I went to sleep. A day or

two before the burial--I think it was a day or two before, but I am

conscious of confusion in my mind about that heavy time, with nothing

to mark its progress--she took me into the room. I only recollect that

underneath some white covering on the bed, with a beautiful cleanliness

and freshness all around it, there seemed to me to lie embodied the

solemn stillness that was in the house; and that when she would have

turned the cover gently back, I cried: 'Oh no! oh no!' and held her

hand.

If the funeral had been yesterday, I could not recollect it better. The

very air of the best parlour, when I went in at the door, the bright

condition of the fire, the shining of the wine in the decanters, the

patterns of the glasses and plates, the faint sweet smell of cake, the

odour of Miss Murdstone's dress, and our black clothes. Mr. Chillip is

in the room, and comes to speak to me.

'And how is Master David?' he says, kindly.

I cannot tell him very well. I give him my hand, which he holds in his.

'Dear me!' says Mr. Chillip, meekly smiling, with something shining in

his eye. 'Our little friends grow up around us. They grow out of our

knowledge, ma'am?' This is to Miss Murdstone, who makes no reply.

'There is a great improvement here, ma'am?' says Mr. Chillip.

Miss Murdstone merely answers with a frown and a formal bend: Mr.

Chillip, discomfited, goes into a corner, keeping me with him, and opens

his mouth no more.

I remark this, because I remark everything that happens, not because

I care about myself, or have done since I came home. And now the bell

begins to sound, and Mr. Omer and another come to make us ready. As

Peggotty was wont to tell me, long ago, the followers of my father to

the same grave were made ready in the same room.

There are Mr. Murdstone, our neighbour Mr. Grayper, Mr. Chillip, and

I. When we go out to the door, the Bearers and their load are in the

garden; and they move before us down the path, and past the elms, and

through the gate, and into the churchyard, where I have so often heard

the birds sing on a summer morning.

We stand around the grave. The day seems different to me from every

other day, and the light not of the same colour--of a sadder colour.

Now there is a solemn hush, which we have brought from home with what is

resting in the mould; and while we stand bareheaded, I hear the voice

of the clergyman, sounding remote in the open air, and yet distinct and

plain, saying: 'I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord!'

Then I hear sobs; and, standing apart among the lookers-on, I see that

good and faithful servant, whom of all the people upon earth I love the

best, and unto whom my childish heart is certain that the Lord will one

day say: 'Well done.'

There are many faces that I know, among the little crowd; faces that I

knew in church, when mine was always wondering there; faces that first

saw my mother, when she came to the village in her youthful bloom. I do

not mind them--I mind nothing but my grief--and yet I see and know them

all; and even in the background, far away, see Minnie looking on, and

her eye glancing on her sweetheart, who is near me.

It is over, and the earth is filled in, and we turn to come away. Before

us stands our house, so pretty and unchanged, so linked in my mind with

the young idea of what is gone, that all my sorrow has been nothing to

the sorrow it calls forth. But they take me on; and Mr. Chillip talks to

me; and when we get home, puts some water to my lips; and when I ask his

leave to go up to my room, dismisses me with the gentleness of a woman.

All this, I say, is yesterday's event. Events of later date have floated

from me to the shore where all forgotten things will reappear, but this

stands like a high rock in the ocean.

I knew that Peggotty would come to me in my room. The Sabbath stillness

of the time (the day was so like Sunday! I have forgotten that) was

suited to us both. She sat down by my side upon my little bed; and

holding my hand, and sometimes putting it to her lips, and sometimes

smoothing it with hers, as she might have comforted my little brother,

told me, in her way, all that she had to tell concerning what had

happened.

'She was never well,' said Peggotty, 'for a long time. She was uncertain

in her mind, and not happy. When her baby was born, I thought at first

she would get better, but she was more delicate, and sunk a little every

day. She used to like to sit alone before her baby came, and then she

cried; but afterwards she used to sing to it--so soft, that I once

thought, when I heard her, it was like a voice up in the air, that was

rising away.

'I think she got to be more timid, and more frightened-like, of late;

and that a hard word was like a blow to her. But she was always the same

to me. She never changed to her foolish Peggotty, didn't my sweet girl.'

Here Peggotty stopped, and softly beat upon my hand a little while.

'The last time that I saw her like her own old self, was the night when

you came home, my dear. The day you went away, she said to me, "I never

shall see my pretty darling again. Something tells me so, that tells the

truth, I know."

'She tried to hold up after that; and many a time, when they told her

she was thoughtless and light-hearted, made believe to be so; but it was

all a bygone then. She never told her husband what she had told me--she

was afraid of saying it to anybody else--till one night, a little more

than a week before it happened, when she said to him: "My dear, I think

I am dying."

'"It's off my mind now, Peggotty," she told me, when I laid her in her

bed that night. "He will believe it more and more, poor fellow, every

day for a few days to come; and then it will be past. I am very tired.

If this is sleep, sit by me while I sleep: don't leave me. God bless

both my children! God protect and keep my fatherless boy!"

'I never left her afterwards,' said Peggotty. 'She often talked to them

two downstairs--for she loved them; she couldn't bear not to love anyone

who was about her--but when they went away from her bed-side, she always

turned to me, as if there was rest where Peggotty was, and never fell

asleep in any other way.

'On the last night, in the evening, she kissed me, and said: "If my baby

should die too, Peggotty, please let them lay him in my arms, and bury

us together." (It was done; for the poor lamb lived but a day beyond

her.) "Let my dearest boy go with us to our resting-place," she said,

"and tell him that his mother, when she lay here, blessed him not once,

but a thousand times."'

Another silence followed this, and another gentle beating on my hand.

'It was pretty far in the night,' said Peggotty, 'when she asked me for

some drink; and when she had taken it, gave me such a patient smile, the

dear!--so beautiful!

'Daybreak had come, and the sun was rising, when she said to me, how

kind and considerate Mr. Copperfield had always been to her, and how

he had borne with her, and told her, when she doubted herself, that

a loving heart was better and stronger than wisdom, and that he was a

happy man in hers. "Peggotty, my dear," she said then, "put me nearer to

you," for she was very weak. "Lay your good arm underneath my neck," she

said, "and turn me to you, for your face is going far off, and I want it

to be near." I put it as she asked; and oh Davy! the time had come when

my first parting words to you were true--when she was glad to lay her

poor head on her stupid cross old Peggotty's arm--and she died like a

child that had gone to sleep!'

Thus ended Peggotty's narration. From the moment of my knowing of the

death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late had vanished

from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother

of my earliest impressions, who had been used to wind her bright curls

round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the

parlour. What Peggotty had told me now, was so far from bringing me back

to the later period, that it rooted the earlier image in my mind. It may

be curious, but it is true. In her death she winged her way back to her

calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest.

The mother who lay in the grave, was the mother of my infancy; the

little creature in her arms, was myself, as I had once been, hushed for

ever on her bosom.

CHAPTER 10. I BECOME NEGLECTED, AND AM PROVIDED FOR

The first act of business Miss Murdstone performed when the day of the

solemnity was over, and light was freely admitted into the house, was

to give Peggotty a month's warning. Much as Peggotty would have disliked

such a service, I believe she would have retained it, for my sake, in

preference to the best upon earth. She told me we must part, and told me

why; and we condoled with one another, in all sincerity.

As to me or my future, not a word was said, or a step taken. Happy

they would have been, I dare say, if they could have dismissed me at a

month's warning too. I mustered courage once, to ask Miss Murdstone when

I was going back to school; and she answered dryly, she believed I was

not going back at all. I was told nothing more. I was very anxious to

know what was going to be done with me, and so was Peggotty; but neither

she nor I could pick up any information on the subject.

There was one change in my condition, which, while it relieved me of

a great deal of present uneasiness, might have made me, if I had been

capable of considering it closely, yet more uncomfortable about the

future. It was this. The constraint that had been put upon me, was quite

abandoned. I was so far from being required to keep my dull post in

the parlour, that on several occasions, when I took my seat there, Miss

Murdstone frowned to me to go away. I was so far from being warned off

from Peggotty's society, that, provided I was not in Mr. Murdstone's, I

was never sought out or inquired for. At first I was in daily dread of

his taking my education in hand again, or of Miss Murdstone's

devoting herself to it; but I soon began to think that such fears were

groundless, and that all I had to anticipate was neglect.

I do not conceive that this discovery gave me much pain then. I was

still giddy with the shock of my mother's death, and in a kind of

stunned state as to all tributary things. I can recollect, indeed, to

have speculated, at odd times, on the possibility of my not being taught

any more, or cared for any more; and growing up to be a shabby, moody

man, lounging an idle life away, about the village; as well as on the

feasibility of my getting rid of this picture by going away somewhere,

like the hero in a story, to seek my fortune: but these were transient

visions, daydreams I sat looking at sometimes, as if they were faintly

painted or written on the wall of my room, and which, as they melted

away, left the wall blank again.

'Peggotty,' I said in a thoughtful whisper, one evening, when I was

warming my hands at the kitchen fire, 'Mr. Murdstone likes me less than

he used to. He never liked me much, Peggotty; but he would rather not

even see me now, if he can help it.'

'Perhaps it's his sorrow,' said Peggotty, stroking my hair.

'I am sure, Peggotty, I am sorry too. If I believed it was his sorrow,

I should not think of it at all. But it's not that; oh, no, it's not

that.'

'How do you know it's not that?' said Peggotty, after a silence.

'Oh, his sorrow is another and quite a different thing. He is sorry at

this moment, sitting by the fireside with Miss Murdstone; but if I was

to go in, Peggotty, he would be something besides.'

'What would he be?' said Peggotty.

'Angry,' I answered, with an involuntary imitation of his dark frown.

'If he was only sorry, he wouldn't look at me as he does. I am only

sorry, and it makes me feel kinder.'

Peggotty said nothing for a little while; and I warmed my hands, as

silent as she.

'Davy,' she said at length.

'Yes, Peggotty?' 'I have tried, my dear, all ways I could think of--all

the ways there are, and all the ways there ain't, in short--to get a

suitable service here, in Blunderstone; but there's no such a thing, my

love.'

'And what do you mean to do, Peggotty,' says I, wistfully. 'Do you mean

to go and seek your fortune?'

'I expect I shall be forced to go to Yarmouth,' replied Peggotty, 'and

live there.'

'You might have gone farther off,' I said, brightening a little, 'and

been as bad as lost. I shall see you sometimes, my dear old Peggotty,

there. You won't be quite at the other end of the world, will you?'

'Contrary ways, please God!' cried Peggotty, with great animation. 'As

long as you are here, my pet, I shall come over every week of my life to

see you. One day, every week of my life!'

I felt a great weight taken off my mind by this promise: but even this

was not all, for Peggotty went on to say:

'I'm a-going, Davy, you see, to my brother's, first, for another

fortnight's visit--just till I have had time to look about me, and

get to be something like myself again. Now, I have been thinking that

perhaps, as they don't want you here at present, you might be let to go

along with me.'

If anything, short of being in a different relation to every one about

me, Peggotty excepted, could have given me a sense of pleasure at that

time, it would have been this project of all others. The idea of being

again surrounded by those honest faces, shining welcome on me; of

renewing the peacefulness of the sweet Sunday morning, when the bells

were ringing, the stones dropping in the water, and the shadowy ships

breaking through the mist; of roaming up and down with little Em'ly,

telling her my troubles, and finding charms against them in the shells

and pebbles on the beach; made a calm in my heart. It was ruffled next

moment, to be sure, by a doubt of Miss Murdstone's giving her consent;

but even that was set at rest soon, for she came out to take an evening

grope in the store-closet while we were yet in conversation, and

Peggotty, with a boldness that amazed me, broached the topic on the

spot.

'The boy will be idle there,' said Miss Murdstone, looking into a

pickle-jar, 'and idleness is the root of all evil. But, to be sure, he

would be idle here--or anywhere, in my opinion.'

Peggotty had an angry answer ready, I could see; but she swallowed it

for my sake, and remained silent.

'Humph!' said Miss Murdstone, still keeping her eye on the pickles;

'it is of more importance than anything else--it is of paramount

importance--that my brother should not be disturbed or made

uncomfortable. I suppose I had better say yes.'

I thanked her, without making any demonstration of joy, lest it should

induce her to withdraw her assent. Nor could I help thinking this a

prudent course, since she looked at me out of the pickle-jar, with

as great an access of sourness as if her black eyes had absorbed its

contents. However, the permission was given, and was never retracted;

for when the month was out, Peggotty and I were ready to depart.

Mr. Barkis came into the house for Peggotty's boxes. I had never known

him to pass the garden-gate before, but on this occasion he came into

the house. And he gave me a look as he shouldered the largest box and

went out, which I thought had meaning in it, if meaning could ever be

said to find its way into Mr. Barkis's visage.

Peggotty was naturally in low spirits at leaving what had been her home

so many years, and where the two strong attachments of her life--for

my mother and myself--had been formed. She had been walking in the

churchyard, too, very early; and she got into the cart, and sat in it

with her handkerchief at her eyes.

So long as she remained in this condition, Mr. Barkis gave no sign

of life whatever. He sat in his usual place and attitude like a great

stuffed figure. But when she began to look about her, and to speak to

me, he nodded his head and grinned several times. I have not the least

notion at whom, or what he meant by it.

'It's a beautiful day, Mr. Barkis!' I said, as an act of politeness.

'It ain't bad,' said Mr. Barkis, who generally qualified his speech, and

rarely committed himself.

'Peggotty is quite comfortable now, Mr. Barkis,' I remarked, for his

satisfaction.

'Is she, though?' said Mr. Barkis.

After reflecting about it, with a sagacious air, Mr. Barkis eyed her,

and said:

'ARE you pretty comfortable?'

Peggotty laughed, and answered in the affirmative.

'But really and truly, you know. Are you?' growled Mr. Barkis, sliding

nearer to her on the seat, and nudging her with his elbow. 'Are you?

Really and truly pretty comfortable? Are you? Eh?'

At each of these inquiries Mr. Barkis shuffled nearer to her, and gave

her another nudge; so that at last we were all crowded together in the

left-hand corner of the cart, and I was so squeezed that I could hardly

bear it.

Peggotty calling his attention to my sufferings, Mr. Barkis gave me a

little more room at once, and got away by degrees. But I could not help

observing that he seemed to think he had hit upon a wonderful expedient

for expressing himself in a neat, agreeable, and pointed manner, without

the inconvenience of inventing conversation. He manifestly chuckled over

it for some time. By and by he turned to Peggotty again, and repeating,

'Are you pretty comfortable though?' bore down upon us as before, until

the breath was nearly edged out of my body. By and by he made another

descent upon us with the same inquiry, and the same result. At length,

I got up whenever I saw him coming, and standing on the foot-board,

pretended to look at the prospect; after which I did very well.

He was so polite as to stop at a public-house, expressly on our account,

and entertain us with broiled mutton and beer. Even when Peggotty was

in the act of drinking, he was seized with one of those approaches, and

almost choked her. But as we drew nearer to the end of our journey, he

had more to do and less time for gallantry; and when we got on Yarmouth

pavement, we were all too much shaken and jolted, I apprehend, to have

any leisure for anything else.

Mr. Peggotty and Ham waited for us at the old place. They received me

and Peggotty in an affectionate manner, and shook hands with Mr. Barkis,

who, with his hat on the very back of his head, and a shame-faced leer

upon his countenance, and pervading his very legs, presented but a

vacant appearance, I thought. They each took one of Peggotty's trunks,

and we were going away, when Mr. Barkis solemnly made a sign to me with

his forefinger to come under an archway.

'I say,' growled Mr. Barkis, 'it was all right.'

I looked up into his face, and answered, with an attempt to be very

profound: 'Oh!'

'It didn't come to a end there,' said Mr. Barkis, nodding

confidentially. 'It was all right.'

Again I answered, 'Oh!'

'You know who was willin',' said my friend. 'It was Barkis, and Barkis

only.'

I nodded assent.

'It's all right,' said Mr. Barkis, shaking hands; 'I'm a friend of

your'n. You made it all right, first. It's all right.'

In his attempts to be particularly lucid, Mr. Barkis was so extremely

mysterious, that I might have stood looking in his face for an hour, and

most assuredly should have got as much information out of it as out

of the face of a clock that had stopped, but for Peggotty's calling me

away. As we were going along, she asked me what he had said; and I told

her he had said it was all right.

'Like his impudence,' said Peggotty, 'but I don't mind that! Davy dear,

what should you think if I was to think of being married?'

'Why--I suppose you would like me as much then, Peggotty, as you do

now?' I returned, after a little consideration.

Greatly to the astonishment of the passengers in the street, as well as

of her relations going on before, the good soul was obliged to stop and

embrace me on the spot, with many protestations of her unalterable love.

'Tell me what should you say, darling?' she asked again, when this was

over, and we were walking on.

'If you were thinking of being married--to Mr. Barkis, Peggotty?'

'Yes,' said Peggotty.

'I should think it would be a very good thing. For then you know,

Peggotty, you would always have the horse and cart to bring you over to

see me, and could come for nothing, and be sure of coming.'

'The sense of the dear!' cried Peggotty. 'What I have been thinking

of, this month back! Yes, my precious; and I think I should be more

independent altogether, you see; let alone my working with a better

heart in my own house, than I could in anybody else's now. I don't know

what I might be fit for, now, as a servant to a stranger. And I shall be

always near my pretty's resting-place,' said Peggotty, musing, 'and be

able to see it when I like; and when I lie down to rest, I may be laid

not far off from my darling girl!'

We neither of us said anything for a little while.

'But I wouldn't so much as give it another thought,' said Peggotty,

cheerily 'if my Davy was anyways against it--not if I had been asked in

church thirty times three times over, and was wearing out the ring in my

pocket.'

'Look at me, Peggotty,' I replied; 'and see if I am not really glad, and

don't truly wish it!' As indeed I did, with all my heart.

'Well, my life,' said Peggotty, giving me a squeeze, 'I have thought of

it night and day, every way I can, and I hope the right way; but I'll

think of it again, and speak to my brother about it, and in the meantime

we'll keep it to ourselves, Davy, you and me. Barkis is a good plain

creature,' said Peggotty, 'and if I tried to do my duty by him, I think

it would be my fault if I wasn't--if I wasn't pretty comfortable,'

said Peggotty, laughing heartily. This quotation from Mr. Barkis was

so appropriate, and tickled us both so much, that we laughed again and

again, and were quite in a pleasant humour when we came within view of

Mr. Peggotty's cottage.

It looked just the same, except that it may, perhaps, have shrunk a

little in my eyes; and Mrs. Gummidge was waiting at the door as if she

had stood there ever since. All within was the same, down to the seaweed

in the blue mug in my bedroom. I went into the out-house to look about

me; and the very same lobsters, crabs, and crawfish possessed by the

same desire to pinch the world in general, appeared to be in the same

state of conglomeration in the same old corner.

But there was no little Em'ly to be seen, so I asked Mr. Peggotty where

she was.

'She's at school, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, wiping the heat consequent

on the porterage of Peggotty's box from his forehead; 'she'll be home,'

looking at the Dutch clock, 'in from twenty minutes to half-an-hour's

time. We all on us feel the loss of her, bless ye!'

Mrs. Gummidge moaned.

'Cheer up, Mawther!' cried Mr. Peggotty.

'I feel it more than anybody else,' said Mrs. Gummidge; 'I'm a lone

lorn creetur', and she used to be a'most the only thing that didn't go

contrary with me.'

Mrs. Gummidge, whimpering and shaking her head, applied herself to

blowing the fire. Mr. Peggotty, looking round upon us while she was so

engaged, said in a low voice, which he shaded with his hand: 'The old

'un!' From this I rightly conjectured that no improvement had taken

place since my last visit in the state of Mrs. Gummidge's spirits.

Now, the whole place was, or it should have been, quite as delightful

a place as ever; and yet it did not impress me in the same way. I felt

rather disappointed with it. Perhaps it was because little Em'ly was

not at home. I knew the way by which she would come, and presently found

myself strolling along the path to meet her.

A figure appeared in the distance before long, and I soon knew it to be

Em'ly, who was a little creature still in stature, though she was grown.

But when she drew nearer, and I saw her blue eyes looking bluer, and her

dimpled face looking brighter, and her whole self prettier and gayer, a

curious feeling came over me that made me pretend not to know her, and

pass by as if I were looking at something a long way off. I have done

such a thing since in later life, or I am mistaken.

Little Em'ly didn't care a bit. She saw me well enough; but instead of

turning round and calling after me, ran away laughing. This obliged me

to run after her, and she ran so fast that we were very near the cottage

before I caught her.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' said little Em'ly.

'Why, you knew who it was, Em'ly,' said I.

'And didn't YOU know who it was?' said Em'ly. I was going to kiss her,

but she covered her cherry lips with her hands, and said she wasn't a

baby now, and ran away, laughing more than ever, into the house.

She seemed to delight in teasing me, which was a change in her I

wondered at very much. The tea table was ready, and our little locker

was put out in its old place, but instead of coming to sit by me, she

went and bestowed her company upon that grumbling Mrs. Gummidge: and on

Mr. Peggotty's inquiring why, rumpled her hair all over her face to hide

it, and could do nothing but laugh.

'A little puss, it is!' said Mr. Peggotty, patting her with his great

hand.

'So sh' is! so sh' is!' cried Ham. 'Mas'r Davy bor', so sh' is!' and he

sat and chuckled at her for some time, in a state of mingled admiration

and delight, that made his face a burning red.

Little Em'ly was spoiled by them all, in fact; and by no one more than

Mr. Peggotty himself, whom she could have coaxed into anything, by

only going and laying her cheek against his rough whisker. That was my

opinion, at least, when I saw her do it; and I held Mr. Peggotty to be

thoroughly in the right. But she was so affectionate and sweet-natured,

and had such a pleasant manner of being both sly and shy at once, that

she captivated me more than ever.

She was tender-hearted, too; for when, as we sat round the fire after

tea, an allusion was made by Mr. Peggotty over his pipe to the loss

I had sustained, the tears stood in her eyes, and she looked at me so

kindly across the table, that I felt quite thankful to her.

'Ah!' said Mr. Peggotty, taking up her curls, and running them over his

hand like water, 'here's another orphan, you see, sir. And here,' said

Mr. Peggotty, giving Ham a backhanded knock in the chest, 'is another of

'em, though he don't look much like it.'

'If I had you for my guardian, Mr. Peggotty,' said I, shaking my head,

'I don't think I should FEEL much like it.'

'Well said, Mas'r Davy bor'!' cried Ham, in an ecstasy. 'Hoorah! Well

said! Nor more you wouldn't! Hor! Hor!'--Here he returned Mr. Peggotty's

back-hander, and little Em'ly got up and kissed Mr. Peggotty. 'And how's

your friend, sir?' said Mr. Peggotty to me.

'Steerforth?' said I.

'That's the name!' cried Mr. Peggotty, turning to Ham. 'I knowed it was

something in our way.'

'You said it was Rudderford,' observed Ham, laughing.

'Well!' retorted Mr. Peggotty. 'And ye steer with a rudder, don't ye? It

ain't fur off. How is he, sir?'

'He was very well indeed when I came away, Mr. Peggotty.'

'There's a friend!' said Mr. Peggotty, stretching out his pipe. 'There's

a friend, if you talk of friends! Why, Lord love my heart alive, if it

ain't a treat to look at him!'

'He is very handsome, is he not?' said I, my heart warming with this

praise.

'Handsome!' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'He stands up to you like--like a--why I

don't know what he don't stand up to you like. He's so bold!'

'Yes! That's just his character,' said I. 'He's as brave as a lion, and

you can't think how frank he is, Mr. Peggotty.'

'And I do suppose, now,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking at me through the

smoke of his pipe, 'that in the way of book-larning he'd take the wind

out of a'most anything.'

'Yes,' said I, delighted; 'he knows everything. He is astonishingly

clever.'

'There's a friend!' murmured Mr. Peggotty, with a grave toss of his

head.

'Nothing seems to cost him any trouble,' said I. 'He knows a task if he

only looks at it. He is the best cricketer you ever saw. He will give

you almost as many men as you like at draughts, and beat you easily.'

Mr. Peggotty gave his head another toss, as much as to say: 'Of course

he will.'

'He is such a speaker,' I pursued, 'that he can win anybody over; and I

don't know what you'd say if you were to hear him sing, Mr. Peggotty.'

Mr. Peggotty gave his head another toss, as much as to say: 'I have no

doubt of it.'

'Then, he's such a generous, fine, noble fellow,' said I, quite carried

away by my favourite theme, 'that it's hardly possible to give him as

much praise as he deserves. I am sure I can never feel thankful enough

for the generosity with which he has protected me, so much younger and

lower in the school than himself.'

I was running on, very fast indeed, when my eyes rested on little

Em'ly's face, which was bent forward over the table, listening with the

deepest attention, her breath held, her blue eyes sparkling like jewels,

and the colour mantling in her cheeks. She looked so extraordinarily

earnest and pretty, that I stopped in a sort of wonder; and they all

observed her at the same time, for as I stopped, they laughed and looked

at her.

'Em'ly is like me,' said Peggotty, 'and would like to see him.'

Em'ly was confused by our all observing her, and hung down her head,

and her face was covered with blushes. Glancing up presently through her

stray curls, and seeing that we were all looking at her still (I am sure

I, for one, could have looked at her for hours), she ran away, and kept

away till it was nearly bedtime.

I lay down in the old little bed in the stern of the boat, and the wind

came moaning on across the flat as it had done before. But I could not

help fancying, now, that it moaned of those who were gone; and instead

of thinking that the sea might rise in the night and float the boat

away, I thought of the sea that had risen, since I last heard those

sounds, and drowned my happy home. I recollect, as the wind and water

began to sound fainter in my ears, putting a short clause into my

prayers, petitioning that I might grow up to marry little Em'ly, and so

dropping lovingly asleep.

The days passed pretty much as they had passed before, except--it was

a great exception--that little Em'ly and I seldom wandered on the beach

now. She had tasks to learn, and needle-work to do; and was absent

during a great part of each day. But I felt that we should not have had

those old wanderings, even if it had been otherwise. Wild and full of

childish whims as Em'ly was, she was more of a little woman than I

had supposed. She seemed to have got a great distance away from me,

in little more than a year. She liked me, but she laughed at me, and

tormented me; and when I went to meet her, stole home another way, and

was laughing at the door when I came back, disappointed. The best times

were when she sat quietly at work in the doorway, and I sat on the

wooden step at her feet, reading to her. It seems to me, at this

hour, that I have never seen such sunlight as on those bright April

afternoons; that I have never seen such a sunny little figure as I used

to see, sitting in the doorway of the old boat; that I have never beheld

such sky, such water, such glorified ships sailing away into golden air.

On the very first evening after our arrival, Mr. Barkis appeared in an

exceedingly vacant and awkward condition, and with a bundle of oranges

tied up in a handkerchief. As he made no allusion of any kind to this

property, he was supposed to have left it behind him by accident when

he went away; until Ham, running after him to restore it, came back with

the information that it was intended for Peggotty. After that occasion

he appeared every evening at exactly the same hour, and always with a

little bundle, to which he never alluded, and which he regularly put

behind the door and left there. These offerings of affection were of a

most various and eccentric description. Among them I remember a double

set of pigs' trotters, a huge pin-cushion, half a bushel or so of

apples, a pair of jet earrings, some Spanish onions, a box of dominoes,

a canary bird and cage, and a leg of pickled pork.

Mr. Barkis's wooing, as I remember it, was altogether of a peculiar

kind. He very seldom said anything; but would sit by the fire in much

the same attitude as he sat in his cart, and stare heavily at Peggotty,

who was opposite. One night, being, as I suppose, inspired by love, he

made a dart at the bit of wax-candle she kept for her thread, and put

it in his waistcoat-pocket and carried it off. After that, his great

delight was to produce it when it was wanted, sticking to the lining of

his pocket, in a partially melted state, and pocket it again when it was

done with. He seemed to enjoy himself very much, and not to feel at all

called upon to talk. Even when he took Peggotty out for a walk on the

flats, he had no uneasiness on that head, I believe; contenting himself

with now and then asking her if she was pretty comfortable; and I

remember that sometimes, after he was gone, Peggotty would throw her

apron over her face, and laugh for half-an-hour. Indeed, we were

all more or less amused, except that miserable Mrs. Gummidge, whose

courtship would appear to have been of an exactly parallel nature, she

was so continually reminded by these transactions of the old one.

At length, when the term of my visit was nearly expired, it was given

out that Peggotty and Mr. Barkis were going to make a day's holiday

together, and that little Em'ly and I were to accompany them. I had but

a broken sleep the night before, in anticipation of the pleasure of

a whole day with Em'ly. We were all astir betimes in the morning; and

while we were yet at breakfast, Mr. Barkis appeared in the distance,

driving a chaise-cart towards the object of his affections.

Peggotty was dressed as usual, in her neat and quiet mourning; but Mr.

Barkis bloomed in a new blue coat, of which the tailor had given him

such good measure, that the cuffs would have rendered gloves unnecessary

in the coldest weather, while the collar was so high that it pushed his

hair up on end on the top of his head. His bright buttons, too, were

of the largest size. Rendered complete by drab pantaloons and a buff

waistcoat, I thought Mr. Barkis a phenomenon of respectability.

When we were all in a bustle outside the door, I found that Mr. Peggotty

was prepared with an old shoe, which was to be thrown after us for luck,

and which he offered to Mrs. Gummidge for that purpose.

'No. It had better be done by somebody else, Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

'I'm a lone lorn creetur' myself, and everythink that reminds me of

creetur's that ain't lone and lorn, goes contrary with me.'

'Come, old gal!' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'Take and heave it.'

'No, Dan'l,' returned Mrs. Gummidge, whimpering and shaking her head.

'If I felt less, I could do more. You don't feel like me, Dan'l; thinks

don't go contrary with you, nor you with them; you had better do it

yourself.'

But here Peggotty, who had been going about from one to another in a

hurried way, kissing everybody, called out from the cart, in which we

all were by this time (Em'ly and I on two little chairs, side by side),

that Mrs. Gummidge must do it. So Mrs. Gummidge did it; and, I am sorry

to relate, cast a damp upon the festive character of our departure, by

immediately bursting into tears, and sinking subdued into the arms of

Ham, with the declaration that she knowed she was a burden, and had

better be carried to the House at once. Which I really thought was a

sensible idea, that Ham might have acted on.

Away we went, however, on our holiday excursion; and the first thing

we did was to stop at a church, where Mr. Barkis tied the horse to some

rails, and went in with Peggotty, leaving little Em'ly and me alone in

the chaise. I took that occasion to put my arm round Em'ly's waist, and

propose that as I was going away so very soon now, we should determine

to be very affectionate to one another, and very happy, all day. Little

Em'ly consenting, and allowing me to kiss her, I became desperate;

informing her, I recollect, that I never could love another, and that

I was prepared to shed the blood of anybody who should aspire to her

affections.

How merry little Em'ly made herself about it! With what a demure

assumption of being immensely older and wiser than I, the fairy little

woman said I was 'a silly boy'; and then laughed so charmingly that

I forgot the pain of being called by that disparaging name, in the

pleasure of looking at her.

Mr. Barkis and Peggotty were a good while in the church, but came out at

last, and then we drove away into the country. As we were going along,

Mr. Barkis turned to me, and said, with a wink,--by the by, I should

hardly have thought, before, that he could wink:

'What name was it as I wrote up in the cart?'

'Clara Peggotty,' I answered.

'What name would it be as I should write up now, if there was a tilt

here?'

'Clara Peggotty, again?' I suggested.

'Clara Peggotty BARKIS!' he returned, and burst into a roar of laughter

that shook the chaise.

In a word, they were married, and had gone into the church for no other

purpose. Peggotty was resolved that it should be quietly done; and

the clerk had given her away, and there had been no witnesses of the

ceremony. She was a little confused when Mr. Barkis made this abrupt

announcement of their union, and could not hug me enough in token of her

unimpaired affection; but she soon became herself again, and said she

was very glad it was over.

We drove to a little inn in a by-road, where we were expected, and

where we had a very comfortable dinner, and passed the day with great

satisfaction. If Peggotty had been married every day for the last ten

years, she could hardly have been more at her ease about it; it made no

sort of difference in her: she was just the same as ever, and went

out for a stroll with little Em'ly and me before tea, while Mr. Barkis

philosophically smoked his pipe, and enjoyed himself, I suppose, with

the contemplation of his happiness. If so, it sharpened his appetite;

for I distinctly call to mind that, although he had eaten a good deal of

pork and greens at dinner, and had finished off with a fowl or two, he

was obliged to have cold boiled bacon for tea, and disposed of a large

quantity without any emotion.

I have often thought, since, what an odd, innocent, out-of-the-way kind

of wedding it must have been! We got into the chaise again soon after

dark, and drove cosily back, looking up at the stars, and talking about

them. I was their chief exponent, and opened Mr. Barkis's mind to

an amazing extent. I told him all I knew, but he would have believed

anything I might have taken it into my head to impart to him; for he

had a profound veneration for my abilities, and informed his wife in my

hearing, on that very occasion, that I was 'a young Roeshus'--by which I

think he meant prodigy.

When we had exhausted the subject of the stars, or rather when I had

exhausted the mental faculties of Mr. Barkis, little Em'ly and I made a

cloak of an old wrapper, and sat under it for the rest of the journey.

Ah, how I loved her! What happiness (I thought) if we were married,

and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields,

never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand

in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our

heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried

by the birds when we were dead! Some such picture, with no real world in

it, bright with the light of our innocence, and vague as the stars afar

off, was in my mind all the way. I am glad to think there were two such

guileless hearts at Peggotty's marriage as little Em'ly's and mine. I

am glad to think the Loves and Graces took such airy forms in its homely

procession.

Well, we came to the old boat again in good time at night; and there

Mr. and Mrs. Barkis bade us good-bye, and drove away snugly to their

own home. I felt then, for the first time, that I had lost Peggotty. I

should have gone to bed with a sore heart indeed under any other roof

but that which sheltered little Em'ly's head.

Mr. Peggotty and Ham knew what was in my thoughts as well as I did, and

were ready with some supper and their hospitable faces to drive it away.

Little Em'ly came and sat beside me on the locker for the only time in

all that visit; and it was altogether a wonderful close to a wonderful

day.

It was a night tide; and soon after we went to bed, Mr. Peggotty and Ham

went out to fish. I felt very brave at being left alone in the solitary

house, the protector of Em'ly and Mrs. Gummidge, and only wished that

a lion or a serpent, or any ill-disposed monster, would make an attack

upon us, that I might destroy him, and cover myself with glory. But as

nothing of the sort happened to be walking about on Yarmouth flats that

night, I provided the best substitute I could by dreaming of dragons

until morning.

With morning came Peggotty; who called to me, as usual, under my window

as if Mr. Barkis the carrier had been from first to last a dream too.

After breakfast she took me to her own home, and a beautiful little

home it was. Of all the moveables in it, I must have been impressed by

a certain old bureau of some dark wood in the parlour (the tile-floored

kitchen was the general sitting-room), with a retreating top which

opened, let down, and became a desk, within which was a large quarto

edition of Foxe's Book of Martyrs. This precious volume, of which I do

not recollect one word, I immediately discovered and immediately applied

myself to; and I never visited the house afterwards, but I kneeled on

a chair, opened the casket where this gem was enshrined, spread my arms

over the desk, and fell to devouring the book afresh. I was chiefly

edified, I am afraid, by the pictures, which were numerous, and

represented all kinds of dismal horrors; but the Martyrs and Peggotty's

house have been inseparable in my mind ever since, and are now.

I took leave of Mr. Peggotty, and Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge, and little

Em'ly, that day; and passed the night at Peggotty's, in a little room

in the roof (with the Crocodile Book on a shelf by the bed's head) which

was to be always mine, Peggotty said, and should always be kept for me

in exactly the same state.

'Young or old, Davy dear, as long as I am alive and have this house over

my head,' said Peggotty, 'you shall find it as if I expected you here

directly minute. I shall keep it every day, as I used to keep your old

little room, my darling; and if you was to go to China, you might think

of it as being kept just the same, all the time you were away.'

I felt the truth and constancy of my dear old nurse, with all my heart,

and thanked her as well as I could. That was not very well, for she

spoke to me thus, with her arms round my neck, in the morning, and I was

going home in the morning, and I went home in the morning, with herself

and Mr. Barkis in the cart. They left me at the gate, not easily or

lightly; and it was a strange sight to me to see the cart go on, taking

Peggotty away, and leaving me under the old elm-trees looking at the

house, in which there was no face to look on mine with love or liking

any more.

And now I fell into a state of neglect, which I cannot look back upon

without compassion. I fell at once into a solitary condition,--apart

from all friendly notice, apart from the society of all other boys of

my own age, apart from all companionship but my own spiritless

thoughts,--which seems to cast its gloom upon this paper as I write.

What would I have given, to have been sent to the hardest school that

ever was kept!--to have been taught something, anyhow, anywhere! No

such hope dawned upon me. They disliked me; and they sullenly, sternly,

steadily, overlooked me. I think Mr. Murdstone's means were straitened

at about this time; but it is little to the purpose. He could not bear

me; and in putting me from him he tried, as I believe, to put away the

notion that I had any claim upon him--and succeeded.

I was not actively ill-used. I was not beaten, or starved; but the wrong

that was done to me had no intervals of relenting, and was done in a

systematic, passionless manner. Day after day, week after week, month

after month, I was coldly neglected. I wonder sometimes, when I think

of it, what they would have done if I had been taken with an illness;

whether I should have lain down in my lonely room, and languished

through it in my usual solitary way, or whether anybody would have

helped me out.

When Mr. and Miss Murdstone were at home, I took my meals with them; in

their absence, I ate and drank by myself. At all times I lounged about

the house and neighbourhood quite disregarded, except that they were

jealous of my making any friends: thinking, perhaps, that if I did, I

might complain to someone. For this reason, though Mr. Chillip often

asked me to go and see him (he was a widower, having, some years before

that, lost a little small light-haired wife, whom I can just remember

connecting in my own thoughts with a pale tortoise-shell cat), it was

but seldom that I enjoyed the happiness of passing an afternoon in his

closet of a surgery; reading some book that was new to me, with

the smell of the whole Pharmacopoeia coming up my nose, or pounding

something in a mortar under his mild directions.

For the same reason, added no doubt to the old dislike of her, I was

seldom allowed to visit Peggotty. Faithful to her promise, she either

came to see me, or met me somewhere near, once every week, and never

empty-handed; but many and bitter were the disappointments I had, in

being refused permission to pay a visit to her at her house. Some few

times, however, at long intervals, I was allowed to go there; and then

I found out that Mr. Barkis was something of a miser, or as Peggotty

dutifully expressed it, was 'a little near', and kept a heap of money

in a box under his bed, which he pretended was only full of coats

and trousers. In this coffer, his riches hid themselves with such a

tenacious modesty, that the smallest instalments could only be tempted

out by artifice; so that Peggotty had to prepare a long and elaborate

scheme, a very Gunpowder Plot, for every Saturday's expenses.

All this time I was so conscious of the waste of any promise I had

given, and of my being utterly neglected, that I should have been

perfectly miserable, I have no doubt, but for the old books. They were

my only comfort; and I was as true to them as they were to me, and read

them over and over I don't know how many times more.

I now approach a period of my life, which I can never lose the

remembrance of, while I remember anything: and the recollection of

which has often, without my invocation, come before me like a ghost, and

haunted happier times.

I had been out, one day, loitering somewhere, in the listless,

meditative manner that my way of life engendered, when, turning the

corner of a lane near our house, I came upon Mr. Murdstone walking with

a gentleman. I was confused, and was going by them, when the gentleman

cried:

'What! Brooks!'

'No, sir, David Copperfield,' I said.

'Don't tell me. You are Brooks,' said the gentleman. 'You are Brooks of

Sheffield. That's your name.'

At these words, I observed the gentleman more attentively. His laugh

coming to my remembrance too, I knew him to be Mr. Quinion, whom I

had gone over to Lowestoft with Mr. Murdstone to see, before--it is no

matter--I need not recall when.

'And how do you get on, and where are you being educated, Brooks?' said

Mr. Quinion.

He had put his hand upon my shoulder, and turned me about, to walk

with them. I did not know what to reply, and glanced dubiously at Mr.

Murdstone.

'He is at home at present,' said the latter. 'He is not being educated

anywhere. I don't know what to do with him. He is a difficult subject.'

That old, double look was on me for a moment; and then his eyes darkened

with a frown, as it turned, in its aversion, elsewhere.

'Humph!' said Mr. Quinion, looking at us both, I thought. 'Fine

weather!'

Silence ensued, and I was considering how I could best disengage my

shoulder from his hand, and go away, when he said:

'I suppose you are a pretty sharp fellow still? Eh, Brooks?'

'Aye! He is sharp enough,' said Mr. Murdstone, impatiently. 'You had

better let him go. He will not thank you for troubling him.'

On this hint, Mr. Quinion released me, and I made the best of my

way home. Looking back as I turned into the front garden, I saw Mr.

Murdstone leaning against the wicket of the churchyard, and Mr. Quinion

talking to him. They were both looking after me, and I felt that they

were speaking of me.

Mr. Quinion lay at our house that night. After breakfast, the next

morning, I had put my chair away, and was going out of the room, when

Mr. Murdstone called me back. He then gravely repaired to another table,

where his sister sat herself at her desk. Mr. Quinion, with his hands

in his pockets, stood looking out of window; and I stood looking at them

all.

'David,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'to the young this is a world for action;

not for moping and droning in.' --'As you do,' added his sister.

'Jane Murdstone, leave it to me, if you please. I say, David, to the

young this is a world for action, and not for moping and droning in. It

is especially so for a young boy of your disposition, which requires a

great deal of correcting; and to which no greater service can be done

than to force it to conform to the ways of the working world, and to

bend it and break it.'

'For stubbornness won't do here,' said his sister 'What it wants is, to

be crushed. And crushed it must be. Shall be, too!'

He gave her a look, half in remonstrance, half in approval, and went on:

'I suppose you know, David, that I am not rich. At any rate, you know it

now. You have received some considerable education already. Education is

costly; and even if it were not, and I could afford it, I am of opinion

that it would not be at all advantageous to you to be kept at school.

What is before you, is a fight with the world; and the sooner you begin

it, the better.'

I think it occurred to me that I had already begun it, in my poor way:

but it occurs to me now, whether or no.

'You have heard the "counting-house" mentioned sometimes,' said Mr.

Murdstone.

'The counting-house, sir?' I repeated. 'Of Murdstone and Grinby, in the

wine trade,' he replied.

I suppose I looked uncertain, for he went on hastily:

'You have heard the "counting-house" mentioned, or the business, or the

cellars, or the wharf, or something about it.'

'I think I have heard the business mentioned, sir,' I said, remembering

what I vaguely knew of his and his sister's resources. 'But I don't know

when.'

'It does not matter when,' he returned. 'Mr. Quinion manages that

business.'

I glanced at the latter deferentially as he stood looking out of window.

'Mr. Quinion suggests that it gives employment to some other boys,

and that he sees no reason why it shouldn't, on the same terms, give

employment to you.'

'He having,' Mr. Quinion observed in a low voice, and half turning

round, 'no other prospect, Murdstone.'

Mr. Murdstone, with an impatient, even an angry gesture, resumed,

without noticing what he had said:

'Those terms are, that you will earn enough for yourself to provide for

your eating and drinking, and pocket-money. Your lodging (which I have

arranged for) will be paid by me. So will your washing--'

'--Which will be kept down to my estimate,' said his sister.

'Your clothes will be looked after for you, too,' said Mr. Murdstone;

'as you will not be able, yet awhile, to get them for yourself. So you

are now going to London, David, with Mr. Quinion, to begin the world on

your own account.'

'In short, you are provided for,' observed his sister; 'and will please

to do your duty.'

Though I quite understood that the purpose of this announcement was

to get rid of me, I have no distinct remembrance whether it pleased

or frightened me. My impression is, that I was in a state of confusion

about it, and, oscillating between the two points, touched neither. Nor

had I much time for the clearing of my thoughts, as Mr. Quinion was to

go upon the morrow.

Behold me, on the morrow, in a much-worn little white hat, with a black

crape round it for my mother, a black jacket, and a pair of hard, stiff

corduroy trousers--which Miss Murdstone considered the best armour for

the legs in that fight with the world which was now to come off. Behold

me so attired, and with my little worldly all before me in a small

trunk, sitting, a lone lorn child (as Mrs. Gummidge might have said),

in the post-chaise that was carrying Mr. Quinion to the London coach at

Yarmouth! See, how our house and church are lessening in the distance;

how the grave beneath the tree is blotted out by intervening objects;

how the spire points upwards from my old playground no more, and the sky

is empty!

CHAPTER 11. I BEGIN LIFE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT, AND DON'T LIKE IT

I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of

being much surprised by anything; but it is matter of some surprise to

me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age.

A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation,

quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems

wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But

none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind

in the service of Murdstone and Grinby.

Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse was at the waterside. It was down in

Blackfriars. Modern improvements have altered the place; but it was the

last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the

river, with some stairs at the end, where people took boat. It was a

crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the

tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun

with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of

a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the

squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and

the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago,

in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as

they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time,

with my trembling hand in Mr. Quinion's.

Murdstone and Grinby's trade was among a good many kinds of people, but

an important branch of it was the supply of wines and spirits to certain

packet ships. I forget now where they chiefly went, but I think there

were some among them that made voyages both to the East and West Indies.

I know that a great many empty bottles were one of the consequences of

this traffic, and that certain men and boys were employed to examine

them against the light, and reject those that were flawed, and to rinse

and wash them. When the empty bottles ran short, there were labels to be

pasted on full ones, or corks to be fitted to them, or seals to be put

upon the corks, or finished bottles to be packed in casks. All this work

was my work, and of the boys employed upon it I was one.

There were three or four of us, counting me. My working place was

established in a corner of the warehouse, where Mr. Quinion could see

me, when he chose to stand up on the bottom rail of his stool in the

counting-house, and look at me through a window above the desk. Hither,

on the first morning of my so auspiciously beginning life on my own

account, the oldest of the regular boys was summoned to show me my

business. His name was Mick Walker, and he wore a ragged apron and a

paper cap. He informed me that his father was a bargeman, and walked, in

a black velvet head-dress, in the Lord Mayor's Show. He also informed me

that our principal associate would be another boy whom he introduced by

the--to me--extraordinary name of Mealy Potatoes. I discovered, however,

that this youth had not been christened by that name, but that it had

been bestowed upon him in the warehouse, on account of his complexion,

which was pale or mealy. Mealy's father was a waterman, who had the

additional distinction of being a fireman, and was engaged as such at

one of the large theatres; where some young relation of Mealy's--I think

his little sister--did Imps in the Pantomimes.

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this

companionship; compared these henceforth everyday associates with those

of my happier childhood--not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the

rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned

and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the

sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in

my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day

by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my

fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little,

never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. As often as Mick

Walker went away in the course of that forenoon, I mingled my tears with

the water in which I was washing the bottles; and sobbed as if there

were a flaw in my own breast, and it were in danger of bursting.

The counting-house clock was at half past twelve, and there was

general preparation for going to dinner, when Mr. Quinion tapped at the

counting-house window, and beckoned to me to go in. I went in, and

found there a stoutish, middle-aged person, in a brown surtout and black

tights and shoes, with no more hair upon his head (which was a large

one, and very shining) than there is upon an egg, and with a very

extensive face, which he turned full upon me. His clothes were shabby,

but he had an imposing shirt-collar on. He carried a jaunty sort of a

stick, with a large pair of rusty tassels to it; and a quizzing-glass

hung outside his coat,--for ornament, I afterwards found, as he very

seldom looked through it, and couldn't see anything when he did.

'This,' said Mr. Quinion, in allusion to myself, 'is he.'

'This,' said the stranger, with a certain condescending roll in his

voice, and a certain indescribable air of doing something genteel, which

impressed me very much, 'is Master Copperfield. I hope I see you well,

sir?'

I said I was very well, and hoped he was. I was sufficiently ill at

ease, Heaven knows; but it was not in my nature to complain much at that

time of my life, so I said I was very well, and hoped he was.

'I am,' said the stranger, 'thank Heaven, quite well. I have received a

letter from Mr. Murdstone, in which he mentions that he would desire

me to receive into an apartment in the rear of my house, which is at

present unoccupied--and is, in short, to be let as a--in short,'

said the stranger, with a smile and in a burst of confidence, 'as a

bedroom--the young beginner whom I have now the pleasure to--' and the

stranger waved his hand, and settled his chin in his shirt-collar.

'This is Mr. Micawber,' said Mr. Quinion to me.

'Ahem!' said the stranger, 'that is my name.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said Mr. Quinion, 'is known to Mr. Murdstone. He takes

orders for us on commission, when he can get any. He has been written to

by Mr. Murdstone, on the subject of your lodgings, and he will receive

you as a lodger.'

'My address,' said Mr. Micawber, 'is Windsor Terrace, City Road. I--in

short,' said Mr. Micawber, with the same genteel air, and in another

burst of confidence--'I live there.'

I made him a bow.

'Under the impression,' said Mr. Micawber, 'that your peregrinations in

this metropolis have not as yet been extensive, and that you might have

some difficulty in penetrating the arcana of the Modern Babylon in the

direction of the City Road,--in short,' said Mr. Micawber, in another

burst of confidence, 'that you might lose yourself--I shall be happy to

call this evening, and install you in the knowledge of the nearest way.'

I thanked him with all my heart, for it was friendly in him to offer to

take that trouble.

'At what hour,' said Mr. Micawber, 'shall I--'

'At about eight,' said Mr. Quinion.

'At about eight,' said Mr. Micawber. 'I beg to wish you good day, Mr.

Quinion. I will intrude no longer.'

So he put on his hat, and went out with his cane under his arm: very

upright, and humming a tune when he was clear of the counting-house.

Mr. Quinion then formally engaged me to be as useful as I could in

the warehouse of Murdstone and Grinby, at a salary, I think, of six

shillings a week. I am not clear whether it was six or seven. I am

inclined to believe, from my uncertainty on this head, that it was six

at first and seven afterwards. He paid me a week down (from his own

pocket, I believe), and I gave Mealy sixpence out of it to get my

trunk carried to Windsor Terrace that night: it being too heavy for my

strength, small as it was. I paid sixpence more for my dinner, which was

a meat pie and a turn at a neighbouring pump; and passed the hour which

was allowed for that meal, in walking about the streets.

At the appointed time in the evening, Mr. Micawber reappeared. I washed

my hands and face, to do the greater honour to his gentility, and we

walked to our house, as I suppose I must now call it, together; Mr.

Micawber impressing the name of streets, and the shapes of corner houses

upon me, as we went along, that I might find my way back, easily, in the

morning.

Arrived at this house in Windsor Terrace (which I noticed was shabby

like himself, but also, like himself, made all the show it could), he

presented me to Mrs. Micawber, a thin and faded lady, not at all

young, who was sitting in the parlour (the first floor was altogether

unfurnished, and the blinds were kept down to delude the neighbours),

with a baby at her breast. This baby was one of twins; and I may remark

here that I hardly ever, in all my experience of the family, saw both

the twins detached from Mrs. Micawber at the same time. One of them was

always taking refreshment.

There were two other children; Master Micawber, aged about four, and

Miss Micawber, aged about three. These, and a dark-complexioned young

woman, with a habit of snorting, who was servant to the family, and

informed me, before half an hour had expired, that she was 'a Orfling',

and came from St. Luke's workhouse, in the neighbourhood, completed the

establishment. My room was at the top of the house, at the back: a close

chamber; stencilled all over with an ornament which my young imagination

represented as a blue muffin; and very scantily furnished.

'I never thought,' said Mrs. Micawber, when she came up, twin and all,

to show me the apartment, and sat down to take breath, 'before I was

married, when I lived with papa and mama, that I should ever find it

necessary to take a lodger. But Mr. Micawber being in difficulties, all

considerations of private feeling must give way.'

I said: 'Yes, ma'am.'

'Mr. Micawber's difficulties are almost overwhelming just at present,'

said Mrs. Micawber; 'and whether it is possible to bring him through

them, I don't know. When I lived at home with papa and mama, I really

should have hardly understood what the word meant, in the sense in which

I now employ it, but experientia does it,--as papa used to say.'

I cannot satisfy myself whether she told me that Mr. Micawber had been

an officer in the Marines, or whether I have imagined it. I only know

that I believe to this hour that he WAS in the Marines once upon a time,

without knowing why. He was a sort of town traveller for a number

of miscellaneous houses, now; but made little or nothing of it, I am

afraid.

'If Mr. Micawber's creditors will not give him time,' said Mrs.

Micawber, 'they must take the consequences; and the sooner they bring it

to an issue the better. Blood cannot be obtained from a stone, neither

can anything on account be obtained at present (not to mention law

expenses) from Mr. Micawber.'

I never can quite understand whether my precocious self-dependence

confused Mrs. Micawber in reference to my age, or whether she was so

full of the subject that she would have talked about it to the very

twins if there had been nobody else to communicate with, but this was

the strain in which she began, and she went on accordingly all the time

I knew her.

Poor Mrs. Micawber! She said she had tried to exert herself, and so,

I have no doubt, she had. The centre of the street door was perfectly

covered with a great brass-plate, on which was engraved 'Mrs. Micawber's

Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies': but I never found that any

young lady had ever been to school there; or that any young lady ever

came, or proposed to come; or that the least preparation was ever made

to receive any young lady. The only visitors I ever saw, or heard of,

were creditors. THEY used to come at all hours, and some of them were

quite ferocious. One dirty-faced man, I think he was a boot-maker,

used to edge himself into the passage as early as seven o'clock in the

morning, and call up the stairs to Mr. Micawber--'Come! You ain't out

yet, you know. Pay us, will you? Don't hide, you know; that's mean. I

wouldn't be mean if I was you. Pay us, will you? You just pay us, d'ye

hear? Come!' Receiving no answer to these taunts, he would mount in

his wrath to the words 'swindlers' and 'robbers'; and these being

ineffectual too, would sometimes go to the extremity of crossing the

street, and roaring up at the windows of the second floor, where he knew

Mr. Micawber was. At these times, Mr. Micawber would be transported with

grief and mortification, even to the length (as I was once made aware by

a scream from his wife) of making motions at himself with a razor;

but within half-an-hour afterwards, he would polish up his shoes with

extraordinary pains, and go out, humming a tune with a greater air of

gentility than ever. Mrs. Micawber was quite as elastic. I have known

her to be thrown into fainting fits by the king's taxes at three

o'clock, and to eat lamb chops, breaded, and drink warm ale (paid for

with two tea-spoons that had gone to the pawnbroker's) at four. On one

occasion, when an execution had just been put in, coming home through

some chance as early as six o'clock, I saw her lying (of course with a

twin) under the grate in a swoon, with her hair all torn about her face;

but I never knew her more cheerful than she was, that very same night,

over a veal cutlet before the kitchen fire, telling me stories about her

papa and mama, and the company they used to keep.

In this house, and with this family, I passed my leisure time. My own

exclusive breakfast of a penny loaf and a pennyworth of milk, I provided

myself. I kept another small loaf, and a modicum of cheese, on a

particular shelf of a particular cupboard, to make my supper on when I

came back at night. This made a hole in the six or seven shillings, I

know well; and I was out at the warehouse all day, and had to support

myself on that money all the week. From Monday morning until Saturday

night, I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation,

no assistance, no support, of any kind, from anyone, that I can call to

mind, as I hope to go to heaven!

I was so young and childish, and so little qualified--how could I be

otherwise?--to undertake the whole charge of my own existence, that

often, in going to Murdstone and Grinby's, of a morning, I could

not resist the stale pastry put out for sale at half-price at the

pastrycooks' doors, and spent in that the money I should have kept for

my dinner. Then, I went without my dinner, or bought a roll or a slice

of pudding. I remember two pudding shops, between which I was divided,

according to my finances. One was in a court close to St. Martin's

Church--at the back of the church,--which is now removed altogether.

The pudding at that shop was made of currants, and was rather a special

pudding, but was dear, twopennyworth not being larger than a pennyworth

of more ordinary pudding. A good shop for the latter was in the

Strand--somewhere in that part which has been rebuilt since. It was a

stout pale pudding, heavy and flabby, and with great flat raisins in it,

stuck in whole at wide distances apart. It came up hot at about my time

every day, and many a day did I dine off it. When I dined regularly and

handsomely, I had a saveloy and a penny loaf, or a fourpenny plate of

red beef from a cook's shop; or a plate of bread and cheese and a

glass of beer, from a miserable old public-house opposite our place of

business, called the Lion, or the Lion and something else that I have

forgotten. Once, I remember carrying my own bread (which I had brought

from home in the morning) under my arm, wrapped in a piece of paper,

like a book, and going to a famous alamode beef-house near Drury Lane,

and ordering a 'small plate' of that delicacy to eat with it. What the

waiter thought of such a strange little apparition coming in all alone,

I don't know; but I can see him now, staring at me as I ate my dinner,

and bringing up the other waiter to look. I gave him a halfpenny for

himself, and I wish he hadn't taken it.

We had half-an-hour, I think, for tea. When I had money enough, I used

to get half-a-pint of ready-made coffee and a slice of bread and butter.

When I had none, I used to look at a venison shop in Fleet Street; or

I have strolled, at such a time, as far as Covent Garden Market, and

stared at the pineapples. I was fond of wandering about the Adelphi,

because it was a mysterious place, with those dark arches. I see myself

emerging one evening from some of these arches, on a little public-house

close to the river, with an open space before it, where some

coal-heavers were dancing; to look at whom I sat down upon a bench. I

wonder what they thought of me!

I was such a child, and so little, that frequently when I went into the

bar of a strange public-house for a glass of ale or porter, to moisten

what I had had for dinner, they were afraid to give it me. I remember

one hot evening I went into the bar of a public-house, and said to the

landlord: 'What is your best--your very best--ale a glass?' For it was a

special occasion. I don't know what. It may have been my birthday.

'Twopence-halfpenny,' says the landlord, 'is the price of the Genuine

Stunning ale.'

'Then,' says I, producing the money, 'just draw me a glass of the

Genuine Stunning, if you please, with a good head to it.'

The landlord looked at me in return over the bar, from head to foot,

with a strange smile on his face; and instead of drawing the beer,

looked round the screen and said something to his wife. She came out

from behind it, with her work in her hand, and joined him in surveying

me. Here we stand, all three, before me now. The landlord in his

shirt-sleeves, leaning against the bar window-frame; his wife looking

over the little half-door; and I, in some confusion, looking up at them

from outside the partition. They asked me a good many questions; as,

what my name was, how old I was, where I lived, how I was employed,

and how I came there. To all of which, that I might commit nobody, I

invented, I am afraid, appropriate answers. They served me with the ale,

though I suspect it was not the Genuine Stunning; and the landlord's

wife, opening the little half-door of the bar, and bending down, gave

me my money back, and gave me a kiss that was half admiring and half

compassionate, but all womanly and good, I am sure.

I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the

scantiness of my resources or the difficulties of my life. I know that

if a shilling were given me by Mr. Quinion at any time, I spent it in

a dinner or a tea. I know that I worked, from morning until night, with

common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I lounged about the

streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for

the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken

of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.

Yet I held some station at Murdstone and Grinby's too. Besides that Mr.

Quinion did what a careless man so occupied, and dealing with a thing so

anomalous, could, to treat me as one upon a different footing from the

rest, I never said, to man or boy, how it was that I came to be there,

or gave the least indication of being sorry that I was there. That I

suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew

but I. How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly

beyond my power to tell. But I kept my own counsel, and I did my work.

I knew from the first, that, if I could not do my work as well as any

of the rest, I could not hold myself above slight and contempt. I soon

became at least as expeditious and as skilful as either of the other

boys. Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manner were

different enough from theirs to place a space between us. They and

the men generally spoke of me as 'the little gent', or 'the young

Suffolker.' A certain man named Gregory, who was foreman of the packers,

and another named Tipp, who was the carman, and wore a red jacket, used

to address me sometimes as 'David': but I think it was mostly when we

were very confidential, and when I had made some efforts to entertain

them, over our work, with some results of the old readings; which were

fast perishing out of my remembrance. Mealy Potatoes uprose once, and

rebelled against my being so distinguished; but Mick Walker settled him

in no time.

My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless, and

abandoned, as such, altogether. I am solemnly convinced that I never for

one hour was reconciled to it, or was otherwise than miserably unhappy;

but I bore it; and even to Peggotty, partly for the love of her and

partly for shame, never in any letter (though many passed between us)

revealed the truth.

Mr. Micawber's difficulties were an addition to the distressed state of

my mind. In my forlorn state I became quite attached to the family, and

used to walk about, busy with Mrs. Micawber's calculations of ways and

means, and heavy with the weight of Mr. Micawber's debts. On a Saturday

night, which was my grand treat,--partly because it was a great thing

to walk home with six or seven shillings in my pocket, looking into the

shops and thinking what such a sum would buy, and partly because I went

home early,--Mrs. Micawber would make the most heart-rending confidences

to me; also on a Sunday morning, when I mixed the portion of tea or

coffee I had bought over-night, in a little shaving-pot, and sat late

at my breakfast. It was nothing at all unusual for Mr. Micawber to sob

violently at the beginning of one of these Saturday night conversations,

and sing about jack's delight being his lovely Nan, towards the end of

it. I have known him come home to supper with a flood of tears, and a

declaration that nothing was now left but a jail; and go to bed making a

calculation of the expense of putting bow-windows to the house, 'in

case anything turned up', which was his favourite expression. And Mrs.

Micawber was just the same.

A curious equality of friendship, originating, I suppose, in our

respective circumstances, sprung up between me and these people,

notwithstanding the ludicrous disparity in our years. But I never

allowed myself to be prevailed upon to accept any invitation to eat and

drink with them out of their stock (knowing that they got on badly with

the butcher and baker, and had often not too much for themselves),

until Mrs. Micawber took me into her entire confidence. This she did one

evening as follows:

'Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'I make no stranger of you,

and therefore do not hesitate to say that Mr. Micawber's difficulties

are coming to a crisis.'

It made me very miserable to hear it, and I looked at Mrs. Micawber's

red eyes with the utmost sympathy.

'With the exception of the heel of a Dutch cheese--which is not adapted

to the wants of a young family'--said Mrs. Micawber, 'there is really

not a scrap of anything in the larder. I was accustomed to speak of

the larder when I lived with papa and mama, and I use the word almost

unconsciously. What I mean to express is, that there is nothing to eat

in the house.'

'Dear me!' I said, in great concern.

I had two or three shillings of my week's money in my pocket--from which

I presume that it must have been on a Wednesday night when we held this

conversation--and I hastily produced them, and with heartfelt emotion

begged Mrs. Micawber to accept of them as a loan. But that lady, kissing

me, and making me put them back in my pocket, replied that she couldn't

think of it.

'No, my dear Master Copperfield,' said she, 'far be it from my thoughts!

But you have a discretion beyond your years, and can render me another

kind of service, if you will; and a service I will thankfully accept

of.'

I begged Mrs. Micawber to name it.

'I have parted with the plate myself,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'Six tea, two

salt, and a pair of sugars, I have at different times borrowed money on,

in secret, with my own hands. But the twins are a great tie; and to me,

with my recollections, of papa and mama, these transactions are very

painful. There are still a few trifles that we could part with. Mr.

Micawber's feelings would never allow him to dispose of them; and

Clickett'--this was the girl from the workhouse--'being of a vulgar

mind, would take painful liberties if so much confidence was reposed in

her. Master Copperfield, if I might ask you--'

I understood Mrs. Micawber now, and begged her to make use of me to any

extent. I began to dispose of the more portable articles of property

that very evening; and went out on a similar expedition almost every

morning, before I went to Murdstone and Grinby's.

Mr. Micawber had a few books on a little chiffonier, which he called the

library; and those went first. I carried them, one after another, to

a bookstall in the City Road--one part of which, near our house, was

almost all bookstalls and bird shops then--and sold them for whatever

they would bring. The keeper of this bookstall, who lived in a little

house behind it, used to get tipsy every night, and to be violently

scolded by his wife every morning. More than once, when I went there

early, I had audience of him in a turn-up bedstead, with a cut in his

forehead or a black eye, bearing witness to his excesses over-night (I

am afraid he was quarrelsome in his drink), and he, with a shaking

hand, endeavouring to find the needful shillings in one or other of the

pockets of his clothes, which lay upon the floor, while his wife, with a

baby in her arms and her shoes down at heel, never left off rating him.

Sometimes he had lost his money, and then he would ask me to call again;

but his wife had always got some--had taken his, I dare say, while he

was drunk--and secretly completed the bargain on the stairs, as we went

down together. At the pawnbroker's shop, too, I began to be very well

known. The principal gentleman who officiated behind the counter, took

a good deal of notice of me; and often got me, I recollect, to decline a

Latin noun or adjective, or to conjugate a Latin verb, in his ear, while

he transacted my business. After all these occasions Mrs. Micawber made

a little treat, which was generally a supper; and there was a peculiar

relish in these meals which I well remember.

At last Mr. Micawber's difficulties came to a crisis, and he was

arrested early one morning, and carried over to the King's Bench Prison

in the Borough. He told me, as he went out of the house, that the God

of day had now gone down upon him--and I really thought his heart was

broken and mine too. But I heard, afterwards, that he was seen to play a

lively game at skittles, before noon.

On the first Sunday after he was taken there, I was to go and see him,

and have dinner with him. I was to ask my way to such a place, and just

short of that place I should see such another place, and just short of

that I should see a yard, which I was to cross, and keep straight on

until I saw a turnkey. All this I did; and when at last I did see a

turnkey (poor little fellow that I was!), and thought how, when Roderick

Random was in a debtors' prison, there was a man there with nothing

on him but an old rug, the turnkey swam before my dimmed eyes and my

beating heart.

Mr. Micawber was waiting for me within the gate, and we went up to his

room (top story but one), and cried very much. He solemnly conjured me,

I remember, to take warning by his fate; and to observe that if a man

had twenty pounds a-year for his income, and spent nineteen pounds

nineteen shillings and sixpence, he would be happy, but that if he

spent twenty pounds one he would be miserable. After which he borrowed a

shilling of me for porter, gave me a written order on Mrs. Micawber for

the amount, and put away his pocket-handkerchief, and cheered up.

We sat before a little fire, with two bricks put within the rusted

grate, one on each side, to prevent its burning too many coals; until

another debtor, who shared the room with Mr. Micawber, came in from the

bakehouse with the loin of mutton which was our joint-stock repast.

Then I was sent up to 'Captain Hopkins' in the room overhead, with Mr.

Micawber's compliments, and I was his young friend, and would Captain

Hopkins lend me a knife and fork.

Captain Hopkins lent me the knife and fork, with his compliments to Mr.

Micawber. There was a very dirty lady in his little room, and two wan

girls, his daughters, with shock heads of hair. I thought it was better

to borrow Captain Hopkins's knife and fork, than Captain Hopkins's comb.

The Captain himself was in the last extremity of shabbiness, with large

whiskers, and an old, old brown great-coat with no other coat below it.

I saw his bed rolled up in a corner; and what plates and dishes and pots

he had, on a shelf; and I divined (God knows how) that though the two

girls with the shock heads of hair were Captain Hopkins's children, the

dirty lady was not married to Captain Hopkins. My timid station on his

threshold was not occupied more than a couple of minutes at most; but

I came down again with all this in my knowledge, as surely as the knife

and fork were in my hand.

There was something gipsy-like and agreeable in the dinner, after all.

I took back Captain Hopkins's knife and fork early in the afternoon,

and went home to comfort Mrs. Micawber with an account of my visit.

She fainted when she saw me return, and made a little jug of egg-hot

afterwards to console us while we talked it over.

I don't know how the household furniture came to be sold for the family

benefit, or who sold it, except that I did not. Sold it was, however,

and carried away in a van; except the bed, a few chairs, and the kitchen

table. With these possessions we encamped, as it were, in the two

parlours of the emptied house in Windsor Terrace; Mrs. Micawber, the

children, the Orfling, and myself; and lived in those rooms night and

day. I have no idea for how long, though it seems to me for a long

time. At last Mrs. Micawber resolved to move into the prison, where Mr.

Micawber had now secured a room to himself. So I took the key of the

house to the landlord, who was very glad to get it; and the beds were

sent over to the King's Bench, except mine, for which a little room was

hired outside the walls in the neighbourhood of that Institution, very

much to my satisfaction, since the Micawbers and I had become too used

to one another, in our troubles, to part. The Orfling was likewise

accommodated with an inexpensive lodging in the same neighbourhood.

Mine was a quiet back-garret with a sloping roof, commanding a pleasant

prospect of a timberyard; and when I took possession of it, with the

reflection that Mr. Micawber's troubles had come to a crisis at last, I

thought it quite a paradise.

All this time I was working at Murdstone and Grinby's in the same common

way, and with the same common companions, and with the same sense of

unmerited degradation as at first. But I never, happily for me no doubt,

made a single acquaintance, or spoke to any of the many boys whom I

saw daily in going to the warehouse, in coming from it, and in prowling

about the streets at meal-times. I led the same secretly unhappy life;

but I led it in the same lonely, self-reliant manner. The only changes

I am conscious of are, firstly, that I had grown more shabby, and

secondly, that I was now relieved of much of the weight of Mr. and Mrs.

Micawber's cares; for some relatives or friends had engaged to help them

at their present pass, and they lived more comfortably in the prison

than they had lived for a long while out of it. I used to breakfast with

them now, in virtue of some arrangement, of which I have forgotten

the details. I forget, too, at what hour the gates were opened in the

morning, admitting of my going in; but I know that I was often up at six

o'clock, and that my favourite lounging-place in the interval was old

London Bridge, where I was wont to sit in one of the stone recesses,

watching the people going by, or to look over the balustrades at the sun

shining in the water, and lighting up the golden flame on the top of the

Monument. The Orfling met me here sometimes, to be told some astonishing

fictions respecting the wharves and the Tower; of which I can say no

more than that I hope I believed them myself. In the evening I used

to go back to the prison, and walk up and down the parade with Mr.

Micawber; or play casino with Mrs. Micawber, and hear reminiscences of

her papa and mama. Whether Mr. Murdstone knew where I was, I am unable

to say. I never told them at Murdstone and Grinby's.

Mr. Micawber's affairs, although past their crisis, were very much

involved by reason of a certain 'Deed', of which I used to hear a great

deal, and which I suppose, now, to have been some former composition

with his creditors, though I was so far from being clear about it

then, that I am conscious of having confounded it with those demoniacal

parchments which are held to have, once upon a time, obtained to a great

extent in Germany. At last this document appeared to be got out of the

way, somehow; at all events it ceased to be the rock-ahead it had been;

and Mrs. Micawber informed me that 'her family' had decided that Mr.

Micawber should apply for his release under the Insolvent Debtors Act,

which would set him free, she expected, in about six weeks.

'And then,' said Mr. Micawber, who was present, 'I have no doubt I

shall, please Heaven, begin to be beforehand with the world, and to live

in a perfectly new manner, if--in short, if anything turns up.'

By way of going in for anything that might be on the cards, I call to

mind that Mr. Micawber, about this time, composed a petition to the

House of Commons, praying for an alteration in the law of imprisonment

for debt. I set down this remembrance here, because it is an instance to

myself of the manner in which I fitted my old books to my altered life,

and made stories for myself, out of the streets, and out of men and

women; and how some main points in the character I shall unconsciously

develop, I suppose, in writing my life, were gradually forming all this

while.

There was a club in the prison, in which Mr. Micawber, as a gentleman,

was a great authority. Mr. Micawber had stated his idea of this petition

to the club, and the club had strongly approved of the same. Wherefore

Mr. Micawber (who was a thoroughly good-natured man, and as active a

creature about everything but his own affairs as ever existed, and never

so happy as when he was busy about something that could never be of any

profit to him) set to work at the petition, invented it, engrossed it

on an immense sheet of paper, spread it out on a table, and appointed a

time for all the club, and all within the walls if they chose, to come

up to his room and sign it.

When I heard of this approaching ceremony, I was so anxious to see them

all come in, one after another, though I knew the greater part of

them already, and they me, that I got an hour's leave of absence from

Murdstone and Grinby's, and established myself in a corner for that

purpose. As many of the principal members of the club as could be got

into the small room without filling it, supported Mr. Micawber in front

of the petition, while my old friend Captain Hopkins (who had washed

himself, to do honour to so solemn an occasion) stationed himself close

to it, to read it to all who were unacquainted with its contents. The

door was then thrown open, and the general population began to come in,

in a long file: several waiting outside, while one entered, affixed his

signature, and went out. To everybody in succession, Captain Hopkins

said: 'Have you read it?'--'No.'---'Would you like to hear it read?' If

he weakly showed the least disposition to hear it, Captain Hopkins, in

a loud sonorous voice, gave him every word of it. The Captain would

have read it twenty thousand times, if twenty thousand people would have

heard him, one by one. I remember a certain luscious roll he gave to

such phrases as 'The people's representatives in Parliament assembled,'

'Your petitioners therefore humbly approach your honourable house,' 'His

gracious Majesty's unfortunate subjects,' as if the words were something

real in his mouth, and delicious to taste; Mr. Micawber, meanwhile,

listening with a little of an author's vanity, and contemplating (not

severely) the spikes on the opposite wall.

As I walked to and fro daily between Southwark and Blackfriars, and

lounged about at meal-times in obscure streets, the stones of which

may, for anything I know, be worn at this moment by my childish feet, I

wonder how many of these people were wanting in the crowd that used to

come filing before me in review again, to the echo of Captain Hopkins's

voice! When my thoughts go back, now, to that slow agony of my youth, I

wonder how much of the histories I invented for such people hangs like a

mist of fancy over well-remembered facts! When I tread the old ground,

I do not wonder that I seem to see and pity, going on before me, an

innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange

experiences and sordid things!

CHAPTER 12. LIKING LIFE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT NO BETTER, I FORM A GREAT RESOLUTION

In due time, Mr. Micawber's petition was ripe for hearing; and that

gentleman was ordered to be discharged under the Act, to my great joy.

His creditors were not implacable; and Mrs. Micawber informed me that

even the revengeful boot-maker had declared in open court that he bore

him no malice, but that when money was owing to him he liked to be paid.

He said he thought it was human nature.

M r Micawber returned to the King's Bench when his case was over, as

some fees were to be settled, and some formalities observed, before he

could be actually released. The club received him with transport, and

held an harmonic meeting that evening in his honour; while Mrs. Micawber

and I had a lamb's fry in private, surrounded by the sleeping family.

'On such an occasion I will give you, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs.

Micawber, 'in a little more flip,' for we had been having some already,

'the memory of my papa and mama.'

'Are they dead, ma'am?' I inquired, after drinking the toast in a

wine-glass.

'My mama departed this life,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'before Mr. Micawber's

difficulties commenced, or at least before they became pressing. My papa

lived to bail Mr. Micawber several times, and then expired, regretted by

a numerous circle.'

Mrs. Micawber shook her head, and dropped a pious tear upon the twin who

happened to be in hand.

As I could hardly hope for a more favourable opportunity of putting a

question in which I had a near interest, I said to Mrs. Micawber:

'May I ask, ma'am, what you and Mr. Micawber intend to do, now that Mr.

Micawber is out of his difficulties, and at liberty? Have you settled

yet?'

'My family,' said Mrs. Micawber, who always said those two words with an

air, though I never could discover who came under the denomination, 'my

family are of opinion that Mr. Micawber should quit London, and exert

his talents in the country. Mr. Micawber is a man of great talent,

Master Copperfield.'

I said I was sure of that.

'Of great talent,' repeated Mrs. Micawber. 'My family are of opinion,

that, with a little interest, something might be done for a man of his

ability in the Custom House. The influence of my family being local, it

is their wish that Mr. Micawber should go down to Plymouth. They think

it indispensable that he should be upon the spot.'

'That he may be ready?' I suggested.

'Exactly,' returned Mrs. Micawber. 'That he may be ready--in case of

anything turning up.'

'And do you go too, ma'am?'

The events of the day, in combination with the twins, if not with the

flip, had made Mrs. Micawber hysterical, and she shed tears as she

replied:

'I never will desert Mr. Micawber. Mr. Micawber may have concealed his

difficulties from me in the first instance, but his sanguine temper may

have led him to expect that he would overcome them. The pearl necklace

and bracelets which I inherited from mama, have been disposed of for

less than half their value; and the set of coral, which was the wedding

gift of my papa, has been actually thrown away for nothing. But I never

will desert Mr. Micawber. No!' cried Mrs. Micawber, more affected than

before, 'I never will do it! It's of no use asking me!'

I felt quite uncomfortable--as if Mrs. Micawber supposed I had asked her

to do anything of the sort!--and sat looking at her in alarm.

'Mr. Micawber has his faults. I do not deny that he is improvident. I

do not deny that he has kept me in the dark as to his resources and his

liabilities both,' she went on, looking at the wall; 'but I never will

desert Mr. Micawber!'

Mrs. Micawber having now raised her voice into a perfect scream, I

was so frightened that I ran off to the club-room, and disturbed Mr.

Micawber in the act of presiding at a long table, and leading the chorus

of

Gee up, Dobbin,

Gee ho, Dobbin,

Gee up, Dobbin,

Gee up, and gee ho--o--o!

with the tidings that Mrs. Micawber was in an alarming state, upon

which he immediately burst into tears, and came away with me with his

waistcoat full of the heads and tails of shrimps, of which he had been

partaking.

'Emma, my angel!' cried Mr. Micawber, running into the room; 'what is

the matter?'

'I never will desert you, Micawber!' she exclaimed.

'My life!' said Mr. Micawber, taking her in his arms. 'I am perfectly

aware of it.'

'He is the parent of my children! He is the father of my twins! He is

the husband of my affections,' cried Mrs. Micawber, struggling; 'and I

ne--ver--will--desert Mr. Micawber!'

Mr. Micawber was so deeply affected by this proof of her devotion (as

to me, I was dissolved in tears), that he hung over her in a passionate

manner, imploring her to look up, and to be calm. But the more he asked

Mrs. Micawber to look up, the more she fixed her eyes on nothing;

and the more he asked her to compose herself, the more she wouldn't.

Consequently Mr. Micawber was soon so overcome, that he mingled his

tears with hers and mine; until he begged me to do him the favour of

taking a chair on the staircase, while he got her into bed. I would have

taken my leave for the night, but he would not hear of my doing that

until the strangers' bell should ring. So I sat at the staircase window,

until he came out with another chair and joined me.

'How is Mrs. Micawber now, sir?' I said.

'Very low,' said Mr. Micawber, shaking his head; 'reaction. Ah, this has

been a dreadful day! We stand alone now--everything is gone from us!'

Mr. Micawber pressed my hand, and groaned, and afterwards shed tears.

I was greatly touched, and disappointed too, for I had expected that we

should be quite gay on this happy and long-looked-for occasion. But Mr.

and Mrs. Micawber were so used to their old difficulties, I think, that

they felt quite shipwrecked when they came to consider that they were

released from them. All their elasticity was departed, and I never saw

them half so wretched as on this night; insomuch that when the bell

rang, and Mr. Micawber walked with me to the lodge, and parted from me

there with a blessing, I felt quite afraid to leave him by himself, he

was so profoundly miserable.

But through all the confusion and lowness of spirits in which we had

been, so unexpectedly to me, involved, I plainly discerned that Mr. and

Mrs. Micawber and their family were going away from London, and that a

parting between us was near at hand. It was in my walk home that night,

and in the sleepless hours which followed when I lay in bed, that the

thought first occurred to me--though I don't know how it came into my

head--which afterwards shaped itself into a settled resolution.

I had grown to be so accustomed to the Micawbers, and had been so

intimate with them in their distresses, and was so utterly friendless

without them, that the prospect of being thrown upon some new shift for

a lodging, and going once more among unknown people, was like being that

moment turned adrift into my present life, with such a knowledge of it

ready made as experience had given me. All the sensitive feelings it

wounded so cruelly, all the shame and misery it kept alive within my

breast, became more poignant as I thought of this; and I determined that

the life was unendurable.

That there was no hope of escape from it, unless the escape was my own

act, I knew quite well. I rarely heard from Miss Murdstone, and never

from Mr. Murdstone: but two or three parcels of made or mended clothes

had come up for me, consigned to Mr. Quinion, and in each there was

a scrap of paper to the effect that J. M. trusted D. C. was applying

himself to business, and devoting himself wholly to his duties--not the

least hint of my ever being anything else than the common drudge into

which I was fast settling down.

The very next day showed me, while my mind was in the first agitation of

what it had conceived, that Mrs. Micawber had not spoken of their going

away without warrant. They took a lodging in the house where I lived,

for a week; at the expiration of which time they were to start for

Plymouth. Mr. Micawber himself came down to the counting-house, in the

afternoon, to tell Mr. Quinion that he must relinquish me on the day

of his departure, and to give me a high character, which I am sure I

deserved. And Mr. Quinion, calling in Tipp the carman, who was a married

man, and had a room to let, quartered me prospectively on him--by our

mutual consent, as he had every reason to think; for I said nothing,

though my resolution was now taken.

I passed my evenings with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, during the remaining

term of our residence under the same roof; and I think we became fonder

of one another as the time went on. On the last Sunday, they invited me

to dinner; and we had a loin of pork and apple sauce, and a pudding. I

had bought a spotted wooden horse over-night as a parting gift to little

Wilkins Micawber--that was the boy--and a doll for little Emma. I had

also bestowed a shilling on the Orfling, who was about to be disbanded.

We had a very pleasant day, though we were all in a tender state about

our approaching separation.

'I shall never, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'revert to the

period when Mr. Micawber was in difficulties, without thinking of

you. Your conduct has always been of the most delicate and obliging

description. You have never been a lodger. You have been a friend.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber; 'Copperfield,' for so he had been

accustomed to call me, of late, 'has a heart to feel for the distresses

of his fellow-creatures when they are behind a cloud, and a head to

plan, and a hand to--in short, a general ability to dispose of such

available property as could be made away with.'

I expressed my sense of this commendation, and said I was very sorry we

were going to lose one another.

'My dear young friend,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I am older than you; a man

of some experience in life, and--and of some experience, in short, in

difficulties, generally speaking. At present, and until something turns

up (which I am, I may say, hourly expecting), I have nothing to bestow

but advice. Still my advice is so far worth taking, that--in short, that

I have never taken it myself, and am the'--here Mr. Micawber, who had

been beaming and smiling, all over his head and face, up to the present

moment, checked himself and frowned--'the miserable wretch you behold.'

'My dear Micawber!' urged his wife.

'I say,' returned Mr. Micawber, quite forgetting himself, and smiling

again, 'the miserable wretch you behold. My advice is, never do tomorrow

what you can do today. Procrastination is the thief of time. Collar

him!'

'My poor papa's maxim,' Mrs. Micawber observed.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, 'your papa was very well in his way, and

Heaven forbid that I should disparage him. Take him for all in all, we

ne'er shall--in short, make the acquaintance, probably, of anybody else

possessing, at his time of life, the same legs for gaiters, and able to

read the same description of print, without spectacles. But he applied

that maxim to our marriage, my dear; and that was so far prematurely

entered into, in consequence, that I never recovered the expense.' Mr.

Micawber looked aside at Mrs. Micawber, and added: 'Not that I am sorry

for it. Quite the contrary, my love.' After which, he was grave for a

minute or so.

'My other piece of advice, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you know.

Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen and

six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure

twenty pounds ought and six, result misery. The blossom is blighted,

the leaf is withered, the god of day goes down upon the dreary scene,

and--and in short you are for ever floored. As I am!'

To make his example the more impressive, Mr. Micawber drank a glass of

punch with an air of great enjoyment and satisfaction, and whistled the

College Hornpipe.

I did not fail to assure him that I would store these precepts in my

mind, though indeed I had no need to do so, for, at the time, they

affected me visibly. Next morning I met the whole family at the coach

office, and saw them, with a desolate heart, take their places outside,

at the back.

'Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'God bless you! I never can

forget all that, you know, and I never would if I could.'

'Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'farewell! Every happiness and

prosperity! If, in the progress of revolving years, I could persuade

myself that my blighted destiny had been a warning to you, I should feel

that I had not occupied another man's place in existence altogether in

vain. In case of anything turning up (of which I am rather confident),

I shall be extremely happy if it should be in my power to improve your

prospects.'

I think, as Mrs. Micawber sat at the back of the coach, with the

children, and I stood in the road looking wistfully at them, a mist

cleared from her eyes, and she saw what a little creature I really was.

I think so, because she beckoned to me to climb up, with quite a new and

motherly expression in her face, and put her arm round my neck, and gave

me just such a kiss as she might have given to her own boy. I had barely

time to get down again before the coach started, and I could hardly see

the family for the handkerchiefs they waved. It was gone in a minute.

The Orfling and I stood looking vacantly at each other in the middle

of the road, and then shook hands and said good-bye; she going back,

I suppose, to St. Luke's workhouse, as I went to begin my weary day at

Murdstone and Grinby's.

But with no intention of passing many more weary days there. No. I had

resolved to run away.---To go, by some means or other, down into the

country, to the only relation I had in the world, and tell my story to

my aunt, Miss Betsey. I have already observed that I don't know how this

desperate idea came into my brain. But, once there, it remained there;

and hardened into a purpose than which I have never entertained a more

determined purpose in my life. I am far from sure that I believed there

was anything hopeful in it, but my mind was thoroughly made up that it

must be carried into execution.

Again, and again, and a hundred times again, since the night when the

thought had first occurred to me and banished sleep, I had gone over

that old story of my poor mother's about my birth, which it had been one

of my great delights in the old time to hear her tell, and which I knew

by heart. My aunt walked into that story, and walked out of it, a dread

and awful personage; but there was one little trait in her behaviour

which I liked to dwell on, and which gave me some faint shadow of

encouragement. I could not forget how my mother had thought that she

felt her touch her pretty hair with no ungentle hand; and though it

might have been altogether my mother's fancy, and might have had no

foundation whatever in fact, I made a little picture, out of it, of my

terrible aunt relenting towards the girlish beauty that I recollected so

well and loved so much, which softened the whole narrative. It is very

possible that it had been in my mind a long time, and had gradually

engendered my determination.

As I did not even know where Miss Betsey lived, I wrote a long letter

to Peggotty, and asked her, incidentally, if she remembered; pretending

that I had heard of such a lady living at a certain place I named at

random, and had a curiosity to know if it were the same. In the course

of that letter, I told Peggotty that I had a particular occasion for

half a guinea; and that if she could lend me that sum until I could

repay it, I should be very much obliged to her, and would tell her

afterwards what I had wanted it for.

Peggotty's answer soon arrived, and was, as usual, full of affectionate

devotion. She enclosed the half guinea (I was afraid she must have had

a world of trouble to get it out of Mr. Barkis's box), and told me that

Miss Betsey lived near Dover, but whether at Dover itself, at Hythe,

Sandgate, or Folkestone, she could not say. One of our men, however,

informing me on my asking him about these places, that they were all

close together, I deemed this enough for my object, and resolved to set

out at the end of that week.

Being a very honest little creature, and unwilling to disgrace the

memory I was going to leave behind me at Murdstone and Grinby's, I

considered myself bound to remain until Saturday night; and, as I had

been paid a week's wages in advance when I first came there, not to

present myself in the counting-house at the usual hour, to receive my

stipend. For this express reason, I had borrowed the half-guinea, that

I might not be without a fund for my travelling-expenses. Accordingly,

when the Saturday night came, and we were all waiting in the warehouse

to be paid, and Tipp the carman, who always took precedence, went in

first to draw his money, I shook Mick Walker by the hand; asked him,

when it came to his turn to be paid, to say to Mr. Quinion that I had

gone to move my box to Tipp's; and, bidding a last good night to Mealy

Potatoes, ran away.

My box was at my old lodging, over the water, and I had written a

direction for it on the back of one of our address cards that we nailed

on the casks: 'Master David, to be left till called for, at the Coach

Office, Dover.' This I had in my pocket ready to put on the box, after I

should have got it out of the house; and as I went towards my lodging,

I looked about me for someone who would help me to carry it to the

booking-office.

There was a long-legged young man with a very little empty donkey-cart,

standing near the Obelisk, in the Blackfriars Road, whose eye I caught

as I was going by, and who, addressing me as 'Sixpenn'orth of bad

ha'pence,' hoped 'I should know him agin to swear to'--in allusion, I

have no doubt, to my staring at him. I stopped to assure him that I had

not done so in bad manners, but uncertain whether he might or might not

like a job.

'Wot job?' said the long-legged young man.

'To move a box,' I answered.

'Wot box?' said the long-legged young man.

I told him mine, which was down that street there, and which I wanted

him to take to the Dover coach office for sixpence.

'Done with you for a tanner!' said the long-legged young man, and

directly got upon his cart, which was nothing but a large wooden tray on

wheels, and rattled away at such a rate, that it was as much as I could

do to keep pace with the donkey.

There was a defiant manner about this young man, and particularly about

the way in which he chewed straw as he spoke to me, that I did not much

like; as the bargain was made, however, I took him upstairs to the room

I was leaving, and we brought the box down, and put it on his cart.

Now, I was unwilling to put the direction-card on there, lest any of my

landlord's family should fathom what I was doing, and detain me; so

I said to the young man that I would be glad if he would stop for a

minute, when he came to the dead-wall of the King's Bench prison. The

words were no sooner out of my mouth, than he rattled away as if he, my

box, the cart, and the donkey, were all equally mad; and I was quite out

of breath with running and calling after him, when I caught him at the

place appointed.

Being much flushed and excited, I tumbled my half-guinea out of my

pocket in pulling the card out. I put it in my mouth for safety, and

though my hands trembled a good deal, had just tied the card on very

much to my satisfaction, when I felt myself violently chucked under the

chin by the long-legged young man, and saw my half-guinea fly out of my

mouth into his hand.

'Wot!' said the young man, seizing me by my jacket collar, with a

frightful grin. 'This is a pollis case, is it? You're a-going to bolt,

are you? Come to the pollis, you young warmin, come to the pollis!'

'You give me my money back, if you please,' said I, very much

frightened; 'and leave me alone.'

'Come to the pollis!' said the young man. 'You shall prove it yourn to

the pollis.'

'Give me my box and money, will you,' I cried, bursting into tears.

The young man still replied: 'Come to the pollis!' and was dragging me

against the donkey in a violent manner, as if there were any affinity

between that animal and a magistrate, when he changed his mind, jumped

into the cart, sat upon my box, and, exclaiming that he would drive to

the pollis straight, rattled away harder than ever.

I ran after him as fast as I could, but I had no breath to call out

with, and should not have dared to call out, now, if I had. I narrowly

escaped being run over, twenty times at least, in half a mile. Now I

lost him, now I saw him, now I lost him, now I was cut at with a whip,

now shouted at, now down in the mud, now up again, now running into

somebody's arms, now running headlong at a post. At length, confused by

fright and heat, and doubting whether half London might not by this time

be turning out for my apprehension, I left the young man to go where

he would with my box and money; and, panting and crying, but never

stopping, faced about for Greenwich, which I had understood was on

the Dover Road: taking very little more out of the world, towards the

retreat of my aunt, Miss Betsey, than I had brought into it, on the

night when my arrival gave her so much umbrage.

CHAPTER 13. THE SEQUEL OF MY RESOLUTION

For anything I know, I may have had some wild idea of running all the

way to Dover, when I gave up the pursuit of the young man with the

donkey-cart, and started for Greenwich. My scattered senses were soon

collected as to that point, if I had; for I came to a stop in the Kent

Road, at a terrace with a piece of water before it, and a great foolish

image in the middle, blowing a dry shell. Here I sat down on a doorstep,

quite spent and exhausted with the efforts I had already made, and with

hardly breath enough to cry for the loss of my box and half-guinea.

It was by this time dark; I heard the clocks strike ten, as I sat

resting. But it was a summer night, fortunately, and fine weather. When

I had recovered my breath, and had got rid of a stifling sensation in

my throat, I rose up and went on. In the midst of my distress, I had no

notion of going back. I doubt if I should have had any, though there had

been a Swiss snow-drift in the Kent Road.

But my standing possessed of only three-halfpence in the world (and I

am sure I wonder how they came to be left in my pocket on a Saturday

night!) troubled me none the less because I went on. I began to picture

to myself, as a scrap of newspaper intelligence, my being found dead in

a day or two, under some hedge; and I trudged on miserably, though as

fast as I could, until I happened to pass a little shop, where it was

written up that ladies' and gentlemen's wardrobes were bought, and that

the best price was given for rags, bones, and kitchen-stuff. The master

of this shop was sitting at the door in his shirt-sleeves, smoking; and

as there were a great many coats and pairs of trousers dangling from

the low ceiling, and only two feeble candles burning inside to show

what they were, I fancied that he looked like a man of a revengeful

disposition, who had hung all his enemies, and was enjoying himself.

My late experiences with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber suggested to me that here

might be a means of keeping off the wolf for a little while. I went up

the next by-street, took off my waistcoat, rolled it neatly under my

arm, and came back to the shop door.

'If you please, sir,' I said, 'I am to sell this for a fair price.'

Mr. Dolloby--Dolloby was the name over the shop door, at least--took the

waistcoat, stood his pipe on its head, against the door-post, went into

the shop, followed by me, snuffed the two candles with his fingers,

spread the waistcoat on the counter, and looked at it there, held it up

against the light, and looked at it there, and ultimately said:

'What do you call a price, now, for this here little weskit?'

'Oh! you know best, sir,' I returned modestly.

'I can't be buyer and seller too,' said Mr. Dolloby. 'Put a price on

this here little weskit.'

'Would eighteenpence be?'--I hinted, after some hesitation.

Mr. Dolloby rolled it up again, and gave it me back. 'I should rob my

family,' he said, 'if I was to offer ninepence for it.'

This was a disagreeable way of putting the business; because it imposed

upon me, a perfect stranger, the unpleasantness of asking Mr. Dolloby to

rob his family on my account. My circumstances being so very pressing,

however, I said I would take ninepence for it, if he pleased. Mr.

Dolloby, not without some grumbling, gave ninepence. I wished him good

night, and walked out of the shop the richer by that sum, and the

poorer by a waistcoat. But when I buttoned my jacket, that was not much.

Indeed, I foresaw pretty clearly that my jacket would go next, and that

I should have to make the best of my way to Dover in a shirt and a pair

of trousers, and might deem myself lucky if I got there even in that

trim. But my mind did not run so much on this as might be supposed.

Beyond a general impression of the distance before me, and of the young

man with the donkey-cart having used me cruelly, I think I had no

very urgent sense of my difficulties when I once again set off with my

ninepence in my pocket.

A plan had occurred to me for passing the night, which I was going to

carry into execution. This was, to lie behind the wall at the back of my

old school, in a corner where there used to be a haystack. I imagined

it would be a kind of company to have the boys, and the bedroom where

I used to tell the stories, so near me: although the boys would know

nothing of my being there, and the bedroom would yield me no shelter.

I had had a hard day's work, and was pretty well jaded when I came

climbing out, at last, upon the level of Blackheath. It cost me some

trouble to find out Salem House; but I found it, and I found a haystack

in the corner, and I lay down by it; having first walked round the wall,

and looked up at the windows, and seen that all was dark and silent

within. Never shall I forget the lonely sensation of first lying down,

without a roof above my head!

Sleep came upon me as it came on many other outcasts, against whom

house-doors were locked, and house-dogs barked, that night--and I

dreamed of lying on my old school-bed, talking to the boys in my room;

and found myself sitting upright, with Steerforth's name upon my lips,

looking wildly at the stars that were glistening and glimmering above

me. When I remembered where I was at that untimely hour, a feeling

stole upon me that made me get up, afraid of I don't know what, and walk

about. But the fainter glimmering of the stars, and the pale light in

the sky where the day was coming, reassured me: and my eyes being very

heavy, I lay down again and slept--though with a knowledge in my sleep

that it was cold--until the warm beams of the sun, and the ringing of

the getting-up bell at Salem House, awoke me. If I could have hoped that

Steerforth was there, I would have lurked about until he came out

alone; but I knew he must have left long since. Traddles still remained,

perhaps, but it was very doubtful; and I had not sufficient confidence

in his discretion or good luck, however strong my reliance was on his

good nature, to wish to trust him with my situation. So I crept away

from the wall as Mr. Creakle's boys were getting up, and struck into the

long dusty track which I had first known to be the Dover Road when I was

one of them, and when I little expected that any eyes would ever see me

the wayfarer I was now, upon it.

What a different Sunday morning from the old Sunday morning at Yarmouth!

In due time I heard the church-bells ringing, as I plodded on; and I met

people who were going to church; and I passed a church or two where the

congregation were inside, and the sound of singing came out into the

sunshine, while the beadle sat and cooled himself in the shade of the

porch, or stood beneath the yew-tree, with his hand to his forehead,

glowering at me going by. But the peace and rest of the old Sunday

morning were on everything, except me. That was the difference. I felt

quite wicked in my dirt and dust, with my tangled hair. But for the

quiet picture I had conjured up, of my mother in her youth and beauty,

weeping by the fire, and my aunt relenting to her, I hardly think I

should have had the courage to go on until next day. But it always went

before me, and I followed.

I got, that Sunday, through three-and-twenty miles on the straight

road, though not very easily, for I was new to that kind of toil. I

see myself, as evening closes in, coming over the bridge at Rochester,

footsore and tired, and eating bread that I had bought for supper.

One or two little houses, with the notice, 'Lodgings for Travellers',

hanging out, had tempted me; but I was afraid of spending the few pence

I had, and was even more afraid of the vicious looks of the trampers I

had met or overtaken. I sought no shelter, therefore, but the sky; and

toiling into Chatham,--which, in that night's aspect, is a mere dream of

chalk, and drawbridges, and mastless ships in a muddy river, roofed

like Noah's arks,--crept, at last, upon a sort of grass-grown battery

overhanging a lane, where a sentry was walking to and fro. Here I

lay down, near a cannon; and, happy in the society of the sentry's

footsteps, though he knew no more of my being above him than the boys

at Salem House had known of my lying by the wall, slept soundly until

morning.

Very stiff and sore of foot I was in the morning, and quite dazed by the

beating of drums and marching of troops, which seemed to hem me in on

every side when I went down towards the long narrow street. Feeling

that I could go but a very little way that day, if I were to reserve any

strength for getting to my journey's end, I resolved to make the sale

of my jacket its principal business. Accordingly, I took the jacket off,

that I might learn to do without it; and carrying it under my arm, began

a tour of inspection of the various slop-shops.

It was a likely place to sell a jacket in; for the dealers in

second-hand clothes were numerous, and were, generally speaking, on the

look-out for customers at their shop doors. But as most of them had,

hanging up among their stock, an officer's coat or two, epaulettes and

all, I was rendered timid by the costly nature of their dealings, and

walked about for a long time without offering my merchandise to anyone.

This modesty of mine directed my attention to the marine-store shops,

and such shops as Mr. Dolloby's, in preference to the regular dealers.

At last I found one that I thought looked promising, at the corner of a

dirty lane, ending in an enclosure full of stinging-nettles, against the

palings of which some second-hand sailors' clothes, that seemed to have

overflowed the shop, were fluttering among some cots, and rusty guns,

and oilskin hats, and certain trays full of so many old rusty keys of so

many sizes that they seemed various enough to open all the doors in the

world.

Into this shop, which was low and small, and which was darkened

rather than lighted by a little window, overhung with clothes, and was

descended into by some steps, I went with a palpitating heart; which was

not relieved when an ugly old man, with the lower part of his face all

covered with a stubbly grey beard, rushed out of a dirty den behind it,

and seized me by the hair of my head. He was a dreadful old man to look

at, in a filthy flannel waistcoat, and smelling terribly of rum. His

bedstead, covered with a tumbled and ragged piece of patchwork, was in

the den he had come from, where another little window showed a prospect

of more stinging-nettles, and a lame donkey.

'Oh, what do you want?' grinned this old man, in a fierce, monotonous

whine. 'Oh, my eyes and limbs, what do you want? Oh, my lungs and liver,

what do you want? Oh, goroo, goroo!'

I was so much dismayed by these words, and particularly by the

repetition of the last unknown one, which was a kind of rattle in his

throat, that I could make no answer; hereupon the old man, still holding

me by the hair, repeated:

'Oh, what do you want? Oh, my eyes and limbs, what do you want? Oh, my

lungs and liver, what do you want? Oh, goroo!'--which he screwed out of

himself, with an energy that made his eyes start in his head.

'I wanted to know,' I said, trembling, 'if you would buy a jacket.'

'Oh, let's see the jacket!' cried the old man. 'Oh, my heart on fire,

show the jacket to us! Oh, my eyes and limbs, bring the jacket out!'

With that he took his trembling hands, which were like the claws of a

great bird, out of my hair; and put on a pair of spectacles, not at all

ornamental to his inflamed eyes.

'Oh, how much for the jacket?' cried the old man, after examining it.

'Oh--goroo!--how much for the jacket?'

'Half-a-crown,' I answered, recovering myself.

'Oh, my lungs and liver,' cried the old man, 'no! Oh, my eyes, no! Oh,

my limbs, no! Eighteenpence. Goroo!'

Every time he uttered this ejaculation, his eyes seemed to be in danger

of starting out; and every sentence he spoke, he delivered in a sort

of tune, always exactly the same, and more like a gust of wind, which

begins low, mounts up high, and falls again, than any other comparison I

can find for it.

'Well,' said I, glad to have closed the bargain, 'I'll take

eighteenpence.'

'Oh, my liver!' cried the old man, throwing the jacket on a shelf. 'Get

out of the shop! Oh, my lungs, get out of the shop! Oh, my eyes and

limbs--goroo!--don't ask for money; make it an exchange.' I never was

so frightened in my life, before or since; but I told him humbly that

I wanted money, and that nothing else was of any use to me, but that I

would wait for it, as he desired, outside, and had no wish to hurry

him. So I went outside, and sat down in the shade in a corner. And I sat

there so many hours, that the shade became sunlight, and the sunlight

became shade again, and still I sat there waiting for the money.

There never was such another drunken madman in that line of business,

I hope. That he was well known in the neighbourhood, and enjoyed the

reputation of having sold himself to the devil, I soon understood from

the visits he received from the boys, who continually came skirmishing

about the shop, shouting that legend, and calling to him to bring out

his gold. 'You ain't poor, you know, Charley, as you pretend. Bring out

your gold. Bring out some of the gold you sold yourself to the devil

for. Come! It's in the lining of the mattress, Charley. Rip it open

and let's have some!' This, and many offers to lend him a knife for

the purpose, exasperated him to such a degree, that the whole day was a

succession of rushes on his part, and flights on the part of the boys.

Sometimes in his rage he would take me for one of them, and come at me,

mouthing as if he were going to tear me in pieces; then, remembering

me, just in time, would dive into the shop, and lie upon his bed, as I

thought from the sound of his voice, yelling in a frantic way, to his

own windy tune, the 'Death of Nelson'; with an Oh! before every line,

and innumerable Goroos interspersed. As if this were not bad enough for

me, the boys, connecting me with the establishment, on account of the

patience and perseverance with which I sat outside, half-dressed, pelted

me, and used me very ill all day.

He made many attempts to induce me to consent to an exchange; at one

time coming out with a fishing-rod, at another with a fiddle, at another

with a cocked hat, at another with a flute. But I resisted all these

overtures, and sat there in desperation; each time asking him, with

tears in my eyes, for my money or my jacket. At last he began to pay me

in halfpence at a time; and was full two hours getting by easy stages to

a shilling.

'Oh, my eyes and limbs!' he then cried, peeping hideously out of the

shop, after a long pause, 'will you go for twopence more?'

'I can't,' I said; 'I shall be starved.'

'Oh, my lungs and liver, will you go for threepence?'

'I would go for nothing, if I could,' I said, 'but I want the money

badly.'

'Oh, go-roo!' (it is really impossible to express how he twisted this

ejaculation out of himself, as he peeped round the door-post at me,

showing nothing but his crafty old head); 'will you go for fourpence?'

I was so faint and weary that I closed with this offer; and taking the

money out of his claw, not without trembling, went away more hungry and

thirsty than I had ever been, a little before sunset. But at an expense

of threepence I soon refreshed myself completely; and, being in better

spirits then, limped seven miles upon my road.

My bed at night was under another haystack, where I rested comfortably,

after having washed my blistered feet in a stream, and dressed them as

well as I was able, with some cool leaves. When I took the road again

next morning, I found that it lay through a succession of hop-grounds

and orchards. It was sufficiently late in the year for the orchards

to be ruddy with ripe apples; and in a few places the hop-pickers were

already at work. I thought it all extremely beautiful, and made up

my mind to sleep among the hops that night: imagining some cheerful

companionship in the long perspectives of poles, with the graceful

leaves twining round them.

The trampers were worse than ever that day, and inspired me with a

dread that is yet quite fresh in my mind. Some of them were most

ferocious-looking ruffians, who stared at me as I went by; and stopped,

perhaps, and called after me to come back and speak to them, and when I

took to my heels, stoned me. I recollect one young fellow--a tinker, I

suppose, from his wallet and brazier--who had a woman with him, and

who faced about and stared at me thus; and then roared to me in such a

tremendous voice to come back, that I halted and looked round.

'Come here, when you're called,' said the tinker, 'or I'll rip your

young body open.'

I thought it best to go back. As I drew nearer to them, trying to

propitiate the tinker by my looks, I observed that the woman had a black

eye.

'Where are you going?' said the tinker, gripping the bosom of my shirt

with his blackened hand.

'I am going to Dover,' I said.

'Where do you come from?' asked the tinker, giving his hand another turn

in my shirt, to hold me more securely.

'I come from London,' I said.

'What lay are you upon?' asked the tinker. 'Are you a prig?'

'N-no,' I said.

'Ain't you, by G--? If you make a brag of your honesty to me,' said the

tinker, 'I'll knock your brains out.'

With his disengaged hand he made a menace of striking me, and then

looked at me from head to foot.

'Have you got the price of a pint of beer about you?' said the tinker.

'If you have, out with it, afore I take it away!'

I should certainly have produced it, but that I met the woman's look,

and saw her very slightly shake her head, and form 'No!' with her lips.

'I am very poor,' I said, attempting to smile, 'and have got no money.'

'Why, what do you mean?' said the tinker, looking so sternly at me, that

I almost feared he saw the money in my pocket.

'Sir!' I stammered.

'What do you mean,' said the tinker, 'by wearing my brother's silk

handkerchief! Give it over here!' And he had mine off my neck in a

moment, and tossed it to the woman.

The woman burst into a fit of laughter, as if she thought this a joke,

and tossed it back to me, nodded once, as slightly as before, and made

the word 'Go!' with her lips. Before I could obey, however, the tinker

seized the handkerchief out of my hand with a roughness that threw me

away like a feather, and putting it loosely round his own neck, turned

upon the woman with an oath, and knocked her down. I never shall forget

seeing her fall backward on the hard road, and lie there with her bonnet

tumbled off, and her hair all whitened in the dust; nor, when I looked

back from a distance, seeing her sitting on the pathway, which was a

bank by the roadside, wiping the blood from her face with a corner of

her shawl, while he went on ahead.

This adventure frightened me so, that, afterwards, when I saw any of

these people coming, I turned back until I could find a hiding-place,

where I remained until they had gone out of sight; which happened so

often, that I was very seriously delayed. But under this difficulty, as

under all the other difficulties of my journey, I seemed to be sustained

and led on by my fanciful picture of my mother in her youth, before I

came into the world. It always kept me company. It was there, among

the hops, when I lay down to sleep; it was with me on my waking in the

morning; it went before me all day. I have associated it, ever since,

with the sunny street of Canterbury, dozing as it were in the hot light;

and with the sight of its old houses and gateways, and the stately,

grey Cathedral, with the rooks sailing round the towers. When I came,

at last, upon the bare, wide downs near Dover, it relieved the solitary

aspect of the scene with hope; and not until I reached that first great

aim of my journey, and actually set foot in the town itself, on the

sixth day of my flight, did it desert me. But then, strange to say,

when I stood with my ragged shoes, and my dusty, sunburnt, half-clothed

figure, in the place so long desired, it seemed to vanish like a dream,

and to leave me helpless and dispirited.

I inquired about my aunt among the boatmen first, and received various

answers. One said she lived in the South Foreland Light, and had singed

her whiskers by doing so; another, that she was made fast to the great

buoy outside the harbour, and could only be visited at half-tide; a

third, that she was locked up in Maidstone jail for child-stealing; a

fourth, that she was seen to mount a broom in the last high wind, and

make direct for Calais. The fly-drivers, among whom I inquired next,

were equally jocose and equally disrespectful; and the shopkeepers, not

liking my appearance, generally replied, without hearing what I had

to say, that they had got nothing for me. I felt more miserable and

destitute than I had done at any period of my running away. My money was

all gone, I had nothing left to dispose of; I was hungry, thirsty, and

worn out; and seemed as distant from my end as if I had remained in

London.

The morning had worn away in these inquiries, and I was sitting on

the step of an empty shop at a street corner, near the market-place,

deliberating upon wandering towards those other places which had been

mentioned, when a fly-driver, coming by with his carriage, dropped a

horsecloth. Something good-natured in the man's face, as I handed it up,

encouraged me to ask him if he could tell me where Miss Trotwood lived;

though I had asked the question so often, that it almost died upon my

lips.

'Trotwood,' said he. 'Let me see. I know the name, too. Old lady?'

'Yes,' I said, 'rather.'

'Pretty stiff in the back?' said he, making himself upright.

'Yes,' I said. 'I should think it very likely.'

'Carries a bag?' said he--'bag with a good deal of room in it--is

gruffish, and comes down upon you, sharp?'

My heart sank within me as I acknowledged the undoubted accuracy of this

description.

'Why then, I tell you what,' said he. 'If you go up there,' pointing

with his whip towards the heights, 'and keep right on till you come to

some houses facing the sea, I think you'll hear of her. My opinion is

she won't stand anything, so here's a penny for you.'

I accepted the gift thankfully, and bought a loaf with it. Dispatching

this refreshment by the way, I went in the direction my friend had

indicated, and walked on a good distance without coming to the houses

he had mentioned. At length I saw some before me; and approaching them,

went into a little shop (it was what we used to call a general shop,

at home), and inquired if they could have the goodness to tell me where

Miss Trotwood lived. I addressed myself to a man behind the counter,

who was weighing some rice for a young woman; but the latter, taking the

inquiry to herself, turned round quickly.

'My mistress?' she said. 'What do you want with her, boy?'

'I want,' I replied, 'to speak to her, if you please.'

'To beg of her, you mean,' retorted the damsel.

'No,' I said, 'indeed.' But suddenly remembering that in truth I came

for no other purpose, I held my peace in confusion, and felt my face

burn.

MY aunt's handmaid, as I supposed she was from what she had said, put

her rice in a little basket and walked out of the shop; telling me that

I could follow her, if I wanted to know where Miss Trotwood lived. I

needed no second permission; though I was by this time in such a state

of consternation and agitation, that my legs shook under me. I followed

the young woman, and we soon came to a very neat little cottage with

cheerful bow-windows: in front of it, a small square gravelled court or

garden full of flowers, carefully tended, and smelling deliciously.

'This is Miss Trotwood's,' said the young woman. 'Now you know; and

that's all I have got to say.' With which words she hurried into the

house, as if to shake off the responsibility of my appearance; and left

me standing at the garden-gate, looking disconsolately over the top of

it towards the parlour window, where a muslin curtain partly undrawn

in the middle, a large round green screen or fan fastened on to the

windowsill, a small table, and a great chair, suggested to me that my

aunt might be at that moment seated in awful state.

My shoes were by this time in a woeful condition. The soles had shed

themselves bit by bit, and the upper leathers had broken and burst until

the very shape and form of shoes had departed from them. My hat (which

had served me for a night-cap, too) was so crushed and bent, that no old

battered handleless saucepan on a dunghill need have been ashamed to vie

with it. My shirt and trousers, stained with heat, dew, grass, and

the Kentish soil on which I had slept--and torn besides--might have

frightened the birds from my aunt's garden, as I stood at the gate. My

hair had known no comb or brush since I left London. My face, neck, and

hands, from unaccustomed exposure to the air and sun, were burnt to a

berry-brown. From head to foot I was powdered almost as white with chalk

and dust, as if I had come out of a lime-kiln. In this plight, and with

a strong consciousness of it, I waited to introduce myself to, and make

my first impression on, my formidable aunt.

The unbroken stillness of the parlour window leading me to infer, after

a while, that she was not there, I lifted up my eyes to the window above

it, where I saw a florid, pleasant-looking gentleman, with a grey head,

who shut up one eye in a grotesque manner, nodded his head at me several

times, shook it at me as often, laughed, and went away.

I had been discomposed enough before; but I was so much the more

discomposed by this unexpected behaviour, that I was on the point of

slinking off, to think how I had best proceed, when there came out of

the house a lady with her handkerchief tied over her cap, and a pair

of gardening gloves on her hands, wearing a gardening pocket like a

toll-man's apron, and carrying a great knife. I knew her immediately

to be Miss Betsey, for she came stalking out of the house exactly as

my poor mother had so often described her stalking up our garden at

Blunderstone Rookery.

'Go away!' said Miss Betsey, shaking her head, and making a distant chop

in the air with her knife. 'Go along! No boys here!'

I watched her, with my heart at my lips, as she marched to a corner of

her garden, and stooped to dig up some little root there. Then, without

a scrap of courage, but with a great deal of desperation, I went softly

in and stood beside her, touching her with my finger.

'If you please, ma'am,' I began.

She started and looked up.

'If you please, aunt.'

'EH?' exclaimed Miss Betsey, in a tone of amazement I have never heard

approached.

'If you please, aunt, I am your nephew.'

'Oh, Lord!' said my aunt. And sat flat down in the garden-path.

'I am David Copperfield, of Blunderstone, in Suffolk--where you came,

on the night when I was born, and saw my dear mama. I have been very

unhappy since she died. I have been slighted, and taught nothing, and

thrown upon myself, and put to work not fit for me. It made me run away

to you. I was robbed at first setting out, and have walked all the

way, and have never slept in a bed since I began the journey.' Here

my self-support gave way all at once; and with a movement of my hands,

intended to show her my ragged state, and call it to witness that I had

suffered something, I broke into a passion of crying, which I suppose

had been pent up within me all the week.

My aunt, with every sort of expression but wonder discharged from her

countenance, sat on the gravel, staring at me, until I began to cry;

when she got up in a great hurry, collared me, and took me into the

parlour. Her first proceeding there was to unlock a tall press, bring

out several bottles, and pour some of the contents of each into my

mouth. I think they must have been taken out at random, for I am sure

I tasted aniseed water, anchovy sauce, and salad dressing. When she had

administered these restoratives, as I was still quite hysterical, and

unable to control my sobs, she put me on the sofa, with a shawl under

my head, and the handkerchief from her own head under my feet, lest I

should sully the cover; and then, sitting herself down behind the green

fan or screen I have already mentioned, so that I could not see her

face, ejaculated at intervals, 'Mercy on us!' letting those exclamations

off like minute guns.

After a time she rang the bell. 'Janet,' said my aunt, when her servant

came in. 'Go upstairs, give my compliments to Mr. Dick, and say I wish

to speak to him.'

Janet looked a little surprised to see me lying stiffly on the sofa (I

was afraid to move lest it should be displeasing to my aunt), but went

on her errand. My aunt, with her hands behind her, walked up and down

the room, until the gentleman who had squinted at me from the upper

window came in laughing.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'don't be a fool, because nobody can be more

discreet than you can, when you choose. We all know that. So don't be a

fool, whatever you are.'

The gentleman was serious immediately, and looked at me, I thought, as

if he would entreat me to say nothing about the window.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'you have heard me mention David Copperfield?

Now don't pretend not to have a memory, because you and I know better.'

'David Copperfield?' said Mr. Dick, who did not appear to me to

remember much about it. 'David Copperfield? Oh yes, to be sure. David,

certainly.'

'Well,' said my aunt, 'this is his boy--his son. He would be as like his

father as it's possible to be, if he was not so like his mother, too.'

'His son?' said Mr. Dick. 'David's son? Indeed!'

'Yes,' pursued my aunt, 'and he has done a pretty piece of business.

He has run away. Ah! His sister, Betsey Trotwood, never would have run

away.' My aunt shook her head firmly, confident in the character and

behaviour of the girl who never was born.

'Oh! you think she wouldn't have run away?' said Mr. Dick.

'Bless and save the man,' exclaimed my aunt, sharply, 'how he talks!

Don't I know she wouldn't? She would have lived with her god-mother,

and we should have been devoted to one another. Where, in the name of

wonder, should his sister, Betsey Trotwood, have run from, or to?'

'Nowhere,' said Mr. Dick.

'Well then,' returned my aunt, softened by the reply, 'how can you

pretend to be wool-gathering, Dick, when you are as sharp as a surgeon's

lancet? Now, here you see young David Copperfield, and the question I

put to you is, what shall I do with him?'

'What shall you do with him?' said Mr. Dick, feebly, scratching his

head. 'Oh! do with him?'

'Yes,' said my aunt, with a grave look, and her forefinger held up.

'Come! I want some very sound advice.'

'Why, if I was you,' said Mr. Dick, considering, and looking vacantly

at me, 'I should--' The contemplation of me seemed to inspire him with a

sudden idea, and he added, briskly, 'I should wash him!'

'Janet,' said my aunt, turning round with a quiet triumph, which I did

not then understand, 'Mr. Dick sets us all right. Heat the bath!'

Although I was deeply interested in this dialogue, I could not help

observing my aunt, Mr. Dick, and Janet, while it was in progress, and

completing a survey I had already been engaged in making of the room.

MY aunt was a tall, hard-featured lady, but by no means ill-looking.

There was an inflexibility in her face, in her voice, in her gait and

carriage, amply sufficient to account for the effect she had made upon

a gentle creature like my mother; but her features were rather handsome

than otherwise, though unbending and austere. I particularly noticed

that she had a very quick, bright eye. Her hair, which was grey, was

arranged in two plain divisions, under what I believe would be called a

mob-cap; I mean a cap, much more common then than now, with side-pieces

fastening under the chin. Her dress was of a lavender colour, and

perfectly neat; but scantily made, as if she desired to be as little

encumbered as possible. I remember that I thought it, in form, more like

a riding-habit with the superfluous skirt cut off, than anything else.

She wore at her side a gentleman's gold watch, if I might judge from its

size and make, with an appropriate chain and seals; she had some linen

at her throat not unlike a shirt-collar, and things at her wrists like

little shirt-wristbands.

Mr. Dick, as I have already said, was grey-headed, and florid: I should

have said all about him, in saying so, had not his head been curiously

bowed--not by age; it reminded me of one of Mr. Creakle's boys' heads

after a beating--and his grey eyes prominent and large, with a strange

kind of watery brightness in them that made me, in combination with his

vacant manner, his submission to my aunt, and his childish delight when

she praised him, suspect him of being a little mad; though, if he were

mad, how he came to be there puzzled me extremely. He was dressed

like any other ordinary gentleman, in a loose grey morning coat and

waistcoat, and white trousers; and had his watch in his fob, and his

money in his pockets: which he rattled as if he were very proud of it.

Janet was a pretty blooming girl, of about nineteen or twenty, and a

perfect picture of neatness. Though I made no further observation of

her at the moment, I may mention here what I did not discover until

afterwards, namely, that she was one of a series of protegees whom my

aunt had taken into her service expressly to educate in a renouncement

of mankind, and who had generally completed their abjuration by marrying

the baker.

The room was as neat as Janet or my aunt. As I laid down my pen, a

moment since, to think of it, the air from the sea came blowing

in again, mixed with the perfume of the flowers; and I saw the

old-fashioned furniture brightly rubbed and polished, my aunt's

inviolable chair and table by the round green fan in the bow-window, the

drugget-covered carpet, the cat, the kettle-holder, the two canaries,

the old china, the punchbowl full of dried rose-leaves, the tall press

guarding all sorts of bottles and pots, and, wonderfully out of keeping

with the rest, my dusty self upon the sofa, taking note of everything.

Janet had gone away to get the bath ready, when my aunt, to my great

alarm, became in one moment rigid with indignation, and had hardly voice

to cry out, 'Janet! Donkeys!'

Upon which, Janet came running up the stairs as if the house were in

flames, darted out on a little piece of green in front, and warned off

two saddle-donkeys, lady-ridden, that had presumed to set hoof upon it;

while my aunt, rushing out of the house, seized the bridle of a third

animal laden with a bestriding child, turned him, led him forth from

those sacred precincts, and boxed the ears of the unlucky urchin in

attendance who had dared to profane that hallowed ground.

To this hour I don't know whether my aunt had any lawful right of way

over that patch of green; but she had settled it in her own mind that

she had, and it was all the same to her. The one great outrage of her

life, demanding to be constantly avenged, was the passage of a donkey

over that immaculate spot. In whatever occupation she was engaged,

however interesting to her the conversation in which she was taking

part, a donkey turned the current of her ideas in a moment, and she was

upon him straight. Jugs of water, and watering-pots, were kept in secret

places ready to be discharged on the offending boys; sticks were laid

in ambush behind the door; sallies were made at all hours; and

incessant war prevailed. Perhaps this was an agreeable excitement to the

donkey-boys; or perhaps the more sagacious of the donkeys, understanding

how the case stood, delighted with constitutional obstinacy in coming

that way. I only know that there were three alarms before the bath was

ready; and that on the occasion of the last and most desperate of all,

I saw my aunt engage, single-handed, with a sandy-headed lad of fifteen,

and bump his sandy head against her own gate, before he seemed to

comprehend what was the matter. These interruptions were of the more

ridiculous to me, because she was giving me broth out of a table-spoon

at the time (having firmly persuaded herself that I was actually

starving, and must receive nourishment at first in very small

quantities), and, while my mouth was yet open to receive the spoon, she

would put it back into the basin, cry 'Janet! Donkeys!' and go out to

the assault.

The bath was a great comfort. For I began to be sensible of acute pains

in my limbs from lying out in the fields, and was now so tired and low

that I could hardly keep myself awake for five minutes together. When I

had bathed, they (I mean my aunt and Janet) enrobed me in a shirt and a

pair of trousers belonging to Mr. Dick, and tied me up in two or three

great shawls. What sort of bundle I looked like, I don't know, but I

felt a very hot one. Feeling also very faint and drowsy, I soon lay down

on the sofa again and fell asleep.

It might have been a dream, originating in the fancy which had occupied

my mind so long, but I awoke with the impression that my aunt had come

and bent over me, and had put my hair away from my face, and laid my

head more comfortably, and had then stood looking at me. The words,

'Pretty fellow,' or 'Poor fellow,' seemed to be in my ears, too; but

certainly there was nothing else, when I awoke, to lead me to believe

that they had been uttered by my aunt, who sat in the bow-window gazing

at the sea from behind the green fan, which was mounted on a kind of

swivel, and turned any way.

We dined soon after I awoke, off a roast fowl and a pudding; I sitting

at table, not unlike a trussed bird myself, and moving my arms with

considerable difficulty. But as my aunt had swathed me up, I made no

complaint of being inconvenienced. All this time I was deeply anxious

to know what she was going to do with me; but she took her dinner in

profound silence, except when she occasionally fixed her eyes on me

sitting opposite, and said, 'Mercy upon us!' which did not by any means

relieve my anxiety.

The cloth being drawn, and some sherry put upon the table (of which I

had a glass), my aunt sent up for Mr. Dick again, who joined us, and

looked as wise as he could when she requested him to attend to my story,

which she elicited from me, gradually, by a course of questions. During

my recital, she kept her eyes on Mr. Dick, who I thought would have gone

to sleep but for that, and who, whensoever he lapsed into a smile, was

checked by a frown from my aunt.

'Whatever possessed that poor unfortunate Baby, that she must go and be

married again,' said my aunt, when I had finished, 'I can't conceive.'

'Perhaps she fell in love with her second husband,' Mr. Dick suggested.

'Fell in love!' repeated my aunt. 'What do you mean? What business had

she to do it?'

'Perhaps,' Mr. Dick simpered, after thinking a little, 'she did it for

pleasure.'

'Pleasure, indeed!' replied my aunt. 'A mighty pleasure for the poor

Baby to fix her simple faith upon any dog of a fellow, certain to

ill-use her in some way or other. What did she propose to herself,

I should like to know! She had had one husband. She had seen David

Copperfield out of the world, who was always running after wax dolls

from his cradle. She had got a baby--oh, there were a pair of babies

when she gave birth to this child sitting here, that Friday night!--and

what more did she want?'

Mr. Dick secretly shook his head at me, as if he thought there was no

getting over this.

'She couldn't even have a baby like anybody else,' said my aunt. 'Where

was this child's sister, Betsey Trotwood? Not forthcoming. Don't tell

me!'

Mr. Dick seemed quite frightened.

'That little man of a doctor, with his head on one side,' said my aunt,

'Jellips, or whatever his name was, what was he about? All he could do,

was to say to me, like a robin redbreast--as he is--"It's a boy." A boy!

Yah, the imbecility of the whole set of 'em!'

The heartiness of the ejaculation startled Mr. Dick exceedingly; and me,

too, if I am to tell the truth.

'And then, as if this was not enough, and she had not stood sufficiently

in the light of this child's sister, Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt,

'she marries a second time--goes and marries a Murderer--or a man with

a name like it--and stands in THIS child's light! And the natural

consequence is, as anybody but a baby might have foreseen, that he

prowls and wanders. He's as like Cain before he was grown up, as he can

be.'

Mr. Dick looked hard at me, as if to identify me in this character.

'And then there's that woman with the Pagan name,' said my aunt, 'that

Peggotty, she goes and gets married next. Because she has not seen

enough of the evil attending such things, she goes and gets married

next, as the child relates. I only hope,' said my aunt, shaking her

head, 'that her husband is one of those Poker husbands who abound in the

newspapers, and will beat her well with one.'

I could not bear to hear my old nurse so decried, and made the subject

of such a wish. I told my aunt that indeed she was mistaken. That

Peggotty was the best, the truest, the most faithful, most devoted, and

most self-denying friend and servant in the world; who had ever loved

me dearly, who had ever loved my mother dearly; who had held my mother's

dying head upon her arm, on whose face my mother had imprinted her last

grateful kiss. And my remembrance of them both, choking me, I broke down

as I was trying to say that her home was my home, and that all she had

was mine, and that I would have gone to her for shelter, but for her

humble station, which made me fear that I might bring some trouble on

her--I broke down, I say, as I was trying to say so, and laid my face in

my hands upon the table.

'Well, well!' said my aunt, 'the child is right to stand by those who

have stood by him--Janet! Donkeys!'

I thoroughly believe that but for those unfortunate donkeys, we should

have come to a good understanding; for my aunt had laid her hand on my

shoulder, and the impulse was upon me, thus emboldened, to embrace her

and beseech her protection. But the interruption, and the disorder she

was thrown into by the struggle outside, put an end to all softer ideas

for the present, and kept my aunt indignantly declaiming to Mr. Dick

about her determination to appeal for redress to the laws of her

country, and to bring actions for trespass against the whole donkey

proprietorship of Dover, until tea-time.

After tea, we sat at the window--on the look-out, as I imagined, from

my aunt's sharp expression of face, for more invaders--until dusk, when

Janet set candles, and a backgammon-board, on the table, and pulled down

the blinds.

'Now, Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, with her grave look, and her forefinger

up as before, 'I am going to ask you another question. Look at this

child.'

'David's son?' said Mr. Dick, with an attentive, puzzled face.

'Exactly so,' returned my aunt. 'What would you do with him, now?'

'Do with David's son?' said Mr. Dick.

'Ay,' replied my aunt, 'with David's son.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Dick. 'Yes. Do with--I should put him to bed.'

'Janet!' cried my aunt, with the same complacent triumph that I had

remarked before. 'Mr. Dick sets us all right. If the bed is ready, we'll

take him up to it.'

Janet reporting it to be quite ready, I was taken up to it; kindly, but

in some sort like a prisoner; my aunt going in front and Janet bringing

up the rear. The only circumstance which gave me any new hope, was my

aunt's stopping on the stairs to inquire about a smell of fire that was

prevalent there; and janet's replying that she had been making tinder

down in the kitchen, of my old shirt. But there were no other clothes in

my room than the odd heap of things I wore; and when I was left there,

with a little taper which my aunt forewarned me would burn exactly five

minutes, I heard them lock my door on the outside. Turning these things

over in my mind I deemed it possible that my aunt, who could know

nothing of me, might suspect I had a habit of running away, and took

precautions, on that account, to have me in safe keeping.

The room was a pleasant one, at the top of the house, overlooking the

sea, on which the moon was shining brilliantly. After I had said my

prayers, and the candle had burnt out, I remember how I still sat

looking at the moonlight on the water, as if I could hope to read my

fortune in it, as in a bright book; or to see my mother with her child,

coming from Heaven, along that shining path, to look upon me as she had

looked when I last saw her sweet face. I remember how the solemn feeling

with which at length I turned my eyes away, yielded to the sensation of

gratitude and rest which the sight of the white-curtained bed--and how

much more the lying softly down upon it, nestling in the snow-white

sheets!--inspired. I remember how I thought of all the solitary places

under the night sky where I had slept, and how I prayed that I never

might be houseless any more, and never might forget the houseless. I

remember how I seemed to float, then, down the melancholy glory of that

track upon the sea, away into the world of dreams.

CHAPTER 14. MY AUNT MAKES UP HER MIND ABOUT ME

On going down in the morning, I found my aunt musing so profoundly over

the breakfast table, with her elbow on the tray, that the contents of

the urn had overflowed the teapot and were laying the whole table-cloth

under water, when my entrance put her meditations to flight. I felt sure

that I had been the subject of her reflections, and was more than ever

anxious to know her intentions towards me. Yet I dared not express my

anxiety, lest it should give her offence.

My eyes, however, not being so much under control as my tongue, were

attracted towards my aunt very often during breakfast. I never could

look at her for a few moments together but I found her looking at me--in

an odd thoughtful manner, as if I were an immense way off, instead of

being on the other side of the small round table. When she had finished

her breakfast, my aunt very deliberately leaned back in her chair,

knitted her brows, folded her arms, and contemplated me at her leisure,

with such a fixedness of attention that I was quite overpowered by

embarrassment. Not having as yet finished my own breakfast, I attempted

to hide my confusion by proceeding with it; but my knife tumbled over my

fork, my fork tripped up my knife, I chipped bits of bacon a surprising

height into the air instead of cutting them for my own eating, and

choked myself with my tea, which persisted in going the wrong way

instead of the right one, until I gave in altogether, and sat blushing

under my aunt's close scrutiny.

'Hallo!' said my aunt, after a long time.

I looked up, and met her sharp bright glance respectfully.

'I have written to him,' said my aunt.

'To--?'

'To your father-in-law,' said my aunt. 'I have sent him a letter that

I'll trouble him to attend to, or he and I will fall out, I can tell

him!'

'Does he know where I am, aunt?' I inquired, alarmed.

'I have told him,' said my aunt, with a nod.

'Shall I--be--given up to him?' I faltered.

'I don't know,' said my aunt. 'We shall see.'

'Oh! I can't think what I shall do,' I exclaimed, 'if I have to go back

to Mr. Murdstone!'

'I don't know anything about it,' said my aunt, shaking her head. 'I

can't say, I am sure. We shall see.'

My spirits sank under these words, and I became very downcast and heavy

of heart. My aunt, without appearing to take much heed of me, put on a

coarse apron with a bib, which she took out of the press; washed up the

teacups with her own hands; and, when everything was washed and set in

the tray again, and the cloth folded and put on the top of the whole,

rang for Janet to remove it. She next swept up the crumbs with a little

broom (putting on a pair of gloves first), until there did not appear

to be one microscopic speck left on the carpet; next dusted and arranged

the room, which was dusted and arranged to a hair's breadth already.

When all these tasks were performed to her satisfaction, she took off

the gloves and apron, folded them up, put them in the particular corner

of the press from which they had been taken, brought out her work-box

to her own table in the open window, and sat down, with the green fan

between her and the light, to work.

'I wish you'd go upstairs,' said my aunt, as she threaded her needle,

'and give my compliments to Mr. Dick, and I'll be glad to know how he

gets on with his Memorial.'

I rose with all alacrity, to acquit myself of this commission.

'I suppose,' said my aunt, eyeing me as narrowly as she had eyed the

needle in threading it, 'you think Mr. Dick a short name, eh?'

'I thought it was rather a short name, yesterday,' I confessed.

'You are not to suppose that he hasn't got a longer name, if he chose

to use it,' said my aunt, with a loftier air. 'Babley--Mr. Richard

Babley--that's the gentleman's true name.'

I was going to suggest, with a modest sense of my youth and the

familiarity I had been already guilty of, that I had better give him the

full benefit of that name, when my aunt went on to say:

'But don't you call him by it, whatever you do. He can't bear his name.

That's a peculiarity of his. Though I don't know that it's much of a

peculiarity, either; for he has been ill-used enough, by some that bear

it, to have a mortal antipathy for it, Heaven knows. Mr. Dick is his

name here, and everywhere else, now--if he ever went anywhere else,

which he don't. So take care, child, you don't call him anything BUT Mr.

Dick.'

I promised to obey, and went upstairs with my message; thinking, as I

went, that if Mr. Dick had been working at his Memorial long, at the

same rate as I had seen him working at it, through the open door, when

I came down, he was probably getting on very well indeed. I found him

still driving at it with a long pen, and his head almost laid upon the

paper. He was so intent upon it, that I had ample leisure to observe the

large paper kite in a corner, the confusion of bundles of manuscript,

the number of pens, and, above all, the quantity of ink (which he seemed

to have in, in half-gallon jars by the dozen), before he observed my

being present.

'Ha! Phoebus!' said Mr. Dick, laying down his pen. 'How does the world

go? I'll tell you what,' he added, in a lower tone, 'I shouldn't wish it

to be mentioned, but it's a--' here he beckoned to me, and put his lips

close to my ear--'it's a mad world. Mad as Bedlam, boy!' said Mr. Dick,

taking snuff from a round box on the table, and laughing heartily.

Without presuming to give my opinion on this question, I delivered my

message.

'Well,' said Mr. Dick, in answer, 'my compliments to her, and I--I

believe I have made a start. I think I have made a start,' said Mr.

Dick, passing his hand among his grey hair, and casting anything but a

confident look at his manuscript. 'You have been to school?'

'Yes, sir,' I answered; 'for a short time.'

'Do you recollect the date,' said Mr. Dick, looking earnestly at me, and

taking up his pen to note it down, 'when King Charles the First had his

head cut off?' I said I believed it happened in the year sixteen hundred

and forty-nine.

'Well,' returned Mr. Dick, scratching his ear with his pen, and looking

dubiously at me. 'So the books say; but I don't see how that can be.

Because, if it was so long ago, how could the people about him have made

that mistake of putting some of the trouble out of his head, after it

was taken off, into mine?'

I was very much surprised by the inquiry; but could give no information

on this point.

'It's very strange,' said Mr. Dick, with a despondent look upon his

papers, and with his hand among his hair again, 'that I never can get

that quite right. I never can make that perfectly clear. But no matter,

no matter!' he said cheerfully, and rousing himself, 'there's time

enough! My compliments to Miss Trotwood, I am getting on very well

indeed.'

I was going away, when he directed my attention to the kite.

'What do you think of that for a kite?' he said.

I answered that it was a beautiful one. I should think it must have been

as much as seven feet high.

'I made it. We'll go and fly it, you and I,' said Mr. Dick. 'Do you see

this?'

He showed me that it was covered with manuscript, very closely and

laboriously written; but so plainly, that as I looked along the lines,

I thought I saw some allusion to King Charles the First's head again, in

one or two places.

'There's plenty of string,' said Mr. Dick, 'and when it flies high, it

takes the facts a long way. That's my manner of diffusing 'em. I don't

know where they may come down. It's according to circumstances, and the

wind, and so forth; but I take my chance of that.'

His face was so very mild and pleasant, and had something so reverend in

it, though it was hale and hearty, that I was not sure but that he was

having a good-humoured jest with me. So I laughed, and he laughed, and

we parted the best friends possible.

'Well, child,' said my aunt, when I went downstairs. 'And what of Mr.

Dick, this morning?'

I informed her that he sent his compliments, and was getting on very

well indeed.

'What do you think of him?' said my aunt.

I had some shadowy idea of endeavouring to evade the question, by

replying that I thought him a very nice gentleman; but my aunt was

not to be so put off, for she laid her work down in her lap, and said,

folding her hands upon it:

'Come! Your sister Betsey Trotwood would have told me what she thought

of anyone, directly. Be as like your sister as you can, and speak out!'

'Is he--is Mr. Dick--I ask because I don't know, aunt--is he at all out

of his mind, then?' I stammered; for I felt I was on dangerous ground.

'Not a morsel,' said my aunt.

'Oh, indeed!' I observed faintly.

'If there is anything in the world,' said my aunt, with great decision

and force of manner, 'that Mr. Dick is not, it's that.'

I had nothing better to offer, than another timid, 'Oh, indeed!'

'He has been CALLED mad,' said my aunt. 'I have a selfish pleasure in

saying he has been called mad, or I should not have had the benefit of

his society and advice for these last ten years and upwards--in fact,

ever since your sister, Betsey Trotwood, disappointed me.'

'So long as that?' I said.

'And nice people they were, who had the audacity to call him mad,'

pursued my aunt. 'Mr. Dick is a sort of distant connexion of mine--it

doesn't matter how; I needn't enter into that. If it hadn't been for me,

his own brother would have shut him up for life. That's all.'

I am afraid it was hypocritical in me, but seeing that my aunt felt

strongly on the subject, I tried to look as if I felt strongly too.

'A proud fool!' said my aunt. 'Because his brother was a little

eccentric--though he is not half so eccentric as a good many people--he

didn't like to have him visible about his house, and sent him away to

some private asylum-place: though he had been left to his particular

care by their deceased father, who thought him almost a natural. And a

wise man he must have been to think so! Mad himself, no doubt.'

Again, as my aunt looked quite convinced, I endeavoured to look quite

convinced also.

'So I stepped in,' said my aunt, 'and made him an offer. I said, "Your

brother's sane--a great deal more sane than you are, or ever will be, it

is to be hoped. Let him have his little income, and come and live with

me. I am not afraid of him, I am not proud, I am ready to take care

of him, and shall not ill-treat him as some people (besides the

asylum-folks) have done." After a good deal of squabbling,' said my

aunt, 'I got him; and he has been here ever since. He is the most

friendly and amenable creature in existence; and as for advice!--But

nobody knows what that man's mind is, except myself.'

My aunt smoothed her dress and shook her head, as if she smoothed

defiance of the whole world out of the one, and shook it out of the

other.

'He had a favourite sister,' said my aunt, 'a good creature, and very

kind to him. But she did what they all do--took a husband. And HE did

what they all do--made her wretched. It had such an effect upon the mind

of Mr. Dick (that's not madness, I hope!) that, combined with his fear

of his brother, and his sense of his unkindness, it threw him into a

fever. That was before he came to me, but the recollection of it is

oppressive to him even now. Did he say anything to you about King

Charles the First, child?'

'Yes, aunt.'

'Ah!' said my aunt, rubbing her nose as if she were a little vexed.

'That's his allegorical way of expressing it. He connects his illness

with great disturbance and agitation, naturally, and that's the figure,

or the simile, or whatever it's called, which he chooses to use. And why

shouldn't he, if he thinks proper!'

I said: 'Certainly, aunt.'

'It's not a business-like way of speaking,' said my aunt, 'nor a worldly

way. I am aware of that; and that's the reason why I insist upon it,

that there shan't be a word about it in his Memorial.'

'Is it a Memorial about his own history that he is writing, aunt?'

'Yes, child,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose again. 'He is memorializing

the Lord Chancellor, or the Lord Somebody or other--one of those people,

at all events, who are paid to be memorialized--about his affairs. I

suppose it will go in, one of these days. He hasn't been able to draw

it up yet, without introducing that mode of expressing himself; but it

don't signify; it keeps him employed.'

In fact, I found out afterwards that Mr. Dick had been for upwards

of ten years endeavouring to keep King Charles the First out of the

Memorial; but he had been constantly getting into it, and was there now.

'I say again,' said my aunt, 'nobody knows what that man's mind is

except myself; and he's the most amenable and friendly creature in

existence. If he likes to fly a kite sometimes, what of that! Franklin

used to fly a kite. He was a Quaker, or something of that sort, if I

am not mistaken. And a Quaker flying a kite is a much more ridiculous

object than anybody else.'

If I could have supposed that my aunt had recounted these particulars

for my especial behoof, and as a piece of confidence in me, I should

have felt very much distinguished, and should have augured favourably

from such a mark of her good opinion. But I could hardly help observing

that she had launched into them, chiefly because the question was raised

in her own mind, and with very little reference to me, though she had

addressed herself to me in the absence of anybody else.

At the same time, I must say that the generosity of her championship

of poor harmless Mr. Dick, not only inspired my young breast with

some selfish hope for myself, but warmed it unselfishly towards her.

I believe that I began to know that there was something about my aunt,

notwithstanding her many eccentricities and odd humours, to be honoured

and trusted in. Though she was just as sharp that day as on the day

before, and was in and out about the donkeys just as often, and was

thrown into a tremendous state of indignation, when a young man, going

by, ogled Janet at a window (which was one of the gravest misdemeanours

that could be committed against my aunt's dignity), she seemed to me to

command more of my respect, if not less of my fear.

The anxiety I underwent, in the interval which necessarily elapsed

before a reply could be received to her letter to Mr. Murdstone, was

extreme; but I made an endeavour to suppress it, and to be as agreeable

as I could in a quiet way, both to my aunt and Mr. Dick. The latter and

I would have gone out to fly the great kite; but that I had still no

other clothes than the anything but ornamental garments with which I

had been decorated on the first day, and which confined me to the house,

except for an hour after dark, when my aunt, for my health's sake,

paraded me up and down on the cliff outside, before going to bed. At

length the reply from Mr. Murdstone came, and my aunt informed me, to my

infinite terror, that he was coming to speak to her herself on the next

day. On the next day, still bundled up in my curious habiliments, I sat

counting the time, flushed and heated by the conflict of sinking hopes

and rising fears within me; and waiting to be startled by the sight of

the gloomy face, whose non-arrival startled me every minute.

MY aunt was a little more imperious and stern than usual, but I observed

no other token of her preparing herself to receive the visitor so much

dreaded by me. She sat at work in the window, and I sat by, with my

thoughts running astray on all possible and impossible results of Mr.

Murdstone's visit, until pretty late in the afternoon. Our dinner had

been indefinitely postponed; but it was growing so late, that my aunt

had ordered it to be got ready, when she gave a sudden alarm of donkeys,

and to my consternation and amazement, I beheld Miss Murdstone, on a

side-saddle, ride deliberately over the sacred piece of green, and stop

in front of the house, looking about her.

'Go along with you!' cried my aunt, shaking her head and her fist at the

window. 'You have no business there. How dare you trespass? Go along!

Oh! you bold-faced thing!'

MY aunt was so exasperated by the coolness with which Miss Murdstone

looked about her, that I really believe she was motionless, and unable

for the moment to dart out according to custom. I seized the opportunity

to inform her who it was; and that the gentleman now coming near the

offender (for the way up was very steep, and he had dropped behind), was

Mr. Murdstone himself.

'I don't care who it is!' cried my aunt, still shaking her head and

gesticulating anything but welcome from the bow-window. 'I won't be

trespassed upon. I won't allow it. Go away! Janet, turn him round.

Lead him off!' and I saw, from behind my aunt, a sort of hurried

battle-piece, in which the donkey stood resisting everybody, with all

his four legs planted different ways, while Janet tried to pull him

round by the bridle, Mr. Murdstone tried to lead him on, Miss Murdstone

struck at Janet with a parasol, and several boys, who had come to see

the engagement, shouted vigorously. But my aunt, suddenly descrying

among them the young malefactor who was the donkey's guardian, and who

was one of the most inveterate offenders against her, though hardly in

his teens, rushed out to the scene of action, pounced upon him, captured

him, dragged him, with his jacket over his head, and his heels grinding

the ground, into the garden, and, calling upon Janet to fetch the

constables and justices, that he might be taken, tried, and executed on

the spot, held him at bay there. This part of the business, however, did

not last long; for the young rascal, being expert at a variety of feints

and dodges, of which my aunt had no conception, soon went whooping away,

leaving some deep impressions of his nailed boots in the flower-beds,

and taking his donkey in triumph with him.

Miss Murdstone, during the latter portion of the contest, had

dismounted, and was now waiting with her brother at the bottom of the

steps, until my aunt should be at leisure to receive them. My aunt, a

little ruffled by the combat, marched past them into the house, with

great dignity, and took no notice of their presence, until they were

announced by Janet.

'Shall I go away, aunt?' I asked, trembling.

'No, sir,' said my aunt. 'Certainly not!' With which she pushed me into

a corner near her, and fenced Me in with a chair, as if it were a prison

or a bar of justice. This position I continued to occupy during the

whole interview, and from it I now saw Mr. and Miss Murdstone enter the

room.

'Oh!' said my aunt, 'I was not aware at first to whom I had the pleasure

of objecting. But I don't allow anybody to ride over that turf. I make

no exceptions. I don't allow anybody to do it.'

'Your regulation is rather awkward to strangers,' said Miss Murdstone.

'Is it!' said my aunt.

Mr. Murdstone seemed afraid of a renewal of hostilities, and interposing

began:

'Miss Trotwood!'

'I beg your pardon,' observed my aunt with a keen look. 'You are the Mr.

Murdstone who married the widow of my late nephew, David Copperfield, of

Blunderstone Rookery!--Though why Rookery, I don't know!'

'I am,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'You'll excuse my saying, sir,' returned my aunt, 'that I think it would

have been a much better and happier thing if you had left that poor

child alone.'

'I so far agree with what Miss Trotwood has remarked,' observed Miss

Murdstone, bridling, 'that I consider our lamented Clara to have been,

in all essential respects, a mere child.'

'It is a comfort to you and me, ma'am,' said my aunt, 'who are getting

on in life, and are not likely to be made unhappy by our personal

attractions, that nobody can say the same of us.'

'No doubt!' returned Miss Murdstone, though, I thought, not with a very

ready or gracious assent. 'And it certainly might have been, as you say,

a better and happier thing for my brother if he had never entered into

such a marriage. I have always been of that opinion.'

'I have no doubt you have,' said my aunt. 'Janet,' ringing the bell, 'my

compliments to Mr. Dick, and beg him to come down.'

Until he came, my aunt sat perfectly upright and stiff, frowning at the

wall. When he came, my aunt performed the ceremony of introduction.

'Mr. Dick. An old and intimate friend. On whose judgement,' said my

aunt, with emphasis, as an admonition to Mr. Dick, who was biting his

forefinger and looking rather foolish, 'I rely.'

Mr. Dick took his finger out of his mouth, on this hint, and stood among

the group, with a grave and attentive expression of face.

My aunt inclined her head to Mr. Murdstone, who went on:

'Miss Trotwood: on the receipt of your letter, I considered it an act of

greater justice to myself, and perhaps of more respect to you-'

'Thank you,' said my aunt, still eyeing him keenly. 'You needn't mind

me.'

'To answer it in person, however inconvenient the journey,' pursued Mr.

Murdstone, 'rather than by letter. This unhappy boy who has run away

from his friends and his occupation--'

'And whose appearance,' interposed his sister, directing general

attention to me in my indefinable costume, 'is perfectly scandalous and

disgraceful.'

'Jane Murdstone,' said her brother, 'have the goodness not to interrupt

me. This unhappy boy, Miss Trotwood, has been the occasion of much

domestic trouble and uneasiness; both during the lifetime of my late

dear wife, and since. He has a sullen, rebellious spirit; a violent

temper; and an untoward, intractable disposition. Both my sister and

myself have endeavoured to correct his vices, but ineffectually. And

I have felt--we both have felt, I may say; my sister being fully in

my confidence--that it is right you should receive this grave and

dispassionate assurance from our lips.'

'It can hardly be necessary for me to confirm anything stated by my

brother,' said Miss Murdstone; 'but I beg to observe, that, of all the

boys in the world, I believe this is the worst boy.'

'Strong!' said my aunt, shortly.

'But not at all too strong for the facts,' returned Miss Murdstone.

'Ha!' said my aunt. 'Well, sir?'

'I have my own opinions,' resumed Mr. Murdstone, whose face darkened

more and more, the more he and my aunt observed each other, which they

did very narrowly, 'as to the best mode of bringing him up; they are

founded, in part, on my knowledge of him, and in part on my knowledge of

my own means and resources. I am responsible for them to myself, I act

upon them, and I say no more about them. It is enough that I place this

boy under the eye of a friend of my own, in a respectable business;

that it does not please him; that he runs away from it; makes himself a

common vagabond about the country; and comes here, in rags, to appeal

to you, Miss Trotwood. I wish to set before you, honourably, the exact

consequences--so far as they are within my knowledge--of your abetting

him in this appeal.'

'But about the respectable business first,' said my aunt. 'If he had

been your own boy, you would have put him to it, just the same, I

suppose?'

'If he had been my brother's own boy,' returned Miss Murdstone, striking

in, 'his character, I trust, would have been altogether different.'

'Or if the poor child, his mother, had been alive, he would still have

gone into the respectable business, would he?' said my aunt.

'I believe,' said Mr. Murdstone, with an inclination of his head,

'that Clara would have disputed nothing which myself and my sister Jane

Murdstone were agreed was for the best.'

Miss Murdstone confirmed this with an audible murmur.

'Humph!' said my aunt. 'Unfortunate baby!'

Mr. Dick, who had been rattling his money all this time, was rattling it

so loudly now, that my aunt felt it necessary to check him with a look,

before saying:

'The poor child's annuity died with her?'

'Died with her,' replied Mr. Murdstone.

'And there was no settlement of the little property--the house and

garden--the what's-its-name Rookery without any rooks in it--upon her

boy?'

'It had been left to her, unconditionally, by her first husband,'

Mr. Murdstone began, when my aunt caught him up with the greatest

irascibility and impatience.

'Good Lord, man, there's no occasion to say that. Left to her

unconditionally! I think I see David Copperfield looking forward to any

condition of any sort or kind, though it stared him point-blank in the

face! Of course it was left to her unconditionally. But when she married

again--when she took that most disastrous step of marrying you, in

short,' said my aunt, 'to be plain--did no one put in a word for the boy

at that time?'

'My late wife loved her second husband, ma'am,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'and

trusted implicitly in him.'

'Your late wife, sir, was a most unworldly, most unhappy, most

unfortunate baby,' returned my aunt, shaking her head at him. 'That's

what she was. And now, what have you got to say next?'

'Merely this, Miss Trotwood,' he returned. 'I am here to take David

back--to take him back unconditionally, to dispose of him as I think

proper, and to deal with him as I think right. I am not here to make any

promise, or give any pledge to anybody. You may possibly have some

idea, Miss Trotwood, of abetting him in his running away, and in his

complaints to you. Your manner, which I must say does not seem intended

to propitiate, induces me to think it possible. Now I must caution you

that if you abet him once, you abet him for good and all; if you step

in between him and me, now, you must step in, Miss Trotwood, for ever.

I cannot trifle, or be trifled with. I am here, for the first and last

time, to take him away. Is he ready to go? If he is not--and you tell me

he is not; on any pretence; it is indifferent to me what--my doors are

shut against him henceforth, and yours, I take it for granted, are open

to him.'

To this address, my aunt had listened with the closest attention,

sitting perfectly upright, with her hands folded on one knee, and

looking grimly on the speaker. When he had finished, she turned her

eyes so as to command Miss Murdstone, without otherwise disturbing her

attitude, and said:

'Well, ma'am, have YOU got anything to remark?'

'Indeed, Miss Trotwood,' said Miss Murdstone, 'all that I could say has

been so well said by my brother, and all that I know to be the fact

has been so plainly stated by him, that I have nothing to add except my

thanks for your politeness. For your very great politeness, I am sure,'

said Miss Murdstone; with an irony which no more affected my aunt, than

it discomposed the cannon I had slept by at Chatham.

'And what does the boy say?' said my aunt. 'Are you ready to go, David?'

I answered no, and entreated her not to let me go. I said that neither

Mr. nor Miss Murdstone had ever liked me, or had ever been kind to me.

That they had made my mama, who always loved me dearly, unhappy about

me, and that I knew it well, and that Peggotty knew it. I said that I

had been more miserable than I thought anybody could believe, who only

knew how young I was. And I begged and prayed my aunt--I forget in

what terms now, but I remember that they affected me very much then--to

befriend and protect me, for my father's sake.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'what shall I do with this child?'

Mr. Dick considered, hesitated, brightened, and rejoined, 'Have him

measured for a suit of clothes directly.'

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt triumphantly, 'give me your hand, for your

common sense is invaluable.' Having shaken it with great cordiality, she

pulled me towards her and said to Mr. Murdstone:

'You can go when you like; I'll take my chance with the boy. If he's all

you say he is, at least I can do as much for him then, as you have done.

But I don't believe a word of it.'

'Miss Trotwood,' rejoined Mr. Murdstone, shrugging his shoulders, as he

rose, 'if you were a gentleman--'

'Bah! Stuff and nonsense!' said my aunt. 'Don't talk to me!'

'How exquisitely polite!' exclaimed Miss Murdstone, rising.

'Overpowering, really!'

'Do you think I don't know,' said my aunt, turning a deaf ear to the

sister, and continuing to address the brother, and to shake her head at

him with infinite expression, 'what kind of life you must have led that

poor, unhappy, misdirected baby? Do you think I don't know what a woeful

day it was for the soft little creature when you first came in her

way--smirking and making great eyes at her, I'll be bound, as if you

couldn't say boh! to a goose!'

'I never heard anything so elegant!' said Miss Murdstone.

'Do you think I can't understand you as well as if I had seen you,'

pursued my aunt, 'now that I DO see and hear you--which, I tell you

candidly, is anything but a pleasure to me? Oh yes, bless us! who so

smooth and silky as Mr. Murdstone at first! The poor, benighted innocent

had never seen such a man. He was made of sweetness. He worshipped her.

He doted on her boy--tenderly doted on him! He was to be another father

to him, and they were all to live together in a garden of roses, weren't

they? Ugh! Get along with you, do!' said my aunt.

'I never heard anything like this person in my life!' exclaimed Miss

Murdstone.

'And when you had made sure of the poor little fool,' said my aunt--'God

forgive me that I should call her so, and she gone where YOU won't go in

a hurry--because you had not done wrong enough to her and hers, you

must begin to train her, must you? begin to break her, like a poor

caged bird, and wear her deluded life away, in teaching her to sing YOUR

notes?'

'This is either insanity or intoxication,' said Miss Murdstone, in a

perfect agony at not being able to turn the current of my aunt's address

towards herself; 'and my suspicion is that it's intoxication.'

Miss Betsey, without taking the least notice of the interruption,

continued to address herself to Mr. Murdstone as if there had been no

such thing.

'Mr. Murdstone,' she said, shaking her finger at him, 'you were a tyrant

to the simple baby, and you broke her heart. She was a loving baby--I

know that; I knew it, years before you ever saw her--and through the

best part of her weakness you gave her the wounds she died of. There

is the truth for your comfort, however you like it. And you and your

instruments may make the most of it.'

'Allow me to inquire, Miss Trotwood,' interposed Miss Murdstone,

'whom you are pleased to call, in a choice of words in which I am not

experienced, my brother's instruments?'

'It was clear enough, as I have told you, years before YOU ever saw

her--and why, in the mysterious dispensations of Providence, you ever

did see her, is more than humanity can comprehend--it was clear enough

that the poor soft little thing would marry somebody, at some time or

other; but I did hope it wouldn't have been as bad as it has turned out.

That was the time, Mr. Murdstone, when she gave birth to her boy here,'

said my aunt; 'to the poor child you sometimes tormented her through

afterwards, which is a disagreeable remembrance and makes the sight of

him odious now. Aye, aye! you needn't wince!' said my aunt. 'I know it's

true without that.'

He had stood by the door, all this while, observant of her with a smile

upon his face, though his black eyebrows were heavily contracted. I

remarked now, that, though the smile was on his face still, his colour

had gone in a moment, and he seemed to breathe as if he had been

running.

'Good day, sir,' said my aunt, 'and good-bye! Good day to you, too,

ma'am,' said my aunt, turning suddenly upon his sister. 'Let me see you

ride a donkey over my green again, and as sure as you have a head upon

your shoulders, I'll knock your bonnet off, and tread upon it!'

It would require a painter, and no common painter too, to depict my

aunt's face as she delivered herself of this very unexpected sentiment,

and Miss Murdstone's face as she heard it. But the manner of the speech,

no less than the matter, was so fiery, that Miss Murdstone, without a

word in answer, discreetly put her arm through her brother's, and walked

haughtily out of the cottage; my aunt remaining in the window looking

after them; prepared, I have no doubt, in case of the donkey's

reappearance, to carry her threat into instant execution.

No attempt at defiance being made, however, her face gradually relaxed,

and became so pleasant, that I was emboldened to kiss and thank her;

which I did with great heartiness, and with both my arms clasped round

her neck. I then shook hands with Mr. Dick, who shook hands with me a

great many times, and hailed this happy close of the proceedings with

repeated bursts of laughter.

'You'll consider yourself guardian, jointly with me, of this child, Mr.

Dick,' said my aunt.

'I shall be delighted,' said Mr. Dick, 'to be the guardian of David's

son.'

'Very good,' returned my aunt, 'that's settled. I have been thinking, do

you know, Mr. Dick, that I might call him Trotwood?'

'Certainly, certainly. Call him Trotwood, certainly,' said Mr. Dick.

'David's son's Trotwood.'

'Trotwood Copperfield, you mean,' returned my aunt.

'Yes, to be sure. Yes. Trotwood Copperfield,' said Mr. Dick, a little

abashed.

My aunt took so kindly to the notion, that some ready-made clothes,

which were purchased for me that afternoon, were marked 'Trotwood

Copperfield', in her own handwriting, and in indelible marking-ink,

before I put them on; and it was settled that all the other clothes

which were ordered to be made for me (a complete outfit was bespoke that

afternoon) should be marked in the same way.

Thus I began my new life, in a new name, and with everything new about

me. Now that the state of doubt was over, I felt, for many days,

like one in a dream. I never thought that I had a curious couple of

guardians, in my aunt and Mr. Dick. I never thought of anything about

myself, distinctly. The two things clearest in my mind were, that a

remoteness had come upon the old Blunderstone life--which seemed to lie

in the haze of an immeasurable distance; and that a curtain had for ever

fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby's. No one has ever raised that

curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative,

with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly. The remembrance of that

life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering

and want of hope, that I have never had the courage even to examine how

long I was doomed to lead it. Whether it lasted for a year, or more, or

less, I do not know. I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that

I have written, and there I leave it.

CHAPTER 15. I MAKE ANOTHER BEGINNING

Mr. Dick and I soon became the best of friends, and very often, when his

day's work was done, went out together to fly the great kite. Every day

of his life he had a long sitting at the Memorial, which never made the

least progress, however hard he laboured, for King Charles the First

always strayed into it, sooner or later, and then it was thrown aside,

and another one begun. The patience and hope with which he bore these

perpetual disappointments, the mild perception he had that there was

something wrong about King Charles the First, the feeble efforts he made

to keep him out, and the certainty with which he came in, and tumbled

the Memorial out of all shape, made a deep impression on me. What Mr.

Dick supposed would come of the Memorial, if it were completed; where he

thought it was to go, or what he thought it was to do; he knew no more

than anybody else, I believe. Nor was it at all necessary that he should

trouble himself with such questions, for if anything were certain under

the sun, it was certain that the Memorial never would be finished. It

was quite an affecting sight, I used to think, to see him with the kite

when it was up a great height in the air. What he had told me, in his

room, about his belief in its disseminating the statements pasted on it,

which were nothing but old leaves of abortive Memorials, might have been

a fancy with him sometimes; but not when he was out, looking up at

the kite in the sky, and feeling it pull and tug at his hand. He never

looked so serene as he did then. I used to fancy, as I sat by him of an

evening, on a green slope, and saw him watch the kite high in the quiet

air, that it lifted his mind out of its confusion, and bore it (such was

my boyish thought) into the skies. As he wound the string in and it came

lower and lower down out of the beautiful light, until it fluttered to

the ground, and lay there like a dead thing, he seemed to wake gradually

out of a dream; and I remember to have seen him take it up, and look

about him in a lost way, as if they had both come down together, so that

I pitied him with all my heart.

While I advanced in friendship and intimacy with Mr. Dick, I did not

go backward in the favour of his staunch friend, my aunt. She took

so kindly to me, that, in the course of a few weeks, she shortened my

adopted name of Trotwood into Trot; and even encouraged me to hope, that

if I went on as I had begun, I might take equal rank in her affections

with my sister Betsey Trotwood.

'Trot,' said my aunt one evening, when the backgammon-board was placed

as usual for herself and Mr. Dick, 'we must not forget your education.'

This was my only subject of anxiety, and I felt quite delighted by her

referring to it.

'Should you like to go to school at Canterbury?' said my aunt.

I replied that I should like it very much, as it was so near her.

'Good,' said my aunt. 'Should you like to go tomorrow?'

Being already no stranger to the general rapidity of my aunt's

evolutions, I was not surprised by the suddenness of the proposal, and

said: 'Yes.'

'Good,' said my aunt again. 'Janet, hire the grey pony and chaise

tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, and pack up Master Trotwood's clothes

tonight.'

I was greatly elated by these orders; but my heart smote me for my

selfishness, when I witnessed their effect on Mr. Dick, who was so

low-spirited at the prospect of our separation, and played so ill in

consequence, that my aunt, after giving him several admonitory raps on

the knuckles with her dice-box, shut up the board, and declined to play

with him any more. But, on hearing from my aunt that I should sometimes

come over on a Saturday, and that he could sometimes come and see me

on a Wednesday, he revived; and vowed to make another kite for those

occasions, of proportions greatly surpassing the present one. In the

morning he was downhearted again, and would have sustained himself by

giving me all the money he had in his possession, gold and silver too,

if my aunt had not interposed, and limited the gift to five shillings,

which, at his earnest petition, were afterwards increased to ten. We

parted at the garden-gate in a most affectionate manner, and Mr. Dick

did not go into the house until my aunt had driven me out of sight of

it.

My aunt, who was perfectly indifferent to public opinion, drove the grey

pony through Dover in a masterly manner; sitting high and stiff like

a state coachman, keeping a steady eye upon him wherever he went, and

making a point of not letting him have his own way in any respect. When

we came into the country road, she permitted him to relax a little,

however; and looking at me down in a valley of cushion by her side,

asked me whether I was happy?

'Very happy indeed, thank you, aunt,' I said.

She was much gratified; and both her hands being occupied, patted me on

the head with her whip.

'Is it a large school, aunt?' I asked.

'Why, I don't know,' said my aunt. 'We are going to Mr. Wickfield's

first.'

'Does he keep a school?' I asked.

'No, Trot,' said my aunt. 'He keeps an office.'

I asked for no more information about Mr. Wickfield, as she offered

none, and we conversed on other subjects until we came to Canterbury,

where, as it was market-day, my aunt had a great opportunity of

insinuating the grey pony among carts, baskets, vegetables, and

huckster's goods. The hair-breadth turns and twists we made, drew down

upon us a variety of speeches from the people standing about, which

were not always complimentary; but my aunt drove on with perfect

indifference, and I dare say would have taken her own way with as much

coolness through an enemy's country.

At length we stopped before a very old house bulging out over the road;

a house with long low lattice-windows bulging out still farther, and

beams with carved heads on the ends bulging out too, so that I fancied

the whole house was leaning forward, trying to see who was passing on

the narrow pavement below. It was quite spotless in its cleanliness.

The old-fashioned brass knocker on the low arched door, ornamented with

carved garlands of fruit and flowers, twinkled like a star; the two

stone steps descending to the door were as white as if they had been

covered with fair linen; and all the angles and corners, and carvings

and mouldings, and quaint little panes of glass, and quainter little

windows, though as old as the hills, were as pure as any snow that ever

fell upon the hills.

When the pony-chaise stopped at the door, and my eyes were intent upon

the house, I saw a cadaverous face appear at a small window on the

ground floor (in a little round tower that formed one side of the

house), and quickly disappear. The low arched door then opened, and

the face came out. It was quite as cadaverous as it had looked in the

window, though in the grain of it there was that tinge of red which is

sometimes to be observed in the skins of red-haired people. It belonged

to a red-haired person--a youth of fifteen, as I take it now, but

looking much older--whose hair was cropped as close as the closest

stubble; who had hardly any eyebrows, and no eyelashes, and eyes of a

red-brown, so unsheltered and unshaded, that I remember wondering how he

went to sleep. He was high-shouldered and bony; dressed in decent black,

with a white wisp of a neckcloth; buttoned up to the throat; and had a

long, lank, skeleton hand, which particularly attracted my attention, as

he stood at the pony's head, rubbing his chin with it, and looking up at

us in the chaise.

'Is Mr. Wickfield at home, Uriah Heep?' said my aunt.

'Mr. Wickfield's at home, ma'am,' said Uriah Heep, 'if you'll please to

walk in there'--pointing with his long hand to the room he meant.

We got out; and leaving him to hold the pony, went into a long low

parlour looking towards the street, from the window of which I caught a

glimpse, as I went in, of Uriah Heep breathing into the pony's nostrils,

and immediately covering them with his hand, as if he were putting

some spell upon him. Opposite to the tall old chimney-piece were two

portraits: one of a gentleman with grey hair (though not by any means

an old man) and black eyebrows, who was looking over some papers tied

together with red tape; the other, of a lady, with a very placid and

sweet expression of face, who was looking at me.

I believe I was turning about in search of Uriah's picture, when, a door

at the farther end of the room opening, a gentleman entered, at sight of

whom I turned to the first-mentioned portrait again, to make quite sure

that it had not come out of its frame. But it was stationary; and as the

gentleman advanced into the light, I saw that he was some years older

than when he had had his picture painted.

'Miss Betsey Trotwood,' said the gentleman, 'pray walk in. I was engaged

for a moment, but you'll excuse my being busy. You know my motive. I

have but one in life.'

Miss Betsey thanked him, and we went into his room, which was furnished

as an office, with books, papers, tin boxes, and so forth. It looked

into a garden, and had an iron safe let into the wall; so immediately

over the mantelshelf, that I wondered, as I sat down, how the sweeps got

round it when they swept the chimney.

'Well, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield; for I soon found that it

was he, and that he was a lawyer, and steward of the estates of a rich

gentleman of the county; 'what wind blows you here? Not an ill wind, I

hope?'

'No,' replied my aunt. 'I have not come for any law.'

'That's right, ma'am,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'You had better come for

anything else.' His hair was quite white now, though his eyebrows were

still black. He had a very agreeable face, and, I thought, was handsome.

There was a certain richness in his complexion, which I had been long

accustomed, under Peggotty's tuition, to connect with port wine; and I

fancied it was in his voice too, and referred his growing corpulency

to the same cause. He was very cleanly dressed, in a blue coat, striped

waistcoat, and nankeen trousers; and his fine frilled shirt and cambric

neckcloth looked unusually soft and white, reminding my strolling fancy

(I call to mind) of the plumage on the breast of a swan.

'This is my nephew,' said my aunt.

'Wasn't aware you had one, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield.

'My grand-nephew, that is to say,' observed my aunt.

'Wasn't aware you had a grand-nephew, I give you my word,' said Mr.

Wickfield.

'I have adopted him,' said my aunt, with a wave of her hand, importing

that his knowledge and his ignorance were all one to her, 'and I have

brought him here, to put to a school where he may be thoroughly well

taught, and well treated. Now tell me where that school is, and what it

is, and all about it.'

'Before I can advise you properly,' said Mr. Wickfield--'the old

question, you know. What's your motive in this?'

'Deuce take the man!' exclaimed my aunt. 'Always fishing for motives,

when they're on the surface! Why, to make the child happy and useful.'

'It must be a mixed motive, I think,' said Mr. Wickfield, shaking his

head and smiling incredulously.

'A mixed fiddlestick,' returned my aunt. 'You claim to have one plain

motive in all you do yourself. You don't suppose, I hope, that you are

the only plain dealer in the world?'

'Ay, but I have only one motive in life, Miss Trotwood,' he rejoined,

smiling. 'Other people have dozens, scores, hundreds. I have only one.

There's the difference. However, that's beside the question. The best

school? Whatever the motive, you want the best?'

My aunt nodded assent.

'At the best we have,' said Mr. Wickfield, considering, 'your nephew

couldn't board just now.'

'But he could board somewhere else, I suppose?' suggested my aunt.

Mr. Wickfield thought I could. After a little discussion, he proposed to

take my aunt to the school, that she might see it and judge for herself;

also, to take her, with the same object, to two or three houses where he

thought I could be boarded. My aunt embracing the proposal, we were all

three going out together, when he stopped and said:

'Our little friend here might have some motive, perhaps, for objecting

to the arrangements. I think we had better leave him behind?'

My aunt seemed disposed to contest the point; but to facilitate matters

I said I would gladly remain behind, if they pleased; and returned into

Mr. Wickfield's office, where I sat down again, in the chair I had first

occupied, to await their return.

It so happened that this chair was opposite a narrow passage, which

ended in the little circular room where I had seen Uriah Heep's pale

face looking out of the window. Uriah, having taken the pony to a

neighbouring stable, was at work at a desk in this room, which had a

brass frame on the top to hang paper upon, and on which the writing he

was making a copy of was then hanging. Though his face was towards me, I

thought, for some time, the writing being between us, that he could not

see me; but looking that way more attentively, it made me uncomfortable

to observe that, every now and then, his sleepless eyes would come below

the writing, like two red suns, and stealthily stare at me for I dare

say a whole minute at a time, during which his pen went, or pretended

to go, as cleverly as ever. I made several attempts to get out of their

way--such as standing on a chair to look at a map on the other side of

the room, and poring over the columns of a Kentish newspaper--but they

always attracted me back again; and whenever I looked towards those two

red suns, I was sure to find them, either just rising or just setting.

At length, much to my relief, my aunt and Mr. Wickfield came back,

after a pretty long absence. They were not so successful as I could have

wished; for though the advantages of the school were undeniable, my aunt

had not approved of any of the boarding-houses proposed for me.

'It's very unfortunate,' said my aunt. 'I don't know what to do, Trot.'

'It does happen unfortunately,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'But I'll tell you

what you can do, Miss Trotwood.'

'What's that?' inquired my aunt.

'Leave your nephew here, for the present. He's a quiet fellow. He

won't disturb me at all. It's a capital house for study. As quiet as a

monastery, and almost as roomy. Leave him here.'

My aunt evidently liked the offer, though she was delicate of accepting

it. So did I. 'Come, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'This is the

way out of the difficulty. It's only a temporary arrangement, you know.

If it don't act well, or don't quite accord with our mutual convenience,

he can easily go to the right-about. There will be time to find some

better place for him in the meanwhile. You had better determine to leave

him here for the present!'

'I am very much obliged to you,' said my aunt; 'and so is he, I see;

but--'

'Come! I know what you mean,' cried Mr. Wickfield. 'You shall not be

oppressed by the receipt of favours, Miss Trotwood. You may pay for

him, if you like. We won't be hard about terms, but you shall pay if you

will.'

'On that understanding,' said my aunt, 'though it doesn't lessen the

real obligation, I shall be very glad to leave him.'

'Then come and see my little housekeeper,' said Mr. Wickfield.

We accordingly went up a wonderful old staircase; with a balustrade

so broad that we might have gone up that, almost as easily; and into

a shady old drawing-room, lighted by some three or four of the quaint

windows I had looked up at from the street: which had old oak seats

in them, that seemed to have come of the same trees as the shining oak

floor, and the great beams in the ceiling. It was a prettily furnished

room, with a piano and some lively furniture in red and green, and some

flowers. It seemed to be all old nooks and corners; and in every nook

and corner there was some queer little table, or cupboard, or bookcase,

or seat, or something or other, that made me think there was not such

another good corner in the room; until I looked at the next one, and

found it equal to it, if not better. On everything there was the same

air of retirement and cleanliness that marked the house outside.

Mr. Wickfield tapped at a door in a corner of the panelled wall, and a

girl of about my own age came quickly out and kissed him. On her face,

I saw immediately the placid and sweet expression of the lady whose

picture had looked at me downstairs. It seemed to my imagination as

if the portrait had grown womanly, and the original remained a child.

Although her face was quite bright and happy, there was a tranquillity

about it, and about her--a quiet, good, calm spirit--that I never have

forgotten; that I shall never forget. This was his little housekeeper,

his daughter Agnes, Mr. Wickfield said. When I heard how he said it, and

saw how he held her hand, I guessed what the one motive of his life was.

She had a little basket-trifle hanging at her side, with keys in it; and

she looked as staid and as discreet a housekeeper as the old house

could have. She listened to her father as he told her about me, with a

pleasant face; and when he had concluded, proposed to my aunt that we

should go upstairs and see my room. We all went together, she before us:

and a glorious old room it was, with more oak beams, and diamond panes;

and the broad balustrade going all the way up to it.

I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a

stained glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But

I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old

staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and I

associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield

ever afterwards.

My aunt was as happy as I was, in the arrangement made for me; and we

went down to the drawing-room again, well pleased and gratified. As she

would not hear of staying to dinner, lest she should by any chance fail

to arrive at home with the grey pony before dark; and as I apprehend Mr.

Wickfield knew her too well to argue any point with her; some lunch was

provided for her there, and Agnes went back to her governess, and Mr.

Wickfield to his office. So we were left to take leave of one another

without any restraint.

She told me that everything would be arranged for me by Mr. Wickfield,

and that I should want for nothing, and gave me the kindest words and

the best advice.

'Trot,' said my aunt in conclusion, 'be a credit to yourself, to me, and

Mr. Dick, and Heaven be with you!'

I was greatly overcome, and could only thank her, again and again, and

send my love to Mr. Dick.

'Never,' said my aunt, 'be mean in anything; never be false; never be

cruel. Avoid those three vices, Trot, and I can always be hopeful of

you.'

I promised, as well as I could, that I would not abuse her kindness or

forget her admonition.

'The pony's at the door,' said my aunt, 'and I am off! Stay here.' With

these words she embraced me hastily, and went out of the room, shutting

the door after her. At first I was startled by so abrupt a departure,

and almost feared I had displeased her; but when I looked into the

street, and saw how dejectedly she got into the chaise, and drove away

without looking up, I understood her better and did not do her that

injustice.

By five o'clock, which was Mr. Wickfield's dinner-hour, I had mustered

up my spirits again, and was ready for my knife and fork. The cloth was

only laid for us two; but Agnes was waiting in the drawing-room before

dinner, went down with her father, and sat opposite to him at table. I

doubted whether he could have dined without her.

We did not stay there, after dinner, but came upstairs into the

drawing-room again: in one snug corner of which, Agnes set glasses for

her father, and a decanter of port wine. I thought he would have missed

its usual flavour, if it had been put there for him by any other hands.

There he sat, taking his wine, and taking a good deal of it, for two

hours; while Agnes played on the piano, worked, and talked to him and

me. He was, for the most part, gay and cheerful with us; but sometimes

his eyes rested on her, and he fell into a brooding state, and was

silent. She always observed this quickly, I thought, and always roused

him with a question or caress. Then he came out of his meditation, and

drank more wine.

Agnes made the tea, and presided over it; and the time passed away after

it, as after dinner, until she went to bed; when her father took her

in his arms and kissed her, and, she being gone, ordered candles in his

office. Then I went to bed too.

But in the course of the evening I had rambled down to the door, and a

little way along the street, that I might have another peep at the old

houses, and the grey Cathedral; and might think of my coming through

that old city on my journey, and of my passing the very house I lived

in, without knowing it. As I came back, I saw Uriah Heep shutting up

the office; and feeling friendly towards everybody, went in and spoke

to him, and at parting, gave him my hand. But oh, what a clammy hand his

was! as ghostly to the touch as to the sight! I rubbed mine afterwards,

to warm it, AND TO RUB HIS OFF.

It was such an uncomfortable hand, that, when I went to my room, it was

still cold and wet upon my memory. Leaning out of the window, and seeing

one of the faces on the beam-ends looking at me sideways, I fancied it

was Uriah Heep got up there somehow, and shut him out in a hurry.

CHAPTER 16. I AM A NEW BOY IN MORE SENSES THAN ONE

Next morning, after breakfast, I entered on school life again. I went,

accompanied by Mr. Wickfield, to the scene of my future studies--a grave

building in a courtyard, with a learned air about it that seemed very

well suited to the stray rooks and jackdaws who came down from the

Cathedral towers to walk with a clerkly bearing on the grass-plot--and

was introduced to my new master, Doctor Strong.

Doctor Strong looked almost as rusty, to my thinking, as the tall iron

rails and gates outside the house; and almost as stiff and heavy as the

great stone urns that flanked them, and were set up, on the top of

the red-brick wall, at regular distances all round the court, like

sublimated skittles, for Time to play at. He was in his library (I mean

Doctor Strong was), with his clothes not particularly well brushed, and

his hair not particularly well combed; his knee-smalls unbraced; his

long black gaiters unbuttoned; and his shoes yawning like two caverns on

the hearth-rug. Turning upon me a lustreless eye, that reminded me of

a long-forgotten blind old horse who once used to crop the grass, and

tumble over the graves, in Blunderstone churchyard, he said he was glad

to see me: and then he gave me his hand; which I didn't know what to do

with, as it did nothing for itself.

But, sitting at work, not far from Doctor Strong, was a very pretty

young lady--whom he called Annie, and who was his daughter, I

supposed--who got me out of my difficulty by kneeling down to put Doctor

Strong's shoes on, and button his gaiters, which she did with great

cheerfulness and quickness. When she had finished, and we were going

out to the schoolroom, I was much surprised to hear Mr. Wickfield,

in bidding her good morning, address her as 'Mrs. Strong'; and I was

wondering could she be Doctor Strong's son's wife, or could she be Mrs.

Doctor Strong, when Doctor Strong himself unconsciously enlightened me.

'By the by, Wickfield,' he said, stopping in a passage with his hand on

my shoulder; 'you have not found any suitable provision for my wife's

cousin yet?'

'No,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'No. Not yet.'

'I could wish it done as soon as it can be done, Wickfield,' said

Doctor Strong, 'for Jack Maldon is needy, and idle; and of those two

bad things, worse things sometimes come. What does Doctor Watts say,' he

added, looking at me, and moving his head to the time of his quotation,

'"Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do."'

'Egad, Doctor,' returned Mr. Wickfield, 'if Doctor Watts knew mankind,

he might have written, with as much truth, "Satan finds some mischief

still, for busy hands to do." The busy people achieve their full share

of mischief in the world, you may rely upon it. What have the people

been about, who have been the busiest in getting money, and in getting

power, this century or two? No mischief?'

'Jack Maldon will never be very busy in getting either, I expect,' said

Doctor Strong, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

'Perhaps not,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'and you bring me back to the

question, with an apology for digressing. No, I have not been able

to dispose of Mr. Jack Maldon yet. I believe,' he said this with some

hesitation, 'I penetrate your motive, and it makes the thing more

difficult.'

'My motive,' returned Doctor Strong, 'is to make some suitable provision

for a cousin, and an old playfellow, of Annie's.'

'Yes, I know,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'at home or abroad.'

'Aye!' replied the Doctor, apparently wondering why he emphasized those

words so much. 'At home or abroad.'

'Your own expression, you know,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Or abroad.'

'Surely,' the Doctor answered. 'Surely. One or other.'

'One or other? Have you no choice?' asked Mr. Wickfield.

'No,' returned the Doctor.

'No?' with astonishment.

'Not the least.'

'No motive,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'for meaning abroad, and not at home?'

'No,' returned the Doctor.

'I am bound to believe you, and of course I do believe you,' said Mr.

Wickfield. 'It might have simplified my office very much, if I had known

it before. But I confess I entertained another impression.'

Doctor Strong regarded him with a puzzled and doubting look,

which almost immediately subsided into a smile that gave me great

encouragement; for it was full of amiability and sweetness, and there

was a simplicity in it, and indeed in his whole manner, when the

studious, pondering frost upon it was got through, very attractive and

hopeful to a young scholar like me. Repeating 'no', and 'not the least',

and other short assurances to the same purport, Doctor Strong jogged

on before us, at a queer, uneven pace; and we followed: Mr. Wickfield,

looking grave, I observed, and shaking his head to himself, without

knowing that I saw him.

The schoolroom was a pretty large hall, on the quietest side of the

house, confronted by the stately stare of some half-dozen of the great

urns, and commanding a peep of an old secluded garden belonging to the

Doctor, where the peaches were ripening on the sunny south wall. There

were two great aloes, in tubs, on the turf outside the windows; the

broad hard leaves of which plant (looking as if they were made of

painted tin) have ever since, by association, been symbolical to me

of silence and retirement. About five-and-twenty boys were studiously

engaged at their books when we went in, but they rose to give the Doctor

good morning, and remained standing when they saw Mr. Wickfield and me.

'A new boy, young gentlemen,' said the Doctor; 'Trotwood Copperfield.'

One Adams, who was the head-boy, then stepped out of his place and

welcomed me. He looked like a young clergyman, in his white cravat, but

he was very affable and good-humoured; and he showed me my place, and

presented me to the masters, in a gentlemanly way that would have put me

at my ease, if anything could.

It seemed to me so long, however, since I had been among such boys,

or among any companions of my own age, except Mick Walker and Mealy

Potatoes, that I felt as strange as ever I have done in my life. I was

so conscious of having passed through scenes of which they could have

no knowledge, and of having acquired experiences foreign to my age,

appearance, and condition as one of them, that I half believed it was an

imposture to come there as an ordinary little schoolboy. I had become,

in the Murdstone and Grinby time, however short or long it may have

been, so unused to the sports and games of boys, that I knew I was

awkward and inexperienced in the commonest things belonging to them.

Whatever I had learnt, had so slipped away from me in the sordid cares

of my life from day to night, that now, when I was examined about what

I knew, I knew nothing, and was put into the lowest form of the school.

But, troubled as I was, by my want of boyish skill, and of book-learning

too, I was made infinitely more uncomfortable by the consideration,

that, in what I did know, I was much farther removed from my companions

than in what I did not. My mind ran upon what they would think, if they

knew of my familiar acquaintance with the King's Bench Prison? Was there

anything about me which would reveal my proceedings in connexion with

the Micawber family--all those pawnings, and sellings, and suppers--in

spite of myself? Suppose some of the boys had seen me coming through

Canterbury, wayworn and ragged, and should find me out? What would they

say, who made so light of money, if they could know how I had scraped my

halfpence together, for the purchase of my daily saveloy and beer, or

my slices of pudding? How would it affect them, who were so innocent of

London life, and London streets, to discover how knowing I was (and was

ashamed to be) in some of the meanest phases of both? All this ran in

my head so much, on that first day at Doctor Strong's, that I felt

distrustful of my slightest look and gesture; shrunk within myself

whensoever I was approached by one of my new schoolfellows; and hurried

off the minute school was over, afraid of committing myself in my

response to any friendly notice or advance.

But there was such an influence in Mr. Wickfield's old house, that when

I knocked at it, with my new school-books under my arm, I began to feel

my uneasiness softening away. As I went up to my airy old room, the

grave shadow of the staircase seemed to fall upon my doubts and fears,

and to make the past more indistinct. I sat there, sturdily conning my

books, until dinner-time (we were out of school for good at three); and

went down, hopeful of becoming a passable sort of boy yet.

Agnes was in the drawing-room, waiting for her father, who was detained

by someone in his office. She met me with her pleasant smile, and asked

me how I liked the school. I told her I should like it very much, I

hoped; but I was a little strange to it at first.

'You have never been to school,' I said, 'have you?' 'Oh yes! Every

day.'

'Ah, but you mean here, at your own home?'

'Papa couldn't spare me to go anywhere else,' she answered, smiling and

shaking her head. 'His housekeeper must be in his house, you know.'

'He is very fond of you, I am sure,' I said.

She nodded 'Yes,' and went to the door to listen for his coming up, that

she might meet him on the stairs. But, as he was not there, she came

back again.

'Mama has been dead ever since I was born,' she said, in her quiet way.

'I only know her picture, downstairs. I saw you looking at it yesterday.

Did you think whose it was?'

I told her yes, because it was so like herself.

'Papa says so, too,' said Agnes, pleased. 'Hark! That's papa now!'

Her bright calm face lighted up with pleasure as she went to meet him,

and as they came in, hand in hand. He greeted me cordially; and told

me I should certainly be happy under Doctor Strong, who was one of the

gentlest of men.

'There may be some, perhaps--I don't know that there are--who abuse

his kindness,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Never be one of those, Trotwood, in

anything. He is the least suspicious of mankind; and whether that's

a merit, or whether it's a blemish, it deserves consideration in all

dealings with the Doctor, great or small.'

He spoke, I thought, as if he were weary, or dissatisfied with

something; but I did not pursue the question in my mind, for dinner was

just then announced, and we went down and took the same seats as before.

We had scarcely done so, when Uriah Heep put in his red head and his

lank hand at the door, and said:

'Here's Mr. Maldon begs the favour of a word, sir.'

'I am but this moment quit of Mr. Maldon,' said his master.

'Yes, sir,' returned Uriah; 'but Mr. Maldon has come back, and he begs

the favour of a word.'

As he held the door open with his hand, Uriah looked at me, and looked

at Agnes, and looked at the dishes, and looked at the plates, and looked

at every object in the room, I thought,--yet seemed to look at nothing;

he made such an appearance all the while of keeping his red eyes

dutifully on his master. 'I beg your pardon. It's only to say, on

reflection,' observed a voice behind Uriah, as Uriah's head was

pushed away, and the speaker's substituted--'pray excuse me for this

intrusion--that as it seems I have no choice in the matter, the sooner

I go abroad the better. My cousin Annie did say, when we talked of it,

that she liked to have her friends within reach rather than to have them

banished, and the old Doctor--'

'Doctor Strong, was that?' Mr. Wickfield interposed, gravely.

'Doctor Strong, of course,' returned the other; 'I call him the old

Doctor; it's all the same, you know.'

'I don't know,' returned Mr. Wickfield.

'Well, Doctor Strong,' said the other--'Doctor Strong was of the same

mind, I believed. But as it appears from the course you take with me he

has changed his mind, why there's no more to be said, except that the

sooner I am off, the better. Therefore, I thought I'd come back and say,

that the sooner I am off the better. When a plunge is to be made into

the water, it's of no use lingering on the bank.'

'There shall be as little lingering as possible, in your case, Mr.

Maldon, you may depend upon it,' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Thank'ee,' said the other. 'Much obliged. I don't want to look a

gift-horse in the mouth, which is not a gracious thing to do; otherwise,

I dare say, my cousin Annie could easily arrange it in her own way. I

suppose Annie would only have to say to the old Doctor--'

'Meaning that Mrs. Strong would only have to say to her husband--do I

follow you?' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Quite so,' returned the other, '--would only have to say, that she

wanted such and such a thing to be so and so; and it would be so and so,

as a matter of course.'

'And why as a matter of course, Mr. Maldon?' asked Mr. Wickfield,

sedately eating his dinner.

'Why, because Annie's a charming young girl, and the old Doctor--Doctor

Strong, I mean--is not quite a charming young boy,' said Mr. Jack

Maldon, laughing. 'No offence to anybody, Mr. Wickfield. I only mean

that I suppose some compensation is fair and reasonable in that sort of

marriage.'

'Compensation to the lady, sir?' asked Mr. Wickfield gravely.

'To the lady, sir,' Mr. Jack Maldon answered, laughing. But appearing

to remark that Mr. Wickfield went on with his dinner in the same sedate,

immovable manner, and that there was no hope of making him relax a

muscle of his face, he added: 'However, I have said what I came to say,

and, with another apology for this intrusion, I may take myself off. Of

course I shall observe your directions, in considering the matter as one

to be arranged between you and me solely, and not to be referred to, up

at the Doctor's.'

'Have you dined?' asked Mr. Wickfield, with a motion of his hand towards

the table.

'Thank'ee. I am going to dine,' said Mr. Maldon, 'with my cousin Annie.

Good-bye!'

Mr. Wickfield, without rising, looked after him thoughtfully as he went

out. He was rather a shallow sort of young gentleman, I thought, with

a handsome face, a rapid utterance, and a confident, bold air. And this

was the first I ever saw of Mr. Jack Maldon; whom I had not expected to

see so soon, when I heard the Doctor speak of him that morning.

When we had dined, we went upstairs again, where everything went on

exactly as on the previous day. Agnes set the glasses and decanters in

the same corner, and Mr. Wickfield sat down to drink, and drank a good

deal. Agnes played the piano to him, sat by him, and worked and talked,

and played some games at dominoes with me. In good time she made tea;

and afterwards, when I brought down my books, looked into them, and

showed me what she knew of them (which was no slight matter, though she

said it was), and what was the best way to learn and understand them.

I see her, with her modest, orderly, placid manner, and I hear her

beautiful calm voice, as I write these words. The influence for all

good, which she came to exercise over me at a later time, begins

already to descend upon my breast. I love little Em'ly, and I don't love

Agnes--no, not at all in that way--but I feel that there are goodness,

peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the

coloured window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and

on me when I am near her, and on everything around.

The time having come for her withdrawal for the night, and she having

left us, I gave Mr. Wickfield my hand, preparatory to going away myself.

But he checked me and said: 'Should you like to stay with us, Trotwood,

or to go elsewhere?'

'To stay,' I answered, quickly.

'You are sure?'

'If you please. If I may!'

'Why, it's but a dull life that we lead here, boy, I am afraid,' he

said.

'Not more dull for me than Agnes, sir. Not dull at all!'

'Than Agnes,' he repeated, walking slowly to the great chimney-piece,

and leaning against it. 'Than Agnes!'

He had drank wine that evening (or I fancied it), until his eyes were

bloodshot. Not that I could see them now, for they were cast down, and

shaded by his hand; but I had noticed them a little while before.

'Now I wonder,' he muttered, 'whether my Agnes tires of me. When should

I ever tire of her! But that's different, that's quite different.'

He was musing, not speaking to me; so I remained quiet.

'A dull old house,' he said, 'and a monotonous life; but I must have

her near me. I must keep her near me. If the thought that I may die and

leave my darling, or that my darling may die and leave me, comes like a

spectre, to distress my happiest hours, and is only to be drowned in--'

He did not supply the word; but pacing slowly to the place where he had

sat, and mechanically going through the action of pouring wine from the

empty decanter, set it down and paced back again.

'If it is miserable to bear, when she is here,' he said, 'what would it

be, and she away? No, no, no. I cannot try that.'

He leaned against the chimney-piece, brooding so long that I could not

decide whether to run the risk of disturbing him by going, or to remain

quietly where I was, until he should come out of his reverie. At length

he aroused himself, and looked about the room until his eyes encountered

mine.

'Stay with us, Trotwood, eh?' he said in his usual manner, and as if

he were answering something I had just said. 'I am glad of it. You are

company to us both. It is wholesome to have you here. Wholesome for me,

wholesome for Agnes, wholesome perhaps for all of us.'

'I am sure it is for me, sir,' I said. 'I am so glad to be here.'

'That's a fine fellow!' said Mr. Wickfield. 'As long as you are glad

to be here, you shall stay here.' He shook hands with me upon it, and

clapped me on the back; and told me that when I had anything to do

at night after Agnes had left us, or when I wished to read for my own

pleasure, I was free to come down to his room, if he were there and if

I desired it for company's sake, and to sit with him. I thanked him for

his consideration; and, as he went down soon afterwards, and I was

not tired, went down too, with a book in my hand, to avail myself, for

half-an-hour, of his permission.

But, seeing a light in the little round office, and immediately feeling

myself attracted towards Uriah Heep, who had a sort of fascination for

me, I went in there instead. I found Uriah reading a great fat book,

with such demonstrative attention, that his lank forefinger followed up

every line as he read, and made clammy tracks along the page (or so I

fully believed) like a snail.

'You are working late tonight, Uriah,' says I.

'Yes, Master Copperfield,' says Uriah.

As I was getting on the stool opposite, to talk to him more

conveniently, I observed that he had not such a thing as a smile about

him, and that he could only widen his mouth and make two hard creases

down his cheeks, one on each side, to stand for one.

'I am not doing office-work, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah.

'What work, then?' I asked.

'I am improving my legal knowledge, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'I

am going through Tidd's Practice. Oh, what a writer Mr. Tidd is, Master

Copperfield!'

My stool was such a tower of observation, that as I watched him reading

on again, after this rapturous exclamation, and following up the lines

with his forefinger, I observed that his nostrils, which were thin and

pointed, with sharp dints in them, had a singular and most uncomfortable

way of expanding and contracting themselves--that they seemed to twinkle

instead of his eyes, which hardly ever twinkled at all.

'I suppose you are quite a great lawyer?' I said, after looking at him

for some time.

'Me, Master Copperfield?' said Uriah. 'Oh, no! I'm a very umble person.'

It was no fancy of mine about his hands, I observed; for he frequently

ground the palms against each other as if to squeeze them dry and

warm, besides often wiping them, in a stealthy way, on his

pocket-handkerchief.

'I am well aware that I am the umblest person going,' said Uriah Heep,

modestly; 'let the other be where he may. My mother is likewise a very

umble person. We live in a numble abode, Master Copperfield, but have

much to be thankful for. My father's former calling was umble. He was a

sexton.'

'What is he now?' I asked.

'He is a partaker of glory at present, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah

Heep. 'But we have much to be thankful for. How much have I to be

thankful for in living with Mr. Wickfield!'

I asked Uriah if he had been with Mr. Wickfield long?

'I have been with him, going on four year, Master Copperfield,' said

Uriah; shutting up his book, after carefully marking the place where he

had left off. 'Since a year after my father's death. How much have I

to be thankful for, in that! How much have I to be thankful for, in Mr.

Wickfield's kind intention to give me my articles, which would otherwise

not lay within the umble means of mother and self!'

'Then, when your articled time is over, you'll be a regular lawyer, I

suppose?' said I.

'With the blessing of Providence, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah.

'Perhaps you'll be a partner in Mr. Wickfield's business, one of these

days,' I said, to make myself agreeable; 'and it will be Wickfield and

Heep, or Heep late Wickfield.'

'Oh no, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, shaking his head, 'I am

much too umble for that!'

He certainly did look uncommonly like the carved face on the beam

outside my window, as he sat, in his humility, eyeing me sideways, with

his mouth widened, and the creases in his cheeks.

'Mr. Wickfield is a most excellent man, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah.

'If you have known him long, you know it, I am sure, much better than I

can inform you.'

I replied that I was certain he was; but that I had not known him long

myself, though he was a friend of my aunt's.

'Oh, indeed, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'Your aunt is a sweet

lady, Master Copperfield!'

He had a way of writhing when he wanted to express enthusiasm, which was

very ugly; and which diverted my attention from the compliment he had

paid my relation, to the snaky twistings of his throat and body.

'A sweet lady, Master Copperfield!' said Uriah Heep. 'She has a great

admiration for Miss Agnes, Master Copperfield, I believe?'

I said, 'Yes,' boldly; not that I knew anything about it, Heaven forgive

me!

'I hope you have, too, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'But I am sure

you must have.'

'Everybody must have,' I returned.

'Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah Heep, 'for that remark!

It is so true! Umble as I am, I know it is so true! Oh, thank you,

Master Copperfield!' He writhed himself quite off his stool in the

excitement of his feelings, and, being off, began to make arrangements

for going home.

'Mother will be expecting me,' he said, referring to a pale,

inexpressive-faced watch in his pocket, 'and getting uneasy; for though

we are very umble, Master Copperfield, we are much attached to one

another. If you would come and see us, any afternoon, and take a cup of

tea at our lowly dwelling, mother would be as proud of your company as I

should be.'

I said I should be glad to come.

'Thank you, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, putting his book

away upon the shelf--'I suppose you stop here, some time, Master

Copperfield?'

I said I was going to be brought up there, I believed, as long as I

remained at school.

'Oh, indeed!' exclaimed Uriah. 'I should think YOU would come into the

business at last, Master Copperfield!'

I protested that I had no views of that sort, and that no such scheme

was entertained in my behalf by anybody; but Uriah insisted on blandly

replying to all my assurances, 'Oh, yes, Master Copperfield, I should

think you would, indeed!' and, 'Oh, indeed, Master Copperfield, I should

think you would, certainly!' over and over again. Being, at last, ready

to leave the office for the night, he asked me if it would suit my

convenience to have the light put out; and on my answering 'Yes,'

instantly extinguished it. After shaking hands with me--his hand felt

like a fish, in the dark--he opened the door into the street a very

little, and crept out, and shut it, leaving me to grope my way back into

the house: which cost me some trouble and a fall over his stool. This

was the proximate cause, I suppose, of my dreaming about him, for what

appeared to me to be half the night; and dreaming, among other things,

that he had launched Mr. Peggotty's house on a piratical expedition,

with a black flag at the masthead, bearing the inscription 'Tidd's

Practice', under which diabolical ensign he was carrying me and little

Em'ly to the Spanish Main, to be drowned.

I got a little the better of my uneasiness when I went to school

next day, and a good deal the better next day, and so shook it off by

degrees, that in less than a fortnight I was quite at home, and happy,

among my new companions. I was awkward enough in their games, and

backward enough in their studies; but custom would improve me in the

first respect, I hoped, and hard work in the second. Accordingly, I

went to work very hard, both in play and in earnest, and gained great

commendation. And, in a very little while, the Murdstone and Grinby life

became so strange to me that I hardly believed in it, while my present

life grew so familiar, that I seemed to have been leading it a long

time.

Doctor Strong's was an excellent school; as different from Mr. Creakle's

as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered, and

on a sound system; with an appeal, in everything, to the honour and good

faith of the boys, and an avowed intention to rely on their possession

of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which

worked wonders. We all felt that we had a part in the management of

the place, and in sustaining its character and dignity. Hence, we soon

became warmly attached to it--I am sure I did for one, and I never knew,

in all my time, of any other boy being otherwise--and learnt with a good

will, desiring to do it credit. We had noble games out of hours, and

plenty of liberty; but even then, as I remember, we were well spoken of

in the town, and rarely did any disgrace, by our appearance or manner,

to the reputation of Doctor Strong and Doctor Strong's boys.

Some of the higher scholars boarded in the Doctor's house, and through

them I learned, at second hand, some particulars of the Doctor's

history--as, how he had not yet been married twelve months to the

beautiful young lady I had seen in the study, whom he had married for

love; for she had not a sixpence, and had a world of poor relations (so

our fellows said) ready to swarm the Doctor out of house and home. Also,

how the Doctor's cogitating manner was attributable to his being always

engaged in looking out for Greek roots; which, in my innocence and

ignorance, I supposed to be a botanical furor on the Doctor's part,

especially as he always looked at the ground when he walked about,

until I understood that they were roots of words, with a view to a new

Dictionary which he had in contemplation. Adams, our head-boy, who had

a turn for mathematics, had made a calculation, I was informed, of the

time this Dictionary would take in completing, on the Doctor's plan, and

at the Doctor's rate of going. He considered that it might be done

in one thousand six hundred and forty-nine years, counting from the

Doctor's last, or sixty-second, birthday.

But the Doctor himself was the idol of the whole school: and it must

have been a badly composed school if he had been anything else, for

he was the kindest of men; with a simple faith in him that might have

touched the stone hearts of the very urns upon the wall. As he walked up

and down that part of the courtyard which was at the side of the house,

with the stray rooks and jackdaws looking after him with their heads

cocked slyly, as if they knew how much more knowing they were in worldly

affairs than he, if any sort of vagabond could only get near enough to

his creaking shoes to attract his attention to one sentence of a tale

of distress, that vagabond was made for the next two days. It was so

notorious in the house, that the masters and head-boys took pains to cut

these marauders off at angles, and to get out of windows, and turn them

out of the courtyard, before they could make the Doctor aware of their

presence; which was sometimes happily effected within a few yards of

him, without his knowing anything of the matter, as he jogged to and

fro. Outside his own domain, and unprotected, he was a very sheep for

the shearers. He would have taken his gaiters off his legs, to give

away. In fact, there was a story current among us (I have no idea, and

never had, on what authority, but I have believed it for so many

years that I feel quite certain it is true), that on a frosty day, one

winter-time, he actually did bestow his gaiters on a beggar-woman, who

occasioned some scandal in the neighbourhood by exhibiting a fine infant

from door to door, wrapped in those garments, which were universally

recognized, being as well known in the vicinity as the Cathedral. The

legend added that the only person who did not identify them was the

Doctor himself, who, when they were shortly afterwards displayed at the

door of a little second-hand shop of no very good repute, where such

things were taken in exchange for gin, was more than once observed to

handle them approvingly, as if admiring some curious novelty in the

pattern, and considering them an improvement on his own.

It was very pleasant to see the Doctor with his pretty young wife. He

had a fatherly, benignant way of showing his fondness for her, which

seemed in itself to express a good man. I often saw them walking in the

garden where the peaches were, and I sometimes had a nearer observation

of them in the study or the parlour. She appeared to me to take great

care of the Doctor, and to like him very much, though I never thought

her vitally interested in the Dictionary: some cumbrous fragments of

which work the Doctor always carried in his pockets, and in the lining

of his hat, and generally seemed to be expounding to her as they walked

about.

I saw a good deal of Mrs. Strong, both because she had taken a liking

for me on the morning of my introduction to the Doctor, and was always

afterwards kind to me, and interested in me; and because she was very

fond of Agnes, and was often backwards and forwards at our house. There

was a curious constraint between her and Mr. Wickfield, I thought (of

whom she seemed to be afraid), that never wore off. When she came there

of an evening, she always shrunk from accepting his escort home, and ran

away with me instead. And sometimes, as we were running gaily across

the Cathedral yard together, expecting to meet nobody, we would meet Mr.

Jack Maldon, who was always surprised to see us.

Mrs. Strong's mama was a lady I took great delight in. Her name was Mrs.

Markleham; but our boys used to call her the Old Soldier, on account of

her generalship, and the skill with which she marshalled great forces

of relations against the Doctor. She was a little, sharp-eyed woman,

who used to wear, when she was dressed, one unchangeable cap, ornamented

with some artificial flowers, and two artificial butterflies supposed

to be hovering above the flowers. There was a superstition among us

that this cap had come from France, and could only originate in the

workmanship of that ingenious nation: but all I certainly know about it,

is, that it always made its appearance of an evening, wheresoever Mrs.

Markleham made HER appearance; that it was carried about to friendly

meetings in a Hindoo basket; that the butterflies had the gift of

trembling constantly; and that they improved the shining hours at Doctor

Strong's expense, like busy bees.

I observed the Old Soldier--not to adopt the name disrespectfully--to

pretty good advantage, on a night which is made memorable to me by

something else I shall relate. It was the night of a little party at the

Doctor's, which was given on the occasion of Mr. Jack Maldon's departure

for India, whither he was going as a cadet, or something of that kind:

Mr. Wickfield having at length arranged the business. It happened to be

the Doctor's birthday, too. We had had a holiday, had made presents to

him in the morning, had made a speech to him through the head-boy, and

had cheered him until we were hoarse, and until he had shed tears. And

now, in the evening, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and I, went to have tea with

him in his private capacity.

Mr. Jack Maldon was there, before us. Mrs. Strong, dressed in white,

with cherry-coloured ribbons, was playing the piano, when we went in;

and he was leaning over her to turn the leaves. The clear red and

white of her complexion was not so blooming and flower-like as usual, I

thought, when she turned round; but she looked very pretty, Wonderfully

pretty.

'I have forgotten, Doctor,' said Mrs. Strong's mama, when we were

seated, 'to pay you the compliments of the day--though they are, as you

may suppose, very far from being mere compliments in my case. Allow me

to wish you many happy returns.'

'I thank you, ma'am,' replied the Doctor.

'Many, many, many, happy returns,' said the Old Soldier. 'Not only

for your own sake, but for Annie's, and John Maldon's, and many other

people's. It seems but yesterday to me, John, when you were a little

creature, a head shorter than Master Copperfield, making baby love to

Annie behind the gooseberry bushes in the back-garden.'

'My dear mama,' said Mrs. Strong, 'never mind that now.'

'Annie, don't be absurd,' returned her mother. 'If you are to blush to

hear of such things now you are an old married woman, when are you not

to blush to hear of them?'

'Old?' exclaimed Mr. Jack Maldon. 'Annie? Come!'

'Yes, John,' returned the Soldier. 'Virtually, an old married woman.

Although not old by years--for when did you ever hear me say, or who has

ever heard me say, that a girl of twenty was old by years!--your cousin

is the wife of the Doctor, and, as such, what I have described her. It

is well for you, John, that your cousin is the wife of the Doctor. You

have found in him an influential and kind friend, who will be kinder

yet, I venture to predict, if you deserve it. I have no false pride.

I never hesitate to admit, frankly, that there are some members of our

family who want a friend. You were one yourself, before your cousin's

influence raised up one for you.'

The Doctor, in the goodness of his heart, waved his hand as if to make

light of it, and save Mr. Jack Maldon from any further reminder. But

Mrs. Markleham changed her chair for one next the Doctor's, and putting

her fan on his coat-sleeve, said:

'No, really, my dear Doctor, you must excuse me if I appear to dwell

on this rather, because I feel so very strongly. I call it quite my

monomania, it is such a subject of mine. You are a blessing to us. You

really are a Boon, you know.'

'Nonsense, nonsense,' said the Doctor.

'No, no, I beg your pardon,' retorted the Old Soldier. 'With nobody

present, but our dear and confidential friend Mr. Wickfield, I cannot

consent to be put down. I shall begin to assert the privileges of a

mother-in-law, if you go on like that, and scold you. I am perfectly

honest and outspoken. What I am saying, is what I said when you first

overpowered me with surprise--you remember how surprised I was?--by

proposing for Annie. Not that there was anything so very much out of

the way, in the mere fact of the proposal--it would be ridiculous to say

that!--but because, you having known her poor father, and having known

her from a baby six months old, I hadn't thought of you in such a light

at all, or indeed as a marrying man in any way,--simply that, you know.'

'Aye, aye,' returned the Doctor, good-humouredly. 'Never mind.'

'But I DO mind,' said the Old Soldier, laying her fan upon his lips. 'I

mind very much. I recall these things that I may be contradicted if I am

wrong. Well! Then I spoke to Annie, and I told her what had happened.

I said, "My dear, here's Doctor Strong has positively been and made you

the subject of a handsome declaration and an offer." Did I press it in

the least? No. I said, "Now, Annie, tell me the truth this moment; is

your heart free?" "Mama," she said crying, "I am extremely young"--which

was perfectly true--"and I hardly know if I have a heart at all." "Then,

my dear," I said, "you may rely upon it, it's free. At all events, my

love," said I, "Doctor Strong is in an agitated state of mind, and

must be answered. He cannot be kept in his present state of suspense."

"Mama," said Annie, still crying, "would he be unhappy without me? If he

would, I honour and respect him so much, that I think I will have him."

So it was settled. And then, and not till then, I said to Annie, "Annie,

Doctor Strong will not only be your husband, but he will represent your

late father: he will represent the head of our family, he will represent

the wisdom and station, and I may say the means, of our family; and will

be, in short, a Boon to it." I used the word at the time, and I have

used it again, today. If I have any merit it is consistency.'

The daughter had sat quite silent and still during this speech, with her

eyes fixed on the ground; her cousin standing near her, and looking on

the ground too. She now said very softly, in a trembling voice:

'Mama, I hope you have finished?' 'No, my dear Annie,' returned the Old

Soldier, 'I have not quite finished. Since you ask me, my love, I reply

that I have not. I complain that you really are a little unnatural

towards your own family; and, as it is of no use complaining to you. I

mean to complain to your husband. Now, my dear Doctor, do look at that

silly wife of yours.'

As the Doctor turned his kind face, with its smile of simplicity and

gentleness, towards her, she drooped her head more. I noticed that Mr.

Wickfield looked at her steadily.

'When I happened to say to that naughty thing, the other day,' pursued

her mother, shaking her head and her fan at her, playfully, 'that there

was a family circumstance she might mention to you--indeed, I think, was

bound to mention--she said, that to mention it was to ask a favour;

and that, as you were too generous, and as for her to ask was always to

have, she wouldn't.'

'Annie, my dear,' said the Doctor. 'That was wrong. It robbed me of a

pleasure.'

'Almost the very words I said to her!' exclaimed her mother. 'Now

really, another time, when I know what she would tell you but for this

reason, and won't, I have a great mind, my dear Doctor, to tell you

myself.'

'I shall be glad if you will,' returned the Doctor.

'Shall I?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, then, I will!' said the Old Soldier. 'That's a bargain.' And

having, I suppose, carried her point, she tapped the Doctor's hand

several times with her fan (which she kissed first), and returned

triumphantly to her former station.

Some more company coming in, among whom were the two masters and Adams,

the talk became general; and it naturally turned on Mr. Jack Maldon, and

his voyage, and the country he was going to, and his various plans and

prospects. He was to leave that night, after supper, in a post-chaise,

for Gravesend; where the ship, in which he was to make the voyage, lay;

and was to be gone--unless he came home on leave, or for his health--I

don't know how many years. I recollect it was settled by general

consent that India was quite a misrepresented country, and had nothing

objectionable in it, but a tiger or two, and a little heat in the warm

part of the day. For my own part, I looked on Mr. Jack Maldon as a

modern Sindbad, and pictured him the bosom friend of all the Rajahs in

the East, sitting under canopies, smoking curly golden pipes--a mile

long, if they could be straightened out.

Mrs. Strong was a very pretty singer: as I knew, who often heard her

singing by herself. But, whether she was afraid of singing before

people, or was out of voice that evening, it was certain that she

couldn't sing at all. She tried a duet, once, with her cousin Maldon,

but could not so much as begin; and afterwards, when she tried to sing

by herself, although she began sweetly, her voice died away on a sudden,

and left her quite distressed, with her head hanging down over the keys.

The good Doctor said she was nervous, and, to relieve her, proposed a

round game at cards; of which he knew as much as of the art of playing

the trombone. But I remarked that the Old Soldier took him into custody

directly, for her partner; and instructed him, as the first preliminary

of initiation, to give her all the silver he had in his pocket.

We had a merry game, not made the less merry by the Doctor's mistakes,

of which he committed an innumerable quantity, in spite of the

watchfulness of the butterflies, and to their great aggravation. Mrs.

Strong had declined to play, on the ground of not feeling very well; and

her cousin Maldon had excused himself because he had some packing to

do. When he had done it, however, he returned, and they sat together,

talking, on the sofa. From time to time she came and looked over the

Doctor's hand, and told him what to play. She was very pale, as she

bent over him, and I thought her finger trembled as she pointed out

the cards; but the Doctor was quite happy in her attention, and took no

notice of this, if it were so.

At supper, we were hardly so gay. Everyone appeared to feel that a

parting of that sort was an awkward thing, and that the nearer it

approached, the more awkward it was. Mr. Jack Maldon tried to be very

talkative, but was not at his ease, and made matters worse. And they

were not improved, as it appeared to me, by the Old Soldier: who

continually recalled passages of Mr. Jack Maldon's youth.

The Doctor, however, who felt, I am sure, that he was making everybody

happy, was well pleased, and had no suspicion but that we were all at

the utmost height of enjoyment.

'Annie, my dear,' said he, looking at his watch, and filling his glass,

'it is past your cousin jack's time, and we must not detain him, since

time and tide--both concerned in this case--wait for no man. Mr. Jack

Maldon, you have a long voyage, and a strange country, before you; but

many men have had both, and many men will have both, to the end of time.

The winds you are going to tempt, have wafted thousands upon thousands

to fortune, and brought thousands upon thousands happily back.'

'It's an affecting thing,' said Mrs. Markleham--'however it's viewed,

it's affecting, to see a fine young man one has known from an infant,

going away to the other end of the world, leaving all he knows behind,

and not knowing what's before him. A young man really well deserves

constant support and patronage,' looking at the Doctor, 'who makes such

sacrifices.'

'Time will go fast with you, Mr. Jack Maldon,' pursued the Doctor,

'and fast with all of us. Some of us can hardly expect, perhaps, in the

natural course of things, to greet you on your return. The next best

thing is to hope to do it, and that's my case. I shall not weary you

with good advice. You have long had a good model before you, in your

cousin Annie. Imitate her virtues as nearly as you can.'

Mrs. Markleham fanned herself, and shook her head.

'Farewell, Mr. Jack,' said the Doctor, standing up; on which we all

stood up. 'A prosperous voyage out, a thriving career abroad, and a

happy return home!'

We all drank the toast, and all shook hands with Mr. Jack Maldon; after

which he hastily took leave of the ladies who were there, and hurried

to the door, where he was received, as he got into the chaise, with a

tremendous broadside of cheers discharged by our boys, who had assembled

on the lawn for the purpose. Running in among them to swell the ranks,

I was very near the chaise when it rolled away; and I had a lively

impression made upon me, in the midst of the noise and dust, of having

seen Mr. Jack Maldon rattle past with an agitated face, and something

cherry-coloured in his hand.

After another broadside for the Doctor, and another for the Doctor's

wife, the boys dispersed, and I went back into the house, where I found

the guests all standing in a group about the Doctor, discussing how Mr.

Jack Maldon had gone away, and how he had borne it, and how he had

felt it, and all the rest of it. In the midst of these remarks, Mrs.

Markleham cried: 'Where's Annie?'

No Annie was there; and when they called to her, no Annie replied. But

all pressing out of the room, in a crowd, to see what was the matter, we

found her lying on the hall floor. There was great alarm at first, until

it was found that she was in a swoon, and that the swoon was yielding

to the usual means of recovery; when the Doctor, who had lifted her

head upon his knee, put her curls aside with his hand, and said, looking

around:

'Poor Annie! She's so faithful and tender-hearted! It's the parting from

her old playfellow and friend--her favourite cousin--that has done this.

Ah! It's a pity! I am very sorry!'

When she opened her eyes, and saw where she was, and that we were all

standing about her, she arose with assistance: turning her head, as she

did so, to lay it on the Doctor's shoulder--or to hide it, I don't know

which. We went into the drawing-room, to leave her with the Doctor and

her mother; but she said, it seemed, that she was better than she had

been since morning, and that she would rather be brought among us; so

they brought her in, looking very white and weak, I thought, and sat her

on a sofa.

'Annie, my dear,' said her mother, doing something to her dress. 'See

here! You have lost a bow. Will anybody be so good as find a ribbon; a

cherry-coloured ribbon?'

It was the one she had worn at her bosom. We all looked for it; I myself

looked everywhere, I am certain--but nobody could find it.

'Do you recollect where you had it last, Annie?' said her mother.

I wondered how I could have thought she looked white, or anything but

burning red, when she answered that she had had it safe, a little while

ago, she thought, but it was not worth looking for.

Nevertheless, it was looked for again, and still not found. She

entreated that there might be no more searching; but it was still sought

for, in a desultory way, until she was quite well, and the company took

their departure.

We walked very slowly home, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and I--Agnes and I

admiring the moonlight, and Mr. Wickfield scarcely raising his eyes from

the ground. When we, at last, reached our own door, Agnes discovered

that she had left her little reticule behind. Delighted to be of any

service to her, I ran back to fetch it.

I went into the supper-room where it had been left, which was deserted

and dark. But a door of communication between that and the Doctor's

study, where there was a light, being open, I passed on there, to say

what I wanted, and to get a candle.

The Doctor was sitting in his easy-chair by the fireside, and his young

wife was on a stool at his feet. The Doctor, with a complacent smile,

was reading aloud some manuscript explanation or statement of a theory

out of that interminable Dictionary, and she was looking up at him. But

with such a face as I never saw. It was so beautiful in its form, it was

so ashy pale, it was so fixed in its abstraction, it was so full of a

wild, sleep-walking, dreamy horror of I don't know what. The eyes

were wide open, and her brown hair fell in two rich clusters on her

shoulders, and on her white dress, disordered by the want of the lost

ribbon. Distinctly as I recollect her look, I cannot say of what it was

expressive, I cannot even say of what it is expressive to me now, rising

again before my older judgement. Penitence, humiliation, shame, pride,

love, and trustfulness--I see them all; and in them all, I see that

horror of I don't know what.

My entrance, and my saying what I wanted, roused her. It disturbed the

Doctor too, for when I went back to replace the candle I had taken from

the table, he was patting her head, in his fatherly way, and saying he

was a merciless drone to let her tempt him into reading on; and he would

have her go to bed.

But she asked him, in a rapid, urgent manner, to let her stay--to let

her feel assured (I heard her murmur some broken words to this effect)

that she was in his confidence that night. And, as she turned again

towards him, after glancing at me as I left the room and went out at the

door, I saw her cross her hands upon his knee, and look up at him with

the same face, something quieted, as he resumed his reading.

It made a great impression on me, and I remembered it a long time

afterwards; as I shall have occasion to narrate when the time comes.

CHAPTER 17. SOMEBODY TURNS UP

It has not occurred to me to mention Peggotty since I ran away; but, of

course, I wrote her a letter almost as soon as I was housed at Dover,

and another, and a longer letter, containing all particulars fully

related, when my aunt took me formally under her protection. On my being

settled at Doctor Strong's I wrote to her again, detailing my happy

condition and prospects. I never could have derived anything like the

pleasure from spending the money Mr. Dick had given me, that I felt in

sending a gold half-guinea to Peggotty, per post, enclosed in this last

letter, to discharge the sum I had borrowed of her: in which epistle,

not before, I mentioned about the young man with the donkey-cart.

To these communications Peggotty replied as promptly, if not as

concisely, as a merchant's clerk. Her utmost powers of expression (which

were certainly not great in ink) were exhausted in the attempt to write

what she felt on the subject of my journey. Four sides of incoherent and

interjectional beginnings of sentences, that had no end, except blots,

were inadequate to afford her any relief. But the blots were more

expressive to me than the best composition; for they showed me that

Peggotty had been crying all over the paper, and what could I have

desired more?

I made out, without much difficulty, that she could not take quite

kindly to my aunt yet. The notice was too short after so long a

prepossession the other way. We never knew a person, she wrote; but to

think that Miss Betsey should seem to be so different from what she had

been thought to be, was a Moral!--that was her word. She was evidently

still afraid of Miss Betsey, for she sent her grateful duty to her but

timidly; and she was evidently afraid of me, too, and entertained the

probability of my running away again soon: if I might judge from the

repeated hints she threw out, that the coach-fare to Yarmouth was always

to be had of her for the asking.

She gave me one piece of intelligence which affected me very much,

namely, that there had been a sale of the furniture at our old home, and

that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were gone away, and the house was shut up,

to be let or sold. God knows I had no part in it while they remained

there, but it pained me to think of the dear old place as altogether

abandoned; of the weeds growing tall in the garden, and the fallen

leaves lying thick and wet upon the paths. I imagined how the winds

of winter would howl round it, how the cold rain would beat upon the

window-glass, how the moon would make ghosts on the walls of the empty

rooms, watching their solitude all night. I thought afresh of the grave

in the churchyard, underneath the tree: and it seemed as if the house

were dead too, now, and all connected with my father and mother were

faded away.

There was no other news in Peggotty's letters. Mr. Barkis was an

excellent husband, she said, though still a little near; but we all had

our faults, and she had plenty (though I am sure I don't know what they

were); and he sent his duty, and my little bedroom was always ready for

me. Mr. Peggotty was well, and Ham was well, and Mrs.. Gummidge was but

poorly, and little Em'ly wouldn't send her love, but said that Peggotty

might send it, if she liked.

All this intelligence I dutifully imparted to my aunt, only reserving

to myself the mention of little Em'ly, to whom I instinctively felt

that she would not very tenderly incline. While I was yet new at Doctor

Strong's, she made several excursions over to Canterbury to see me, and

always at unseasonable hours: with the view, I suppose, of taking me by

surprise. But, finding me well employed, and bearing a good character,

and hearing on all hands that I rose fast in the school, she soon

discontinued these visits. I saw her on a Saturday, every third or

fourth week, when I went over to Dover for a treat; and I saw Mr. Dick

every alternate Wednesday, when he arrived by stage-coach at noon, to

stay until next morning.

On these occasions Mr. Dick never travelled without a leathern

writing-desk, containing a supply of stationery and the Memorial; in

relation to which document he had a notion that time was beginning to

press now, and that it really must be got out of hand.

Mr. Dick was very partial to gingerbread. To render his visits the more

agreeable, my aunt had instructed me to open a credit for him at a cake

shop, which was hampered with the stipulation that he should not be

served with more than one shilling's-worth in the course of any one day.

This, and the reference of all his little bills at the county inn where

he slept, to my aunt, before they were paid, induced me to suspect that

he was only allowed to rattle his money, and not to spend it. I found

on further investigation that this was so, or at least there was an

agreement between him and my aunt that he should account to her for

all his disbursements. As he had no idea of deceiving her, and always

desired to please her, he was thus made chary of launching into expense.

On this point, as well as on all other possible points, Mr. Dick was

convinced that my aunt was the wisest and most wonderful of women; as he

repeatedly told me with infinite secrecy, and always in a whisper.

'Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, with an air of mystery, after imparting this

confidence to me, one Wednesday; 'who's the man that hides near our

house and frightens her?'

'Frightens my aunt, sir?'

Mr. Dick nodded. 'I thought nothing would have frightened her,' he said,

'for she's--' here he whispered softly, 'don't mention it--the wisest

and most wonderful of women.' Having said which, he drew back, to

observe the effect which this description of her made upon me.

'The first time he came,' said Mr. Dick, 'was--let me see--sixteen

hundred and forty-nine was the date of King Charles's execution. I think

you said sixteen hundred and forty-nine?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I don't know how it can be,' said Mr. Dick, sorely puzzled and shaking

his head. 'I don't think I am as old as that.'

'Was it in that year that the man appeared, sir?' I asked.

'Why, really' said Mr. Dick, 'I don't see how it can have been in that

year, Trotwood. Did you get that date out of history?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I suppose history never lies, does it?' said Mr. Dick, with a gleam of

hope.

'Oh dear, no, sir!' I replied, most decisively. I was ingenuous and

young, and I thought so.

'I can't make it out,' said Mr. Dick, shaking his head. 'There's

something wrong, somewhere. However, it was very soon after the mistake

was made of putting some of the trouble out of King Charles's head into

my head, that the man first came. I was walking out with Miss Trotwood

after tea, just at dark, and there he was, close to our house.'

'Walking about?' I inquired.

'Walking about?' repeated Mr. Dick. 'Let me see, I must recollect a bit.

N-no, no; he was not walking about.'

I asked, as the shortest way to get at it, what he WAS doing.

'Well, he wasn't there at all,' said Mr. Dick, 'until he came up behind

her, and whispered. Then she turned round and fainted, and I stood still

and looked at him, and he walked away; but that he should have

been hiding ever since (in the ground or somewhere), is the most

extraordinary thing!'

'HAS he been hiding ever since?' I asked.

'To be sure he has,' retorted Mr. Dick, nodding his head gravely. 'Never

came out, till last night! We were walking last night, and he came up

behind her again, and I knew him again.'

'And did he frighten my aunt again?'

'All of a shiver,' said Mr. Dick, counterfeiting that affection and

making his teeth chatter. 'Held by the palings. Cried. But, Trotwood,

come here,' getting me close to him, that he might whisper very softly;

'why did she give him money, boy, in the moonlight?'

'He was a beggar, perhaps.'

Mr. Dick shook his head, as utterly renouncing the suggestion; and

having replied a great many times, and with great confidence, 'No

beggar, no beggar, no beggar, sir!' went on to say, that from his window

he had afterwards, and late at night, seen my aunt give this person

money outside the garden rails in the moonlight, who then slunk

away--into the ground again, as he thought probable--and was seen no

more: while my aunt came hurriedly and secretly back into the house, and

had, even that morning, been quite different from her usual self; which

preyed on Mr. Dick's mind.

I had not the least belief, in the outset of this story, that the

unknown was anything but a delusion of Mr. Dick's, and one of the line

of that ill-fated Prince who occasioned him so much difficulty; but

after some reflection I began to entertain the question whether an

attempt, or threat of an attempt, might have been twice made to take

poor Mr. Dick himself from under my aunt's protection, and whether

my aunt, the strength of whose kind feeling towards him I knew from

herself, might have been induced to pay a price for his peace and quiet.

As I was already much attached to Mr. Dick, and very solicitous for his

welfare, my fears favoured this supposition; and for a long time his

Wednesday hardly ever came round, without my entertaining a misgiving

that he would not be on the coach-box as usual. There he always

appeared, however, grey-headed, laughing, and happy; and he never had

anything more to tell of the man who could frighten my aunt.

These Wednesdays were the happiest days of Mr. Dick's life; they were

far from being the least happy of mine. He soon became known to every

boy in the school; and though he never took an active part in any game

but kite-flying, was as deeply interested in all our sports as anyone

among us. How often have I seen him, intent upon a match at marbles

or pegtop, looking on with a face of unutterable interest, and hardly

breathing at the critical times! How often, at hare and hounds, have

I seen him mounted on a little knoll, cheering the whole field on

to action, and waving his hat above his grey head, oblivious of King

Charles the Martyr's head, and all belonging to it! How many a

summer hour have I known to be but blissful minutes to him in

the cricket-field! How many winter days have I seen him, standing

blue-nosed, in the snow and east wind, looking at the boys going down

the long slide, and clapping his worsted gloves in rapture!

He was an universal favourite, and his ingenuity in little things was

transcendent. He could cut oranges into such devices as none of us had

an idea of. He could make a boat out of anything, from a skewer upwards.

He could turn cramp-bones into chessmen; fashion Roman chariots from old

court cards; make spoked wheels out of cotton reels, and bird-cages of

old wire. But he was greatest of all, perhaps, in the articles of string

and straw; with which we were all persuaded he could do anything that

could be done by hands.

Mr. Dick's renown was not long confined to us. After a few Wednesdays,

Doctor Strong himself made some inquiries of me about him, and I told

him all my aunt had told me; which interested the Doctor so much that

he requested, on the occasion of his next visit, to be presented to him.

This ceremony I performed; and the Doctor begging Mr. Dick, whensoever

he should not find me at the coach office, to come on there, and rest

himself until our morning's work was over, it soon passed into a custom

for Mr. Dick to come on as a matter of course, and, if we were a little

late, as often happened on a Wednesday, to walk about the courtyard,

waiting for me. Here he made the acquaintance of the Doctor's beautiful

young wife (paler than formerly, all this time; more rarely seen by

me or anyone, I think; and not so gay, but not less beautiful), and so

became more and more familiar by degrees, until, at last, he would come

into the school and wait. He always sat in a particular corner, on a

particular stool, which was called 'Dick', after him; here he would sit,

with his grey head bent forward, attentively listening to whatever might

be going on, with a profound veneration for the learning he had never

been able to acquire.

This veneration Mr. Dick extended to the Doctor, whom he thought the

most subtle and accomplished philosopher of any age. It was long before

Mr. Dick ever spoke to him otherwise than bareheaded; and even when he

and the Doctor had struck up quite a friendship, and would walk together

by the hour, on that side of the courtyard which was known among us as

The Doctor's Walk, Mr. Dick would pull off his hat at intervals to show

his respect for wisdom and knowledge. How it ever came about that the

Doctor began to read out scraps of the famous Dictionary, in these

walks, I never knew; perhaps he felt it all the same, at first, as

reading to himself. However, it passed into a custom too; and Mr. Dick,

listening with a face shining with pride and pleasure, in his heart of

hearts believed the Dictionary to be the most delightful book in the

world.

As I think of them going up and down before those schoolroom

windows--the Doctor reading with his complacent smile, an occasional

flourish of the manuscript, or grave motion of his head; and Mr. Dick

listening, enchained by interest, with his poor wits calmly wandering

God knows where, upon the wings of hard words--I think of it as one of

the pleasantest things, in a quiet way, that I have ever seen. I feel

as if they might go walking to and fro for ever, and the world might

somehow be the better for it--as if a thousand things it makes a noise

about, were not one half so good for it, or me.

Agnes was one of Mr. Dick's friends, very soon; and in often coming

to the house, he made acquaintance with Uriah. The friendship between

himself and me increased continually, and it was maintained on this odd

footing: that, while Mr. Dick came professedly to look after me as my

guardian, he always consulted me in any little matter of doubt that

arose, and invariably guided himself by my advice; not only having a

high respect for my native sagacity, but considering that I inherited a

good deal from my aunt.

One Thursday morning, when I was about to walk with Mr. Dick from the

hotel to the coach office before going back to school (for we had an

hour's school before breakfast), I met Uriah in the street, who reminded

me of the promise I had made to take tea with himself and his mother:

adding, with a writhe, 'But I didn't expect you to keep it, Master

Copperfield, we're so very umble.'

I really had not yet been able to make up my mind whether I liked Uriah

or detested him; and I was very doubtful about it still, as I stood

looking him in the face in the street. But I felt it quite an affront to

be supposed proud, and said I only wanted to be asked.

'Oh, if that's all, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'and it really

isn't our umbleness that prevents you, will you come this evening?

But if it is our umbleness, I hope you won't mind owning to it, Master

Copperfield; for we are well aware of our condition.'

I said I would mention it to Mr. Wickfield, and if he approved, as I had

no doubt he would, I would come with pleasure. So, at six o'clock that

evening, which was one of the early office evenings, I announced myself

as ready, to Uriah.

'Mother will be proud, indeed,' he said, as we walked away together. 'Or

she would be proud, if it wasn't sinful, Master Copperfield.'

'Yet you didn't mind supposing I was proud this morning,' I returned.

'Oh dear, no, Master Copperfield!' returned Uriah. 'Oh, believe me, no!

Such a thought never came into my head! I shouldn't have deemed it at

all proud if you had thought US too umble for you. Because we are so

very umble.'

'Have you been studying much law lately?' I asked, to change the

subject.

'Oh, Master Copperfield,' he said, with an air of self-denial, 'my

reading is hardly to be called study. I have passed an hour or two in

the evening, sometimes, with Mr. Tidd.'

'Rather hard, I suppose?' said I. 'He is hard to me sometimes,' returned

Uriah. 'But I don't know what he might be to a gifted person.'

After beating a little tune on his chin as he walked on, with the two

forefingers of his skeleton right hand, he added:

'There are expressions, you see, Master Copperfield--Latin words

and terms--in Mr. Tidd, that are trying to a reader of my umble

attainments.'

'Would you like to be taught Latin?' I said briskly. 'I will teach it

you with pleasure, as I learn it.'

'Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield,' he answered, shaking his head. 'I

am sure it's very kind of you to make the offer, but I am much too umble

to accept it.'

'What nonsense, Uriah!'

'Oh, indeed you must excuse me, Master Copperfield! I am greatly

obliged, and I should like it of all things, I assure you; but I am far

too umble. There are people enough to tread upon me in my lowly state,

without my doing outrage to their feelings by possessing learning.

Learning ain't for me. A person like myself had better not aspire. If he

is to get on in life, he must get on umbly, Master Copperfield!'

I never saw his mouth so wide, or the creases in his cheeks so deep, as

when he delivered himself of these sentiments: shaking his head all the

time, and writhing modestly.

'I think you are wrong, Uriah,' I said. 'I dare say there are several

things that I could teach you, if you would like to learn them.'

'Oh, I don't doubt that, Master Copperfield,' he answered; 'not in the

least. But not being umble yourself, you don't judge well, perhaps, for

them that are. I won't provoke my betters with knowledge, thank you. I'm

much too umble. Here is my umble dwelling, Master Copperfield!'

We entered a low, old-fashioned room, walked straight into from the

street, and found there Mrs. Heep, who was the dead image of Uriah, only

short. She received me with the utmost humility, and apologized to me

for giving her son a kiss, observing that, lowly as they were, they

had their natural affections, which they hoped would give no offence to

anyone. It was a perfectly decent room, half parlour and half kitchen,

but not at all a snug room. The tea-things were set upon the table, and

the kettle was boiling on the hob. There was a chest of drawers with an

escritoire top, for Uriah to read or write at of an evening; there was

Uriah's blue bag lying down and vomiting papers; there was a company of

Uriah's books commanded by Mr. Tidd; there was a corner cupboard: and

there were the usual articles of furniture. I don't remember that any

individual object had a bare, pinched, spare look; but I do remember

that the whole place had.

It was perhaps a part of Mrs. Heep's humility, that she still wore

weeds. Notwithstanding the lapse of time that had occurred since Mr.

Heep's decease, she still wore weeds. I think there was some compromise

in the cap; but otherwise she was as weedy as in the early days of her

mourning.

'This is a day to be remembered, my Uriah, I am sure,' said Mrs. Heep,

making the tea, 'when Master Copperfield pays us a visit.'

'I said you'd think so, mother,' said Uriah.

'If I could have wished father to remain among us for any reason,' said

Mrs. Heep, 'it would have been, that he might have known his company

this afternoon.'

I felt embarrassed by these compliments; but I was sensible, too, of

being entertained as an honoured guest, and I thought Mrs. Heep an

agreeable woman.

'My Uriah,' said Mrs. Heep, 'has looked forward to this, sir, a long

while. He had his fears that our umbleness stood in the way, and I

joined in them myself. Umble we are, umble we have been, umble we shall

ever be,' said Mrs. Heep.

'I am sure you have no occasion to be so, ma'am,' I said, 'unless you

like.'

'Thank you, sir,' retorted Mrs. Heep. 'We know our station and are

thankful in it.'

I found that Mrs. Heep gradually got nearer to me, and that Uriah

gradually got opposite to me, and that they respectfully plied me

with the choicest of the eatables on the table. There was nothing

particularly choice there, to be sure; but I took the will for the deed,

and felt that they were very attentive. Presently they began to talk

about aunts, and then I told them about mine; and about fathers and

mothers, and then I told them about mine; and then Mrs. Heep began to

talk about fathers-in-law, and then I began to tell her about mine--but

stopped, because my aunt had advised me to observe a silence on that

subject. A tender young cork, however, would have had no more chance

against a pair of corkscrews, or a tender young tooth against a pair of

dentists, or a little shuttlecock against two battledores, than I had

against Uriah and Mrs. Heep. They did just what they liked with me; and

wormed things out of me that I had no desire to tell, with a certainty

I blush to think of, the more especially, as in my juvenile frankness, I

took some credit to myself for being so confidential and felt that I was

quite the patron of my two respectful entertainers.

They were very fond of one another: that was certain. I take it, that

had its effect upon me, as a touch of nature; but the skill with which

the one followed up whatever the other said, was a touch of art which I

was still less proof against. When there was nothing more to be got

out of me about myself (for on the Murdstone and Grinby life, and on my

journey, I was dumb), they began about Mr. Wickfield and Agnes. Uriah

threw the ball to Mrs. Heep, Mrs. Heep caught it and threw it back to

Uriah, Uriah kept it up a little while, then sent it back to Mrs. Heep,

and so they went on tossing it about until I had no idea who had got it,

and was quite bewildered. The ball itself was always changing too. Now

it was Mr. Wickfield, now Agnes, now the excellence of Mr. Wickfield,

now my admiration of Agnes; now the extent of Mr. Wickfield's business

and resources, now our domestic life after dinner; now, the wine that

Mr. Wickfield took, the reason why he took it, and the pity that it was

he took so much; now one thing, now another, then everything at once;

and all the time, without appearing to speak very often, or to do

anything but sometimes encourage them a little, for fear they should be

overcome by their humility and the honour of my company, I found myself

perpetually letting out something or other that I had no business to

let out and seeing the effect of it in the twinkling of Uriah's dinted

nostrils.

I had begun to be a little uncomfortable, and to wish myself well out

of the visit, when a figure coming down the street passed the door--it

stood open to air the room, which was warm, the weather being close for

the time of year--came back again, looked in, and walked in, exclaiming

loudly, 'Copperfield! Is it possible?'

It was Mr. Micawber! It was Mr. Micawber, with his eye-glass, and

his walking-stick, and his shirt-collar, and his genteel air, and the

condescending roll in his voice, all complete!

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, putting out his hand, 'this is

indeed a meeting which is calculated to impress the mind with a sense

of the instability and uncertainty of all human--in short, it is a most

extraordinary meeting. Walking along the street, reflecting upon the

probability of something turning up (of which I am at present rather

sanguine), I find a young but valued friend turn up, who is connected

with the most eventful period of my life; I may say, with the

turning-point of my existence. Copperfield, my dear fellow, how do you

do?'

I cannot say--I really cannot say--that I was glad to see Mr. Micawber

there; but I was glad to see him too, and shook hands with him,

heartily, inquiring how Mrs. Micawber was.

'Thank you,' said Mr. Micawber, waving his hand as of old, and settling

his chin in his shirt-collar. 'She is tolerably convalescent. The twins

no longer derive their sustenance from Nature's founts--in short,' said

Mr. Micawber, in one of his bursts of confidence, 'they are weaned--and

Mrs. Micawber is, at present, my travelling companion. She will be

rejoiced, Copperfield, to renew her acquaintance with one who has

proved himself in all respects a worthy minister at the sacred altar of

friendship.'

I said I should be delighted to see her.

'You are very good,' said Mr. Micawber.

Mr. Micawber then smiled, settled his chin again, and looked about him.

'I have discovered my friend Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber genteelly,

and without addressing himself particularly to anyone, 'not in solitude,

but partaking of a social meal in company with a widow lady, and one who

is apparently her offspring--in short,' said Mr. Micawber, in another

of his bursts of confidence, 'her son. I shall esteem it an honour to be

presented.'

I could do no less, under these circumstances, than make Mr. Micawber

known to Uriah Heep and his mother; which I accordingly did. As they

abased themselves before him, Mr. Micawber took a seat, and waved his

hand in his most courtly manner.

'Any friend of my friend Copperfield's,' said Mr. Micawber, 'has a

personal claim upon myself.'

'We are too umble, sir,' said Mrs. Heep, 'my son and me, to be the

friends of Master Copperfield. He has been so good as take his tea with

us, and we are thankful to him for his company, also to you, sir, for

your notice.'

'Ma'am,' returned Mr. Micawber, with a bow, 'you are very obliging: and

what are you doing, Copperfield? Still in the wine trade?'

I was excessively anxious to get Mr. Micawber away; and replied, with my

hat in my hand, and a very red face, I have no doubt, that I was a pupil

at Doctor Strong's.

'A pupil?' said Mr. Micawber, raising his eyebrows. 'I am extremely

happy to hear it. Although a mind like my friend Copperfield's'--to

Uriah and Mrs. Heep--'does not require that cultivation which, without

his knowledge of men and things, it would require, still it is a rich

soil teeming with latent vegetation--in short,' said Mr. Micawber,

smiling, in another burst of confidence, 'it is an intellect capable of

getting up the classics to any extent.'

Uriah, with his long hands slowly twining over one another, made a

ghastly writhe from the waist upwards, to express his concurrence in

this estimation of me.

'Shall we go and see Mrs. Micawber, sir?' I said, to get Mr. Micawber

away.

'If you will do her that favour, Copperfield,' replied Mr. Micawber,

rising. 'I have no scruple in saying, in the presence of our friends

here, that I am a man who has, for some years, contended against the

pressure of pecuniary difficulties.' I knew he was certain to say

something of this kind; he always would be so boastful about his

difficulties. 'Sometimes I have risen superior to my difficulties.

Sometimes my difficulties have--in short, have floored me. There have

been times when I have administered a succession of facers to them;

there have been times when they have been too many for me, and I have

given in, and said to Mrs. Micawber, in the words of Cato, "Plato, thou

reasonest well. It's all up now. I can show fight no more." But at no

time of my life,' said Mr. Micawber, 'have I enjoyed a higher degree of

satisfaction than in pouring my griefs (if I may describe difficulties,

chiefly arising out of warrants of attorney and promissory notes at two

and four months, by that word) into the bosom of my friend Copperfield.'

Mr. Micawber closed this handsome tribute by saying, 'Mr. Heep! Good

evening. Mrs. Heep! Your servant,' and then walking out with me in his

most fashionable manner, making a good deal of noise on the pavement

with his shoes, and humming a tune as we went.

It was a little inn where Mr. Micawber put up, and he occupied a little

room in it, partitioned off from the commercial room, and strongly

flavoured with tobacco-smoke. I think it was over the kitchen, because

a warm greasy smell appeared to come up through the chinks in the floor,

and there was a flabby perspiration on the walls. I know it was near the

bar, on account of the smell of spirits and jingling of glasses. Here,

recumbent on a small sofa, underneath a picture of a race-horse, with

her head close to the fire, and her feet pushing the mustard off the

dumb-waiter at the other end of the room, was Mrs. Micawber, to whom Mr.

Micawber entered first, saying, 'My dear, allow me to introduce to you a

pupil of Doctor Strong's.'

I noticed, by the by, that although Mr. Micawber was just as much

confused as ever about my age and standing, he always remembered, as a

genteel thing, that I was a pupil of Doctor Strong's.

Mrs. Micawber was amazed, but very glad to see me. I was very glad to

see her too, and, after an affectionate greeting on both sides, sat down

on the small sofa near her.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, 'if you will mention to Copperfield what

our present position is, which I have no doubt he will like to know, I

will go and look at the paper the while, and see whether anything turns

up among the advertisements.'

'I thought you were at Plymouth, ma'am,' I said to Mrs. Micawber, as he

went out.

'My dear Master Copperfield,' she replied, 'we went to Plymouth.'

'To be on the spot,' I hinted.

'Just so,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'To be on the spot. But, the truth is,

talent is not wanted in the Custom House. The local influence of my

family was quite unavailing to obtain any employment in that department,

for a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities. They would rather NOT have a man

of Mr. Micawber's abilities. He would only show the deficiency of the

others. Apart from which,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'I will not disguise

from you, my dear Master Copperfield, that when that branch of my

family which is settled in Plymouth, became aware that Mr. Micawber was

accompanied by myself, and by little Wilkins and his sister, and by the

twins, they did not receive him with that ardour which he might have

expected, being so newly released from captivity. In fact,' said Mrs.

Micawber, lowering her voice,--'this is between ourselves--our reception

was cool.'

'Dear me!' I said.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'It is truly painful to contemplate mankind

in such an aspect, Master Copperfield, but our reception was, decidedly,

cool. There is no doubt about it. In fact, that branch of my family

which is settled in Plymouth became quite personal to Mr. Micawber,

before we had been there a week.'

I said, and thought, that they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

'Still, so it was,' continued Mrs. Micawber. 'Under such circumstances,

what could a man of Mr. Micawber's spirit do? But one obvious course

was left. To borrow, of that branch of my family, the money to return to

London, and to return at any sacrifice.'

'Then you all came back again, ma'am?' I said.

'We all came back again,' replied Mrs. Micawber. 'Since then, I have

consulted other branches of my family on the course which it is most

expedient for Mr. Micawber to take--for I maintain that he must take

some course, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, argumentatively.

'It is clear that a family of six, not including a domestic, cannot live

upon air.'

'Certainly, ma'am,' said I.

'The opinion of those other branches of my family,' pursued Mrs.

Micawber, 'is, that Mr. Micawber should immediately turn his attention

to coals.'

'To what, ma'am?'

'To coals,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'To the coal trade. Mr. Micawber was

induced to think, on inquiry, that there might be an opening for a

man of his talent in the Medway Coal Trade. Then, as Mr. Micawber very

properly said, the first step to be taken clearly was, to come and see

the Medway. Which we came and saw. I say "we", Master Copperfield; for

I never will,' said Mrs. Micawber with emotion, 'I never will desert Mr.

Micawber.'

I murmured my admiration and approbation.

'We came,' repeated Mrs. Micawber, 'and saw the Medway. My opinion of

the coal trade on that river is, that it may require talent, but that

it certainly requires capital. Talent, Mr. Micawber has; capital, Mr.

Micawber has not. We saw, I think, the greater part of the Medway; and

that is my individual conclusion. Being so near here, Mr. Micawber was

of opinion that it would be rash not to come on, and see the Cathedral.

Firstly, on account of its being so well worth seeing, and our never

having seen it; and secondly, on account of the great probability of

something turning up in a cathedral town. We have been here,' said Mrs.

Micawber, 'three days. Nothing has, as yet, turned up; and it may

not surprise you, my dear Master Copperfield, so much as it would a

stranger, to know that we are at present waiting for a remittance from

London, to discharge our pecuniary obligations at this hotel. Until the

arrival of that remittance,' said Mrs. Micawber with much feeling, 'I am

cut off from my home (I allude to lodgings in Pentonville), from my boy

and girl, and from my twins.'

I felt the utmost sympathy for Mr. and Mrs. Micawber in this anxious

extremity, and said as much to Mr. Micawber, who now returned: adding

that I only wished I had money enough, to lend them the amount they

needed. Mr. Micawber's answer expressed the disturbance of his mind. He

said, shaking hands with me, 'Copperfield, you are a true friend; but

when the worst comes to the worst, no man is without a friend who is

possessed of shaving materials.' At this dreadful hint Mrs. Micawber

threw her arms round Mr. Micawber's neck and entreated him to be calm.

He wept; but so far recovered, almost immediately, as to ring the bell

for the waiter, and bespeak a hot kidney pudding and a plate of shrimps

for breakfast in the morning.

When I took my leave of them, they both pressed me so much to come and

dine before they went away, that I could not refuse. But, as I knew I

could not come next day, when I should have a good deal to prepare in

the evening, Mr. Micawber arranged that he would call at Doctor Strong's

in the course of the morning (having a presentiment that the remittance

would arrive by that post), and propose the day after, if it would suit

me better. Accordingly I was called out of school next forenoon, and

found Mr. Micawber in the parlour; who had called to say that the dinner

would take place as proposed. When I asked him if the remittance had

come, he pressed my hand and departed.

As I was looking out of window that same evening, it surprised me, and

made me rather uneasy, to see Mr. Micawber and Uriah Heep walk past, arm

in arm: Uriah humbly sensible of the honour that was done him, and Mr.

Micawber taking a bland delight in extending his patronage to Uriah. But

I was still more surprised, when I went to the little hotel next day at

the appointed dinner-hour, which was four o'clock, to find, from what

Mr. Micawber said, that he had gone home with Uriah, and had drunk

brandy-and-water at Mrs. Heep's.

'And I'll tell you what, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'your

friend Heep is a young fellow who might be attorney-general. If I had

known that young man, at the period when my difficulties came to a

crisis, all I can say is, that I believe my creditors would have been a

great deal better managed than they were.'

I hardly understood how this could have been, seeing that Mr. Micawber

had paid them nothing at all as it was; but I did not like to

ask. Neither did I like to say, that I hoped he had not been too

communicative to Uriah; or to inquire if they had talked much about me.

I was afraid of hurting Mr. Micawber's feelings, or, at all events, Mrs.

Micawber's, she being very sensitive; but I was uncomfortable about it,

too, and often thought about it afterwards.

We had a beautiful little dinner. Quite an elegant dish of fish; the

kidney-end of a loin of veal, roasted; fried sausage-meat; a partridge,

and a pudding. There was wine, and there was strong ale; and after

dinner Mrs. Micawber made us a bowl of hot punch with her own hands.

Mr. Micawber was uncommonly convivial. I never saw him such good

company. He made his face shine with the punch, so that it looked as if

it had been varnished all over. He got cheerfully sentimental about

the town, and proposed success to it; observing that Mrs. Micawber and

himself had been made extremely snug and comfortable there and that he

never should forget the agreeable hours they had passed in Canterbury.

He proposed me afterwards; and he, and Mrs. Micawber, and I, took a

review of our past acquaintance, in the course of which we sold the

property all over again. Then I proposed Mrs. Micawber: or, at least,

said, modestly, 'If you'll allow me, Mrs. Micawber, I shall now have

the pleasure of drinking your health, ma'am.' On which Mr. Micawber

delivered an eulogium on Mrs. Micawber's character, and said she

had ever been his guide, philosopher, and friend, and that he would

recommend me, when I came to a marrying time of life, to marry such

another woman, if such another woman could be found.

As the punch disappeared, Mr. Micawber became still more friendly and

convivial. Mrs. Micawber's spirits becoming elevated, too, we sang 'Auld

Lang Syne'. When we came to 'Here's a hand, my trusty frere', we all

joined hands round the table; and when we declared we would 'take a

right gude Willie Waught', and hadn't the least idea what it meant, we

were really affected.

In a word, I never saw anybody so thoroughly jovial as Mr. Micawber

was, down to the very last moment of the evening, when I took a hearty

farewell of himself and his amiable wife. Consequently, I was not

prepared, at seven o'clock next morning, to receive the following

communication, dated half past nine in the evening; a quarter of an hour

after I had left him:--

'My DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

'The die is cast--all is over. Hiding the ravages of care with a sickly

mask of mirth, I have not informed you, this evening, that there is no

hope of the remittance! Under these circumstances, alike humiliating to

endure, humiliating to contemplate, and humiliating to relate, I have

discharged the pecuniary liability contracted at this establishment,

by giving a note of hand, made payable fourteen days after date, at

my residence, Pentonville, London. When it becomes due, it will not be

taken up. The result is destruction. The bolt is impending, and the tree

must fall.

'Let the wretched man who now addresses you, my dear Copperfield, be a

beacon to you through life. He writes with that intention, and in that

hope. If he could think himself of so much use, one gleam of day might,

by possibility, penetrate into the cheerless dungeon of his remaining

existence--though his longevity is, at present (to say the least of it),

extremely problematical.

'This is the last communication, my dear Copperfield, you will ever

receive

'From

'The

'Beggared Outcast,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

I was so shocked by the contents of this heart-rending letter, that I

ran off directly towards the little hotel with the intention of taking

it on my way to Doctor Strong's, and trying to soothe Mr. Micawber with

a word of comfort. But, half-way there, I met the London coach with Mr.

and Mrs. Micawber up behind; Mr. Micawber, the very picture of tranquil

enjoyment, smiling at Mrs. Micawber's conversation, eating walnuts out

of a paper bag, with a bottle sticking out of his breast pocket. As they

did not see me, I thought it best, all things considered, not to

see them. So, with a great weight taken off my mind, I turned into a

by-street that was the nearest way to school, and felt, upon the whole,

relieved that they were gone; though I still liked them very much,

nevertheless.

CHAPTER 18. A RETROSPECT

My school-days! The silent gliding on of my existence--the unseen,

unfelt progress of my life--from childhood up to youth! Let me think,

as I look back upon that flowing water, now a dry channel overgrown with

leaves, whether there are any marks along its course, by which I can

remember how it ran.

A moment, and I occupy my place in the Cathedral, where we all went

together, every Sunday morning, assembling first at school for that

purpose. The earthy smell, the sunless air, the sensation of the world

being shut out, the resounding of the organ through the black and white

arched galleries and aisles, are wings that take me back, and hold me

hovering above those days, in a half-sleeping and half-waking dream.

I am not the last boy in the school. I have risen in a few months, over

several heads. But the first boy seems to me a mighty creature, dwelling

afar off, whose giddy height is unattainable. Agnes says 'No,' but I say

'Yes,' and tell her that she little thinks what stores of knowledge have

been mastered by the wonderful Being, at whose place she thinks I, even

I, weak aspirant, may arrive in time. He is not my private friend

and public patron, as Steerforth was, but I hold him in a reverential

respect. I chiefly wonder what he'll be, when he leaves Doctor Strong's,

and what mankind will do to maintain any place against him.

But who is this that breaks upon me? This is Miss Shepherd, whom I love.

Miss Shepherd is a boarder at the Misses Nettingalls' establishment. I

adore Miss Shepherd. She is a little girl, in a spencer, with a round

face and curly flaxen hair. The Misses Nettingalls' young ladies come to

the Cathedral too. I cannot look upon my book, for I must look upon

Miss Shepherd. When the choristers chaunt, I hear Miss Shepherd. In the

service I mentally insert Miss Shepherd's name--I put her in among the

Royal Family. At home, in my own room, I am sometimes moved to cry out,

'Oh, Miss Shepherd!' in a transport of love.

For some time, I am doubtful of Miss Shepherd's feelings, but, at

length, Fate being propitious, we meet at the dancing-school. I have

Miss Shepherd for my partner. I touch Miss Shepherd's glove, and feel a

thrill go up the right arm of my jacket, and come out at my hair. I say

nothing to Miss Shepherd, but we understand each other. Miss Shepherd

and myself live but to be united.

Why do I secretly give Miss Shepherd twelve Brazil nuts for a present, I

wonder? They are not expressive of affection, they are difficult to pack

into a parcel of any regular shape, they are hard to crack, even in

room doors, and they are oily when cracked; yet I feel that they are

appropriate to Miss Shepherd. Soft, seedy biscuits, also, I bestow upon

Miss Shepherd; and oranges innumerable. Once, I kiss Miss Shepherd in

the cloak-room. Ecstasy! What are my agony and indignation next day,

when I hear a flying rumour that the Misses Nettingall have stood Miss

Shepherd in the stocks for turning in her toes!

Miss Shepherd being the one pervading theme and vision of my life, how

do I ever come to break with her? I can't conceive. And yet a coolness

grows between Miss Shepherd and myself. Whispers reach me of Miss

Shepherd having said she wished I wouldn't stare so, and having avowed a

preference for Master Jones--for Jones! a boy of no merit whatever! The

gulf between me and Miss Shepherd widens. At last, one day, I meet the

Misses Nettingalls' establishment out walking. Miss Shepherd makes

a face as she goes by, and laughs to her companion. All is over. The

devotion of a life--it seems a life, it is all the same--is at an end;

Miss Shepherd comes out of the morning service, and the Royal Family

know her no more.

I am higher in the school, and no one breaks my peace. I am not at all

polite, now, to the Misses Nettingalls' young ladies, and shouldn't

dote on any of them, if they were twice as many and twenty times as

beautiful. I think the dancing-school a tiresome affair, and wonder why

the girls can't dance by themselves and leave us alone. I am growing

great in Latin verses, and neglect the laces of my boots. Doctor Strong

refers to me in public as a promising young scholar. Mr. Dick is wild

with joy, and my aunt remits me a guinea by the next post.

The shade of a young butcher rises, like the apparition of an armed head

in Macbeth. Who is this young butcher? He is the terror of the youth

of Canterbury. There is a vague belief abroad, that the beef suet with

which he anoints his hair gives him unnatural strength, and that he is

a match for a man. He is a broad-faced, bull-necked, young butcher, with

rough red cheeks, an ill-conditioned mind, and an injurious tongue.

His main use of this tongue, is, to disparage Doctor Strong's young

gentlemen. He says, publicly, that if they want anything he'll give it

'em. He names individuals among them (myself included), whom he could

undertake to settle with one hand, and the other tied behind him. He

waylays the smaller boys to punch their unprotected heads, and calls

challenges after me in the open streets. For these sufficient reasons I

resolve to fight the butcher.

It is a summer evening, down in a green hollow, at the corner of a wall.

I meet the butcher by appointment. I am attended by a select body of our

boys; the butcher, by two other butchers, a young publican, and a sweep.

The preliminaries are adjusted, and the butcher and myself stand face to

face. In a moment the butcher lights ten thousand candles out of my left

eyebrow. In another moment, I don't know where the wall is, or where

I am, or where anybody is. I hardly know which is myself and which the

butcher, we are always in such a tangle and tussle, knocking about upon

the trodden grass. Sometimes I see the butcher, bloody but confident;

sometimes I see nothing, and sit gasping on my second's knee; sometimes

I go in at the butcher madly, and cut my knuckles open against his face,

without appearing to discompose him at all. At last I awake, very queer

about the head, as from a giddy sleep, and see the butcher walking off,

congratulated by the two other butchers and the sweep and publican, and

putting on his coat as he goes; from which I augur, justly, that the

victory is his.

I am taken home in a sad plight, and I have beef-steaks put to my eyes,

and am rubbed with vinegar and brandy, and find a great puffy place

bursting out on my upper lip, which swells immoderately. For three or

four days I remain at home, a very ill-looking subject, with a green

shade over my eyes; and I should be very dull, but that Agnes is a

sister to me, and condoles with me, and reads to me, and makes the time

light and happy. Agnes has my confidence completely, always; I tell her

all about the butcher, and the wrongs he has heaped upon me; she thinks

I couldn't have done otherwise than fight the butcher, while she shrinks

and trembles at my having fought him.

Time has stolen on unobserved, for Adams is not the head-boy in the days

that are come now, nor has he been this many and many a day. Adams has

left the school so long, that when he comes back, on a visit to Doctor

Strong, there are not many there, besides myself, who know him. Adams is

going to be called to the bar almost directly, and is to be an advocate,

and to wear a wig. I am surprised to find him a meeker man than I had

thought, and less imposing in appearance. He has not staggered the world

yet, either; for it goes on (as well as I can make out) pretty much the

same as if he had never joined it.

A blank, through which the warriors of poetry and history march on in

stately hosts that seem to have no end--and what comes next! I am

the head-boy, now! I look down on the line of boys below me, with a

condescending interest in such of them as bring to my mind the boy I was

myself, when I first came there. That little fellow seems to be no part

of me; I remember him as something left behind upon the road of life--as

something I have passed, rather than have actually been--and almost

think of him as of someone else.

And the little girl I saw on that first day at Mr. Wickfield's, where

is she? Gone also. In her stead, the perfect likeness of the picture,

a child likeness no more, moves about the house; and Agnes--my sweet

sister, as I call her in my thoughts, my counsellor and friend, the

better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good,

self-denying influence--is quite a woman.

What other changes have come upon me, besides the changes in my growth

and looks, and in the knowledge I have garnered all this while? I wear

a gold watch and chain, a ring upon my little finger, and a long-tailed

coat; and I use a great deal of bear's grease--which, taken in

conjunction with the ring, looks bad. Am I in love again? I am. I

worship the eldest Miss Larkins.

The eldest Miss Larkins is not a little girl. She is a tall, dark,

black-eyed, fine figure of a woman. The eldest Miss Larkins is not a

chicken; for the youngest Miss Larkins is not that, and the eldest must

be three or four years older. Perhaps the eldest Miss Larkins may be

about thirty. My passion for her is beyond all bounds.

The eldest Miss Larkins knows officers. It is an awful thing to bear. I

see them speaking to her in the street. I see them cross the way to meet

her, when her bonnet (she has a bright taste in bonnets) is seen coming

down the pavement, accompanied by her sister's bonnet. She laughs and

talks, and seems to like it. I spend a good deal of my own spare time in

walking up and down to meet her. If I can bow to her once in the day (I

know her to bow to, knowing Mr. Larkins), I am happier. I deserve a bow

now and then. The raging agonies I suffer on the night of the Race Ball,

where I know the eldest Miss Larkins will be dancing with the military,

ought to have some compensation, if there be even-handed justice in the

world.

My passion takes away my appetite, and makes me wear my newest silk

neckerchief continually. I have no relief but in putting on my best

clothes, and having my boots cleaned over and over again. I seem, then,

to be worthier of the eldest Miss Larkins. Everything that belongs to

her, or is connected with her, is precious to me. Mr. Larkins (a gruff

old gentleman with a double chin, and one of his eyes immovable in his

head) is fraught with interest to me. When I can't meet his daughter,

I go where I am likely to meet him. To say 'How do you do, Mr. Larkins?

Are the young ladies and all the family quite well?' seems so pointed,

that I blush.

I think continually about my age. Say I am seventeen, and say that

seventeen is young for the eldest Miss Larkins, what of that? Besides,

I shall be one-and-twenty in no time almost. I regularly take walks

outside Mr. Larkins's house in the evening, though it cuts me to the

heart to see the officers go in, or to hear them up in the drawing-room,

where the eldest Miss Larkins plays the harp. I even walk, on two or

three occasions, in a sickly, spoony manner, round and round the house

after the family are gone to bed, wondering which is the eldest Miss

Larkins's chamber (and pitching, I dare say now, on Mr. Larkins's

instead); wishing that a fire would burst out; that the assembled crowd

would stand appalled; that I, dashing through them with a ladder, might

rear it against her window, save her in my arms, go back for something

she had left behind, and perish in the flames. For I am generally

disinterested in my love, and think I could be content to make a figure

before Miss Larkins, and expire.

Generally, but not always. Sometimes brighter visions rise before me.

When I dress (the occupation of two hours), for a great ball given at

the Larkins's (the anticipation of three weeks), I indulge my fancy with

pleasing images. I picture myself taking courage to make a declaration

to Miss Larkins. I picture Miss Larkins sinking her head upon my

shoulder, and saying, 'Oh, Mr. Copperfield, can I believe my ears!' I

picture Mr. Larkins waiting on me next morning, and saying, 'My dear

Copperfield, my daughter has told me all. Youth is no objection. Here

are twenty thousand pounds. Be happy!' I picture my aunt relenting,

and blessing us; and Mr. Dick and Doctor Strong being present at the

marriage ceremony. I am a sensible fellow, I believe--I believe,

on looking back, I mean--and modest I am sure; but all this goes on

notwithstanding. I repair to the enchanted house, where there are

lights, chattering, music, flowers, officers (I am sorry to see), and

the eldest Miss Larkins, a blaze of beauty. She is dressed in blue, with

blue flowers in her hair--forget-me-nots--as if SHE had any need to wear

forget-me-nots. It is the first really grown-up party that I have ever

been invited to, and I am a little uncomfortable; for I appear not to

belong to anybody, and nobody appears to have anything to say to me,

except Mr. Larkins, who asks me how my schoolfellows are, which he

needn't do, as I have not come there to be insulted.

But after I have stood in the doorway for some time, and feasted my eyes

upon the goddess of my heart, she approaches me--she, the eldest Miss

Larkins!--and asks me pleasantly, if I dance?

I stammer, with a bow, 'With you, Miss Larkins.'

'With no one else?' inquires Miss Larkins.

'I should have no pleasure in dancing with anyone else.'

Miss Larkins laughs and blushes (or I think she blushes), and says,

'Next time but one, I shall be very glad.'

The time arrives. 'It is a waltz, I think,' Miss Larkins doubtfully

observes, when I present myself. 'Do you waltz? If not, Captain

Bailey--'

But I do waltz (pretty well, too, as it happens), and I take Miss

Larkins out. I take her sternly from the side of Captain Bailey. He

is wretched, I have no doubt; but he is nothing to me. I have been

wretched, too. I waltz with the eldest Miss Larkins! I don't know where,

among whom, or how long. I only know that I swim about in space, with a

blue angel, in a state of blissful delirium, until I find myself alone

with her in a little room, resting on a sofa. She admires a flower (pink

camellia japonica, price half-a-crown), in my button-hole. I give it

her, and say:

'I ask an inestimable price for it, Miss Larkins.'

'Indeed! What is that?' returns Miss Larkins.

'A flower of yours, that I may treasure it as a miser does gold.'

'You're a bold boy,' says Miss Larkins. 'There.'

She gives it me, not displeased; and I put it to my lips, and then into

my breast. Miss Larkins, laughing, draws her hand through my arm, and

says, 'Now take me back to Captain Bailey.'

I am lost in the recollection of this delicious interview, and the

waltz, when she comes to me again, with a plain elderly gentleman who

has been playing whist all night, upon her arm, and says:

'Oh! here is my bold friend! Mr. Chestle wants to know you, Mr.

Copperfield.'

I feel at once that he is a friend of the family, and am much gratified.

'I admire your taste, sir,' says Mr. Chestle. 'It does you credit. I

suppose you don't take much interest in hops; but I am a pretty

large grower myself; and if you ever like to come over to our

neighbourhood--neighbourhood of Ashford--and take a run about our

place,--we shall be glad for you to stop as long as you like.'

I thank Mr. Chestle warmly, and shake hands. I think I am in a happy

dream. I waltz with the eldest Miss Larkins once again. She says I

waltz so well! I go home in a state of unspeakable bliss, and waltz in

imagination, all night long, with my arm round the blue waist of my dear

divinity. For some days afterwards, I am lost in rapturous reflections;

but I neither see her in the street, nor when I call. I am imperfectly

consoled for this disappointment by the sacred pledge, the perished

flower.

'Trotwood,' says Agnes, one day after dinner. 'Who do you think is going

to be married tomorrow? Someone you admire.'

'Not you, I suppose, Agnes?'

'Not me!' raising her cheerful face from the music she is copying. 'Do

you hear him, Papa?--The eldest Miss Larkins.'

'To--to Captain Bailey?' I have just enough power to ask.

'No; to no Captain. To Mr. Chestle, a hop-grower.'

I am terribly dejected for about a week or two. I take off my ring, I

wear my worst clothes, I use no bear's grease, and I frequently lament

over the late Miss Larkins's faded flower. Being, by that time, rather

tired of this kind of life, and having received new provocation from

the butcher, I throw the flower away, go out with the butcher, and

gloriously defeat him.

This, and the resumption of my ring, as well as of the bear's grease

in moderation, are the last marks I can discern, now, in my progress to

seventeen.

CHAPTER 19. I LOOK ABOUT ME, AND MAKE A DISCOVERY

I am doubtful whether I was at heart glad or sorry, when my school-days

drew to an end, and the time came for my leaving Doctor Strong's. I had

been very happy there, I had a great attachment for the Doctor, and I

was eminent and distinguished in that little world. For these reasons

I was sorry to go; but for other reasons, unsubstantial enough, I

was glad. Misty ideas of being a young man at my own disposal, of

the importance attaching to a young man at his own disposal, of the

wonderful things to be seen and done by that magnificent animal, and the

wonderful effects he could not fail to make upon society, lured me away.

So powerful were these visionary considerations in my boyish mind, that

I seem, according to my present way of thinking, to have left school

without natural regret. The separation has not made the impression on

me, that other separations have. I try in vain to recall how I felt

about it, and what its circumstances were; but it is not momentous in my

recollection. I suppose the opening prospect confused me. I know that my

juvenile experiences went for little or nothing then; and that life was

more like a great fairy story, which I was just about to begin to read,

than anything else.

MY aunt and I had held many grave deliberations on the calling to which

I should be devoted. For a year or more I had endeavoured to find a

satisfactory answer to her often-repeated question, 'What I would like

to be?' But I had no particular liking, that I could discover, for

anything. If I could have been inspired with a knowledge of the science

of navigation, taken the command of a fast-sailing expedition, and gone

round the world on a triumphant voyage of discovery, I think I might

have considered myself completely suited. But, in the absence of any

such miraculous provision, my desire was to apply myself to some pursuit

that would not lie too heavily upon her purse; and to do my duty in it,

whatever it might be.

Mr. Dick had regularly assisted at our councils, with a meditative

and sage demeanour. He never made a suggestion but once; and on that

occasion (I don't know what put it in his head), he suddenly proposed

that I should be 'a Brazier'. My aunt received this proposal so very

ungraciously, that he never ventured on a second; but ever afterwards

confined himself to looking watchfully at her for her suggestions, and

rattling his money.

'Trot, I tell you what, my dear,' said my aunt, one morning in the

Christmas season when I left school: 'as this knotty point is still

unsettled, and as we must not make a mistake in our decision if we can

help it, I think we had better take a little breathing-time. In the

meanwhile, you must try to look at it from a new point of view, and not

as a schoolboy.'

'I will, aunt.'

'It has occurred to me,' pursued my aunt, 'that a little change, and a

glimpse of life out of doors, may be useful in helping you to know your

own mind, and form a cooler judgement. Suppose you were to go down into

the old part of the country again, for instance, and see that--that

out-of-the-way woman with the savagest of names,' said my aunt, rubbing

her nose, for she could never thoroughly forgive Peggotty for being so

called.

'Of all things in the world, aunt, I should like it best!'

'Well,' said my aunt, 'that's lucky, for I should like it too. But

it's natural and rational that you should like it. And I am very

well persuaded that whatever you do, Trot, will always be natural and

rational.'

'I hope so, aunt.'

'Your sister, Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt, 'would have been as

natural and rational a girl as ever breathed. You'll be worthy of her,

won't you?'

'I hope I shall be worthy of YOU, aunt. That will be enough for me.'

'It's a mercy that poor dear baby of a mother of yours didn't live,'

said my aunt, looking at me approvingly, 'or she'd have been so vain

of her boy by this time, that her soft little head would have been

completely turned, if there was anything of it left to turn.' (My aunt

always excused any weakness of her own in my behalf, by transferring it

in this way to my poor mother.) 'Bless me, Trotwood, how you do remind

me of her!'

'Pleasantly, I hope, aunt?' said I.

'He's as like her, Dick,' said my aunt, emphatically, 'he's as like her,

as she was that afternoon before she began to fret--bless my heart, he's

as like her, as he can look at me out of his two eyes!'

'Is he indeed?' said Mr. Dick.

'And he's like David, too,' said my aunt, decisively.

'He is very like David!' said Mr. Dick.

'But what I want you to be, Trot,' resumed my aunt, '--I don't mean

physically, but morally; you are very well physically--is, a firm

fellow. A fine firm fellow, with a will of your own. With resolution,'

said my aunt, shaking her cap at me, and clenching her hand. 'With

determination. With character, Trot--with strength of character that is

not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody, or by anything.

That's what I want you to be. That's what your father and mother might

both have been, Heaven knows, and been the better for it.'

I intimated that I hoped I should be what she described.

'That you may begin, in a small way, to have a reliance upon yourself,

and to act for yourself,' said my aunt, 'I shall send you upon your

trip, alone. I did think, once, of Mr. Dick's going with you; but, on

second thoughts, I shall keep him to take care of me.'

Mr. Dick, for a moment, looked a little disappointed; until the honour

and dignity of having to take care of the most wonderful woman in the

world, restored the sunshine to his face.

'Besides,' said my aunt, 'there's the Memorial--'

'Oh, certainly,' said Mr. Dick, in a hurry, 'I intend, Trotwood, to get

that done immediately--it really must be done immediately! And then it

will go in, you know--and then--' said Mr. Dick, after checking himself,

and pausing a long time, 'there'll be a pretty kettle of fish!'

In pursuance of my aunt's kind scheme, I was shortly afterwards fitted

out with a handsome purse of money, and a portmanteau, and tenderly

dismissed upon my expedition. At parting, my aunt gave me some good

advice, and a good many kisses; and said that as her object was that I

should look about me, and should think a little, she would recommend me

to stay a few days in London, if I liked it, either on my way down into

Suffolk, or in coming back. In a word, I was at liberty to do what I

would, for three weeks or a month; and no other conditions were imposed

upon my freedom than the before-mentioned thinking and looking about me,

and a pledge to write three times a week and faithfully report myself.

I went to Canterbury first, that I might take leave of Agnes and Mr.

Wickfield (my old room in whose house I had not yet relinquished), and

also of the good Doctor. Agnes was very glad to see me, and told me that

the house had not been like itself since I had left it.

'I am sure I am not like myself when I am away,' said I. 'I seem to

want my right hand, when I miss you. Though that's not saying much; for

there's no head in my right hand, and no heart. Everyone who knows you,

consults with you, and is guided by you, Agnes.'

'Everyone who knows me, spoils me, I believe,' she answered, smiling.

'No. It's because you are like no one else. You are so good, and so

sweet-tempered. You have such a gentle nature, and you are always

right.'

'You talk,' said Agnes, breaking into a pleasant laugh, as she sat at

work, 'as if I were the late Miss Larkins.'

'Come! It's not fair to abuse my confidence,' I answered, reddening at

the recollection of my blue enslaver. 'But I shall confide in you, just

the same, Agnes. I can never grow out of that. Whenever I fall into

trouble, or fall in love, I shall always tell you, if you'll let

me--even when I come to fall in love in earnest.'

'Why, you have always been in earnest!' said Agnes, laughing again.

'Oh! that was as a child, or a schoolboy,' said I, laughing in my turn,

not without being a little shame-faced. 'Times are altering now, and I

suppose I shall be in a terrible state of earnestness one day or other.

My wonder is, that you are not in earnest yourself, by this time,

Agnes.'

Agnes laughed again, and shook her head.

'Oh, I know you are not!' said I, 'because if you had been you would

have told me. Or at least'--for I saw a faint blush in her face, 'you

would have let me find it out for myself. But there is no one that I

know of, who deserves to love you, Agnes. Someone of a nobler character,

and more worthy altogether than anyone I have ever seen here, must rise

up, before I give my consent. In the time to come, I shall have a wary

eye on all admirers; and shall exact a great deal from the successful

one, I assure you.'

We had gone on, so far, in a mixture of confidential jest and earnest,

that had long grown naturally out of our familiar relations, begun as

mere children. But Agnes, now suddenly lifting up her eyes to mine, and

speaking in a different manner, said:

'Trotwood, there is something that I want to ask you, and that I may not

have another opportunity of asking for a long time, perhaps--something

I would ask, I think, of no one else. Have you observed any gradual

alteration in Papa?'

I had observed it, and had often wondered whether she had too. I must

have shown as much, now, in my face; for her eyes were in a moment cast

down, and I saw tears in them.

'Tell me what it is,' she said, in a low voice.

'I think--shall I be quite plain, Agnes, liking him so much?'

'Yes,' she said.

'I think he does himself no good by the habit that has increased upon

him since I first came here. He is often very nervous--or I fancy so.'

'It is not fancy,' said Agnes, shaking her head.

'His hand trembles, his speech is not plain, and his eyes look wild. I

have remarked that at those times, and when he is least like himself, he

is most certain to be wanted on some business.'

'By Uriah,' said Agnes.

'Yes; and the sense of being unfit for it, or of not having understood

it, or of having shown his condition in spite of himself, seems to make

him so uneasy, that next day he is worse, and next day worse, and so he

becomes jaded and haggard. Do not be alarmed by what I say, Agnes, but

in this state I saw him, only the other evening, lay down his head upon

his desk, and shed tears like a child.'

Her hand passed softly before my lips while I was yet speaking, and in

a moment she had met her father at the door of the room, and was hanging

on his shoulder. The expression of her face, as they both looked towards

me, I felt to be very touching. There was such deep fondness for him,

and gratitude to him for all his love and care, in her beautiful look;

and there was such a fervent appeal to me to deal tenderly by him, even

in my inmost thoughts, and to let no harsh construction find any place

against him; she was, at once, so proud of him and devoted to him, yet

so compassionate and sorry, and so reliant upon me to be so, too; that

nothing she could have said would have expressed more to me, or moved me

more.

We were to drink tea at the Doctor's. We went there at the usual hour;

and round the study fireside found the Doctor, and his young wife, and

her mother. The Doctor, who made as much of my going away as if I were

going to China, received me as an honoured guest; and called for a log

of wood to be thrown on the fire, that he might see the face of his old

pupil reddening in the blaze.

'I shall not see many more new faces in Trotwood's stead, Wickfield,'

said the Doctor, warming his hands; 'I am getting lazy, and want ease.

I shall relinquish all my young people in another six months, and lead a

quieter life.'

'You have said so, any time these ten years, Doctor,' Mr. Wickfield

answered.

'But now I mean to do it,' returned the Doctor. 'My first master will

succeed me--I am in earnest at last--so you'll soon have to arrange our

contracts, and to bind us firmly to them, like a couple of knaves.'

'And to take care,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'that you're not imposed on, eh?

As you certainly would be, in any contract you should make for yourself.

Well! I am ready. There are worse tasks than that, in my calling.'

'I shall have nothing to think of then,' said the Doctor, with a smile,

'but my Dictionary; and this other contract-bargain--Annie.'

As Mr. Wickfield glanced towards her, sitting at the tea table by Agnes,

she seemed to me to avoid his look with such unwonted hesitation and

timidity, that his attention became fixed upon her, as if something were

suggested to his thoughts.

'There is a post come in from India, I observe,' he said, after a short

silence.

'By the by! and letters from Mr. Jack Maldon!' said the Doctor.

'Indeed!' 'Poor dear Jack!' said Mrs. Markleham, shaking her head. 'That

trying climate!--like living, they tell me, on a sand-heap, underneath

a burning-glass! He looked strong, but he wasn't. My dear Doctor, it was

his spirit, not his constitution, that he ventured on so boldly. Annie,

my dear, I am sure you must perfectly recollect that your cousin

never was strong--not what can be called ROBUST, you know,' said Mrs.

Markleham, with emphasis, and looking round upon us generally, '--from

the time when my daughter and himself were children together, and

walking about, arm-in-arm, the livelong day.'

Annie, thus addressed, made no reply.

'Do I gather from what you say, ma'am, that Mr. Maldon is ill?' asked

Mr. Wickfield.

'Ill!' replied the Old Soldier. 'My dear sir, he's all sorts of things.'

'Except well?' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Except well, indeed!' said the Old Soldier. 'He has had dreadful

strokes of the sun, no doubt, and jungle fevers and agues, and every

kind of thing you can mention. As to his liver,' said the Old Soldier

resignedly, 'that, of course, he gave up altogether, when he first went

out!'

'Does he say all this?' asked Mr. Wickfield.

'Say? My dear sir,' returned Mrs. Markleham, shaking her head and her

fan, 'you little know my poor Jack Maldon when you ask that question.

Say? Not he. You might drag him at the heels of four wild horses first.'

'Mama!' said Mrs. Strong.

'Annie, my dear,' returned her mother, 'once for all, I must really beg

that you will not interfere with me, unless it is to confirm what I say.

You know as well as I do that your cousin Maldon would be dragged at the

heels of any number of wild horses--why should I confine myself to four!

I WON'T confine myself to four--eight, sixteen, two-and-thirty, rather

than say anything calculated to overturn the Doctor's plans.'

'Wickfield's plans,' said the Doctor, stroking his face, and looking

penitently at his adviser. 'That is to say, our joint plans for him. I

said myself, abroad or at home.'

'And I said' added Mr. Wickfield gravely, 'abroad. I was the means of

sending him abroad. It's my responsibility.'

'Oh! Responsibility!' said the Old Soldier. 'Everything was done for

the best, my dear Mr. Wickfield; everything was done for the kindest and

best, we know. But if the dear fellow can't live there, he can't live

there. And if he can't live there, he'll die there, sooner than he'll

overturn the Doctor's plans. I know him,' said the Old Soldier, fanning

herself, in a sort of calm prophetic agony, 'and I know he'll die there,

sooner than he'll overturn the Doctor's plans.'

'Well, well, ma'am,' said the Doctor cheerfully, 'I am not bigoted to

my plans, and I can overturn them myself. I can substitute some other

plans. If Mr. Jack Maldon comes home on account of ill health, he must

not be allowed to go back, and we must endeavour to make some more

suitable and fortunate provision for him in this country.'

Mrs. Markleham was so overcome by this generous speech--which, I need

not say, she had not at all expected or led up to--that she could only

tell the Doctor it was like himself, and go several times through that

operation of kissing the sticks of her fan, and then tapping his hand

with it. After which she gently chid her daughter Annie, for not being

more demonstrative when such kindnesses were showered, for her sake, on

her old playfellow; and entertained us with some particulars concerning

other deserving members of her family, whom it was desirable to set on

their deserving legs.

All this time, her daughter Annie never once spoke, or lifted up her

eyes. All this time, Mr. Wickfield had his glance upon her as she sat

by his own daughter's side. It appeared to me that he never thought of

being observed by anyone; but was so intent upon her, and upon his own

thoughts in connexion with her, as to be quite absorbed. He now asked

what Mr. Jack Maldon had actually written in reference to himself, and

to whom he had written?

'Why, here,' said Mrs. Markleham, taking a letter from the chimney-piece

above the Doctor's head, 'the dear fellow says to the Doctor

himself--where is it? Oh!--"I am sorry to inform you that my health is

suffering severely, and that I fear I may be reduced to the necessity

of returning home for a time, as the only hope of restoration." That's

pretty plain, poor fellow! His only hope of restoration! But Annie's

letter is plainer still. Annie, show me that letter again.'

'Not now, mama,' she pleaded in a low tone.

'My dear, you absolutely are, on some subjects, one of the most

ridiculous persons in the world,' returned her mother, 'and perhaps the

most unnatural to the claims of your own family. We never should have

heard of the letter at all, I believe, unless I had asked for it myself.

Do you call that confidence, my love, towards Doctor Strong? I am

surprised. You ought to know better.'

The letter was reluctantly produced; and as I handed it to the old lady,

I saw how the unwilling hand from which I took it, trembled.

'Now let us see,' said Mrs. Markleham, putting her glass to her eye,

'where the passage is. "The remembrance of old times, my dearest

Annie"--and so forth--it's not there. "The amiable old Proctor"--who's

he? Dear me, Annie, how illegibly your cousin Maldon writes, and how

stupid I am! "Doctor," of course. Ah! amiable indeed!' Here she left

off, to kiss her fan again, and shake it at the Doctor, who was looking

at us in a state of placid satisfaction. 'Now I have found it. "You may

not be surprised to hear, Annie,"--no, to be sure, knowing that he never

was really strong; what did I say just now?--"that I have undergone

so much in this distant place, as to have decided to leave it at all

hazards; on sick leave, if I can; on total resignation, if that is

not to be obtained. What I have endured, and do endure here, is

insupportable." And but for the promptitude of that best of creatures,'

said Mrs. Markleham, telegraphing the Doctor as before, and refolding

the letter, 'it would be insupportable to me to think of.'

Mr. Wickfield said not one word, though the old lady looked to him as if

for his commentary on this intelligence; but sat severely silent, with

his eyes fixed on the ground. Long after the subject was dismissed,

and other topics occupied us, he remained so; seldom raising his eyes,

unless to rest them for a moment, with a thoughtful frown, upon the

Doctor, or his wife, or both.

The Doctor was very fond of music. Agnes sang with great sweetness and

expression, and so did Mrs. Strong. They sang together, and played duets

together, and we had quite a little concert. But I remarked two things:

first, that though Annie soon recovered her composure, and was quite

herself, there was a blank between her and Mr. Wickfield which separated

them wholly from each other; secondly, that Mr. Wickfield seemed

to dislike the intimacy between her and Agnes, and to watch it with

uneasiness. And now, I must confess, the recollection of what I had seen

on that night when Mr. Maldon went away, first began to return upon me

with a meaning it had never had, and to trouble me. The innocent beauty

of her face was not as innocent to me as it had been; I mistrusted the

natural grace and charm of her manner; and when I looked at Agnes by her

side, and thought how good and true Agnes was, suspicions arose within

me that it was an ill-assorted friendship.

She was so happy in it herself, however, and the other was so happy too,

that they made the evening fly away as if it were but an hour. It closed

in an incident which I well remember. They were taking leave of each

other, and Agnes was going to embrace her and kiss her, when Mr.

Wickfield stepped between them, as if by accident, and drew Agnes

quickly away. Then I saw, as though all the intervening time had been

cancelled, and I were still standing in the doorway on the night of the

departure, the expression of that night in the face of Mrs. Strong, as

it confronted his.

I cannot say what an impression this made upon me, or how impossible I

found it, when I thought of her afterwards, to separate her from this

look, and remember her face in its innocent loveliness again. It haunted

me when I got home. I seemed to have left the Doctor's roof with a dark

cloud lowering on it. The reverence that I had for his grey head, was

mingled with commiseration for his faith in those who were treacherous

to him, and with resentment against those who injured him. The impending

shadow of a great affliction, and a great disgrace that had no distinct

form in it yet, fell like a stain upon the quiet place where I had

worked and played as a boy, and did it a cruel wrong. I had no pleasure

in thinking, any more, of the grave old broad-leaved aloe-trees, which

remained shut up in themselves a hundred years together, and of the trim

smooth grass-plot, and the stone urns, and the Doctor's walk, and the

congenial sound of the Cathedral bell hovering above them all. It was as

if the tranquil sanctuary of my boyhood had been sacked before my face,

and its peace and honour given to the winds.

But morning brought with it my parting from the old house, which Agnes

had filled with her influence; and that occupied my mind sufficiently.

I should be there again soon, no doubt; I might sleep again--perhaps

often--in my old room; but the days of my inhabiting there were gone,

and the old time was past. I was heavier at heart when I packed up such

of my books and clothes as still remained there to be sent to Dover,

than I cared to show to Uriah Heep; who was so officious to help me,

that I uncharitably thought him mighty glad that I was going.

I got away from Agnes and her father, somehow, with an indifferent show

of being very manly, and took my seat upon the box of the London coach.

I was so softened and forgiving, going through the town, that I had half

a mind to nod to my old enemy the butcher, and throw him five shillings

to drink. But he looked such a very obdurate butcher as he stood

scraping the great block in the shop, and moreover, his appearance was

so little improved by the loss of a front tooth which I had knocked out,

that I thought it best to make no advances.

The main object on my mind, I remember, when we got fairly on the road,

was to appear as old as possible to the coachman, and to speak extremely

gruff. The latter point I achieved at great personal inconvenience; but

I stuck to it, because I felt it was a grown-up sort of thing.

'You are going through, sir?' said the coachman.

'Yes, William,' I said, condescendingly (I knew him); 'I am going to

London. I shall go down into Suffolk afterwards.'

'Shooting, sir?' said the coachman.

He knew as well as I did that it was just as likely, at that time of

year, I was going down there whaling; but I felt complimented, too.

'I don't know,' I said, pretending to be undecided, 'whether I shall

take a shot or not.' 'Birds is got wery shy, I'm told,' said William.

'So I understand,' said I.

'Is Suffolk your county, sir?' asked William.

'Yes,' I said, with some importance. 'Suffolk's my county.'

'I'm told the dumplings is uncommon fine down there,' said William.

I was not aware of it myself, but I felt it necessary to uphold the

institutions of my county, and to evince a familiarity with them; so I

shook my head, as much as to say, 'I believe you!'

'And the Punches,' said William. 'There's cattle! A Suffolk Punch, when

he's a good un, is worth his weight in gold. Did you ever breed any

Suffolk Punches yourself, sir?'

'N-no,' I said, 'not exactly.'

'Here's a gen'lm'n behind me, I'll pound it,' said William, 'as has bred

'em by wholesale.'

The gentleman spoken of was a gentleman with a very unpromising squint,

and a prominent chin, who had a tall white hat on with a narrow flat

brim, and whose close-fitting drab trousers seemed to button all the way

up outside his legs from his boots to his hips. His chin was cocked over

the coachman's shoulder, so near to me, that his breath quite tickled

the back of my head; and as I looked at him, he leered at the leaders

with the eye with which he didn't squint, in a very knowing manner.

'Ain't you?' asked William.

'Ain't I what?' said the gentleman behind.

'Bred them Suffolk Punches by wholesale?'

'I should think so,' said the gentleman. 'There ain't no sort of orse

that I ain't bred, and no sort of dorg. Orses and dorgs is some

men's fancy. They're wittles and drink to me--lodging, wife, and

children--reading, writing, and Arithmetic--snuff, tobacker, and sleep.'

'That ain't a sort of man to see sitting behind a coach-box, is it

though?' said William in my ear, as he handled the reins.

I construed this remark into an indication of a wish that he should have

my place, so I blushingly offered to resign it.

'Well, if you don't mind, sir,' said William, 'I think it would be more

correct.'

I have always considered this as the first fall I had in life. When I

booked my place at the coach office I had had 'Box Seat' written against

the entry, and had given the book-keeper half-a-crown. I was got up in

a special great-coat and shawl, expressly to do honour to that

distinguished eminence; had glorified myself upon it a good deal; and

had felt that I was a credit to the coach. And here, in the very first

stage, I was supplanted by a shabby man with a squint, who had no other

merit than smelling like a livery-stables, and being able to walk across

me, more like a fly than a human being, while the horses were at a

canter!

A distrust of myself, which has often beset me in life on small

occasions, when it would have been better away, was assuredly not

stopped in its growth by this little incident outside the Canterbury

coach. It was in vain to take refuge in gruffness of speech. I spoke

from the pit of my stomach for the rest of the journey, but I felt

completely extinguished, and dreadfully young.

It was curious and interesting, nevertheless, to be sitting up there

behind four horses: well educated, well dressed, and with plenty of

money in my pocket; and to look out for the places where I had slept on

my weary journey. I had abundant occupation for my thoughts, in every

conspicuous landmark on the road. When I looked down at the trampers

whom we passed, and saw that well-remembered style of face turned up,

I felt as if the tinker's blackened hand were in the bosom of my shirt

again. When we clattered through the narrow street of Chatham, and I

caught a glimpse, in passing, of the lane where the old monster lived

who had bought my jacket, I stretched my neck eagerly to look for the

place where I had sat, in the sun and in the shade, waiting for my

money. When we came, at last, within a stage of London, and passed the

veritable Salem House where Mr. Creakle had laid about him with a heavy

hand, I would have given all I had, for lawful permission to get down

and thrash him, and let all the boys out like so many caged sparrows.

We went to the Golden Cross at Charing Cross, then a mouldy sort of

establishment in a close neighbourhood. A waiter showed me into the

coffee-room; and a chambermaid introduced me to my small bedchamber,

which smelt like a hackney-coach, and was shut up like a family vault.

I was still painfully conscious of my youth, for nobody stood in any awe

of me at all: the chambermaid being utterly indifferent to my opinions

on any subject, and the waiter being familiar with me, and offering

advice to my inexperience.

'Well now,' said the waiter, in a tone of confidence, 'what would you

like for dinner? Young gentlemen likes poultry in general: have a fowl!'

I told him, as majestically as I could, that I wasn't in the humour for

a fowl.

'Ain't you?' said the waiter. 'Young gentlemen is generally tired of

beef and mutton: have a weal cutlet!'

I assented to this proposal, in default of being able to suggest

anything else.

'Do you care for taters?' said the waiter, with an insinuating smile,

and his head on one side. 'Young gentlemen generally has been overdosed

with taters.'

I commanded him, in my deepest voice, to order a veal cutlet and

potatoes, and all things fitting; and to inquire at the bar if there

were any letters for Trotwood Copperfield, Esquire--which I knew there

were not, and couldn't be, but thought it manly to appear to expect.

He soon came back to say that there were none (at which I was much

surprised) and began to lay the cloth for my dinner in a box by the

fire. While he was so engaged, he asked me what I would take with it;

and on my replying 'Half a pint of sherry,'thought it a favourable

opportunity, I am afraid, to extract that measure of wine from the

stale leavings at the bottoms of several small decanters. I am of this

opinion, because, while I was reading the newspaper, I observed him

behind a low wooden partition, which was his private apartment, very

busy pouring out of a number of those vessels into one, like a chemist

and druggist making up a prescription. When the wine came, too, I

thought it flat; and it certainly had more English crumbs in it, than

were to be expected in a foreign wine in anything like a pure state, but

I was bashful enough to drink it, and say nothing.

Being then in a pleasant frame of mind (from which I infer that

poisoning is not always disagreeable in some stages of the process), I

resolved to go to the play. It was Covent Garden Theatre that I chose;

and there, from the back of a centre box, I saw Julius Caesar and the

new Pantomime. To have all those noble Romans alive before me, and

walking in and out for my entertainment, instead of being the stern

taskmasters they had been at school, was a most novel and delightful

effect. But the mingled reality and mystery of the whole show, the

influence upon me of the poetry, the lights, the music, the company, the

smooth stupendous changes of glittering and brilliant scenery, were so

dazzling, and opened up such illimitable regions of delight, that when I

came out into the rainy street, at twelve o'clock at night, I felt as if

I had come from the clouds, where I had been leading a romantic life

for ages, to a bawling, splashing, link-lighted, umbrella-struggling,

hackney-coach-jostling, patten-clinking, muddy, miserable world.

I had emerged by another door, and stood in the street for a little

while, as if I really were a stranger upon earth: but the unceremonious

pushing and hustling that I received, soon recalled me to myself, and

put me in the road back to the hotel; whither I went, revolving the

glorious vision all the way; and where, after some porter and oysters,

I sat revolving it still, at past one o'clock, with my eyes on the

coffee-room fire.

I was so filled with the play, and with the past--for it was, in a

manner, like a shining transparency, through which I saw my earlier

life moving along--that I don't know when the figure of a handsome

well-formed young man dressed with a tasteful easy negligence which I

have reason to remember very well, became a real presence to me. But

I recollect being conscious of his company without having noticed his

coming in--and my still sitting, musing, over the coffee-room fire.

At last I rose to go to bed, much to the relief of the sleepy waiter,

who had got the fidgets in his legs, and was twisting them, and hitting

them, and putting them through all kinds of contortions in his small

pantry. In going towards the door, I passed the person who had come in,

and saw him plainly. I turned directly, came back, and looked again. He

did not know me, but I knew him in a moment.

At another time I might have wanted the confidence or the decision to

speak to him, and might have put it off until next day, and might have

lost him. But, in the then condition of my mind, where the play was

still running high, his former protection of me appeared so deserving

of my gratitude, and my old love for him overflowed my breast so freshly

and spontaneously, that I went up to him at once, with a fast-beating

heart, and said:

'Steerforth! won't you speak to me?'

He looked at me--just as he used to look, sometimes--but I saw no

recognition in his face.

'You don't remember me, I am afraid,' said I.

'My God!' he suddenly exclaimed. 'It's little Copperfield!'

I grasped him by both hands, and could not let them go. But for very

shame, and the fear that it might displease him, I could have held him

round the neck and cried.

'I never, never, never was so glad! My dear Steerforth, I am so

overjoyed to see you!'

'And I am rejoiced to see you, too!' he said, shaking my hands heartily.

'Why, Copperfield, old boy, don't be overpowered!' And yet he was glad,

too, I thought, to see how the delight I had in meeting him affected me.

I brushed away the tears that my utmost resolution had not been able to

keep back, and I made a clumsy laugh of it, and we sat down together,

side by side.

'Why, how do you come to be here?' said Steerforth, clapping me on the

shoulder.

'I came here by the Canterbury coach, today. I have been adopted by

an aunt down in that part of the country, and have just finished my

education there. How do YOU come to be here, Steerforth?'

'Well, I am what they call an Oxford man,' he returned; 'that is to say,

I get bored to death down there, periodically--and I am on my way now to

my mother's. You're a devilish amiable-looking fellow, Copperfield. Just

what you used to be, now I look at you! Not altered in the least!'

'I knew you immediately,' I said; 'but you are more easily remembered.'

He laughed as he ran his hand through the clustering curls of his hair,

and said gaily:

'Yes, I am on an expedition of duty. My mother lives a little way out of

town; and the roads being in a beastly condition, and our house tedious

enough, I remained here tonight instead of going on. I have not been in

town half-a-dozen hours, and those I have been dozing and grumbling away

at the play.'

'I have been at the play, too,' said I. 'At Covent Garden. What a

delightful and magnificent entertainment, Steerforth!'

Steerforth laughed heartily.

'My dear young Davy,' he said, clapping me on the shoulder again, 'you

are a very Daisy. The daisy of the field, at sunrise, is not fresher

than you are. I have been at Covent Garden, too, and there never was a

more miserable business. Holloa, you sir!'

This was addressed to the waiter, who had been very attentive to our

recognition, at a distance, and now came forward deferentially.

'Where have you put my friend, Mr. Copperfield?' said Steerforth.

'Beg your pardon, sir?'

'Where does he sleep? What's his number? You know what I mean,' said

Steerforth.

'Well, sir,' said the waiter, with an apologetic air. 'Mr. Copperfield

is at present in forty-four, sir.'

'And what the devil do you mean,' retorted Steerforth, 'by putting Mr.

Copperfield into a little loft over a stable?'

'Why, you see we wasn't aware, sir,' returned the waiter, still

apologetically, 'as Mr. Copperfield was anyways particular. We can give

Mr. Copperfield seventy-two, sir, if it would be preferred. Next you,

sir.'

'Of course it would be preferred,' said Steerforth. 'And do it at once.'

The waiter immediately withdrew to make the exchange. Steerforth, very

much amused at my having been put into forty-four, laughed again, and

clapped me on the shoulder again, and invited me to breakfast with him

next morning at ten o'clock--an invitation I was only too proud and

happy to accept. It being now pretty late, we took our candles and went

upstairs, where we parted with friendly heartiness at his door, and

where I found my new room a great improvement on my old one, it not

being at all musty, and having an immense four-post bedstead in it,

which was quite a little landed estate. Here, among pillows enough for

six, I soon fell asleep in a blissful condition, and dreamed of ancient

Rome, Steerforth, and friendship, until the early morning coaches,

rumbling out of the archway underneath, made me dream of thunder and the

gods.

CHAPTER 20. STEERFORTH'S HOME

When the chambermaid tapped at my door at eight o'clock, and informed

me that my shaving-water was outside, I felt severely the having no

occasion for it, and blushed in my bed. The suspicion that she laughed

too, when she said it, preyed upon my mind all the time I was dressing;

and gave me, I was conscious, a sneaking and guilty air when I passed

her on the staircase, as I was going down to breakfast. I was so

sensitively aware, indeed, of being younger than I could have wished,

that for some time I could not make up my mind to pass her at all, under

the ignoble circumstances of the case; but, hearing her there with

a broom, stood peeping out of window at King Charles on horseback,

surrounded by a maze of hackney-coaches, and looking anything but regal

in a drizzling rain and a dark-brown fog, until I was admonished by the

waiter that the gentleman was waiting for me.

It was not in the coffee-room that I found Steerforth expecting me, but

in a snug private apartment, red-curtained and Turkey-carpeted, where

the fire burnt bright, and a fine hot breakfast was set forth on a table

covered with a clean cloth; and a cheerful miniature of the room, the

fire, the breakfast, Steerforth, and all, was shining in the little

round mirror over the sideboard. I was rather bashful at first,

Steerforth being so self-possessed, and elegant, and superior to me in

all respects (age included); but his easy patronage soon put that to

rights, and made me quite at home. I could not enough admire the change

he had wrought in the Golden Cross; or compare the dull forlorn state

I had held yesterday, with this morning's comfort and this morning's

entertainment. As to the waiter's familiarity, it was quenched as if it

had never been. He attended on us, as I may say, in sackcloth and ashes.

'Now, Copperfield,' said Steerforth, when we were alone, 'I should like

to hear what you are doing, and where you are going, and all about you.

I feel as if you were my property.' Glowing with pleasure to find that

he had still this interest in me, I told him how my aunt had proposed

the little expedition that I had before me, and whither it tended.

'As you are in no hurry, then,' said Steerforth, 'come home with me to

Highgate, and stay a day or two. You will be pleased with my mother--she

is a little vain and prosy about me, but that you can forgive her--and

she will be pleased with you.'

'I should like to be as sure of that, as you are kind enough to say you

are,' I answered, smiling.

'Oh!' said Steerforth, 'everyone who likes me, has a claim on her that

is sure to be acknowledged.'

'Then I think I shall be a favourite,' said I.

'Good!' said Steerforth. 'Come and prove it. We will go and see the

lions for an hour or two--it's something to have a fresh fellow like you

to show them to, Copperfield--and then we'll journey out to Highgate by

the coach.'

I could hardly believe but that I was in a dream, and that I should wake

presently in number forty-four, to the solitary box in the coffee-room

and the familiar waiter again. After I had written to my aunt and told

her of my fortunate meeting with my admired old schoolfellow, and my

acceptance of his invitation, we went out in a hackney-chariot, and saw

a Panorama and some other sights, and took a walk through the Museum,

where I could not help observing how much Steerforth knew, on an

infinite variety of subjects, and of how little account he seemed to

make his knowledge.

'You'll take a high degree at college, Steerforth,' said I, 'if you have

not done so already; and they will have good reason to be proud of you.'

'I take a degree!' cried Steerforth. 'Not I! my dear Daisy--will you

mind my calling you Daisy?'

'Not at all!' said I.

'That's a good fellow! My dear Daisy,' said Steerforth, laughing. 'I

have not the least desire or intention to distinguish myself in that

way. I have done quite sufficient for my purpose. I find that I am heavy

company enough for myself as I am.'

'But the fame--' I was beginning.

'You romantic Daisy!' said Steerforth, laughing still more heartily:

'why should I trouble myself, that a parcel of heavy-headed fellows may

gape and hold up their hands? Let them do it at some other man. There's

fame for him, and he's welcome to it.'

I was abashed at having made so great a mistake, and was glad to change

the subject. Fortunately it was not difficult to do, for Steerforth

could always pass from one subject to another with a carelessness and

lightness that were his own.

Lunch succeeded to our sight-seeing, and the short winter day wore away

so fast, that it was dusk when the stage-coach stopped with us at an

old brick house at Highgate on the summit of the hill. An elderly lady,

though not very far advanced in years, with a proud carriage and

a handsome face, was in the doorway as we alighted; and greeting

Steerforth as 'My dearest James,' folded him in her arms. To this lady

he presented me as his mother, and she gave me a stately welcome.

It was a genteel old-fashioned house, very quiet and orderly. From the

windows of my room I saw all London lying in the distance like a great

vapour, with here and there some lights twinkling through it. I had only

time, in dressing, to glance at the solid furniture, the framed pieces

of work (done, I supposed, by Steerforth's mother when she was a girl),

and some pictures in crayons of ladies with powdered hair and bodices,

coming and going on the walls, as the newly-kindled fire crackled and

sputtered, when I was called to dinner.

There was a second lady in the dining-room, of a slight short figure,

dark, and not agreeable to look at, but with some appearance of good

looks too, who attracted my attention: perhaps because I had not

expected to see her; perhaps because I found myself sitting opposite

to her; perhaps because of something really remarkable in her. She had

black hair and eager black eyes, and was thin, and had a scar upon her

lip. It was an old scar--I should rather call it seam, for it was not

discoloured, and had healed years ago--which had once cut through her

mouth, downward towards the chin, but was now barely visible across

the table, except above and on her upper lip, the shape of which it had

altered. I concluded in my own mind that she was about thirty years

of age, and that she wished to be married. She was a little

dilapidated--like a house--with having been so long to let; yet had, as

I have said, an appearance of good looks. Her thinness seemed to be the

effect of some wasting fire within her, which found a vent in her gaunt

eyes.

She was introduced as Miss Dartle, and both Steerforth and his mother

called her Rosa. I found that she lived there, and had been for a long

time Mrs. Steerforth's companion. It appeared to me that she never said

anything she wanted to say, outright; but hinted it, and made a great

deal more of it by this practice. For example, when Mrs. Steerforth

observed, more in jest than earnest, that she feared her son led but a

wild life at college, Miss Dartle put in thus:

'Oh, really? You know how ignorant I am, and that I only ask for

information, but isn't it always so? I thought that kind of life was

on all hands understood to be--eh?' 'It is education for a very grave

profession, if you mean that, Rosa,' Mrs. Steerforth answered with some

coldness.

'Oh! Yes! That's very true,' returned Miss Dartle. 'But isn't it,

though?--I want to be put right, if I am wrong--isn't it, really?'

'Really what?' said Mrs. Steerforth.

'Oh! You mean it's not!' returned Miss Dartle. 'Well, I'm very glad to

hear it! Now, I know what to do! That's the advantage of asking. I shall

never allow people to talk before me about wastefulness and profligacy,

and so forth, in connexion with that life, any more.'

'And you will be right,' said Mrs. Steerforth. 'My son's tutor is a

conscientious gentleman; and if I had not implicit reliance on my son, I

should have reliance on him.'

'Should you?' said Miss Dartle. 'Dear me! Conscientious, is he? Really

conscientious, now?'

'Yes, I am convinced of it,' said Mrs. Steerforth.

'How very nice!' exclaimed Miss Dartle. 'What a comfort! Really

conscientious? Then he's not--but of course he can't be, if he's really

conscientious. Well, I shall be quite happy in my opinion of him, from

this time. You can't think how it elevates him in my opinion, to know

for certain that he's really conscientious!'

Her own views of every question, and her correction of everything that

was said to which she was opposed, Miss Dartle insinuated in the same

way: sometimes, I could not conceal from myself, with great power,

though in contradiction even of Steerforth. An instance happened before

dinner was done. Mrs. Steerforth speaking to me about my intention

of going down into Suffolk, I said at hazard how glad I should be, if

Steerforth would only go there with me; and explaining to him that I was

going to see my old nurse, and Mr. Peggotty's family, I reminded him of

the boatman whom he had seen at school.

'Oh! That bluff fellow!' said Steerforth. 'He had a son with him, hadn't

he?'

'No. That was his nephew,' I replied; 'whom he adopted, though, as

a son. He has a very pretty little niece too, whom he adopted as a

daughter. In short, his house--or rather his boat, for he lives in one,

on dry land--is full of people who are objects of his generosity and

kindness. You would be delighted to see that household.'

'Should I?' said Steerforth. 'Well, I think I should. I must see what

can be done. It would be worth a journey (not to mention the pleasure of

a journey with you, Daisy), to see that sort of people together, and to

make one of 'em.'

My heart leaped with a new hope of pleasure. But it was in reference

to the tone in which he had spoken of 'that sort of people', that Miss

Dartle, whose sparkling eyes had been watchful of us, now broke in

again.

'Oh, but, really? Do tell me. Are they, though?' she said.

'Are they what? And are who what?' said Steerforth.

'That sort of people.---Are they really animals and clods, and beings of

another order? I want to know SO much.'

'Why, there's a pretty wide separation between them and us,' said

Steerforth, with indifference. 'They are not to be expected to be

as sensitive as we are. Their delicacy is not to be shocked, or hurt

easily. They are wonderfully virtuous, I dare say--some people contend

for that, at least; and I am sure I don't want to contradict them--but

they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like

their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded.'

'Really!' said Miss Dartle. 'Well, I don't know, now, when I have been

better pleased than to hear that. It's so consoling! It's such a delight

to know that, when they suffer, they don't feel! Sometimes I have been

quite uneasy for that sort of people; but now I shall just dismiss the

idea of them, altogether. Live and learn. I had my doubts, I confess,

but now they're cleared up. I didn't know, and now I do know, and that

shows the advantage of asking--don't it?'

I believed that Steerforth had said what he had, in jest, or to draw

Miss Dartle out; and I expected him to say as much when she was gone,

and we two were sitting before the fire. But he merely asked me what I

thought of her.

'She is very clever, is she not?' I asked.

'Clever! She brings everything to a grindstone,' said Steerforth, and

sharpens it, as she has sharpened her own face and figure these years

past. She has worn herself away by constant sharpening. She is all

edge.'

'What a remarkable scar that is upon her lip!' I said.

Steerforth's face fell, and he paused a moment.

'Why, the fact is,' he returned, 'I did that.'

'By an unfortunate accident!'

'No. I was a young boy, and she exasperated me, and I threw a hammer at

her. A promising young angel I must have been!' I was deeply sorry to

have touched on such a painful theme, but that was useless now.

'She has borne the mark ever since, as you see,' said Steerforth; 'and

she'll bear it to her grave, if she ever rests in one--though I can

hardly believe she will ever rest anywhere. She was the motherless child

of a sort of cousin of my father's. He died one day. My mother, who was

then a widow, brought her here to be company to her. She has a couple of

thousand pounds of her own, and saves the interest of it every year, to

add to the principal. There's the history of Miss Rosa Dartle for you.'

'And I have no doubt she loves you like a brother?' said I.

'Humph!' retorted Steerforth, looking at the fire. 'Some brothers are

not loved over much; and some love--but help yourself, Copperfield!

We'll drink the daisies of the field, in compliment to you; and the

lilies of the valley that toil not, neither do they spin, in compliment

to me--the more shame for me!' A moody smile that had overspread his

features cleared off as he said this merrily, and he was his own frank,

winning self again.

I could not help glancing at the scar with a painful interest when we

went in to tea. It was not long before I observed that it was the most

susceptible part of her face, and that, when she turned pale, that mark

altered first, and became a dull, lead-coloured streak, lengthening out

to its full extent, like a mark in invisible ink brought to the fire.

There was a little altercation between her and Steerforth about a cast

of the dice at back gammon--when I thought her, for one moment, in a

storm of rage; and then I saw it start forth like the old writing on the

wall.

It was no matter of wonder to me to find Mrs. Steerforth devoted to her

son. She seemed to be able to speak or think about nothing else. She

showed me his picture as an infant, in a locket, with some of his

baby-hair in it; she showed me his picture as he had been when I first

knew him; and she wore at her breast his picture as he was now. All the

letters he had ever written to her, she kept in a cabinet near her own

chair by the fire; and she would have read me some of them, and I should

have been very glad to hear them too, if he had not interposed, and

coaxed her out of the design.

'It was at Mr. Creakle's, my son tells me, that you first became

acquainted,' said Mrs. Steerforth, as she and I were talking at one

table, while they played backgammon at another. 'Indeed, I recollect his

speaking, at that time, of a pupil younger than himself who had taken

his fancy there; but your name, as you may suppose, has not lived in my

memory.'

'He was very generous and noble to me in those days, I assure you,

ma'am,' said I, 'and I stood in need of such a friend. I should have

been quite crushed without him.'

'He is always generous and noble,' said Mrs. Steerforth, proudly.

I subscribed to this with all my heart, God knows. She knew I did; for

the stateliness of her manner already abated towards me, except when she

spoke in praise of him, and then her air was always lofty.

'It was not a fit school generally for my son,' said she; 'far from it;

but there were particular circumstances to be considered at the time, of

more importance even than that selection. My son's high spirit made

it desirable that he should be placed with some man who felt its

superiority, and would be content to bow himself before it; and we found

such a man there.'

I knew that, knowing the fellow. And yet I did not despise him the more

for it, but thought it a redeeming quality in him if he could be allowed

any grace for not resisting one so irresistible as Steerforth.

'My son's great capacity was tempted on, there, by a feeling of

voluntary emulation and conscious pride,' the fond lady went on to say.

'He would have risen against all constraint; but he found himself the

monarch of the place, and he haughtily determined to be worthy of his

station. It was like himself.'

I echoed, with all my heart and soul, that it was like himself.

'So my son took, of his own will, and on no compulsion, to the course

in which he can always, when it is his pleasure, outstrip every

competitor,' she pursued. 'My son informs me, Mr. Copperfield, that

you were quite devoted to him, and that when you met yesterday you made

yourself known to him with tears of joy. I should be an affected woman

if I made any pretence of being surprised by my son's inspiring such

emotions; but I cannot be indifferent to anyone who is so sensible of

his merit, and I am very glad to see you here, and can assure you that

he feels an unusual friendship for you, and that you may rely on his

protection.'

Miss Dartle played backgammon as eagerly as she did everything else.

If I had seen her, first, at the board, I should have fancied that her

figure had got thin, and her eyes had got large, over that pursuit, and

no other in the world. But I am very much mistaken if she missed a

word of this, or lost a look of mine as I received it with the utmost

pleasure, and honoured by Mrs. Steerforth's confidence, felt older than

I had done since I left Canterbury.

When the evening was pretty far spent, and a tray of glasses and

decanters came in, Steerforth promised, over the fire, that he would

seriously think of going down into the country with me. There was no

hurry, he said; a week hence would do; and his mother hospitably said

the same. While we were talking, he more than once called me Daisy;

which brought Miss Dartle out again.

'But really, Mr. Copperfield,' she asked, 'is it a nickname? And

why does he give it you? Is it--eh?--because he thinks you young and

innocent? I am so stupid in these things.'

I coloured in replying that I believed it was.

'Oh!' said Miss Dartle. 'Now I am glad to know that! I ask for

information, and I am glad to know it. He thinks you young and innocent;

and so you are his friend. Well, that's quite delightful!'

She went to bed soon after this, and Mrs. Steerforth retired too.

Steerforth and I, after lingering for half-an-hour over the fire,

talking about Traddles and all the rest of them at old Salem House, went

upstairs together. Steerforth's room was next to mine, and I went in to

look at it. It was a picture of comfort, full of easy-chairs, cushions

and footstools, worked by his mother's hand, and with no sort of thing

omitted that could help to render it complete. Finally, her handsome

features looked down on her darling from a portrait on the wall, as if

it were even something to her that her likeness should watch him while

he slept.

I found the fire burning clear enough in my room by this time, and the

curtains drawn before the windows and round the bed, giving it a very

snug appearance. I sat down in a great chair upon the hearth to meditate

on my happiness; and had enjoyed the contemplation of it for some time,

when I found a likeness of Miss Dartle looking eagerly at me from above

the chimney-piece.

It was a startling likeness, and necessarily had a startling look. The

painter hadn't made the scar, but I made it; and there it was, coming

and going; now confined to the upper lip as I had seen it at dinner, and

now showing the whole extent of the wound inflicted by the hammer, as I

had seen it when she was passionate.

I wondered peevishly why they couldn't put her anywhere else instead

of quartering her on me. To get rid of her, I undressed quickly,

extinguished my light, and went to bed. But, as I fell asleep, I could

not forget that she was still there looking, 'Is it really, though?

I want to know'; and when I awoke in the night, I found that I was

uneasily asking all sorts of people in my dreams whether it really was

or not--without knowing what I meant.

CHAPTER 21. LITTLE EM'LY

There was a servant in that house, a man who, I understood, was usually

with Steerforth, and had come into his service at the University, who

was in appearance a pattern of respectability. I believe there never

existed in his station a more respectable-looking man. He was taciturn,

soft-footed, very quiet in his manner, deferential, observant, always at

hand when wanted, and never near when not wanted; but his great claim to

consideration was his respectability. He had not a pliant face, he had

rather a stiff neck, rather a tight smooth head with short hair clinging

to it at the sides, a soft way of speaking, with a peculiar habit of

whispering the letter S so distinctly, that he seemed to use it

oftener than any other man; but every peculiarity that he had he made

respectable. If his nose had been upside-down, he would have made that

respectable. He surrounded himself with an atmosphere of respectability,

and walked secure in it. It would have been next to impossible to

suspect him of anything wrong, he was so thoroughly respectable.

Nobody could have thought of putting him in a livery, he was so highly

respectable. To have imposed any derogatory work upon him, would have

been to inflict a wanton insult on the feelings of a most respectable

man. And of this, I noticed--the women-servants in the household were

so intuitively conscious, that they always did such work themselves, and

generally while he read the paper by the pantry fire.

Such a self-contained man I never saw. But in that quality, as in every

other he possessed, he only seemed to be the more respectable. Even the

fact that no one knew his Christian name, seemed to form a part of his

respectability. Nothing could be objected against his surname, Littimer,

by which he was known. Peter might have been hanged, or Tom transported;

but Littimer was perfectly respectable.

It was occasioned, I suppose, by the reverend nature of respectability

in the abstract, but I felt particularly young in this man's presence.

How old he was himself, I could not guess--and that again went to his

credit on the same score; for in the calmness of respectability he might

have numbered fifty years as well as thirty.

Littimer was in my room in the morning before I was up, to bring me that

reproachful shaving-water, and to put out my clothes. When I undrew the

curtains and looked out of bed, I saw him, in an equable temperature

of respectability, unaffected by the east wind of January, and not

even breathing frostily, standing my boots right and left in the first

dancing position, and blowing specks of dust off my coat as he laid it

down like a baby.

I gave him good morning, and asked him what o'clock it was. He took

out of his pocket the most respectable hunting-watch I ever saw, and

preventing the spring with his thumb from opening far, looked in at the

face as if he were consulting an oracular oyster, shut it up again, and

said, if I pleased, it was half past eight.

'Mr. Steerforth will be glad to hear how you have rested, sir.'

'Thank you,' said I, 'very well indeed. Is Mr. Steerforth quite well?'

'Thank you, sir, Mr. Steerforth is tolerably well.' Another of his

characteristics--no use of superlatives. A cool calm medium always.

'Is there anything more I can have the honour of doing for you, sir? The

warning-bell will ring at nine; the family take breakfast at half past

nine.'

'Nothing, I thank you.'

'I thank YOU, sir, if you please'; and with that, and with a little

inclination of his head when he passed the bed-side, as an apology for

correcting me, he went out, shutting the door as delicately as if I had

just fallen into a sweet sleep on which my life depended.

Every morning we held exactly this conversation: never any more, and

never any less: and yet, invariably, however far I might have been

lifted out of myself over-night, and advanced towards maturer years,

by Steerforth's companionship, or Mrs. Steerforth's confidence, or Miss

Dartle's conversation, in the presence of this most respectable man I

became, as our smaller poets sing, 'a boy again'.

He got horses for us; and Steerforth, who knew everything, gave me

lessons in riding. He provided foils for us, and Steerforth gave me

lessons in fencing--gloves, and I began, of the same master, to improve

in boxing. It gave me no manner of concern that Steerforth should find

me a novice in these sciences, but I never could bear to show my want of

skill before the respectable Littimer. I had no reason to believe

that Littimer understood such arts himself; he never led me to suppose

anything of the kind, by so much as the vibration of one of his

respectable eyelashes; yet whenever he was by, while we were practising,

I felt myself the greenest and most inexperienced of mortals.

I am particular about this man, because he made a particular effect on

me at that time, and because of what took place thereafter.

The week passed away in a most delightful manner. It passed rapidly, as

may be supposed, to one entranced as I was; and yet it gave me so many

occasions for knowing Steerforth better, and admiring him more in a

thousand respects, that at its close I seemed to have been with him

for a much longer time. A dashing way he had of treating me like a

plaything, was more agreeable to me than any behaviour he could have

adopted. It reminded me of our old acquaintance; it seemed the natural

sequel of it; it showed me that he was unchanged; it relieved me of

any uneasiness I might have felt, in comparing my merits with his, and

measuring my claims upon his friendship by any equal standard; above

all, it was a familiar, unrestrained, affectionate demeanour that he

used towards no one else. As he had treated me at school differently

from all the rest, I joyfully believed that he treated me in life unlike

any other friend he had. I believed that I was nearer to his heart than

any other friend, and my own heart warmed with attachment to him. He

made up his mind to go with me into the country, and the day arrived for

our departure. He had been doubtful at first whether to take Littimer

or not, but decided to leave him at home. The respectable creature,

satisfied with his lot whatever it was, arranged our portmanteaux on

the little carriage that was to take us into London, as if they were

intended to defy the shocks of ages, and received my modestly proffered

donation with perfect tranquillity.

We bade adieu to Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle, with many thanks on

my part, and much kindness on the devoted mother's. The last thing I

saw was Littimer's unruffled eye; fraught, as I fancied, with the silent

conviction that I was very young indeed.

What I felt, in returning so auspiciously to the old familiar places,

I shall not endeavour to describe. We went down by the Mail. I was

so concerned, I recollect, even for the honour of Yarmouth, that when

Steerforth said, as we drove through its dark streets to the inn, that,

as well as he could make out, it was a good, queer, out-of-the-way kind

of hole, I was highly pleased. We went to bed on our arrival (I observed

a pair of dirty shoes and gaiters in connexion with my old friend the

Dolphin as we passed that door), and breakfasted late in the morning.

Steerforth, who was in great spirits, had been strolling about the

beach before I was up, and had made acquaintance, he said, with half the

boatmen in the place. Moreover, he had seen, in the distance, what he

was sure must be the identical house of Mr. Peggotty, with smoke coming

out of the chimney; and had had a great mind, he told me, to walk in and

swear he was myself grown out of knowledge.

'When do you propose to introduce me there, Daisy?' he said. 'I am at

your disposal. Make your own arrangements.'

'Why, I was thinking that this evening would be a good time, Steerforth,

when they are all sitting round the fire. I should like you to see it

when it's snug, it's such a curious place.'

'So be it!' returned Steerforth. 'This evening.'

'I shall not give them any notice that we are here, you know,' said I,

delighted. 'We must take them by surprise.'

'Oh, of course! It's no fun,' said Steerforth, 'unless we take them by

surprise. Let us see the natives in their aboriginal condition.'

'Though they ARE that sort of people that you mentioned,' I returned.

'Aha! What! you recollect my skirmishes with Rosa, do you?' he exclaimed

with a quick look. 'Confound the girl, I am half afraid of her. She's

like a goblin to me. But never mind her. Now what are you going to do?

You are going to see your nurse, I suppose?'

'Why, yes,' I said, 'I must see Peggotty first of all.'

'Well,' replied Steerforth, looking at his watch. 'Suppose I deliver you

up to be cried over for a couple of hours. Is that long enough?'

I answered, laughing, that I thought we might get through it in that

time, but that he must come also; for he would find that his renown had

preceded him, and that he was almost as great a personage as I was.

'I'll come anywhere you like,' said Steerforth, 'or do anything you

like. Tell me where to come to; and in two hours I'll produce myself in

any state you please, sentimental or comical.'

I gave him minute directions for finding the residence of Mr. Barkis,

carrier to Blunderstone and elsewhere; and, on this understanding, went

out alone. There was a sharp bracing air; the ground was dry; the sea

was crisp and clear; the sun was diffusing abundance of light, if not

much warmth; and everything was fresh and lively. I was so fresh and

lively myself, in the pleasure of being there, that I could have stopped

the people in the streets and shaken hands with them.

The streets looked small, of course. The streets that we have only seen

as children always do, I believe, when we go back to them. But I had

forgotten nothing in them, and found nothing changed, until I came to

Mr. Omer's shop. OMER AND Joram was now written up, where OMER used to

be; but the inscription, DRAPER, TAILOR, HABERDASHER, FUNERAL FURNISHER,

&c., remained as it was.

My footsteps seemed to tend so naturally to the shop door, after I had

read these words from over the way, that I went across the road and

looked in. There was a pretty woman at the back of the shop, dancing

a little child in her arms, while another little fellow clung to her

apron. I had no difficulty in recognizing either Minnie or Minnie's

children. The glass door of the parlour was not open; but in the

workshop across the yard I could faintly hear the old tune playing, as

if it had never left off.

'Is Mr. Omer at home?' said I, entering. 'I should like to see him, for

a moment, if he is.'

'Oh yes, sir, he is at home,' said Minnie; 'the weather don't suit his

asthma out of doors. Joe, call your grandfather!'

The little fellow, who was holding her apron, gave such a lusty shout,

that the sound of it made him bashful, and he buried his face in her

skirts, to her great admiration. I heard a heavy puffing and blowing

coming towards us, and soon Mr. Omer, shorter-winded than of yore, but

not much older-looking, stood before me.

'Servant, sir,' said Mr. Omer. 'What can I do for you, sir?' 'You can

shake hands with me, Mr. Omer, if you please,' said I, putting out my

own. 'You were very good-natured to me once, when I am afraid I didn't

show that I thought so.'

'Was I though?' returned the old man. 'I'm glad to hear it, but I don't

remember when. Are you sure it was me?'

'Quite.'

'I think my memory has got as short as my breath,' said Mr. Omer,

looking at me and shaking his head; 'for I don't remember you.'

'Don't you remember your coming to the coach to meet me, and my having

breakfast here, and our riding out to Blunderstone together: you, and I,

and Mrs. Joram, and Mr. Joram too--who wasn't her husband then?'

'Why, Lord bless my soul!' exclaimed Mr. Omer, after being thrown by his

surprise into a fit of coughing, 'you don't say so! Minnie, my dear, you

recollect? Dear me, yes; the party was a lady, I think?'

'My mother,' I rejoined.

'To--be--sure,' said Mr. Omer, touching my waistcoat with his

forefinger, 'and there was a little child too! There was two parties.

The little party was laid along with the other party. Over at

Blunderstone it was, of course. Dear me! And how have you been since?'

Very well, I thanked him, as I hoped he had been too.

'Oh! nothing to grumble at, you know,' said Mr. Omer. 'I find my breath

gets short, but it seldom gets longer as a man gets older. I take it as

it comes, and make the most of it. That's the best way, ain't it?'

Mr. Omer coughed again, in consequence of laughing, and was assisted out

of his fit by his daughter, who now stood close beside us, dancing her

smallest child on the counter.

'Dear me!' said Mr. Omer. 'Yes, to be sure. Two parties! Why, in that

very ride, if you'll believe me, the day was named for my Minnie to

marry Joram. "Do name it, sir," says Joram. "Yes, do, father," says

Minnie. And now he's come into the business. And look here! The

youngest!'

Minnie laughed, and stroked her banded hair upon her temples, as her

father put one of his fat fingers into the hand of the child she was

dancing on the counter.

'Two parties, of course!' said Mr. Omer, nodding his head

retrospectively. 'Ex-actly so! And Joram's at work, at this minute, on

a grey one with silver nails, not this measurement'--the measurement of

the dancing child upon the counter--'by a good two inches.---Will you

take something?'

I thanked him, but declined.

'Let me see,' said Mr. Omer. 'Barkis's the carrier's wife--Peggotty's

the boatman's sister--she had something to do with your family? She was

in service there, sure?'

My answering in the affirmative gave him great satisfaction.

'I believe my breath will get long next, my memory's getting so much

so,' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir, we've got a young relation of hers here,

under articles to us, that has as elegant a taste in the dress-making

business--I assure you I don't believe there's a Duchess in England can

touch her.'

'Not little Em'ly?' said I, involuntarily.

'Em'ly's her name,' said Mr. Omer, 'and she's little too. But if you'll

believe me, she has such a face of her own that half the women in this

town are mad against her.'

'Nonsense, father!' cried Minnie.

'My dear,' said Mr. Omer, 'I don't say it's the case with you,' winking

at me, 'but I say that half the women in Yarmouth--ah! and in five mile

round--are mad against that girl.'

'Then she should have kept to her own station in life, father,' said

Minnie, 'and not have given them any hold to talk about her, and then

they couldn't have done it.'

'Couldn't have done it, my dear!' retorted Mr. Omer. 'Couldn't have

done it! Is that YOUR knowledge of life? What is there that any woman

couldn't do, that she shouldn't do--especially on the subject of another

woman's good looks?'

I really thought it was all over with Mr. Omer, after he had uttered

this libellous pleasantry. He coughed to that extent, and his breath

eluded all his attempts to recover it with that obstinacy, that I fully

expected to see his head go down behind the counter, and his little

black breeches, with the rusty little bunches of ribbons at the knees,

come quivering up in a last ineffectual struggle. At length, however,

he got better, though he still panted hard, and was so exhausted that he

was obliged to sit on the stool of the shop-desk.

'You see,' he said, wiping his head, and breathing with difficulty, 'she

hasn't taken much to any companions here; she hasn't taken kindly to

any particular acquaintances and friends, not to mention sweethearts. In

consequence, an ill-natured story got about, that Em'ly wanted to be a

lady. Now my opinion is, that it came into circulation principally on

account of her sometimes saying, at the school, that if she was a lady

she would like to do so-and-so for her uncle--don't you see?--and buy

him such-and-such fine things.'

'I assure you, Mr. Omer, she has said so to me,' I returned eagerly,

'when we were both children.'

Mr. Omer nodded his head and rubbed his chin. 'Just so. Then out of a

very little, she could dress herself, you see, better than most others

could out of a deal, and that made things unpleasant. Moreover, she was

rather what might be called wayward--I'll go so far as to say what I

should call wayward myself,' said Mr. Omer; '-didn't know her own mind

quite--a little spoiled--and couldn't, at first, exactly bind herself

down. No more than that was ever said against her, Minnie?'

'No, father,' said Mrs. Joram. 'That's the worst, I believe.'

'So when she got a situation,' said Mr. Omer, 'to keep a fractious old

lady company, they didn't very well agree, and she didn't stop. At last

she came here, apprenticed for three years. Nearly two of 'em are over,

and she has been as good a girl as ever was. Worth any six! Minnie, is

she worth any six, now?'

'Yes, father,' replied Minnie. 'Never say I detracted from her!'

'Very good,' said Mr. Omer. 'That's right. And so, young gentleman,' he

added, after a few moments' further rubbing of his chin, 'that you may

not consider me long-winded as well as short-breathed, I believe that's

all about it.'

As they had spoken in a subdued tone, while speaking of Em'ly, I had no

doubt that she was near. On my asking now, if that were not so, Mr.

Omer nodded yes, and nodded towards the door of the parlour. My hurried

inquiry if I might peep in, was answered with a free permission; and,

looking through the glass, I saw her sitting at her work. I saw her, a

most beautiful little creature, with the cloudless blue eyes, that had

looked into my childish heart, turned laughingly upon another child

of Minnie's who was playing near her; with enough of wilfulness in her

bright face to justify what I had heard; with much of the old capricious

coyness lurking in it; but with nothing in her pretty looks, I am sure,

but what was meant for goodness and for happiness, and what was on a

good and happy course.

The tune across the yard that seemed as if it never had left off--alas!

it was the tune that never DOES leave off--was beating, softly, all the

while.

'Wouldn't you like to step in,' said Mr. Omer, 'and speak to her? Walk

in and speak to her, sir! Make yourself at home!'

I was too bashful to do so then--I was afraid of confusing her, and I

was no less afraid of confusing myself.--but I informed myself of the

hour at which she left of an evening, in order that our visit might

be timed accordingly; and taking leave of Mr. Omer, and his pretty

daughter, and her little children, went away to my dear old Peggotty's.

Here she was, in the tiled kitchen, cooking dinner! The moment I knocked

at the door she opened it, and asked me what I pleased to want. I looked

at her with a smile, but she gave me no smile in return. I had never

ceased to write to her, but it must have been seven years since we had

met.

'Is Mr. Barkis at home, ma'am?' I said, feigning to speak roughly to

her.

'He's at home, sir,' returned Peggotty, 'but he's bad abed with the

rheumatics.'

'Don't he go over to Blunderstone now?' I asked.

'When he's well he do,' she answered.

'Do YOU ever go there, Mrs. Barkis?'

She looked at me more attentively, and I noticed a quick movement of her

hands towards each other.

'Because I want to ask a question about a house there, that they call

the--what is it?--the Rookery,' said I.

She took a step backward, and put out her hands in an undecided

frightened way, as if to keep me off.

'Peggotty!' I cried to her.

She cried, 'My darling boy!' and we both burst into tears, and were

locked in one another's arms.

What extravagances she committed; what laughing and crying over me; what

pride she showed, what joy, what sorrow that she whose pride and joy I

might have been, could never hold me in a fond embrace; I have not the

heart to tell. I was troubled with no misgiving that it was young in

me to respond to her emotions. I had never laughed and cried in all my

life, I dare say--not even to her--more freely than I did that morning.

'Barkis will be so glad,' said Peggotty, wiping her eyes with her apron,

'that it'll do him more good than pints of liniment. May I go and tell

him you are here? Will you come up and see him, my dear?'

Of course I would. But Peggotty could not get out of the room as easily

as she meant to, for as often as she got to the door and looked round

at me, she came back again to have another laugh and another cry upon my

shoulder. At last, to make the matter easier, I went upstairs with

her; and having waited outside for a minute, while she said a word of

preparation to Mr. Barkis, presented myself before that invalid.

He received me with absolute enthusiasm. He was too rheumatic to be

shaken hands with, but he begged me to shake the tassel on the top of

his nightcap, which I did most cordially. When I sat down by the side

of the bed, he said that it did him a world of good to feel as if he

was driving me on the Blunderstone road again. As he lay in bed, face

upward, and so covered, with that exception, that he seemed to be

nothing but a face--like a conventional cherubim--he looked the queerest

object I ever beheld.

'What name was it, as I wrote up in the cart, sir?' said Mr. Barkis,

with a slow rheumatic smile.

'Ah! Mr. Barkis, we had some grave talks about that matter, hadn't we?'

'I was willin' a long time, sir?' said Mr. Barkis.

'A long time,' said I.

'And I don't regret it,' said Mr. Barkis. 'Do you remember what you

told me once, about her making all the apple parsties and doing all the

cooking?'

'Yes, very well,' I returned.

'It was as true,' said Mr. Barkis, 'as turnips is. It was as true,' said

Mr. Barkis, nodding his nightcap, which was his only means of emphasis,

'as taxes is. And nothing's truer than them.'

Mr. Barkis turned his eyes upon me, as if for my assent to this result

of his reflections in bed; and I gave it.

'Nothing's truer than them,' repeated Mr. Barkis; 'a man as poor as I

am, finds that out in his mind when he's laid up. I'm a very poor man,

sir!'

'I am sorry to hear it, Mr. Barkis.'

'A very poor man, indeed I am,' said Mr. Barkis.

Here his right hand came slowly and feebly from under the bedclothes,

and with a purposeless uncertain grasp took hold of a stick which was

loosely tied to the side of the bed. After some poking about with

this instrument, in the course of which his face assumed a variety of

distracted expressions, Mr. Barkis poked it against a box, an end

of which had been visible to me all the time. Then his face became

composed.

'Old clothes,' said Mr. Barkis.

'Oh!' said I.

'I wish it was Money, sir,' said Mr. Barkis.

'I wish it was, indeed,' said I.

'But it AIN'T,' said Mr. Barkis, opening both his eyes as wide as he

possibly could.

I expressed myself quite sure of that, and Mr. Barkis, turning his eyes

more gently to his wife, said:

'She's the usefullest and best of women, C. P. Barkis. All the praise

that anyone can give to C. P. Barkis, she deserves, and more! My dear,

you'll get a dinner today, for company; something good to eat and drink,

will you?'

I should have protested against this unnecessary demonstration in

my honour, but that I saw Peggotty, on the opposite side of the bed,

extremely anxious I should not. So I held my peace.

'I have got a trifle of money somewhere about me, my dear,' said Mr.

Barkis, 'but I'm a little tired. If you and Mr. David will leave me for

a short nap, I'll try and find it when I wake.'

We left the room, in compliance with this request. When we got outside

the door, Peggotty informed me that Mr. Barkis, being now 'a little

nearer' than he used to be, always resorted to this same device before

producing a single coin from his store; and that he endured unheard-of

agonies in crawling out of bed alone, and taking it from that unlucky

box. In effect, we presently heard him uttering suppressed groans of the

most dismal nature, as this magpie proceeding racked him in every joint;

but while Peggotty's eyes were full of compassion for him, she said his

generous impulse would do him good, and it was better not to check it.

So he groaned on, until he had got into bed again, suffering, I have no

doubt, a martyrdom; and then called us in, pretending to have just

woke up from a refreshing sleep, and to produce a guinea from under his

pillow. His satisfaction in which happy imposition on us, and in

having preserved the impenetrable secret of the box, appeared to be a

sufficient compensation to him for all his tortures.

I prepared Peggotty for Steerforth's arrival and it was not long before

he came. I am persuaded she knew no difference between his having been a

personal benefactor of hers, and a kind friend to me, and that she would

have received him with the utmost gratitude and devotion in any case.

But his easy, spirited good humour; his genial manner, his handsome

looks, his natural gift of adapting himself to whomsoever he pleased,

and making direct, when he cared to do it, to the main point of interest

in anybody's heart; bound her to him wholly in five minutes. His

manner to me, alone, would have won her. But, through all these causes

combined, I sincerely believe she had a kind of adoration for him before

he left the house that night.

He stayed there with me to dinner--if I were to say willingly, I should

not half express how readily and gaily. He went into Mr. Barkis's room

like light and air, brightening and refreshing it as if he were healthy

weather. There was no noise, no effort, no consciousness, in anything

he did; but in everything an indescribable lightness, a seeming

impossibility of doing anything else, or doing anything better, which

was so graceful, so natural, and agreeable, that it overcomes me, even

now, in the remembrance.

We made merry in the little parlour, where the Book of Martyrs,

unthumbed since my time, was laid out upon the desk as of old, and where

I now turned over its terrific pictures, remembering the old sensations

they had awakened, but not feeling them. When Peggotty spoke of what

she called my room, and of its being ready for me at night, and of her

hoping I would occupy it, before I could so much as look at Steerforth,

hesitating, he was possessed of the whole case.

'Of course,' he said. 'You'll sleep here, while we stay, and I shall

sleep at the hotel.'

'But to bring you so far,' I returned, 'and to separate, seems bad

companionship, Steerforth.'

'Why, in the name of Heaven, where do you naturally belong?' he said.

'What is "seems", compared to that?' It was settled at once.

He maintained all his delightful qualities to the last, until we started

forth, at eight o'clock, for Mr. Peggotty's boat. Indeed, they were more

and more brightly exhibited as the hours went on; for I thought even

then, and I have no doubt now, that the consciousness of success in his

determination to please, inspired him with a new delicacy of perception,

and made it, subtle as it was, more easy to him. If anyone had told me,

then, that all this was a brilliant game, played for the excitement of

the moment, for the employment of high spirits, in the thoughtless love

of superiority, in a mere wasteful careless course of winning what was

worthless to him, and next minute thrown away--I say, if anyone had told

me such a lie that night, I wonder in what manner of receiving it my

indignation would have found a vent! Probably only in an increase, had

that been possible, of the romantic feelings of fidelity and friendship

with which I walked beside him, over the dark wintry sands towards the

old boat; the wind sighing around us even more mournfully, than it had

sighed and moaned upon the night when I first darkened Mr. Peggotty's

door.

'This is a wild kind of place, Steerforth, is it not?'

'Dismal enough in the dark,' he said: 'and the sea roars as if it were

hungry for us. Is that the boat, where I see a light yonder?' 'That's

the boat,' said I.

'And it's the same I saw this morning,' he returned. 'I came straight to

it, by instinct, I suppose.'

We said no more as we approached the light, but made softly for the

door. I laid my hand upon the latch; and whispering Steerforth to keep

close to me, went in.

A murmur of voices had been audible on the outside, and, at the

moment of our entrance, a clapping of hands: which latter noise, I

was surprised to see, proceeded from the generally disconsolate Mrs.

Gummidge. But Mrs. Gummidge was not the only person there who was

unusually excited. Mr. Peggotty, his face lighted up with uncommon

satisfaction, and laughing with all his might, held his rough arms

wide open, as if for little Em'ly to run into them; Ham, with a mixed

expression in his face of admiration, exultation, and a lumbering sort

of bashfulness that sat upon him very well, held little Em'ly by

the hand, as if he were presenting her to Mr. Peggotty; little Em'ly

herself, blushing and shy, but delighted with Mr. Peggotty's delight, as

her joyous eyes expressed, was stopped by our entrance (for she saw us

first) in the very act of springing from Ham to nestle in Mr. Peggotty's

embrace. In the first glimpse we had of them all, and at the moment of

our passing from the dark cold night into the warm light room, this

was the way in which they were all employed: Mrs. Gummidge in the

background, clapping her hands like a madwoman.

The little picture was so instantaneously dissolved by our going in,

that one might have doubted whether it had ever been. I was in the midst

of the astonished family, face to face with Mr. Peggotty, and holding

out my hand to him, when Ham shouted:

'Mas'r Davy! It's Mas'r Davy!'

In a moment we were all shaking hands with one another, and asking one

another how we did, and telling one another how glad we were to meet,

and all talking at once. Mr. Peggotty was so proud and overjoyed to see

us, that he did not know what to say or do, but kept over and over again

shaking hands with me, and then with Steerforth, and then with me, and

then ruffling his shaggy hair all over his head, and laughing with such

glee and triumph, that it was a treat to see him.

'Why, that you two gent'lmen--gent'lmen growed--should come to this here

roof tonight, of all nights in my life,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'is such a

thing as never happened afore, I do rightly believe! Em'ly, my darling,

come here! Come here, my little witch! There's Mas'r Davy's friend, my

dear! There's the gent'lman as you've heerd on, Em'ly. He comes to see

you, along with Mas'r Davy, on the brightest night of your uncle's life

as ever was or will be, Gorm the t'other one, and horroar for it!'

After delivering this speech all in a breath, and with extraordinary

animation and pleasure, Mr. Peggotty put one of his large hands

rapturously on each side of his niece's face, and kissing it a dozen

times, laid it with a gentle pride and love upon his broad chest, and

patted it as if his hand had been a lady's. Then he let her go; and as

she ran into the little chamber where I used to sleep, looked round upon

us, quite hot and out of breath with his uncommon satisfaction.

'If you two gent'lmen--gent'lmen growed now, and such gent'lmen--' said

Mr. Peggotty.

'So th' are, so th' are!' cried Ham. 'Well said! So th' are. Mas'r Davy

bor'--gent'lmen growed--so th' are!'

'If you two gent'lmen, gent'lmen growed,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'don't

ex-cuse me for being in a state of mind, when you understand matters,

I'll arks your pardon. Em'ly, my dear!--She knows I'm a going to tell,'

here his delight broke out again, 'and has made off. Would you be so

good as look arter her, Mawther, for a minute?'

Mrs. Gummidge nodded and disappeared.

'If this ain't,' said Mr. Peggotty, sitting down among us by the fire,

'the brightest night o' my life, I'm a shellfish--biled too--and more I

can't say. This here little Em'ly, sir,' in a low voice to Steerforth,

'--her as you see a blushing here just now--'

Steerforth only nodded; but with such a pleased expression of interest,

and of participation in Mr. Peggotty's feelings, that the latter

answered him as if he had spoken.

'To be sure,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'That's her, and so she is. Thankee,

sir.'

Ham nodded to me several times, as if he would have said so too.

'This here little Em'ly of ours,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'has been, in our

house, what I suppose (I'm a ignorant man, but that's my belief) no one

but a little bright-eyed creetur can be in a house. She ain't my

child; I never had one; but I couldn't love her more. You understand! I

couldn't do it!'

'I quite understand,' said Steerforth.

'I know you do, sir,' returned Mr. Peggotty, 'and thankee again. Mas'r

Davy, he can remember what she was; you may judge for your own self what

she is; but neither of you can't fully know what she has been, is, and

will be, to my loving art. I am rough, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I am as

rough as a Sea Porkypine; but no one, unless, mayhap, it is a woman, can

know, I think, what our little Em'ly is to me. And betwixt ourselves,'

sinking his voice lower yet, 'that woman's name ain't Missis Gummidge

neither, though she has a world of merits.' Mr. Peggotty ruffled his

hair again, with both hands, as a further preparation for what he was

going to say, and went on, with a hand upon each of his knees:

'There was a certain person as had know'd our Em'ly, from the time when

her father was drownded; as had seen her constant; when a babby, when

a young gal, when a woman. Not much of a person to look at, he warn't,'

said Mr. Peggotty, 'something o' my own build--rough--a good deal o'

the sou'-wester in him--wery salt--but, on the whole, a honest sort of a

chap, with his art in the right place.'

I thought I had never seen Ham grin to anything like the extent to which

he sat grinning at us now.

'What does this here blessed tarpaulin go and do,' said Mr. Peggotty,

with his face one high noon of enjoyment, 'but he loses that there art

of his to our little Em'ly. He follers her about, he makes hisself a

sort o' servant to her, he loses in a great measure his relish for his

wittles, and in the long-run he makes it clear to me wot's amiss. Now I

could wish myself, you see, that our little Em'ly was in a fair way of

being married. I could wish to see her, at all ewents, under articles to

a honest man as had a right to defend her. I don't know how long I may

live, or how soon I may die; but I know that if I was capsized, any

night, in a gale of wind in Yarmouth Roads here, and was to see the

town-lights shining for the last time over the rollers as I couldn't

make no head against, I could go down quieter for thinking "There's a

man ashore there, iron-true to my little Em'ly, God bless her, and no

wrong can touch my Em'ly while so be as that man lives."'

Mr. Peggotty, in simple earnestness, waved his right arm, as if he were

waving it at the town-lights for the last time, and then, exchanging a

nod with Ham, whose eye he caught, proceeded as before.

'Well! I counsels him to speak to Em'ly. He's big enough, but he's

bashfuller than a little un, and he don't like. So I speak. "What! Him!"

says Em'ly. "Him that I've know'd so intimate so many years, and like so

much. Oh, Uncle! I never can have him. He's such a good fellow!" I gives

her a kiss, and I says no more to her than, "My dear, you're right to

speak out, you're to choose for yourself, you're as free as a little

bird." Then I aways to him, and I says, "I wish it could have been so,

but it can't. But you can both be as you was, and wot I say to you is,

Be as you was with her, like a man." He says to me, a-shaking of my

hand, "I will!" he says. And he was--honourable and manful--for two year

going on, and we was just the same at home here as afore.'

Mr. Peggotty's face, which had varied in its expression with the various

stages of his narrative, now resumed all its former triumphant delight,

as he laid a hand upon my knee and a hand upon Steerforth's (previously

wetting them both, for the greater emphasis of the action), and divided

the following speech between us:

'All of a sudden, one evening--as it might be tonight--comes little

Em'ly from her work, and him with her! There ain't so much in that,

you'll say. No, because he takes care on her, like a brother, arter

dark, and indeed afore dark, and at all times. But this tarpaulin chap,

he takes hold of her hand, and he cries out to me, joyful, "Look here!

This is to be my little wife!" And she says, half bold and half shy, and

half a laughing and half a crying, "Yes, Uncle! If you please."--If I

please!' cried Mr. Peggotty, rolling his head in an ecstasy at the idea;

'Lord, as if I should do anythink else!--"If you please, I am steadier

now, and I have thought better of it, and I'll be as good a little wife

as I can to him, for he's a dear, good fellow!" Then Missis Gummidge,

she claps her hands like a play, and you come in. Theer! the murder's

out!' said Mr. Peggotty--'You come in! It took place this here present

hour; and here's the man that'll marry her, the minute she's out of her

time.'

Ham staggered, as well he might, under the blow Mr. Peggotty dealt

him in his unbounded joy, as a mark of confidence and friendship; but

feeling called upon to say something to us, he said, with much faltering

and great difficulty:

'She warn't no higher than you was, Mas'r Davy--when you first

come--when I thought what she'd grow up to be. I see her grown

up--gent'lmen--like a flower. I'd lay down my life for

her--Mas'r Davy--Oh! most content and cheerful! She's more to

me--gent'lmen--than--she's all to me that ever I can want, and more

than ever I--than ever I could say. I--I love her true. There ain't a

gent'lman in all the land--nor yet sailing upon all the sea--that

can love his lady more than I love her, though there's many a common

man--would say better--what he meant.'

I thought it affecting to see such a sturdy fellow as Ham was now,

trembling in the strength of what he felt for the pretty little creature

who had won his heart. I thought the simple confidence reposed in us by

Mr. Peggotty and by himself, was, in itself, affecting. I was affected

by the story altogether. How far my emotions were influenced by the

recollections of my childhood, I don't know. Whether I had come there

with any lingering fancy that I was still to love little Em'ly, I don't

know. I know that I was filled with pleasure by all this; but, at first,

with an indescribably sensitive pleasure, that a very little would have

changed to pain.

Therefore, if it had depended upon me to touch the prevailing chord

among them with any skill, I should have made a poor hand of it. But it

depended upon Steerforth; and he did it with such address, that in a few

minutes we were all as easy and as happy as it was possible to be.

'Mr. Peggotty,' he said, 'you are a thoroughly good fellow, and deserve

to be as happy as you are tonight. My hand upon it! Ham, I give you

joy, my boy. My hand upon that, too! Daisy, stir the fire, and make it a

brisk one! and Mr. Peggotty, unless you can induce your gentle niece to

come back (for whom I vacate this seat in the corner), I shall go.

Any gap at your fireside on such a night--such a gap least of all--I

wouldn't make, for the wealth of the Indies!'

So Mr. Peggotty went into my old room to fetch little Em'ly. At first

little Em'ly didn't like to come, and then Ham went. Presently they

brought her to the fireside, very much confused, and very shy,--but

she soon became more assured when she found how gently and respectfully

Steerforth spoke to her; how skilfully he avoided anything that would

embarrass her; how he talked to Mr. Peggotty of boats, and ships, and

tides, and fish; how he referred to me about the time when he had seen

Mr. Peggotty at Salem House; how delighted he was with the boat and all

belonging to it; how lightly and easily he carried on, until he brought

us, by degrees, into a charmed circle, and we were all talking away

without any reserve.

Em'ly, indeed, said little all the evening; but she looked, and

listened, and her face got animated, and she was charming. Steerforth

told a story of a dismal shipwreck (which arose out of his talk with Mr.

Peggotty), as if he saw it all before him--and little Em'ly's eyes were

fastened on him all the time, as if she saw it too. He told us a merry

adventure of his own, as a relief to that, with as much gaiety as if the

narrative were as fresh to him as it was to us--and little Em'ly

laughed until the boat rang with the musical sounds, and we all laughed

(Steerforth too), in irresistible sympathy with what was so pleasant and

light-hearted. He got Mr. Peggotty to sing, or rather to roar, 'When

the stormy winds do blow, do blow, do blow'; and he sang a sailor's

song himself, so pathetically and beautifully, that I could have almost

fancied that the real wind creeping sorrowfully round the house, and

murmuring low through our unbroken silence, was there to listen.

As to Mrs. Gummidge, he roused that victim of despondency with a success

never attained by anyone else (so Mr. Peggotty informed me), since

the decease of the old one. He left her so little leisure for being

miserable, that she said next day she thought she must have been

bewitched.

But he set up no monopoly of the general attention, or the conversation.

When little Em'ly grew more courageous, and talked (but still bashfully)

across the fire to me, of our old wanderings upon the beach, to pick up

shells and pebbles; and when I asked her if she recollected how I used

to be devoted to her; and when we both laughed and reddened, casting

these looks back on the pleasant old times, so unreal to look at now; he

was silent and attentive, and observed us thoughtfully. She sat, at this

time, and all the evening, on the old locker in her old little corner

by the fire--Ham beside her, where I used to sit. I could not satisfy

myself whether it was in her own little tormenting way, or in a maidenly

reserve before us, that she kept quite close to the wall, and away from

him; but I observed that she did so, all the evening.

As I remember, it was almost midnight when we took our leave. We had had

some biscuit and dried fish for supper, and Steerforth had produced from

his pocket a full flask of Hollands, which we men (I may say we men,

now, without a blush) had emptied. We parted merrily; and as they all

stood crowded round the door to light us as far as they could upon our

road, I saw the sweet blue eyes of little Em'ly peeping after us, from

behind Ham, and heard her soft voice calling to us to be careful how we

went.

'A most engaging little Beauty!' said Steerforth, taking my arm. 'Well!

It's a quaint place, and they are quaint company, and it's quite a new

sensation to mix with them.'

'How fortunate we are, too,' I returned, 'to have arrived to witness

their happiness in that intended marriage! I never saw people so happy.

How delightful to see it, and to be made the sharers in their honest

joy, as we have been!'

'That's rather a chuckle-headed fellow for the girl; isn't he?' said

Steerforth.

He had been so hearty with him, and with them all, that I felt a shock

in this unexpected and cold reply. But turning quickly upon him, and

seeing a laugh in his eyes, I answered, much relieved:

'Ah, Steerforth! It's well for you to joke about the poor! You may

skirmish with Miss Dartle, or try to hide your sympathies in jest from

me, but I know better. When I see how perfectly you understand them, how

exquisitely you can enter into happiness like this plain fisherman's,

or humour a love like my old nurse's, I know that there is not a joy or

sorrow, not an emotion, of such people, that can be indifferent to you.

And I admire and love you for it, Steerforth, twenty times the more!'

He stopped, and, looking in my face, said, 'Daisy, I believe you are

in earnest, and are good. I wish we all were!' Next moment he was

gaily singing Mr. Peggotty's song, as we walked at a round pace back to

Yarmouth.

CHAPTER 22. SOME OLD SCENES, AND SOME NEW PEOPLE

Steerforth and I stayed for more than a fortnight in that part of the

country. We were very much together, I need not say; but occasionally we

were asunder for some hours at a time. He was a good sailor, and I was

but an indifferent one; and when he went out boating with Mr. Peggotty,

which was a favourite amusement of his, I generally remained ashore. My

occupation of Peggotty's spare-room put a constraint upon me, from which

he was free: for, knowing how assiduously she attended on Mr. Barkis

all day, I did not like to remain out late at night; whereas Steerforth,

lying at the Inn, had nothing to consult but his own humour. Thus it

came about, that I heard of his making little treats for the fishermen

at Mr. Peggotty's house of call, 'The Willing Mind', after I was in bed,

and of his being afloat, wrapped in fishermen's clothes, whole moonlight

nights, and coming back when the morning tide was at flood. By this

time, however, I knew that his restless nature and bold spirits

delighted to find a vent in rough toil and hard weather, as in any other

means of excitement that presented itself freshly to him; so none of his

proceedings surprised me.

Another cause of our being sometimes apart, was, that I had naturally an

interest in going over to Blunderstone, and revisiting the old familiar

scenes of my childhood; while Steerforth, after being there once, had

naturally no great interest in going there again. Hence, on three or

four days that I can at once recall, we went our several ways after an

early breakfast, and met again at a late dinner. I had no idea how he

employed his time in the interval, beyond a general knowledge that

he was very popular in the place, and had twenty means of actively

diverting himself where another man might not have found one.

For my own part, my occupation in my solitary pilgrimages was to recall

every yard of the old road as I went along it, and to haunt the old

spots, of which I never tired. I haunted them, as my memory had often

done, and lingered among them as my younger thoughts had lingered when I

was far away. The grave beneath the tree, where both my parents lay--on

which I had looked out, when it was my father's only, with such curious

feelings of compassion, and by which I had stood, so desolate, when it

was opened to receive my pretty mother and her baby--the grave which

Peggotty's own faithful care had ever since kept neat, and made a garden

of, I walked near, by the hour. It lay a little off the churchyard path,

in a quiet corner, not so far removed but I could read the names

upon the stone as I walked to and fro, startled by the sound of the

church-bell when it struck the hour, for it was like a departed voice to

me. My reflections at these times were always associated with the figure

I was to make in life, and the distinguished things I was to do. My

echoing footsteps went to no other tune, but were as constant to that as

if I had come home to build my castles in the air at a living mother's

side.

There were great changes in my old home. The ragged nests, so long

deserted by the rooks, were gone; and the trees were lopped and topped

out of their remembered shapes. The garden had run wild, and half the

windows of the house were shut up. It was occupied, but only by a poor

lunatic gentleman, and the people who took care of him. He was always

sitting at my little window, looking out into the churchyard; and I

wondered whether his rambling thoughts ever went upon any of the fancies

that used to occupy mine, on the rosy mornings when I peeped out of

that same little window in my night-clothes, and saw the sheep quietly

feeding in the light of the rising sun.

Our old neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Grayper, were gone to South America,

and the rain had made its way through the roof of their empty house,

and stained the outer walls. Mr. Chillip was married again to a tall,

raw-boned, high-nosed wife; and they had a weazen little baby, with a

heavy head that it couldn't hold up, and two weak staring eyes, with

which it seemed to be always wondering why it had ever been born.

It was with a singular jumble of sadness and pleasure that I used to

linger about my native place, until the reddening winter sun admonished

me that it was time to start on my returning walk. But, when the place

was left behind, and especially when Steerforth and I were happily

seated over our dinner by a blazing fire, it was delicious to think of

having been there. So it was, though in a softened degree, when I

went to my neat room at night; and, turning over the leaves of the

crocodile-book (which was always there, upon a little table), remembered

with a grateful heart how blest I was in having such a friend as

Steerforth, such a friend as Peggotty, and such a substitute for what I

had lost as my excellent and generous aunt.

MY nearest way to Yarmouth, in coming back from these long walks, was by

a ferry. It landed me on the flat between the town and the sea, which I

could make straight across, and so save myself a considerable circuit by

the high road. Mr. Peggotty's house being on that waste-place, and not

a hundred yards out of my track, I always looked in as I went by.

Steerforth was pretty sure to be there expecting me, and we went on

together through the frosty air and gathering fog towards the twinkling

lights of the town.

One dark evening, when I was later than usual--for I had, that day, been

making my parting visit to Blunderstone, as we were now about to return

home--I found him alone in Mr. Peggotty's house, sitting thoughtfully

before the fire. He was so intent upon his own reflections that he was

quite unconscious of my approach. This, indeed, he might easily have

been if he had been less absorbed, for footsteps fell noiselessly on the

sandy ground outside; but even my entrance failed to rouse him. I was

standing close to him, looking at him; and still, with a heavy brow, he

was lost in his meditations.

He gave such a start when I put my hand upon his shoulder, that he made

me start too.

'You come upon me,' he said, almost angrily, 'like a reproachful ghost!'

'I was obliged to announce myself, somehow,' I replied. 'Have I called

you down from the stars?'

'No,' he answered. 'No.'

'Up from anywhere, then?' said I, taking my seat near him.

'I was looking at the pictures in the fire,' he returned.

'But you are spoiling them for me,' said I, as he stirred it quickly

with a piece of burning wood, striking out of it a train of red-hot

sparks that went careering up the little chimney, and roaring out into

the air.

'You would not have seen them,' he returned. 'I detest this mongrel

time, neither day nor night. How late you are! Where have you been?'

'I have been taking leave of my usual walk,' said I.

'And I have been sitting here,' said Steerforth, glancing round the

room, 'thinking that all the people we found so glad on the night of

our coming down, might--to judge from the present wasted air of the

place--be dispersed, or dead, or come to I don't know what harm. David,

I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years!'

'My dear Steerforth, what is the matter?'

'I wish with all my soul I had been better guided!' he exclaimed. 'I

wish with all my soul I could guide myself better!'

There was a passionate dejection in his manner that quite amazed me. He

was more unlike himself than I could have supposed possible.

'It would be better to be this poor Peggotty, or his lout of a nephew,'

he said, getting up and leaning moodily against the chimney-piece, with

his face towards the fire, 'than to be myself, twenty times richer and

twenty times wiser, and be the torment to myself that I have been, in

this Devil's bark of a boat, within the last half-hour!'

I was so confounded by the alteration in him, that at first I could only

observe him in silence, as he stood leaning his head upon his hand, and

looking gloomily down at the fire. At length I begged him, with all

the earnestness I felt, to tell me what had occurred to cross him so

unusually, and to let me sympathize with him, if I could not hope to

advise him. Before I had well concluded, he began to laugh--fretfully at

first, but soon with returning gaiety.

'Tut, it's nothing, Daisy! nothing!' he replied. 'I told you at the

inn in London, I am heavy company for myself, sometimes. I have been a

nightmare to myself, just now--must have had one, I think. At odd dull

times, nursery tales come up into the memory, unrecognized for what

they are. I believe I have been confounding myself with the bad boy who

"didn't care", and became food for lions--a grander kind of going to

the dogs, I suppose. What old women call the horrors, have been creeping

over me from head to foot. I have been afraid of myself.'

'You are afraid of nothing else, I think,' said I.

'Perhaps not, and yet may have enough to be afraid of too,' he answered.

'Well! So it goes by! I am not about to be hipped again, David; but I

tell you, my good fellow, once more, that it would have been well for me

(and for more than me) if I had had a steadfast and judicious father!'

His face was always full of expression, but I never saw it express such

a dark kind of earnestness as when he said these words, with his glance

bent on the fire.

'So much for that!' he said, making as if he tossed something light

into the air, with his hand. "'Why, being gone, I am a man again," like

Macbeth. And now for dinner! If I have not (Macbeth-like) broken up the

feast with most admired disorder, Daisy.'

'But where are they all, I wonder!' said I.

'God knows,' said Steerforth. 'After strolling to the ferry looking

for you, I strolled in here and found the place deserted. That set me

thinking, and you found me thinking.'

The advent of Mrs. Gummidge with a basket, explained how the house had

happened to be empty. She had hurried out to buy something that was

needed, against Mr. Peggotty's return with the tide; and had left the

door open in the meanwhile, lest Ham and little Em'ly, with whom it was

an early night, should come home while she was gone. Steerforth, after

very much improving Mrs. Gummidge's spirits by a cheerful salutation and

a jocose embrace, took my arm, and hurried me away.

He had improved his own spirits, no less than Mrs. Gummidge's, for

they were again at their usual flow, and he was full of vivacious

conversation as we went along.

'And so,' he said, gaily, 'we abandon this buccaneer life tomorrow, do

we?'

'So we agreed,' I returned. 'And our places by the coach are taken, you

know.'

'Ay! there's no help for it, I suppose,' said Steerforth. 'I have

almost forgotten that there is anything to do in the world but to go out

tossing on the sea here. I wish there was not.'

'As long as the novelty should last,' said I, laughing.

'Like enough,' he returned; 'though there's a sarcastic meaning in that

observation for an amiable piece of innocence like my young friend.

Well! I dare say I am a capricious fellow, David. I know I am; but

while the iron is hot, I can strike it vigorously too. I could pass

a reasonably good examination already, as a pilot in these waters, I

think.'

'Mr. Peggotty says you are a wonder,' I returned.

'A nautical phenomenon, eh?' laughed Steerforth.

'Indeed he does, and you know how truly; I know how ardent you are

in any pursuit you follow, and how easily you can master it. And that

amazes me most in you, Steerforth--that you should be contented with

such fitful uses of your powers.'

'Contented?' he answered, merrily. 'I am never contented, except with

your freshness, my gentle Daisy. As to fitfulness, I have never learnt

the art of binding myself to any of the wheels on which the Ixions of

these days are turning round and round. I missed it somehow in a bad

apprenticeship, and now don't care about it.---You know I have bought a

boat down here?'

'What an extraordinary fellow you are, Steerforth!' I exclaimed,

stopping--for this was the first I had heard of it. 'When you may never

care to come near the place again!'

'I don't know that,' he returned. 'I have taken a fancy to the place. At

all events,' walking me briskly on, 'I have bought a boat that was for

sale--a clipper, Mr. Peggotty says; and so she is--and Mr. Peggotty will

be master of her in my absence.'

'Now I understand you, Steerforth!' said I, exultingly. 'You pretend

to have bought it for yourself, but you have really done so to confer

a benefit on him. I might have known as much at first, knowing you.

My dear kind Steerforth, how can I tell you what I think of your

generosity?'

'Tush!' he answered, turning red. 'The less said, the better.'

'Didn't I know?' cried I, 'didn't I say that there was not a joy, or

sorrow, or any emotion of such honest hearts that was indifferent to

you?'

'Aye, aye,' he answered, 'you told me all that. There let it rest. We

have said enough!'

Afraid of offending him by pursuing the subject when he made so light

of it, I only pursued it in my thoughts as we went on at even a quicker

pace than before.

'She must be newly rigged,' said Steerforth, 'and I shall leave Littimer

behind to see it done, that I may know she is quite complete. Did I tell

you Littimer had come down?'

'No.'

'Oh yes! came down this morning, with a letter from my mother.'

As our looks met, I observed that he was pale even to his lips, though

he looked very steadily at me. I feared that some difference between him

and his mother might have led to his being in the frame of mind in which

I had found him at the solitary fireside. I hinted so.

'Oh no!' he said, shaking his head, and giving a slight laugh. 'Nothing

of the sort! Yes. He is come down, that man of mine.'

'The same as ever?' said I.

'The same as ever,' said Steerforth. 'Distant and quiet as the North

Pole. He shall see to the boat being fresh named. She's the "Stormy

Petrel" now. What does Mr. Peggotty care for Stormy Petrels! I'll have

her christened again.'

'By what name?' I asked.

'The "Little Em'ly".'

As he had continued to look steadily at me, I took it as a reminder that

he objected to being extolled for his consideration. I could not help

showing in my face how much it pleased me, but I said little, and he

resumed his usual smile, and seemed relieved.

'But see here,' he said, looking before us, 'where the original little

Em'ly comes! And that fellow with her, eh? Upon my soul, he's a true

knight. He never leaves her!'

Ham was a boat-builder in these days, having improved a natural

ingenuity in that handicraft, until he had become a skilled workman. He

was in his working-dress, and looked rugged enough, but manly withal,

and a very fit protector for the blooming little creature at his

side. Indeed, there was a frankness in his face, an honesty, and an

undisguised show of his pride in her, and his love for her, which were,

to me, the best of good looks. I thought, as they came towards us, that

they were well matched even in that particular.

She withdrew her hand timidly from his arm as we stopped to speak to

them, and blushed as she gave it to Steerforth and to me. When they

passed on, after we had exchanged a few words, she did not like to

replace that hand, but, still appearing timid and constrained, walked

by herself. I thought all this very pretty and engaging, and Steerforth

seemed to think so too, as we looked after them fading away in the light

of a young moon.

Suddenly there passed us--evidently following them--a young woman whose

approach we had not observed, but whose face I saw as she went by, and

thought I had a faint remembrance of. She was lightly dressed; looked

bold, and haggard, and flaunting, and poor; but seemed, for the time, to

have given all that to the wind which was blowing, and to have nothing

in her mind but going after them. As the dark distant level, absorbing

their figures into itself, left but itself visible between us and the

sea and clouds, her figure disappeared in like manner, still no nearer

to them than before.

'That is a black shadow to be following the girl,' said Steerforth,

standing still; 'what does it mean?'

He spoke in a low voice that sounded almost strange to Me.

'She must have it in her mind to beg of them, I think,' said I.

'A beggar would be no novelty,' said Steerforth; 'but it is a strange

thing that the beggar should take that shape tonight.'

'Why?' I asked.

'For no better reason, truly, than because I was thinking,' he said,

after a pause, 'of something like it, when it came by. Where the Devil

did it come from, I wonder!'

'From the shadow of this wall, I think,' said I, as we emerged upon a

road on which a wall abutted.

'It's gone!' he returned, looking over his shoulder. 'And all ill go

with it. Now for our dinner!'

But he looked again over his shoulder towards the sea-line glimmering

afar off, and yet again. And he wondered about it, in some broken

expressions, several times, in the short remainder of our walk; and only

seemed to forget it when the light of fire and candle shone upon us,

seated warm and merry, at table.

Littimer was there, and had his usual effect upon me. When I said to

him that I hoped Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle were well, he answered

respectfully (and of course respectably), that they were tolerably well,

he thanked me, and had sent their compliments. This was all, and yet he

seemed to me to say as plainly as a man could say: 'You are very young,

sir; you are exceedingly young.'

We had almost finished dinner, when taking a step or two towards the

table, from the corner where he kept watch upon us, or rather upon me,

as I felt, he said to his master:

'I beg your pardon, sir. Miss Mowcher is down here.'

'Who?' cried Steerforth, much astonished.

'Miss Mowcher, sir.'

'Why, what on earth does she do here?' said Steerforth.

'It appears to be her native part of the country, sir. She informs me

that she makes one of her professional visits here, every year, sir.

I met her in the street this afternoon, and she wished to know if she

might have the honour of waiting on you after dinner, sir.'

'Do you know the Giantess in question, Daisy?' inquired Steerforth.

I was obliged to confess--I felt ashamed, even of being at this

disadvantage before Littimer--that Miss Mowcher and I were wholly

unacquainted.

'Then you shall know her,' said Steerforth, 'for she is one of the seven

wonders of the world. When Miss Mowcher comes, show her in.'

I felt some curiosity and excitement about this lady, especially as

Steerforth burst into a fit of laughing when I referred to her, and

positively refused to answer any question of which I made her the

subject. I remained, therefore, in a state of considerable expectation

until the cloth had been removed some half an hour, and we were sitting

over our decanter of wine before the fire, when the door opened, and

Littimer, with his habitual serenity quite undisturbed, announced:

'Miss Mowcher!'

I looked at the doorway and saw nothing. I was still looking at

the doorway, thinking that Miss Mowcher was a long while making her

appearance, when, to my infinite astonishment, there came waddling round

a sofa which stood between me and it, a pursy dwarf, of about forty

or forty-five, with a very large head and face, a pair of roguish grey

eyes, and such extremely little arms, that, to enable herself to lay a

finger archly against her snub nose, as she ogled Steerforth, she was

obliged to meet the finger half-way, and lay her nose against it.

Her chin, which was what is called a double chin, was so fat that it

entirely swallowed up the strings of her bonnet, bow and all. Throat she

had none; waist she had none; legs she had none, worth mentioning; for

though she was more than full-sized down to where her waist would have

been, if she had had any, and though she terminated, as human beings

generally do, in a pair of feet, she was so short that she stood at a

common-sized chair as at a table, resting a bag she carried on the seat.

This lady--dressed in an off-hand, easy style; bringing her nose and her

forefinger together, with the difficulty I have described; standing with

her head necessarily on one side, and, with one of her sharp eyes shut

up, making an uncommonly knowing face--after ogling Steerforth for a few

moments, broke into a torrent of words.

'What! My flower!' she pleasantly began, shaking her large head at him.

'You're there, are you! Oh, you naughty boy, fie for shame, what do you

do so far away from home? Up to mischief, I'll be bound. Oh, you're a

downy fellow, Steerforth, so you are, and I'm another, ain't I? Ha, ha,

ha! You'd have betted a hundred pound to five, now, that you wouldn't

have seen me here, wouldn't you? Bless you, man alive, I'm everywhere.

I'm here and there, and where not, like the conjurer's half-crown in the

lady's handkercher. Talking of handkerchers--and talking of ladies--what

a comfort you are to your blessed mother, ain't you, my dear boy, over

one of my shoulders, and I don't say which!'

Miss Mowcher untied her bonnet, at this passage of her discourse, threw

back the strings, and sat down, panting, on a footstool in front of

the fire--making a kind of arbour of the dining table, which spread its

mahogany shelter above her head.

'Oh my stars and what's-their-names!' she went on, clapping a hand on

each of her little knees, and glancing shrewdly at me, 'I'm of too full

a habit, that's the fact, Steerforth. After a flight of stairs, it gives

me as much trouble to draw every breath I want, as if it was a bucket of

water. If you saw me looking out of an upper window, you'd think I was a

fine woman, wouldn't you?'

'I should think that, wherever I saw you,' replied Steerforth.

'Go along, you dog, do!' cried the little creature, making a whisk at

him with the handkerchief with which she was wiping her face, 'and don't

be impudent! But I give you my word and honour I was at Lady Mithers's

last week--THERE'S a woman! How SHE wears!--and Mithers himself came

into the room where I was waiting for her--THERE'S a man! How HE wears!

and his wig too, for he's had it these ten years--and he went on at

that rate in the complimentary line, that I began to think I should be

obliged to ring the bell. Ha! ha! ha! He's a pleasant wretch, but he

wants principle.'

'What were you doing for Lady Mithers?' asked Steerforth.

'That's tellings, my blessed infant,' she retorted, tapping her nose

again, screwing up her face, and twinkling her eyes like an imp of

supernatural intelligence. 'Never YOU mind! You'd like to know whether

I stop her hair from falling off, or dye it, or touch up her

complexion, or improve her eyebrows, wouldn't you? And so you shall, my

darling--when I tell you! Do you know what my great grandfather's name

was?'

'No,' said Steerforth.

'It was Walker, my sweet pet,' replied Miss Mowcher, 'and he came of a

long line of Walkers, that I inherit all the Hookey estates from.'

I never beheld anything approaching to Miss Mowcher's wink except Miss

Mowcher's self-possession. She had a wonderful way too, when listening

to what was said to her, or when waiting for an answer to what she had

said herself, of pausing with her head cunningly on one side, and one

eye turned up like a magpie's. Altogether I was lost in amazement,

and sat staring at her, quite oblivious, I am afraid, of the laws of

politeness.

She had by this time drawn the chair to her side, and was busily engaged

in producing from the bag (plunging in her short arm to the shoulder, at

every dive) a number of small bottles, sponges, combs, brushes, bits of

flannel, little pairs of curling-irons, and other instruments, which

she tumbled in a heap upon the chair. From this employment she suddenly

desisted, and said to Steerforth, much to my confusion:

'Who's your friend?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Steerforth; 'he wants to know you.'

'Well, then, he shall! I thought he looked as if he did!' returned Miss

Mowcher, waddling up to me, bag in hand, and laughing on me as she came.

'Face like a peach!' standing on tiptoe to pinch my cheek as I

sat. 'Quite tempting! I'm very fond of peaches. Happy to make your

acquaintance, Mr. Copperfield, I'm sure.'

I said that I congratulated myself on having the honour to make hers,

and that the happiness was mutual.

'Oh, my goodness, how polite we are!' exclaimed Miss Mowcher, making a

preposterous attempt to cover her large face with her morsel of a hand.

'What a world of gammon and spinnage it is, though, ain't it!'

This was addressed confidentially to both of us, as the morsel of a

hand came away from the face, and buried itself, arm and all, in the bag

again.

'What do you mean, Miss Mowcher?' said Steerforth.

'Ha! ha! ha! What a refreshing set of humbugs we are, to be sure, ain't

we, my sweet child?' replied that morsel of a woman, feeling in the bag

with her head on one side and her eye in the air. 'Look here!' taking

something out. 'Scraps of the Russian Prince's nails. Prince Alphabet

turned topsy-turvy, I call him, for his name's got all the letters in

it, higgledy-piggledy.'

'The Russian Prince is a client of yours, is he?' said Steerforth.

'I believe you, my pet,' replied Miss Mowcher. 'I keep his nails in

order for him. Twice a week! Fingers and toes.'

'He pays well, I hope?' said Steerforth.

'Pays, as he speaks, my dear child--through the nose,' replied Miss

Mowcher. 'None of your close shavers the Prince ain't. You'd say so, if

you saw his moustachios. Red by nature, black by art.'

'By your art, of course,' said Steerforth.

Miss Mowcher winked assent. 'Forced to send for me. Couldn't help it.

The climate affected his dye; it did very well in Russia, but it was no

go here. You never saw such a rusty Prince in all your born days as he

was. Like old iron!' 'Is that why you called him a humbug, just now?'

inquired Steerforth.

'Oh, you're a broth of a boy, ain't you?' returned Miss Mowcher, shaking

her head violently. 'I said, what a set of humbugs we were in general,

and I showed you the scraps of the Prince's nails to prove it. The

Prince's nails do more for me in private families of the genteel sort,

than all my talents put together. I always carry 'em about. They're the

best introduction. If Miss Mowcher cuts the Prince's nails, she must be

all right. I give 'em away to the young ladies. They put 'em in albums,

I believe. Ha! ha! ha! Upon my life, "the whole social system" (as

the men call it when they make speeches in Parliament) is a system of

Prince's nails!' said this least of women, trying to fold her short

arms, and nodding her large head.

Steerforth laughed heartily, and I laughed too. Miss Mowcher continuing

all the time to shake her head (which was very much on one side), and to

look into the air with one eye, and to wink with the other.

'Well, well!' she said, smiting her small knees, and rising, 'this is

not business. Come, Steerforth, let's explore the polar regions, and

have it over.'

She then selected two or three of the little instruments, and a

little bottle, and asked (to my surprise) if the table would bear. On

Steerforth's replying in the affirmative, she pushed a chair against it,

and begging the assistance of my hand, mounted up, pretty nimbly, to the

top, as if it were a stage.

'If either of you saw my ankles,' she said, when she was safely

elevated, 'say so, and I'll go home and destroy myself!'

'I did not,' said Steerforth.

'I did not,' said I.

'Well then,' cried Miss Mowcher,' I'll consent to live. Now, ducky,

ducky, ducky, come to Mrs. Bond and be killed.'

This was an invocation to Steerforth to place himself under her hands;

who, accordingly, sat himself down, with his back to the table, and

his laughing face towards me, and submitted his head to her inspection,

evidently for no other purpose than our entertainment. To see Miss

Mowcher standing over him, looking at his rich profusion of brown

hair through a large round magnifying glass, which she took out of her

pocket, was a most amazing spectacle.

'You're a pretty fellow!' said Miss Mowcher, after a brief inspection.

'You'd be as bald as a friar on the top of your head in twelve months,

but for me. Just half a minute, my young friend, and we'll give you a

polishing that shall keep your curls on for the next ten years!'

With this, she tilted some of the contents of the little bottle on to

one of the little bits of flannel, and, again imparting some of the

virtues of that preparation to one of the little brushes, began rubbing

and scraping away with both on the crown of Steerforth's head in the

busiest manner I ever witnessed, talking all the time.

'There's Charley Pyegrave, the duke's son,' she said. 'You know

Charley?' peeping round into his face.

'A little,' said Steerforth.

'What a man HE is! THERE'S a whisker! As to Charley's legs, if they

were only a pair (which they ain't), they'd defy competition. Would you

believe he tried to do without me--in the Life-Guards, too?'

'Mad!' said Steerforth.

'It looks like it. However, mad or sane, he tried,' returned Miss

Mowcher. 'What does he do, but, lo and behold you, he goes into a

perfumer's shop, and wants to buy a bottle of the Madagascar Liquid.'

'Charley does?' said Steerforth.

'Charley does. But they haven't got any of the Madagascar Liquid.'

'What is it? Something to drink?' asked Steerforth.

'To drink?' returned Miss Mowcher, stopping to slap his cheek. 'To

doctor his own moustachios with, you know. There was a woman in the

shop--elderly female--quite a Griffin--who had never even heard of it

by name. "Begging pardon, sir," said the Griffin to Charley, "it's

not--not--not ROUGE, is it?" "Rouge," said Charley to the Griffin. "What

the unmentionable to ears polite, do you think I want with rouge?" "No

offence, sir," said the Griffin; "we have it asked for by so many names,

I thought it might be." Now that, my child,' continued Miss Mowcher,

rubbing all the time as busily as ever, 'is another instance of

the refreshing humbug I was speaking of. I do something in that way

myself--perhaps a good deal--perhaps a little--sharp's the word, my dear

boy--never mind!'

'In what way do you mean? In the rouge way?' said Steerforth.

'Put this and that together, my tender pupil,' returned the wary

Mowcher, touching her nose, 'work it by the rule of Secrets in all

trades, and the product will give you the desired result. I say I do a

little in that way myself. One Dowager, SHE calls it lip-salve. Another,

SHE calls it gloves. Another, SHE calls it tucker-edging. Another, SHE

calls it a fan. I call it whatever THEY call it. I supply it for 'em,

but we keep up the trick so, to one another, and make believe with

such a face, that they'd as soon think of laying it on, before a whole

drawing-room, as before me. And when I wait upon 'em, they'll say to

me sometimes--WITH IT ON--thick, and no mistake--"How am I looking,

Mowcher? Am I pale?" Ha! ha! ha! ha! Isn't THAT refreshing, my young

friend!'

I never did in my days behold anything like Mowcher as she stood upon

the dining table, intensely enjoying this refreshment, rubbing busily at

Steerforth's head, and winking at me over it.

'Ah!' she said. 'Such things are not much in demand hereabouts. That

sets me off again! I haven't seen a pretty woman since I've been here,

jemmy.'

'No?' said Steerforth.

'Not the ghost of one,' replied Miss Mowcher.

'We could show her the substance of one, I think?' said Steerforth,

addressing his eyes to mine. 'Eh, Daisy?'

'Yes, indeed,' said I.

'Aha?' cried the little creature, glancing sharply at my face, and then

peeping round at Steerforth's. 'Umph?'

The first exclamation sounded like a question put to both of us, and the

second like a question put to Steerforth only. She seemed to have found

no answer to either, but continued to rub, with her head on one side and

her eye turned up, as if she were looking for an answer in the air and

were confident of its appearing presently.

'A sister of yours, Mr. Copperfield?' she cried, after a pause, and

still keeping the same look-out. 'Aye, aye?'

'No,' said Steerforth, before I could reply. 'Nothing of the sort. On

the contrary, Mr. Copperfield used--or I am much mistaken--to have a

great admiration for her.'

'Why, hasn't he now?' returned Miss Mowcher. 'Is he fickle? Oh, for

shame! Did he sip every flower, and change every hour, until Polly his

passion requited?--Is her name Polly?'

The Elfin suddenness with which she pounced upon me with this question,

and a searching look, quite disconcerted me for a moment.

'No, Miss Mowcher,' I replied. 'Her name is Emily.'

'Aha?' she cried exactly as before. 'Umph? What a rattle I am! Mr.

Copperfield, ain't I volatile?'

Her tone and look implied something that was not agreeable to me in

connexion with the subject. So I said, in a graver manner than any of us

had yet assumed: 'She is as virtuous as she is pretty. She is engaged

to be married to a most worthy and deserving man in her own station of

life. I esteem her for her good sense, as much as I admire her for her

good looks.'

'Well said!' cried Steerforth. 'Hear, hear, hear! Now I'll quench the

curiosity of this little Fatima, my dear Daisy, by leaving her nothing

to guess at. She is at present apprenticed, Miss Mowcher, or articled,

or whatever it may be, to Omer and Joram, Haberdashers, Milliners, and

so forth, in this town. Do you observe? Omer and Joram. The promise of

which my friend has spoken, is made and entered into with her cousin;

Christian name, Ham; surname, Peggotty; occupation, boat-builder;

also of this town. She lives with a relative; Christian name, unknown;

surname, Peggotty; occupation, seafaring; also of this town. She is the

prettiest and most engaging little fairy in the world. I admire her--as

my friend does--exceedingly. If it were not that I might appear to

disparage her Intended, which I know my friend would not like, I would

add, that to me she seems to be throwing herself away; that I am sure

she might do better; and that I swear she was born to be a lady.'

Miss Mowcher listened to these words, which were very slowly and

distinctly spoken, with her head on one side, and her eye in the air

as if she were still looking for that answer. When he ceased she became

brisk again in an instant, and rattled away with surprising volubility.

'Oh! And that's all about it, is it?' she exclaimed, trimming his

whiskers with a little restless pair of scissors, that went glancing

round his head in all directions. 'Very well: very well! Quite a long

story. Ought to end "and they lived happy ever afterwards"; oughtn't

it? Ah! What's that game at forfeits? I love my love with an E, because

she's enticing; I hate her with an E, because she's engaged. I took her

to the sign of the exquisite, and treated her with an elopement, her

name's Emily, and she lives in the east? Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Copperfield,

ain't I volatile?'

Merely looking at me with extravagant slyness, and not waiting for any

reply, she continued, without drawing breath:

'There! If ever any scapegrace was trimmed and touched up to perfection,

you are, Steerforth. If I understand any noddle in the world, I

understand yours. Do you hear me when I tell you that, my darling? I

understand yours,' peeping down into his face. 'Now you may mizzle,

jemmy (as we say at Court), and if Mr. Copperfield will take the chair

I'll operate on him.'

'What do you say, Daisy?' inquired Steerforth, laughing, and resigning

his seat. 'Will you be improved?'

'Thank you, Miss Mowcher, not this evening.'

'Don't say no,' returned the little woman, looking at me with the aspect

of a connoisseur; 'a little bit more eyebrow?'

'Thank you,' I returned, 'some other time.'

'Have it carried half a quarter of an inch towards the temple,' said

Miss Mowcher. 'We can do it in a fortnight.'

'No, I thank you. Not at present.'

'Go in for a tip,' she urged. 'No? Let's get the scaffolding up, then,

for a pair of whiskers. Come!'

I could not help blushing as I declined, for I felt we were on my weak

point, now. But Miss Mowcher, finding that I was not at present disposed

for any decoration within the range of her art, and that I was, for the

time being, proof against the blandishments of the small bottle which

she held up before one eye to enforce her persuasions, said we would

make a beginning on an early day, and requested the aid of my hand to

descend from her elevated station. Thus assisted, she skipped down with

much agility, and began to tie her double chin into her bonnet.

'The fee,' said Steerforth, 'is--'

'Five bob,' replied Miss Mowcher, 'and dirt cheap, my chicken. Ain't I

volatile, Mr. Copperfield?'

I replied politely: 'Not at all.' But I thought she was rather so, when

she tossed up his two half-crowns like a goblin pieman, caught them,

dropped them in her pocket, and gave it a loud slap.

'That's the Till!' observed Miss Mowcher, standing at the chair again,

and replacing in the bag a miscellaneous collection of little objects

she had emptied out of it. 'Have I got all my traps? It seems so. It

won't do to be like long Ned Beadwood, when they took him to church "to

marry him to somebody", as he says, and left the bride behind. Ha! ha!

ha! A wicked rascal, Ned, but droll! Now, I know I'm going to break

your hearts, but I am forced to leave you. You must call up all your

fortitude, and try to bear it. Good-bye, Mr. Copperfield! Take care of

yourself, jockey of Norfolk! How I have been rattling on! It's all

the fault of you two wretches. I forgive you! "Bob swore!"--as the

Englishman said for "Good night", when he first learnt French, and

thought it so like English. "Bob swore," my ducks!'

With the bag slung over her arm, and rattling as she waddled away, she

waddled to the door, where she stopped to inquire if she should leave

us a lock of her hair. 'Ain't I volatile?' she added, as a commentary on

this offer, and, with her finger on her nose, departed.

Steerforth laughed to that degree, that it was impossible for me to help

laughing too; though I am not sure I should have done so, but for this

inducement. When we had had our laugh quite out, which was after some

time, he told me that Miss Mowcher had quite an extensive connexion, and

made herself useful to a variety of people in a variety of ways. Some

people trifled with her as a mere oddity, he said; but she was as

shrewdly and sharply observant as anyone he knew, and as long-headed as

she was short-armed. He told me that what she had said of being here,

and there, and everywhere, was true enough; for she made little darts

into the provinces, and seemed to pick up customers everywhere, and to

know everybody. I asked him what her disposition was: whether it was at

all mischievous, and if her sympathies were generally on the right side

of things: but, not succeeding in attracting his attention to these

questions after two or three attempts, I forbore or forgot to repeat

them. He told me instead, with much rapidity, a good deal about her

skill, and her profits; and about her being a scientific cupper, if I

should ever have occasion for her service in that capacity.

She was the principal theme of our conversation during the evening:

and when we parted for the night Steerforth called after me over the

banisters, 'Bob swore!' as I went downstairs.

I was surprised, when I came to Mr. Barkis's house, to find Ham walking

up and down in front of it, and still more surprised to learn from him

that little Em'ly was inside. I naturally inquired why he was not there

too, instead of pacing the streets by himself?

'Why, you see, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined, in a hesitating manner, 'Em'ly,

she's talking to some 'un in here.'

'I should have thought,' said I, smiling, 'that that was a reason for

your being in here too, Ham.'

'Well, Mas'r Davy, in a general way, so 't would be,' he returned;

'but look'ee here, Mas'r Davy,' lowering his voice, and speaking very

gravely. 'It's a young woman, sir--a young woman, that Em'ly knowed

once, and doen't ought to know no more.'

When I heard these words, a light began to fall upon the figure I had

seen following them, some hours ago.

'It's a poor wurem, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, 'as is trod under foot by all

the town. Up street and down street. The mowld o' the churchyard don't

hold any that the folk shrink away from, more.'

'Did I see her tonight, Ham, on the sand, after we met you?'

'Keeping us in sight?' said Ham. 'It's like you did, Mas'r Davy. Not

that I know'd then, she was theer, sir, but along of her creeping soon

arterwards under Em'ly's little winder, when she see the light come,

and whispering "Em'ly, Em'ly, for Christ's sake, have a woman's heart

towards me. I was once like you!" Those was solemn words, Mas'r Davy,

fur to hear!'

'They were indeed, Ham. What did Em'ly do?' 'Says Em'ly, "Martha, is

it you? Oh, Martha, can it be you?"--for they had sat at work together,

many a day, at Mr. Omer's.'

'I recollect her now!' cried I, recalling one of the two girls I had

seen when I first went there. 'I recollect her quite well!'

'Martha Endell,' said Ham. 'Two or three year older than Em'ly, but was

at the school with her.'

'I never heard her name,' said I. 'I didn't mean to interrupt you.'

'For the matter o' that, Mas'r Davy,' replied Ham, 'all's told a'most

in them words, "Em'ly, Em'ly, for Christ's sake, have a woman's heart

towards me. I was once like you!" She wanted to speak to Em'ly. Em'ly

couldn't speak to her theer, for her loving uncle was come home, and

he wouldn't--no, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, with great earnestness, 'he

couldn't, kind-natur'd, tender-hearted as he is, see them two together,

side by side, for all the treasures that's wrecked in the sea.'

I felt how true this was. I knew it, on the instant, quite as well as

Ham.

'So Em'ly writes in pencil on a bit of paper,' he pursued, 'and gives it

to her out o' winder to bring here. "Show that," she says, "to my aunt,

Mrs. Barkis, and she'll set you down by her fire, for the love of me,

till uncle is gone out, and I can come." By and by she tells me what

I tell you, Mas'r Davy, and asks me to bring her. What can I do? She

doen't ought to know any such, but I can't deny her, when the tears is

on her face.'

He put his hand into the breast of his shaggy jacket, and took out with

great care a pretty little purse.

'And if I could deny her when the tears was on her face, Mas'r Davy,'

said Ham, tenderly adjusting it on the rough palm of his hand, 'how

could I deny her when she give me this to carry for her--knowing what

she brought it for? Such a toy as it is!' said Ham, thoughtfully looking

on it. 'With such a little money in it, Em'ly my dear.'

I shook him warmly by the hand when he had put it away again--for that

was more satisfactory to me than saying anything--and we walked up

and down, for a minute or two, in silence. The door opened then, and

Peggotty appeared, beckoning to Ham to come in. I would have kept away,

but she came after me, entreating me to come in too. Even then, I

would have avoided the room where they all were, but for its being the

neat-tiled kitchen I have mentioned more than once. The door opening

immediately into it, I found myself among them before I considered

whither I was going.

The girl--the same I had seen upon the sands--was near the fire. She

was sitting on the ground, with her head and one arm lying on a chair.

I fancied, from the disposition of her figure, that Em'ly had but newly

risen from the chair, and that the forlorn head might perhaps have been

lying on her lap. I saw but little of the girl's face, over which her

hair fell loose and scattered, as if she had been disordering it with

her own hands; but I saw that she was young, and of a fair complexion.

Peggotty had been crying. So had little Em'ly. Not a word was spoken

when we first went in; and the Dutch clock by the dresser seemed, in the

silence, to tick twice as loud as usual. Em'ly spoke first.

'Martha wants,' she said to Ham, 'to go to London.'

'Why to London?' returned Ham.

He stood between them, looking on the prostrate girl with a mixture of

compassion for her, and of jealousy of her holding any companionship

with her whom he loved so well, which I have always remembered

distinctly. They both spoke as if she were ill; in a soft, suppressed

tone that was plainly heard, although it hardly rose above a whisper.

'Better there than here,' said a third voice aloud--Martha's, though she

did not move. 'No one knows me there. Everybody knows me here.'

'What will she do there?' inquired Ham.

She lifted up her head, and looked darkly round at him for a moment;

then laid it down again, and curved her right arm about her neck, as

a woman in a fever, or in an agony of pain from a shot, might twist

herself.

'She will try to do well,' said little Em'ly. 'You don't know what she

has said to us. Does he--do they--aunt?'

Peggotty shook her head compassionately.

'I'll try,' said Martha, 'if you'll help me away. I never can do worse

than I have done here. I may do better. Oh!' with a dreadful shiver,

'take me out of these streets, where the whole town knows me from a

child!'

As Em'ly held out her hand to Ham, I saw him put in it a little canvas

bag. She took it, as if she thought it were her purse, and made a step

or two forward; but finding her mistake, came back to where he had

retired near me, and showed it to him.

'It's all yourn, Em'ly,' I could hear him say. 'I haven't nowt in all

the wureld that ain't yourn, my dear. It ain't of no delight to me,

except for you!'

The tears rose freshly in her eyes, but she turned away and went to

Martha. What she gave her, I don't know. I saw her stooping over her,

and putting money in her bosom. She whispered something, as she asked

was that enough? 'More than enough,' the other said, and took her hand

and kissed it.

Then Martha arose, and gathering her shawl about her, covering her

face with it, and weeping aloud, went slowly to the door. She stopped

a moment before going out, as if she would have uttered something or

turned back; but no word passed her lips. Making the same low, dreary,

wretched moaning in her shawl, she went away.

As the door closed, little Em'ly looked at us three in a hurried manner

and then hid her face in her hands, and fell to sobbing.

'Doen't, Em'ly!' said Ham, tapping her gently on the shoulder. 'Doen't,

my dear! You doen't ought to cry so, pretty!'

'Oh, Ham!' she exclaimed, still weeping pitifully, 'I am not so good a

girl as I ought to be! I know I have not the thankful heart, sometimes,

I ought to have!'

'Yes, yes, you have, I'm sure,' said Ham.

'No! no! no!' cried little Em'ly, sobbing, and shaking her head. 'I am

not as good a girl as I ought to be. Not near! not near!' And still she

cried, as if her heart would break.

'I try your love too much. I know I do!' she sobbed. 'I'm often cross to

you, and changeable with you, when I ought to be far different. You are

never so to me. Why am I ever so to you, when I should think of nothing

but how to be grateful, and to make you happy!'

'You always make me so,' said Ham, 'my dear! I am happy in the sight of

you. I am happy, all day long, in the thoughts of you.'

'Ah! that's not enough!' she cried. 'That is because you are good; not

because I am! Oh, my dear, it might have been a better fortune for

you, if you had been fond of someone else--of someone steadier and

much worthier than me, who was all bound up in you, and never vain and

changeable like me!'

'Poor little tender-heart,' said Ham, in a low voice. 'Martha has

overset her, altogether.'

'Please, aunt,' sobbed Em'ly, 'come here, and let me lay my head upon

you. Oh, I am very miserable tonight, aunt! Oh, I am not as good a girl

as I ought to be. I am not, I know!'

Peggotty had hastened to the chair before the fire. Em'ly, with her

arms around her neck, kneeled by her, looking up most earnestly into her

face.

'Oh, pray, aunt, try to help me! Ham, dear, try to help me! Mr. David,

for the sake of old times, do, please, try to help me! I want to be a

better girl than I am. I want to feel a hundred times more thankful than

I do. I want to feel more, what a blessed thing it is to be the wife of

a good man, and to lead a peaceful life. Oh me, oh me! Oh my heart, my

heart!'

She dropped her face on my old nurse's breast, and, ceasing this

supplication, which in its agony and grief was half a woman's, half a

child's, as all her manner was (being, in that, more natural, and better

suited to her beauty, as I thought, than any other manner could have

been), wept silently, while my old nurse hushed her like an infant.

She got calmer by degrees, and then we soothed her; now talking

encouragingly, and now jesting a little with her, until she began to

raise her head and speak to us. So we got on, until she was able to

smile, and then to laugh, and then to sit up, half ashamed; while

Peggotty recalled her stray ringlets, dried her eyes, and made her neat

again, lest her uncle should wonder, when she got home, why his darling

had been crying.

I saw her do, that night, what I had never seen her do before. I saw her

innocently kiss her chosen husband on the cheek, and creep close to his

bluff form as if it were her best support. When they went away together,

in the waning moonlight, and I looked after them, comparing their

departure in my mind with Martha's, I saw that she held his arm with

both her hands, and still kept close to him.

CHAPTER 23. I CORROBORATE Mr. DICK, AND CHOOSE A PROFESSION

When I awoke in the morning I thought very much of little Em'ly, and her

emotion last night, after Martha had left. I felt as if I had come into

the knowledge of those domestic weaknesses and tendernesses in a sacred

confidence, and that to disclose them, even to Steerforth, would be

wrong. I had no gentler feeling towards anyone than towards the

pretty creature who had been my playmate, and whom I have always been

persuaded, and shall always be persuaded, to my dying day, I then

devotedly loved. The repetition to any ears--even to Steerforth's--of

what she had been unable to repress when her heart lay open to me by an

accident, I felt would be a rough deed, unworthy of myself, unworthy of

the light of our pure childhood, which I always saw encircling her head.

I made a resolution, therefore, to keep it in my own breast; and there

it gave her image a new grace.

While we were at breakfast, a letter was delivered to me from my aunt.

As it contained matter on which I thought Steerforth could advise me

as well as anyone, and on which I knew I should be delighted to consult

him, I resolved to make it a subject of discussion on our journey home.

For the present we had enough to do, in taking leave of all our friends.

Mr. Barkis was far from being the last among them, in his regret at

our departure; and I believe would even have opened the box again, and

sacrificed another guinea, if it would have kept us eight-and-forty

hours in Yarmouth. Peggotty and all her family were full of grief at our

going. The whole house of Omer and Joram turned out to bid us good-bye;

and there were so many seafaring volunteers in attendance on Steerforth,

when our portmanteaux went to the coach, that if we had had the baggage

of a regiment with us, we should hardly have wanted porters to carry it.

In a word, we departed to the regret and admiration of all concerned,

and left a great many people very sorry behind US.

Do you stay long here, Littimer?' said I, as he stood waiting to see the

coach start.

'No, sir,' he replied; 'probably not very long, sir.'

'He can hardly say, just now,' observed Steerforth, carelessly. 'He

knows what he has to do, and he'll do it.'

'That I am sure he will,' said I.

Littimer touched his hat in acknowledgement of my good opinion, and I

felt about eight years old. He touched it once more, wishing us a good

journey; and we left him standing on the pavement, as respectable a

mystery as any pyramid in Egypt.

For some little time we held no conversation, Steerforth being unusually

silent, and I being sufficiently engaged in wondering, within myself,

when I should see the old places again, and what new changes might

happen to me or them in the meanwhile. At length Steerforth, becoming

gay and talkative in a moment, as he could become anything he liked at

any moment, pulled me by the arm:

'Find a voice, David. What about that letter you were speaking of at

breakfast?'

'Oh!' said I, taking it out of my pocket. 'It's from my aunt.'

'And what does she say, requiring consideration?'

'Why, she reminds me, Steerforth,' said I, 'that I came out on this

expedition to look about me, and to think a little.'

'Which, of course, you have done?'

'Indeed I can't say I have, particularly. To tell you the truth, I am

afraid I have forgotten it.'

'Well! look about you now, and make up for your negligence,' said

Steerforth. 'Look to the right, and you'll see a flat country, with a

good deal of marsh in it; look to the left, and you'll see the same.

Look to the front, and you'll find no difference; look to the rear,

and there it is still.' I laughed, and replied that I saw no suitable

profession in the whole prospect; which was perhaps to be attributed to

its flatness.

'What says our aunt on the subject?' inquired Steerforth, glancing at

the letter in my hand. 'Does she suggest anything?'

'Why, yes,' said I. 'She asks me, here, if I think I should like to be a

proctor? What do you think of it?'

'Well, I don't know,' replied Steerforth, coolly. 'You may as well do

that as anything else, I suppose?'

I could not help laughing again, at his balancing all callings and

professions so equally; and I told him so.

'What is a proctor, Steerforth?' said I.

'Why, he is a sort of monkish attorney,' replied Steerforth. 'He is, to

some faded courts held in Doctors' Commons,--a lazy old nook near St.

Paul's Churchyard--what solicitors are to the courts of law and equity.

He is a functionary whose existence, in the natural course of things,

would have terminated about two hundred years ago. I can tell you best

what he is, by telling you what Doctors' Commons is. It's a

little out-of-the-way place, where they administer what is called

ecclesiastical law, and play all kinds of tricks with obsolete old

monsters of acts of Parliament, which three-fourths of the world know

nothing about, and the other fourth supposes to have been dug up, in

a fossil state, in the days of the Edwards. It's a place that has an

ancient monopoly in suits about people's wills and people's marriages,

and disputes among ships and boats.'

'Nonsense, Steerforth!' I exclaimed. 'You don't mean to say that there

is any affinity between nautical matters and ecclesiastical matters?'

'I don't, indeed, my dear boy,' he returned; 'but I mean to say that

they are managed and decided by the same set of people, down in that

same Doctors' Commons. You shall go there one day, and find them

blundering through half the nautical terms in Young's Dictionary,

apropos of the "Nancy" having run down the "Sarah Jane", or Mr. Peggotty

and the Yarmouth boatmen having put off in a gale of wind with an anchor

and cable to the "Nelson" Indiaman in distress; and you shall go there

another day, and find them deep in the evidence, pro and con, respecting

a clergyman who has misbehaved himself; and you shall find the judge

in the nautical case, the advocate in the clergyman's case, or

contrariwise. They are like actors: now a man's a judge, and now he is

not a judge; now he's one thing, now he's another; now he's something

else, change and change about; but it's always a very pleasant,

profitable little affair of private theatricals, presented to an

uncommonly select audience.'

'But advocates and proctors are not one and the same?' said I, a little

puzzled. 'Are they?'

'No,' returned Steerforth, 'the advocates are civilians--men who have

taken a doctor's degree at college--which is the first reason of my

knowing anything about it. The proctors employ the advocates. Both get

very comfortable fees, and altogether they make a mighty snug little

party. On the whole, I would recommend you to take to Doctors' Commons

kindly, David. They plume them-selves on their gentility there, I can

tell you, if that's any satisfaction.'

I made allowance for Steerforth's light way of treating the subject,

and, considering it with reference to the staid air of gravity and

antiquity which I associated with that 'lazy old nook near St. Paul's

Churchyard', did not feel indisposed towards my aunt's suggestion; which

she left to my free decision, making no scruple of telling me that it

had occurred to her, on her lately visiting her own proctor in Doctors'

Commons for the purpose of settling her will in my favour.

'That's a laudable proceeding on the part of our aunt, at all events,'

said Steerforth, when I mentioned it; 'and one deserving of all

encouragement. Daisy, my advice is that you take kindly to Doctors'

Commons.'

I quite made up my mind to do so. I then told Steerforth that my aunt

was in town awaiting me (as I found from her letter), and that she had

taken lodgings for a week at a kind of private hotel at Lincoln's Inn

Fields, where there was a stone staircase, and a convenient door in

the roof; my aunt being firmly persuaded that every house in London was

going to be burnt down every night.

We achieved the rest of our journey pleasantly, sometimes recurring to

Doctors' Commons, and anticipating the distant days when I should be a

proctor there, which Steerforth pictured in a variety of humorous and

whimsical lights, that made us both merry. When we came to our journey's

end, he went home, engaging to call upon me next day but one; and I

drove to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where I found my aunt up, and waiting

supper.

If I had been round the world since we parted, we could hardly have been

better pleased to meet again. My aunt cried outright as she embraced me;

and said, pretending to laugh, that if my poor mother had been alive,

that silly little creature would have shed tears, she had no doubt.

'So you have left Mr. Dick behind, aunt?' said I. 'I am sorry for that.

Ah, Janet, how do you do?'

As Janet curtsied, hoping I was well, I observed my aunt's visage

lengthen very much.

'I am sorry for it, too,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose. 'I have had

no peace of mind, Trot, since I have been here.' Before I could ask why,

she told me.

'I am convinced,' said my aunt, laying her hand with melancholy firmness

on the table, 'that Dick's character is not a character to keep the

donkeys off. I am confident he wants strength of purpose. I ought to

have left Janet at home, instead, and then my mind might perhaps have

been at ease. If ever there was a donkey trespassing on my green,' said

my aunt, with emphasis, 'there was one this afternoon at four o'clock.

A cold feeling came over me from head to foot, and I know it was a

donkey!'

I tried to comfort her on this point, but she rejected consolation.

'It was a donkey,' said my aunt; 'and it was the one with the stumpy

tail which that Murdering sister of a woman rode, when she came to my

house.' This had been, ever since, the only name my aunt knew for Miss

Murdstone. 'If there is any Donkey in Dover, whose audacity it is harder

to me to bear than another's, that,' said my aunt, striking the table,

'is the animal!'

Janet ventured to suggest that my aunt might be disturbing herself

unnecessarily, and that she believed the donkey in question was then

engaged in the sand-and-gravel line of business, and was not available

for purposes of trespass. But my aunt wouldn't hear of it.

Supper was comfortably served and hot, though my aunt's rooms were very

high up--whether that she might have more stone stairs for her money, or

might be nearer to the door in the roof, I don't know--and consisted of

a roast fowl, a steak, and some vegetables, to all of which I did ample

justice, and which were all excellent. But my aunt had her own ideas

concerning London provision, and ate but little.

'I suppose this unfortunate fowl was born and brought up in a cellar,'

said my aunt, 'and never took the air except on a hackney coach-stand. I

hope the steak may be beef, but I don't believe it. Nothing's genuine in

the place, in my opinion, but the dirt.'

'Don't you think the fowl may have come out of the country, aunt?' I

hinted.

'Certainly not,' returned my aunt. 'It would be no pleasure to a London

tradesman to sell anything which was what he pretended it was.'

I did not venture to controvert this opinion, but I made a good supper,

which it greatly satisfied her to see me do. When the table was cleared,

Janet assisted her to arrange her hair, to put on her nightcap, which

was of a smarter construction than usual ('in case of fire', my aunt

said), and to fold her gown back over her knees, these being her usual

preparations for warming herself before going to bed. I then made her,

according to certain established regulations from which no deviation,

however slight, could ever be permitted, a glass of hot wine and

water, and a slice of toast cut into long thin strips. With these

accompaniments we were left alone to finish the evening, my aunt sitting

opposite to me drinking her wine and water; soaking her strips of toast

in it, one by one, before eating them; and looking benignantly on me,

from among the borders of her nightcap.

'Well, Trot,' she began, 'what do you think of the proctor plan? Or have

you not begun to think about it yet?'

'I have thought a good deal about it, my dear aunt, and I have talked a

good deal about it with Steerforth. I like it very much indeed. I like

it exceedingly.'

'Come!' said my aunt. 'That's cheering!'

'I have only one difficulty, aunt.'

'Say what it is, Trot,' she returned.

'Why, I want to ask, aunt, as this seems, from what I understand, to

be a limited profession, whether my entrance into it would not be very

expensive?'

'It will cost,' returned my aunt, 'to article you, just a thousand

pounds.'

'Now, my dear aunt,' said I, drawing my chair nearer, 'I am uneasy in

my mind about that. It's a large sum of money. You have expended a

great deal on my education, and have always been as liberal to me in all

things as it was possible to be. You have been the soul of generosity.

Surely there are some ways in which I might begin life with hardly any

outlay, and yet begin with a good hope of getting on by resolution and

exertion. Are you sure that it would not be better to try that course?

Are you certain that you can afford to part with so much money, and that

it is right that it should be so expended? I only ask you, my second

mother, to consider. Are you certain?'

My aunt finished eating the piece of toast on which she was then

engaged, looking me full in the face all the while; and then setting

her glass on the chimney-piece, and folding her hands upon her folded

skirts, replied as follows:

'Trot, my child, if I have any object in life, it is to provide for

your being a good, a sensible, and a happy man. I am bent upon it--so is

Dick. I should like some people that I know to hear Dick's conversation

on the subject. Its sagacity is wonderful. But no one knows the

resources of that man's intellect, except myself!'

She stopped for a moment to take my hand between hers, and went on:

'It's in vain, Trot, to recall the past, unless it works some influence

upon the present. Perhaps I might have been better friends with your

poor father. Perhaps I might have been better friends with that poor

child your mother, even after your sister Betsey Trotwood disappointed

me. When you came to me, a little runaway boy, all dusty and way-worn,

perhaps I thought so. From that time until now, Trot, you have ever been

a credit to me and a pride and a pleasure. I have no other claim upon

my means; at least'--here to my surprise she hesitated, and was

confused--'no, I have no other claim upon my means--and you are my

adopted child. Only be a loving child to me in my age, and bear with my

whims and fancies; and you will do more for an old woman whose prime of

life was not so happy or conciliating as it might have been, than ever

that old woman did for you.'

It was the first time I had heard my aunt refer to her past history.

There was a magnanimity in her quiet way of doing so, and of dismissing

it, which would have exalted her in my respect and affection, if

anything could.

'All is agreed and understood between us, now, Trot,' said my aunt,

'and we need talk of this no more. Give me a kiss, and we'll go to the

Commons after breakfast tomorrow.'

We had a long chat by the fire before we went to bed. I slept in a room

on the same floor with my aunt's, and was a little disturbed in the

course of the night by her knocking at my door as often as she was

agitated by a distant sound of hackney-coaches or market-carts, and

inquiring, 'if I heard the engines?' But towards morning she slept

better, and suffered me to do so too.

At about mid-day, we set out for the office of Messrs Spenlow and

Jorkins, in Doctors' Commons. My aunt, who had this other general

opinion in reference to London, that every man she saw was a pickpocket,

gave me her purse to carry for her, which had ten guineas in it and some

silver.

We made a pause at the toy shop in Fleet Street, to see the giants of

Saint Dunstan's strike upon the bells--we had timed our going, so as to

catch them at it, at twelve o'clock--and then went on towards Ludgate

Hill, and St. Paul's Churchyard. We were crossing to the former place,

when I found that my aunt greatly accelerated her speed, and looked

frightened. I observed, at the same time, that a lowering ill-dressed

man who had stopped and stared at us in passing, a little before, was

coming so close after us as to brush against her.

'Trot! My dear Trot!' cried my aunt, in a terrified whisper, and

pressing my arm. 'I don't know what I am to do.'

'Don't be alarmed,' said I. 'There's nothing to be afraid of. Step into

a shop, and I'll soon get rid of this fellow.'

'No, no, child!' she returned. 'Don't speak to him for the world. I

entreat, I order you!'

'Good Heaven, aunt!' said I. 'He is nothing but a sturdy beggar.'

'You don't know what he is!' replied my aunt. 'You don't know who he is!

You don't know what you say!'

We had stopped in an empty door-way, while this was passing, and he had

stopped too.

'Don't look at him!' said my aunt, as I turned my head indignantly, 'but

get me a coach, my dear, and wait for me in St. Paul's Churchyard.'

'Wait for you?' I replied.

'Yes,' rejoined my aunt. 'I must go alone. I must go with him.'

'With him, aunt? This man?'

'I am in my senses,' she replied, 'and I tell you I must. Get mea

coach!'

However much astonished I might be, I was sensible that I had no right

to refuse compliance with such a peremptory command. I hurried away a

few paces, and called a hackney-chariot which was passing empty. Almost

before I could let down the steps, my aunt sprang in, I don't know how,

and the man followed. She waved her hand to me to go away, so earnestly,

that, all confounded as I was, I turned from them at once. In doing so,

I heard her say to the coachman, 'Drive anywhere! Drive straight on!'

and presently the chariot passed me, going up the hill.

What Mr. Dick had told me, and what I had supposed to be a delusion of

his, now came into my mind. I could not doubt that this person was the

person of whom he had made such mysterious mention, though what the

nature of his hold upon my aunt could possibly be, I was quite unable

to imagine. After half an hour's cooling in the churchyard, I saw the

chariot coming back. The driver stopped beside me, and my aunt was

sitting in it alone.

She had not yet sufficiently recovered from her agitation to be quite

prepared for the visit we had to make. She desired me to get into the

chariot, and to tell the coachman to drive slowly up and down a little

while. She said no more, except, 'My dear child, never ask me what

it was, and don't refer to it,' until she had perfectly regained her

composure, when she told me she was quite herself now, and we might get

out. On her giving me her purse to pay the driver, I found that all the

guineas were gone, and only the loose silver remained.

Doctors' Commons was approached by a little low archway. Before we had

taken many paces down the street beyond it, the noise of the city seemed

to melt, as if by magic, into a softened distance. A few dull courts

and narrow ways brought us to the sky-lighted offices of Spenlow and

Jorkins; in the vestibule of which temple, accessible to pilgrims

without the ceremony of knocking, three or four clerks were at work as

copyists. One of these, a little dry man, sitting by himself, who wore

a stiff brown wig that looked as if it were made of gingerbread, rose to

receive my aunt, and show us into Mr. Spenlow's room.

'Mr. Spenlow's in Court, ma'am,' said the dry man; 'it's an Arches day;

but it's close by, and I'll send for him directly.'

As we were left to look about us while Mr. Spenlow was fetched, I

availed myself of the opportunity. The furniture of the room was

old-fashioned and dusty; and the green baize on the top of the

writing-table had lost all its colour, and was as withered and pale as

an old pauper. There were a great many bundles of papers on it, some

endorsed as Allegations, and some (to my surprise) as Libels, and some

as being in the Consistory Court, and some in the Arches Court, and some

in the Prerogative Court, and some in the Admiralty Court, and some in

the Delegates' Court; giving me occasion to wonder much, how many Courts

there might be in the gross, and how long it would take to understand

them all. Besides these, there were sundry immense manuscript Books

of Evidence taken on affidavit, strongly bound, and tied together in

massive sets, a set to each cause, as if every cause were a history in

ten or twenty volumes. All this looked tolerably expensive, I thought,

and gave me an agreeable notion of a proctor's business. I was casting

my eyes with increasing complacency over these and many similar objects,

when hasty footsteps were heard in the room outside, and Mr. Spenlow,

in a black gown trimmed with white fur, came hurrying in, taking off his

hat as he came.

He was a little light-haired gentleman, with undeniable boots, and the

stiffest of white cravats and shirt-collars. He was buttoned up, mighty

trim and tight, and must have taken a great deal of pains with his

whiskers, which were accurately curled. His gold watch-chain was so

massive, that a fancy came across me, that he ought to have a sinewy

golden arm, to draw it out with, like those which are put up over the

goldbeaters' shops. He was got up with such care, and was so stiff, that

he could hardly bend himself; being obliged, when he glanced at some

papers on his desk, after sitting down in his chair, to move his whole

body, from the bottom of his spine, like Punch.

I had previously been presented by my aunt, and had been courteously

received. He now said:

'And so, Mr. Copperfield, you think of entering into our profession?

I casually mentioned to Miss Trotwood, when I had the pleasure of an

interview with her the other day,'--with another inclination of his

body--Punch again--'that there was a vacancy here. Miss Trotwood was

good enough to mention that she had a nephew who was her peculiar care,

and for whom she was seeking to provide genteelly in life. That

nephew, I believe, I have now the pleasure of'--Punch again. I bowed my

acknowledgements, and said, my aunt had mentioned to me that there was

that opening, and that I believed I should like it very much. That I was

strongly inclined to like it, and had taken immediately to the proposal.

That I could not absolutely pledge myself to like it, until I knew

something more about it. That although it was little else than a matter

of form, I presumed I should have an opportunity of trying how I liked

it, before I bound myself to it irrevocably.

'Oh surely! surely!' said Mr. Spenlow. 'We always, in this house,

propose a month--an initiatory month. I should be happy, myself, to

propose two months--three--an indefinite period, in fact--but I have a

partner. Mr. Jorkins.'

'And the premium, sir,' I returned, 'is a thousand pounds?'

'And the premium, Stamp included, is a thousand pounds,' said Mr.

Spenlow. 'As I have mentioned to Miss Trotwood, I am actuated by no

mercenary considerations; few men are less so, I believe; but Mr.

Jorkins has his opinions on these subjects, and I am bound to respect

Mr. Jorkins's opinions. Mr. Jorkins thinks a thousand pounds too little,

in short.'

'I suppose, sir,' said I, still desiring to spare my aunt, 'that it is

not the custom here, if an articled clerk were particularly useful,

and made himself a perfect master of his profession'--I could not help

blushing, this looked so like praising myself--'I suppose it is not the

custom, in the later years of his time, to allow him any--'

Mr. Spenlow, by a great effort, just lifted his head far enough out of

his cravat to shake it, and answered, anticipating the word 'salary':

'No. I will not say what consideration I might give to that point

myself, Mr. Copperfield, if I were unfettered. Mr. Jorkins is

immovable.'

I was quite dismayed by the idea of this terrible Jorkins. But I found

out afterwards that he was a mild man of a heavy temperament, whose

place in the business was to keep himself in the background, and be

constantly exhibited by name as the most obdurate and ruthless of men.

If a clerk wanted his salary raised, Mr. Jorkins wouldn't listen to such

a proposition. If a client were slow to settle his bill of costs, Mr.

Jorkins was resolved to have it paid; and however painful these things

might be (and always were) to the feelings of Mr. Spenlow, Mr. Jorkins

would have his bond. The heart and hand of the good angel Spenlow would

have been always open, but for the restraining demon Jorkins. As I have

grown older, I think I have had experience of some other houses doing

business on the principle of Spenlow and Jorkins!

It was settled that I should begin my month's probation as soon as I

pleased, and that my aunt need neither remain in town nor return at

its expiration, as the articles of agreement, of which I was to be the

subject, could easily be sent to her at home for her signature. When

we had got so far, Mr. Spenlow offered to take me into Court then and

there, and show me what sort of place it was. As I was willing enough

to know, we went out with this object, leaving my aunt behind; who would

trust herself, she said, in no such place, and who, I think, regarded

all Courts of Law as a sort of powder-mills that might blow up at any

time.

Mr. Spenlow conducted me through a paved courtyard formed of grave brick

houses, which I inferred, from the Doctors' names upon the doors, to be

the official abiding-places of the learned advocates of whom Steerforth

had told me; and into a large dull room, not unlike a chapel to my

thinking, on the left hand. The upper part of this room was fenced off

from the rest; and there, on the two sides of a raised platform of the

horse-shoe form, sitting on easy old-fashioned dining-room chairs, were

sundry gentlemen in red gowns and grey wigs, whom I found to be the

Doctors aforesaid. Blinking over a little desk like a pulpit-desk, in

the curve of the horse-shoe, was an old gentleman, whom, if I had seen

him in an aviary, I should certainly have taken for an owl, but who, I

learned, was the presiding judge. In the space within the horse-shoe,

lower than these, that is to say, on about the level of the floor, were

sundry other gentlemen, of Mr. Spenlow's rank, and dressed like him in

black gowns with white fur upon them, sitting at a long green table.

Their cravats were in general stiff, I thought, and their looks haughty;

but in this last respect I presently conceived I had done them an

injustice, for when two or three of them had to rise and answer a

question of the presiding dignitary, I never saw anything more sheepish.

The public, represented by a boy with a comforter, and a shabby-genteel

man secretly eating crumbs out of his coat pockets, was warming itself

at a stove in the centre of the Court. The languid stillness of the

place was only broken by the chirping of this fire and by the voice of

one of the Doctors, who was wandering slowly through a perfect library

of evidence, and stopping to put up, from time to time, at little

roadside inns of argument on the journey. Altogether, I have never,

on any occasion, made one at such a cosey, dosey, old-fashioned,

time-forgotten, sleepy-headed little family-party in all my life; and

I felt it would be quite a soothing opiate to belong to it in any

character--except perhaps as a suitor.

Very well satisfied with the dreamy nature of this retreat, I informed

Mr. Spenlow that I had seen enough for that time, and we rejoined

my aunt; in company with whom I presently departed from the Commons,

feeling very young when I went out of Spenlow and Jorkins's, on account

of the clerks poking one another with their pens to point me out.

We arrived at Lincoln's Inn Fields without any new adventures, except

encountering an unlucky donkey in a costermonger's cart, who suggested

painful associations to my aunt. We had another long talk about my

plans, when we were safely housed; and as I knew she was anxious to

get home, and, between fire, food, and pickpockets, could never be

considered at her ease for half-an-hour in London, I urged her not to be

uncomfortable on my account, but to leave me to take care of myself.

'I have not been here a week tomorrow, without considering that too, my

dear,' she returned. 'There is a furnished little set of chambers to be

let in the Adelphi, Trot, which ought to suit you to a marvel.'

With this brief introduction, she produced from her pocket an

advertisement, carefully cut out of a newspaper, setting forth that in

Buckingham Street in the Adelphi there was to be let furnished, with a

view of the river, a singularly desirable, and compact set of chambers,

forming a genteel residence for a young gentleman, a member of one

of the Inns of Court, or otherwise, with immediate possession. Terms

moderate, and could be taken for a month only, if required.

'Why, this is the very thing, aunt!' said I, flushed with the possible

dignity of living in chambers.

'Then come,' replied my aunt, immediately resuming the bonnet she had a

minute before laid aside. 'We'll go and look at 'em.'

Away we went. The advertisement directed us to apply to Mrs. Crupp

on the premises, and we rung the area bell, which we supposed to

communicate with Mrs. Crupp. It was not until we had rung three or four

times that we could prevail on Mrs. Crupp to communicate with us, but

at last she appeared, being a stout lady with a flounce of flannel

petticoat below a nankeen gown.

'Let us see these chambers of yours, if you please, ma'am,' said my

aunt.

'For this gentleman?' said Mrs. Crupp, feeling in her pocket for her

keys.

'Yes, for my nephew,' said my aunt.

'And a sweet set they is for sich!' said Mrs. Crupp.

So we went upstairs.

They were on the top of the house--a great point with my aunt, being

near the fire-escape--and consisted of a little half-blind entry where

you could see hardly anything, a little stone-blind pantry where you

could see nothing at all, a sitting-room, and a bedroom. The furniture

was rather faded, but quite good enough for me; and, sure enough, the

river was outside the windows.

As I was delighted with the place, my aunt and Mrs. Crupp withdrew into

the pantry to discuss the terms, while I remained on the sitting-room

sofa, hardly daring to think it possible that I could be destined to

live in such a noble residence. After a single combat of some duration

they returned, and I saw, to my joy, both in Mrs. Crupp's countenance

and in my aunt's, that the deed was done.

'Is it the last occupant's furniture?' inquired my aunt.

'Yes, it is, ma'am,' said Mrs. Crupp.

'What's become of him?' asked my aunt.

Mrs. Crupp was taken with a troublesome cough, in the midst of which

she articulated with much difficulty. 'He was took ill here, ma'am,

and--ugh! ugh! ugh! dear me!--and he died!'

'Hey! What did he die of?' asked my aunt.

'Well, ma'am, he died of drink,' said Mrs. Crupp, in confidence. 'And

smoke.'

'Smoke? You don't mean chimneys?' said my aunt.

'No, ma'am,' returned Mrs. Crupp. 'Cigars and pipes.'

'That's not catching, Trot, at any rate,' remarked my aunt, turning to

me.

'No, indeed,' said I.

In short, my aunt, seeing how enraptured I was with the premises, took

them for a month, with leave to remain for twelve months when that

time was out. Mrs. Crupp was to find linen, and to cook; every other

necessary was already provided; and Mrs. Crupp expressly intimated that

she should always yearn towards me as a son. I was to take possession

the day after tomorrow, and Mrs. Crupp said, thank Heaven she had now

found summun she could care for!

On our way back, my aunt informed me how she confidently trusted that

the life I was now to lead would make me firm and self-reliant, which

was all I wanted. She repeated this several times next day, in the

intervals of our arranging for the transmission of my clothes and books

from Mr. Wickfield's; relative to which, and to all my late holiday, I

wrote a long letter to Agnes, of which my aunt took charge, as she was

to leave on the succeeding day. Not to lengthen these particulars, I

need only add, that she made a handsome provision for all my

possible wants during my month of trial; that Steerforth, to my great

disappointment and hers too, did not make his appearance before she went

away; that I saw her safely seated in the Dover coach, exulting in the

coming discomfiture of the vagrant donkeys, with Janet at her side; and

that when the coach was gone, I turned my face to the Adelphi, pondering

on the old days when I used to roam about its subterranean arches, and

on the happy changes which had brought me to the surface.

CHAPTER 24. MY FIRST DISSIPATION

It was a wonderfully fine thing to have that lofty castle to myself, and

to feel, when I shut my outer door, like Robinson Crusoe, when he had

got into his fortification, and pulled his ladder up after him. It was a

wonderfully fine thing to walk about town with the key of my house in my

pocket, and to know that I could ask any fellow to come home, and make

quite sure of its being inconvenient to nobody, if it were not so to me.

It was a wonderfully fine thing to let myself in and out, and to come

and go without a word to anyone, and to ring Mrs. Crupp up, gasping,

from the depths of the earth, when I wanted her--and when she was

disposed to come. All this, I say, was wonderfully fine; but I must say,

too, that there were times when it was very dreary.

It was fine in the morning, particularly in the fine mornings. It looked

a very fresh, free life, by daylight: still fresher, and more free, by

sunlight. But as the day declined, the life seemed to go down too. I

don't know how it was; it seldom looked well by candle-light. I wanted

somebody to talk to, then. I missed Agnes. I found a tremendous blank,

in the place of that smiling repository of my confidence. Mrs. Crupp

appeared to be a long way off. I thought about my predecessor, who had

died of drink and smoke; and I could have wished he had been so good as

to live, and not bother me with his decease.

After two days and nights, I felt as if I had lived there for a year,

and yet I was not an hour older, but was quite as much tormented by my

own youthfulness as ever.

Steerforth not yet appearing, which induced me to apprehend that he must

be ill, I left the Commons early on the third day, and walked out to

Highgate. Mrs. Steerforth was very glad to see me, and said that he had

gone away with one of his Oxford friends to see another who lived near

St. Albans, but that she expected him to return tomorrow. I was so fond

of him, that I felt quite jealous of his Oxford friends.

As she pressed me to stay to dinner, I remained, and I believe we talked

about nothing but him all day. I told her how much the people liked him

at Yarmouth, and what a delightful companion he had been. Miss Dartle

was full of hints and mysterious questions, but took a great interest

in all our proceedings there, and said, 'Was it really though?' and so

forth, so often, that she got everything out of me she wanted to know.

Her appearance was exactly what I have described it, when I first saw

her; but the society of the two ladies was so agreeable, and came so

natural to me, that I felt myself falling a little in love with her. I

could not help thinking, several times in the course of the evening, and

particularly when I walked home at night, what delightful company she

would be in Buckingham Street.

I was taking my coffee and roll in the morning, before going to the

Commons--and I may observe in this place that it is surprising how

much coffee Mrs. Crupp used, and how weak it was, considering--when

Steerforth himself walked in, to my unbounded joy.

'My dear Steerforth,' cried I, 'I began to think I should never see you

again!'

'I was carried off, by force of arms,' said Steerforth, 'the very next

morning after I got home. Why, Daisy, what a rare old bachelor you are

here!'

I showed him over the establishment, not omitting the pantry, with no

little pride, and he commended it highly. 'I tell you what, old boy,' he

added, 'I shall make quite a town-house of this place, unless you give

me notice to quit.'

This was a delightful hearing. I told him if he waited for that, he

would have to wait till doomsday.

'But you shall have some breakfast!' said I, with my hand on the

bell-rope, 'and Mrs. Crupp shall make you some fresh coffee, and I'll

toast you some bacon in a bachelor's Dutch-oven, that I have got here.'

'No, no!' said Steerforth. 'Don't ring! I can't! I am going to breakfast

with one of these fellows who is at the Piazza Hotel, in Covent Garden.'

'But you'll come back to dinner?' said I.

'I can't, upon my life. There's nothing I should like better, but I must

remain with these two fellows. We are all three off together tomorrow

morning.'

'Then bring them here to dinner,' I returned. 'Do you think they would

come?'

'Oh! they would come fast enough,' said Steerforth; 'but we should

inconvenience you. You had better come and dine with us somewhere.'

I would not by any means consent to this, for it occurred to me that I

really ought to have a little house-warming, and that there never

could be a better opportunity. I had a new pride in my rooms after

his approval of them, and burned with a desire to develop their utmost

resources. I therefore made him promise positively in the names of his

two friends, and we appointed six o'clock as the dinner-hour.

When he was gone, I rang for Mrs. Crupp, and acquainted her with my

desperate design. Mrs. Crupp said, in the first place, of course it was

well known she couldn't be expected to wait, but she knew a handy young

man, who she thought could be prevailed upon to do it, and whose terms

would be five shillings, and what I pleased. I said, certainly we would

have him. Next Mrs. Crupp said it was clear she couldn't be in two

places at once (which I felt to be reasonable), and that 'a young gal'

stationed in the pantry with a bedroom candle, there never to desist

from washing plates, would be indispensable. I said, what would be

the expense of this young female? and Mrs. Crupp said she supposed

eighteenpence would neither make me nor break me. I said I supposed not;

and THAT was settled. Then Mrs. Crupp said, Now about the dinner.

It was a remarkable instance of want of forethought on the part of the

ironmonger who had made Mrs. Crupp's kitchen fireplace, that it was

capable of cooking nothing but chops and mashed potatoes. As to a

fish-kittle, Mrs. Crupp said, well! would I only come and look at the

range? She couldn't say fairer than that. Would I come and look at

it? As I should not have been much the wiser if I HAD looked at it, I

declined, and said, 'Never mind fish.' But Mrs. Crupp said, Don't say

that; oysters was in, why not them? So THAT was settled. Mrs. Crupp

then said what she would recommend would be this. A pair of hot

roast fowls--from the pastry-cook's; a dish of stewed beef, with

vegetables--from the pastry-cook's; two little corner things, as a

raised pie and a dish of kidneys--from the pastrycook's; a tart, and (if

I liked) a shape of jelly--from the pastrycook's. This, Mrs. Crupp said,

would leave her at full liberty to concentrate her mind on the potatoes,

and to serve up the cheese and celery as she could wish to see it done.

I acted on Mrs. Crupp's opinion, and gave the order at the pastry-cook's

myself. Walking along the Strand, afterwards, and observing a hard

mottled substance in the window of a ham and beef shop, which resembled

marble, but was labelled 'Mock Turtle', I went in and bought a slab of

it, which I have since seen reason to believe would have sufficed for

fifteen people. This preparation, Mrs. Crupp, after some difficulty,

consented to warm up; and it shrunk so much in a liquid state, that we

found it what Steerforth called 'rather a tight fit' for four.

These preparations happily completed, I bought a little dessert in

Covent Garden Market, and gave a rather extensive order at a retail

wine-merchant's in that vicinity. When I came home in the afternoon, and

saw the bottles drawn up in a square on the pantry floor, they looked

so numerous (though there were two missing, which made Mrs. Crupp very

uncomfortable), that I was absolutely frightened at them.

One of Steerforth's friends was named Grainger, and the other Markham.

They were both very gay and lively fellows; Grainger, something older

than Steerforth; Markham, youthful-looking, and I should say not

more than twenty. I observed that the latter always spoke of himself

indefinitely, as 'a man', and seldom or never in the first person

singular.

'A man might get on very well here, Mr. Copperfield,' said

Markham--meaning himself.

'It's not a bad situation,' said I, 'and the rooms are really

commodious.'

'I hope you have both brought appetites with you?' said Steerforth.

'Upon my honour,' returned Markham, 'town seems to sharpen a man's

appetite. A man is hungry all day long. A man is perpetually eating.'

Being a little embarrassed at first, and feeling much too young to

preside, I made Steerforth take the head of the table when dinner was

announced, and seated myself opposite to him. Everything was very good;

we did not spare the wine; and he exerted himself so brilliantly to make

the thing pass off well, that there was no pause in our festivity. I was

not quite such good company during dinner as I could have wished to be,

for my chair was opposite the door, and my attention was distracted by

observing that the handy young man went out of the room very often, and

that his shadow always presented itself, immediately afterwards, on the

wall of the entry, with a bottle at its mouth. The 'young gal' likewise

occasioned me some uneasiness: not so much by neglecting to wash the

plates, as by breaking them. For being of an inquisitive disposition,

and unable to confine herself (as her positive instructions were) to the

pantry, she was constantly peering in at us, and constantly imagining

herself detected; in which belief, she several times retired upon the

plates (with which she had carefully paved the floor), and did a great

deal of destruction.

These, however, were small drawbacks, and easily forgotten when the

cloth was cleared, and the dessert put on the table; at which period of

the entertainment the handy young man was discovered to be speechless.

Giving him private directions to seek the society of Mrs. Crupp, and

to remove the 'young gal' to the basement also, I abandoned myself to

enjoyment.

I began, by being singularly cheerful and light-hearted; all sorts of

half-forgotten things to talk about, came rushing into my mind, and made

me hold forth in a most unwonted manner. I laughed heartily at my own

jokes, and everybody else's; called Steerforth to order for not passing

the wine; made several engagements to go to Oxford; announced that

I meant to have a dinner-party exactly like that, once a week, until

further notice; and madly took so much snuff out of Grainger's box, that

I was obliged to go into the pantry, and have a private fit of sneezing

ten minutes long.

I went on, by passing the wine faster and faster yet, and continually

starting up with a corkscrew to open more wine, long before any was

needed. I proposed Steerforth's health. I said he was my dearest friend,

the protector of my boyhood, and the companion of my prime. I said I was

delighted to propose his health. I said I owed him more obligations than

I could ever repay, and held him in a higher admiration than I could

ever express. I finished by saying, 'I'll give you Steerforth! God bless

him! Hurrah!' We gave him three times three, and another, and a good one

to finish with. I broke my glass in going round the table to shake

hands with him, and I said (in two words)

'Steerforth--you'retheguidingstarofmyexistence.'

I went on, by finding suddenly that somebody was in the middle of a

song. Markham was the singer, and he sang 'When the heart of a man is

depressed with care'. He said, when he had sung it, he would give us

'Woman!' I took objection to that, and I couldn't allow it. I said

it was not a respectful way of proposing the toast, and I would never

permit that toast to be drunk in my house otherwise than as 'The

Ladies!' I was very high with him, mainly I think because I saw

Steerforth and Grainger laughing at me--or at him--or at both of us. He

said a man was not to be dictated to. I said a man was. He said a man

was not to be insulted, then. I said he was right there--never under

my roof, where the Lares were sacred, and the laws of hospitality

paramount. He said it was no derogation from a man's dignity to confess

that I was a devilish good fellow. I instantly proposed his health.

Somebody was smoking. We were all smoking. I was smoking, and trying

to suppress a rising tendency to shudder. Steerforth had made a speech

about me, in the course of which I had been affected almost to tears.

I returned thanks, and hoped the present company would dine with me

tomorrow, and the day after--each day at five o'clock, that we might

enjoy the pleasures of conversation and society through a long evening.

I felt called upon to propose an individual. I would give them my aunt.

Miss Betsey Trotwood, the best of her sex!

Somebody was leaning out of my bedroom window, refreshing his forehead

against the cool stone of the parapet, and feeling the air upon his

face. It was myself. I was addressing myself as 'Copperfield', and

saying, 'Why did you try to smoke? You might have known you couldn't

do it.' Now, somebody was unsteadily contemplating his features in the

looking-glass. That was I too. I was very pale in the looking-glass;

my eyes had a vacant appearance; and my hair--only my hair, nothing

else--looked drunk.

Somebody said to me, 'Let us go to the theatre, Copperfield!' There was

no bedroom before me, but again the jingling table covered with glasses;

the lamp; Grainger on my right hand, Markham on my left, and Steerforth

opposite--all sitting in a mist, and a long way off. The theatre? To

be sure. The very thing. Come along! But they must excuse me if I saw

everybody out first, and turned the lamp off--in case of fire.

Owing to some confusion in the dark, the door was gone. I was feeling

for it in the window-curtains, when Steerforth, laughing, took me by

the arm and led me out. We went downstairs, one behind another. Near

the bottom, somebody fell, and rolled down. Somebody else said it was

Copperfield. I was angry at that false report, until, finding myself on

my back in the passage, I began to think there might be some foundation

for it.

A very foggy night, with great rings round the lamps in the streets!

There was an indistinct talk of its being wet. I considered it frosty.

Steerforth dusted me under a lamp-post, and put my hat into shape, which

somebody produced from somewhere in a most extraordinary manner, for

I hadn't had it on before. Steerforth then said, 'You are all right,

Copperfield, are you not?' and I told him, 'Neverberrer.'

A man, sitting in a pigeon-hole-place, looked out of the fog, and took

money from somebody, inquiring if I was one of the gentlemen paid for,

and appearing rather doubtful (as I remember in the glimpse I had of

him) whether to take the money for me or not. Shortly afterwards, we

were very high up in a very hot theatre, looking down into a large pit,

that seemed to me to smoke; the people with whom it was crammed were so

indistinct. There was a great stage, too, looking very clean and

smooth after the streets; and there were people upon it, talking about

something or other, but not at all intelligibly. There was an abundance

of bright lights, and there was music, and there were ladies down in the

boxes, and I don't know what more. The whole building looked to me as if

it were learning to swim; it conducted itself in such an unaccountable

manner, when I tried to steady it.

On somebody's motion, we resolved to go downstairs to the dress-boxes,

where the ladies were. A gentleman lounging, full dressed, on a sofa,

with an opera-glass in his hand, passed before my view, and also my own

figure at full length in a glass. Then I was being ushered into one of

these boxes, and found myself saying something as I sat down, and people

about me crying 'Silence!' to somebody, and ladies casting indignant

glances at me, and--what! yes!--Agnes, sitting on the seat before me, in

the same box, with a lady and gentleman beside her, whom I didn't

know. I see her face now, better than I did then, I dare say, with its

indelible look of regret and wonder turned upon me.

'Agnes!' I said, thickly, 'Lorblessmer! Agnes!'

'Hush! Pray!' she answered, I could not conceive why. 'You disturb the

company. Look at the stage!'

I tried, on her injunction, to fix it, and to hear something of what was

going on there, but quite in vain. I looked at her again by and by, and

saw her shrink into her corner, and put her gloved hand to her forehead.

'Agnes!' I said. 'I'mafraidyou'renorwell.'

'Yes, yes. Do not mind me, Trotwood,' she returned. 'Listen! Are you

going away soon?'

'Amigoarawaysoo?' I repeated.

'Yes.'

I had a stupid intention of replying that I was going to wait, to hand

her downstairs. I suppose I expressed it, somehow; for after she had

looked at me attentively for a little while, she appeared to understand,

and replied in a low tone:

'I know you will do as I ask you, if I tell you I am very earnest in

it. Go away now, Trotwood, for my sake, and ask your friends to take you

home.'

She had so far improved me, for the time, that though I was angry with

her, I felt ashamed, and with a short 'Goori!' (which I intended for

'Good night!') got up and went away. They followed, and I stepped at

once out of the box-door into my bedroom, where only Steerforth was with

me, helping me to undress, and where I was by turns telling him that

Agnes was my sister, and adjuring him to bring the corkscrew, that I

might open another bottle of wine.

How somebody, lying in my bed, lay saying and doing all this over again,

at cross purposes, in a feverish dream all night--the bed a rocking sea

that was never still! How, as that somebody slowly settled down into

myself, did I begin to parch, and feel as if my outer covering of skin

were a hard board; my tongue the bottom of an empty kettle, furred with

long service, and burning up over a slow fire; the palms of my hands,

hot plates of metal which no ice could cool!

But the agony of mind, the remorse, and shame I felt when I became

conscious next day! My horror of having committed a thousand offences I

had forgotten, and which nothing could ever expiate--my recollection

of that indelible look which Agnes had given me--the torturing

impossibility of communicating with her, not knowing, Beast that I was,

how she came to be in London, or where she stayed--my disgust of

the very sight of the room where the revel had been held--my racking

head--the smell of smoke, the sight of glasses, the impossibility of

going out, or even getting up! Oh, what a day it was!

Oh, what an evening, when I sat down by my fire to a basin of mutton

broth, dimpled all over with fat, and thought I was going the way of my

predecessor, and should succeed to his dismal story as well as to his

chambers, and had half a mind to rush express to Dover and reveal

all! What an evening, when Mrs. Crupp, coming in to take away the

broth-basin, produced one kidney on a cheese-plate as the entire remains

of yesterday's feast, and I was really inclined to fall upon her nankeen

breast and say, in heartfelt penitence, 'Oh, Mrs. Crupp, Mrs. Crupp,

never mind the broken meats! I am very miserable!'--only that I doubted,

even at that pass, if Mrs. Crupp were quite the sort of woman to confide

in!

CHAPTER 25. GOOD AND BAD ANGELS

I was going out at my door on the morning after that deplorable day of

headache, sickness, and repentance, with an odd confusion in my mind

relative to the date of my dinner-party, as if a body of Titans had

taken an enormous lever and pushed the day before yesterday some months

back, when I saw a ticket-porter coming upstairs, with a letter in his

hand. He was taking his time about his errand, then; but when he saw me

on the top of the staircase, looking at him over the banisters, he swung

into a trot, and came up panting as if he had run himself into a state

of exhaustion.

'T. Copperfield, Esquire,' said the ticket-porter, touching his hat with

his little cane.

I could scarcely lay claim to the name: I was so disturbed by the

conviction that the letter came from Agnes. However, I told him I was T.

Copperfield, Esquire, and he believed it, and gave me the letter, which

he said required an answer. I shut him out on the landing to wait for

the answer, and went into my chambers again, in such a nervous state

that I was fain to lay the letter down on my breakfast table, and

familiarize myself with the outside of it a little, before I could

resolve to break the seal.

I found, when I did open it, that it was a very kind note, containing

no reference to my condition at the theatre. All it said was, 'My dear

Trotwood. I am staying at the house of papa's agent, Mr. Waterbrook, in

Ely Place, Holborn. Will you come and see me today, at any time you like

to appoint? Ever yours affectionately, AGNES.'

It took me such a long time to write an answer at all to my

satisfaction, that I don't know what the ticket-porter can have

thought, unless he thought I was learning to write. I must have written

half-a-dozen answers at least. I began one, 'How can I ever hope,

my dear Agnes, to efface from your remembrance the disgusting

impression'--there I didn't like it, and then I tore it up. I began

another, 'Shakespeare has observed, my dear Agnes, how strange it is

that a man should put an enemy into his mouth'--that reminded me of

Markham, and it got no farther. I even tried poetry. I began one note,

in a six-syllable line, 'Oh, do not remember'--but that associated

itself with the fifth of November, and became an absurdity. After many

attempts, I wrote, 'My dear Agnes. Your letter is like you, and what

could I say of it that would be higher praise than that? I will come at

four o'clock. Affectionately and sorrowfully, T.C.' With this missive

(which I was in twenty minds at once about recalling, as soon as it was

out of my hands), the ticket-porter at last departed.

If the day were half as tremendous to any other professional gentleman

in Doctors' Commons as it was to me, I sincerely believe he made some

expiation for his share in that rotten old ecclesiastical cheese.

Although I left the office at half past three, and was prowling about

the place of appointment within a few minutes afterwards, the appointed

time was exceeded by a full quarter of an hour, according to the

clock of St. Andrew's, Holborn, before I could muster up sufficient

desperation to pull the private bell-handle let into the left-hand

door-post of Mr. Waterbrook's house.

The professional business of Mr. Waterbrook's establishment was done on

the ground-floor, and the genteel business (of which there was a good

deal) in the upper part of the building. I was shown into a pretty but

rather close drawing-room, and there sat Agnes, netting a purse.

She looked so quiet and good, and reminded me so strongly of my airy

fresh school days at Canterbury, and the sodden, smoky, stupid wretch

I had been the other night, that, nobody being by, I yielded to my

self-reproach and shame, and--in short, made a fool of myself. I cannot

deny that I shed tears. To this hour I am undecided whether it was upon

the whole the wisest thing I could have done, or the most ridiculous.

'If it had been anyone but you, Agnes,' said I, turning away my head, 'I

should not have minded it half so much. But that it should have been you

who saw me! I almost wish I had been dead, first.'

She put her hand--its touch was like no other hand--upon my arm for a

moment; and I felt so befriended and comforted, that I could not help

moving it to my lips, and gratefully kissing it.

'Sit down,' said Agnes, cheerfully. 'Don't be unhappy, Trotwood. If you

cannot confidently trust me, whom will you trust?'

'Ah, Agnes!' I returned. 'You are my good Angel!'

She smiled rather sadly, I thought, and shook her head.

'Yes, Agnes, my good Angel! Always my good Angel!'

'If I were, indeed, Trotwood,' she returned, 'there is one thing that I

should set my heart on very much.'

I looked at her inquiringly; but already with a foreknowledge of her

meaning.

'On warning you,' said Agnes, with a steady glance, 'against your bad

Angel.'

'My dear Agnes,' I began, 'if you mean Steerforth--'

'I do, Trotwood,' she returned. 'Then, Agnes, you wrong him very much.

He my bad Angel, or anyone's! He, anything but a guide, a support, and

a friend to me! My dear Agnes! Now, is it not unjust, and unlike you, to

judge him from what you saw of me the other night?'

'I do not judge him from what I saw of you the other night,' she quietly

replied.

'From what, then?'

'From many things--trifles in themselves, but they do not seem to me to

be so, when they are put together. I judge him, partly from your account

of him, Trotwood, and your character, and the influence he has over

you.'

There was always something in her modest voice that seemed to touch a

chord within me, answering to that sound alone. It was always earnest;

but when it was very earnest, as it was now, there was a thrill in it

that quite subdued me. I sat looking at her as she cast her eyes down on

her work; I sat seeming still to listen to her; and Steerforth, in spite

of all my attachment to him, darkened in that tone.

'It is very bold in me,' said Agnes, looking up again, 'who have lived

in such seclusion, and can know so little of the world, to give you my

advice so confidently, or even to have this strong opinion. But I know

in what it is engendered, Trotwood,--in how true a remembrance of our

having grown up together, and in how true an interest in all relating

to you. It is that which makes me bold. I am certain that what I say is

right. I am quite sure it is. I feel as if it were someone else speaking

to you, and not I, when I caution you that you have made a dangerous

friend.'

Again I looked at her, again I listened to her after she was silent, and

again his image, though it was still fixed in my heart, darkened.

'I am not so unreasonable as to expect,' said Agnes, resuming her usual

tone, after a little while, 'that you will, or that you can, at once,

change any sentiment that has become a conviction to you; least of all

a sentiment that is rooted in your trusting disposition. You ought not

hastily to do that. I only ask you, Trotwood, if you ever think of me--I

mean,' with a quiet smile, for I was going to interrupt her, and she

knew why, 'as often as you think of me--to think of what I have said. Do

you forgive me for all this?'

'I will forgive you, Agnes,' I replied, 'when you come to do Steerforth

justice, and to like him as well as I do.'

'Not until then?' said Agnes.

I saw a passing shadow on her face when I made this mention of him, but

she returned my smile, and we were again as unreserved in our mutual

confidence as of old.

'And when, Agnes,' said I, 'will you forgive me the other night?'

'When I recall it,' said Agnes.

She would have dismissed the subject so, but I was too full of it to

allow that, and insisted on telling her how it happened that I had

disgraced myself, and what chain of accidental circumstances had had the

theatre for its final link. It was a great relief to me to do this, and

to enlarge on the obligation that I owed to Steerforth for his care of

me when I was unable to take care of myself.

'You must not forget,' said Agnes, calmly changing the conversation as

soon as I had concluded, 'that you are always to tell me, not only when

you fall into trouble, but when you fall in love. Who has succeeded to

Miss Larkins, Trotwood?'

'No one, Agnes.'

'Someone, Trotwood,' said Agnes, laughing, and holding up her finger.

'No, Agnes, upon my word! There is a lady, certainly, at Mrs.

Steerforth's house, who is very clever, and whom I like to talk to--Miss

Dartle--but I don't adore her.'

Agnes laughed again at her own penetration, and told me that if I were

faithful to her in my confidence she thought she should keep a little

register of my violent attachments, with the date, duration, and

termination of each, like the table of the reigns of the kings and

queens, in the History of England. Then she asked me if I had seen

Uriah.

'Uriah Heep?' said I. 'No. Is he in London?'

'He comes to the office downstairs, every day,' returned Agnes. 'He

was in London a week before me. I am afraid on disagreeable business,

Trotwood.'

'On some business that makes you uneasy, Agnes, I see,' said I. 'What

can that be?'

Agnes laid aside her work, and replied, folding her hands upon one

another, and looking pensively at me out of those beautiful soft eyes of

hers:

'I believe he is going to enter into partnership with papa.'

'What? Uriah? That mean, fawning fellow, worm himself into such

promotion!' I cried, indignantly. 'Have you made no remonstrance about

it, Agnes? Consider what a connexion it is likely to be. You must speak

out. You must not allow your father to take such a mad step. You must

prevent it, Agnes, while there's time.'

Still looking at me, Agnes shook her head while I was speaking, with a

faint smile at my warmth: and then replied:

'You remember our last conversation about papa? It was not long after

that--not more than two or three days--when he gave me the first

intimation of what I tell you. It was sad to see him struggling between

his desire to represent it to me as a matter of choice on his part,

and his inability to conceal that it was forced upon him. I felt very

sorry.'

'Forced upon him, Agnes! Who forces it upon him?'

'Uriah,' she replied, after a moment's hesitation, 'has made himself

indispensable to papa. He is subtle and watchful. He has mastered papa's

weaknesses, fostered them, and taken advantage of them, until--to say

all that I mean in a word, Trotwood,--until papa is afraid of him.'

There was more that she might have said; more that she knew, or that she

suspected; I clearly saw. I could not give her pain by asking what it

was, for I knew that she withheld it from me, to spare her father. It

had long been going on to this, I was sensible: yes, I could not but

feel, on the least reflection, that it had been going on to this for a

long time. I remained silent.

'His ascendancy over papa,' said Agnes, 'is very great. He professes

humility and gratitude--with truth, perhaps: I hope so--but his position

is really one of power, and I fear he makes a hard use of his power.'

I said he was a hound, which, at the moment, was a great satisfaction to

me.

'At the time I speak of, as the time when papa spoke to me,' pursued

Agnes, 'he had told papa that he was going away; that he was very sorry,

and unwilling to leave, but that he had better prospects. Papa was very

much depressed then, and more bowed down by care than ever you or I have

seen him; but he seemed relieved by this expedient of the partnership,

though at the same time he seemed hurt by it and ashamed of it.'

'And how did you receive it, Agnes?'

'I did, Trotwood,' she replied, 'what I hope was right. Feeling sure

that it was necessary for papa's peace that the sacrifice should be

made, I entreated him to make it. I said it would lighten the load

of his life--I hope it will!--and that it would give me increased

opportunities of being his companion. Oh, Trotwood!' cried Agnes,

putting her hands before her face, as her tears started on it, 'I almost

feel as if I had been papa's enemy, instead of his loving child. For

I know how he has altered, in his devotion to me. I know how he has

narrowed the circle of his sympathies and duties, in the concentration

of his whole mind upon me. I know what a multitude of things he has shut

out for my sake, and how his anxious thoughts of me have shadowed his

life, and weakened his strength and energy, by turning them always upon

one idea. If I could ever set this right! If I could ever work out his

restoration, as I have so innocently been the cause of his decline!'

I had never before seen Agnes cry. I had seen tears in her eyes when I

had brought new honours home from school, and I had seen them there when

we last spoke about her father, and I had seen her turn her gentle head

aside when we took leave of one another; but I had never seen her grieve

like this. It made me so sorry that I could only say, in a foolish,

helpless manner, 'Pray, Agnes, don't! Don't, my dear sister!'

But Agnes was too superior to me in character and purpose, as I know

well now, whatever I might know or not know then, to be long in need of

my entreaties. The beautiful, calm manner, which makes her so different

in my remembrance from everybody else, came back again, as if a cloud

had passed from a serene sky.

'We are not likely to remain alone much longer,' said Agnes, 'and while

I have an opportunity, let me earnestly entreat you, Trotwood, to be

friendly to Uriah. Don't repel him. Don't resent (as I think you have a

general disposition to do) what may be uncongenial to you in him. He may

not deserve it, for we know no certain ill of him. In any case, think

first of papa and me!'

Agnes had no time to say more, for the room door opened, and Mrs.

Waterbrook, who was a large lady--or who wore a large dress: I don't

exactly know which, for I don't know which was dress and which was

lady--came sailing in. I had a dim recollection of having seen her

at the theatre, as if I had seen her in a pale magic lantern; but she

appeared to remember me perfectly, and still to suspect me of being in a

state of intoxication.

Finding by degrees, however, that I was sober, and (I hope) that I was

a modest young gentleman, Mrs. Waterbrook softened towards me

considerably, and inquired, firstly, if I went much into the parks,

and secondly, if I went much into society. On my replying to both these

questions in the negative, it occurred to me that I fell again in her

good opinion; but she concealed the fact gracefully, and invited me to

dinner next day. I accepted the invitation, and took my leave, making a

call on Uriah in the office as I went out, and leaving a card for him in

his absence.

When I went to dinner next day, and on the street door being opened,

plunged into a vapour-bath of haunch of mutton, I divined that I was

not the only guest, for I immediately identified the ticket-porter in

disguise, assisting the family servant, and waiting at the foot of the

stairs to carry up my name. He looked, to the best of his ability, when

he asked me for it confidentially, as if he had never seen me before;

but well did I know him, and well did he know me. Conscience made

cowards of us both.

I found Mr. Waterbrook to be a middle-aged gentleman, with a short

throat, and a good deal of shirt-collar, who only wanted a black nose to

be the portrait of a pug-dog. He told me he was happy to have the

honour of making my acquaintance; and when I had paid my homage to Mrs.

Waterbrook, presented me, with much ceremony, to a very awful lady in

a black velvet dress, and a great black velvet hat, whom I remember as

looking like a near relation of Hamlet's--say his aunt.

Mrs. Henry Spiker was this lady's name; and her husband was there

too: so cold a man, that his head, instead of being grey, seemed to

be sprinkled with hoar-frost. Immense deference was shown to the Henry

Spikers, male and female; which Agnes told me was on account of Mr.

Henry Spiker being solicitor to something Or to Somebody, I forget what

or which, remotely connected with the Treasury.

I found Uriah Heep among the company, in a suit of black, and in deep

humility. He told me, when I shook hands with him, that he was proud

to be noticed by me, and that he really felt obliged to me for my

condescension. I could have wished he had been less obliged to me, for

he hovered about me in his gratitude all the rest of the evening; and

whenever I said a word to Agnes, was sure, with his shadowless eyes and

cadaverous face, to be looking gauntly down upon us from behind.

There were other guests--all iced for the occasion, as it struck me,

like the wine. But there was one who attracted my attention before he

came in, on account of my hearing him announced as Mr. Traddles! My mind

flew back to Salem House; and could it be Tommy, I thought, who used to

draw the skeletons!

I looked for Mr. Traddles with unusual interest. He was a sober,

steady-looking young man of retiring manners, with a comic head of hair,

and eyes that were rather wide open; and he got into an obscure corner

so soon, that I had some difficulty in making him out. At length I had

a good view of him, and either my vision deceived me, or it was the old

unfortunate Tommy.

I made my way to Mr. Waterbrook, and said, that I believed I had the

pleasure of seeing an old schoolfellow there.

'Indeed!' said Mr. Waterbrook, surprised. 'You are too young to have

been at school with Mr. Henry Spiker?'

'Oh, I don't mean him!' I returned. 'I mean the gentleman named

Traddles.'

'Oh! Aye, aye! Indeed!' said my host, with much diminished interest.

'Possibly.'

'If it's really the same person,' said I, glancing towards him, 'it

was at a place called Salem House where we were together, and he was an

excellent fellow.'

'Oh yes. Traddles is a good fellow,' returned my host nodding his head

with an air of toleration. 'Traddles is quite a good fellow.'

'It's a curious coincidence,' said I.

'It is really,' returned my host, 'quite a coincidence, that Traddles

should be here at all: as Traddles was only invited this morning, when

the place at table, intended to be occupied by Mrs. Henry Spiker's

brother, became vacant, in consequence of his indisposition. A very

gentlemanly man, Mrs. Henry Spiker's brother, Mr. Copperfield.'

I murmured an assent, which was full of feeling, considering that I

knew nothing at all about him; and I inquired what Mr. Traddles was by

profession.

'Traddles,' returned Mr. Waterbrook, 'is a young man reading for the

bar. Yes. He is quite a good fellow--nobody's enemy but his own.'

'Is he his own enemy?' said I, sorry to hear this.

'Well,' returned Mr. Waterbrook, pursing up his mouth, and playing with

his watch-chain, in a comfortable, prosperous sort of way. 'I should say

he was one of those men who stand in their own light. Yes, I should say

he would never, for example, be worth five hundred pound. Traddles was

recommended to me by a professional friend. Oh yes. Yes. He has a kind

of talent for drawing briefs, and stating a case in writing, plainly. I

am able to throw something in Traddles's way, in the course of the year;

something--for him--considerable. Oh yes. Yes.'

I was much impressed by the extremely comfortable and satisfied manner

in which Mr. Waterbrook delivered himself of this little word 'Yes',

every now and then. There was wonderful expression in it. It completely

conveyed the idea of a man who had been born, not to say with a silver

spoon, but with a scaling-ladder, and had gone on mounting all the

heights of life one after another, until now he looked, from the top of

the fortifications, with the eye of a philosopher and a patron, on the

people down in the trenches.

My reflections on this theme were still in progress when dinner was

announced. Mr. Waterbrook went down with Hamlet's aunt. Mr. Henry Spiker

took Mrs. Waterbrook. Agnes, whom I should have liked to take myself,

was given to a simpering fellow with weak legs. Uriah, Traddles, and I,

as the junior part of the company, went down last, how we could. I was

not so vexed at losing Agnes as I might have been, since it gave me

an opportunity of making myself known to Traddles on the stairs, who

greeted me with great fervour; while Uriah writhed with such obtrusive

satisfaction and self-abasement, that I could gladly have pitched

him over the banisters. Traddles and I were separated at table, being

billeted in two remote corners: he in the glare of a red velvet lady;

I, in the gloom of Hamlet's aunt. The dinner was very long, and the

conversation was about the Aristocracy--and Blood. Mrs. Waterbrook

repeatedly told us, that if she had a weakness, it was Blood.

It occurred to me several times that we should have got on better, if we

had not been quite so genteel. We were so exceedingly genteel, that our

scope was very limited. A Mr. and Mrs. Gulpidge were of the party, who

had something to do at second-hand (at least, Mr. Gulpidge had) with

the law business of the Bank; and what with the Bank, and what with

the Treasury, we were as exclusive as the Court Circular. To mend the

matter, Hamlet's aunt had the family failing of indulging in soliloquy,

and held forth in a desultory manner, by herself, on every topic that

was introduced. These were few enough, to be sure; but as we always fell

back upon Blood, she had as wide a field for abstract speculation as her

nephew himself.

We might have been a party of Ogres, the conversation assumed such a

sanguine complexion.

'I confess I am of Mrs. Waterbrook's opinion,' said Mr. Waterbrook, with

his wine-glass at his eye. 'Other things are all very well in their way,

but give me Blood!'

'Oh! There is nothing,' observed Hamlet's aunt, 'so satisfactory to one!

There is nothing that is so much one's beau-ideal of--of all that sort

of thing, speaking generally. There are some low minds (not many, I am

happy to believe, but there are some) that would prefer to do what I

should call bow down before idols. Positively Idols! Before service,

intellect, and so on. But these are intangible points. Blood is not so.

We see Blood in a nose, and we know it. We meet with it in a chin, and

we say, "There it is! That's Blood!" It is an actual matter of fact. We

point it out. It admits of no doubt.'

The simpering fellow with the weak legs, who had taken Agnes down,

stated the question more decisively yet, I thought.

'Oh, you know, deuce take it,' said this gentleman, looking round the

board with an imbecile smile, 'we can't forego Blood, you know. We must

have Blood, you know. Some young fellows, you know, may be a little

behind their station, perhaps, in point of education and behaviour, and

may go a little wrong, you know, and get themselves and other people

into a variety of fixes--and all that--but deuce take it, it's

delightful to reflect that they've got Blood in 'em! Myself, I'd rather

at any time be knocked down by a man who had got Blood in him, than I'd

be picked up by a man who hadn't!'

This sentiment, as compressing the general question into a nutshell,

gave the utmost satisfaction, and brought the gentleman into great

notice until the ladies retired. After that, I observed that Mr.

Gulpidge and Mr. Henry Spiker, who had hitherto been very distant,

entered into a defensive alliance against us, the common enemy, and

exchanged a mysterious dialogue across the table for our defeat and

overthrow.

'That affair of the first bond for four thousand five hundred pounds has

not taken the course that was expected, Spiker,' said Mr. Gulpidge.

'Do you mean the D. of A.'s?' said Mr. Spiker.

'The C. of B.'s!' said Mr. Gulpidge.

Mr. Spiker raised his eyebrows, and looked much concerned.

'When the question was referred to Lord--I needn't name him,' said Mr.

Gulpidge, checking himself--

'I understand,' said Mr. Spiker, 'N.'

Mr. Gulpidge darkly nodded--'was referred to him, his answer was,

"Money, or no release."'

'Lord bless my soul!' cried Mr. Spiker.

"'Money, or no release,"' repeated Mr. Gulpidge, firmly. 'The next in

reversion--you understand me?'

'K.,' said Mr. Spiker, with an ominous look.

'--K. then positively refused to sign. He was attended at Newmarket for

that purpose, and he point-blank refused to do it.'

Mr. Spiker was so interested, that he became quite stony.

'So the matter rests at this hour,' said Mr. Gulpidge, throwing himself

back in his chair. 'Our friend Waterbrook will excuse me if I forbear to

explain myself generally, on account of the magnitude of the interests

involved.'

Mr. Waterbrook was only too happy, as it appeared to me, to have such

interests, and such names, even hinted at, across his table. He assumed

an expression of gloomy intelligence (though I am persuaded he knew

no more about the discussion than I did), and highly approved of the

discretion that had been observed. Mr. Spiker, after the receipt of such

a confidence, naturally desired to favour his friend with a confidence

of his own; therefore the foregoing dialogue was succeeded by another,

in which it was Mr. Gulpidge's turn to be surprised, and that by another

in which the surprise came round to Mr. Spiker's turn again, and so on,

turn and turn about. All this time we, the outsiders, remained oppressed

by the tremendous interests involved in the conversation; and our

host regarded us with pride, as the victims of a salutary awe and

astonishment. I was very glad indeed to get upstairs to Agnes, and to

talk with her in a corner, and to introduce Traddles to her, who was

shy, but agreeable, and the same good-natured creature still. As he

was obliged to leave early, on account of going away next morning for

a month, I had not nearly so much conversation with him as I could have

wished; but we exchanged addresses, and promised ourselves the pleasure

of another meeting when he should come back to town. He was greatly

interested to hear that I knew Steerforth, and spoke of him with such

warmth that I made him tell Agnes what he thought of him. But Agnes only

looked at me the while, and very slightly shook her head when only I

observed her.

As she was not among people with whom I believed she could be very much

at home, I was almost glad to hear that she was going away within a few

days, though I was sorry at the prospect of parting from her again

so soon. This caused me to remain until all the company were gone.

Conversing with her, and hearing her sing, was such a delightful

reminder to me of my happy life in the grave old house she had made so

beautiful, that I could have remained there half the night; but, having

no excuse for staying any longer, when the lights of Mr. Waterbrook's

society were all snuffed out, I took my leave very much against my

inclination. I felt then, more than ever, that she was my better Angel;

and if I thought of her sweet face and placid smile, as though they had

shone on me from some removed being, like an Angel, I hope I thought no

harm.

I have said that the company were all gone; but I ought to have excepted

Uriah, whom I don't include in that denomination, and who had never

ceased to hover near us. He was close behind me when I went downstairs.

He was close beside me, when I walked away from the house, slowly

fitting his long skeleton fingers into the still longer fingers of a

great Guy Fawkes pair of gloves.

It was in no disposition for Uriah's company, but in remembrance of the

entreaty Agnes had made to me, that I asked him if he would come home to

my rooms, and have some coffee.

'Oh, really, Master Copperfield,' he rejoined--'I beg your pardon,

Mister Copperfield, but the other comes so natural, I don't like that

you should put a constraint upon yourself to ask a numble person like me

to your ouse.'

'There is no constraint in the case,' said I. 'Will you come?'

'I should like to, very much,' replied Uriah, with a writhe.

'Well, then, come along!' said I.

I could not help being rather short with him, but he appeared not to

mind it. We went the nearest way, without conversing much upon the road;

and he was so humble in respect of those scarecrow gloves, that he

was still putting them on, and seemed to have made no advance in that

labour, when we got to my place.

I led him up the dark stairs, to prevent his knocking his head against

anything, and really his damp cold hand felt so like a frog in mine,

that I was tempted to drop it and run away. Agnes and hospitality

prevailed, however, and I conducted him to my fireside. When I lighted

my candles, he fell into meek transports with the room that was revealed

to him; and when I heated the coffee in an unassuming block-tin vessel

in which Mrs. Crupp delighted to prepare it (chiefly, I believe, because

it was not intended for the purpose, being a shaving-pot, and because

there was a patent invention of great price mouldering away in the

pantry), he professed so much emotion, that I could joyfully have

scalded him.

'Oh, really, Master Copperfield,--I mean Mister Copperfield,' said

Uriah, 'to see you waiting upon me is what I never could have expected!

But, one way and another, so many things happen to me which I never

could have expected, I am sure, in my umble station, that it seems

to rain blessings on my ed. You have heard something, I des-say, of a

change in my expectations, Master Copperfield,--I should say, Mister

Copperfield?'

As he sat on my sofa, with his long knees drawn up under his coffee-cup,

his hat and gloves upon the ground close to him, his spoon going softly

round and round, his shadowless red eyes, which looked as if they had

scorched their lashes off, turned towards me without looking at me, the

disagreeable dints I have formerly described in his nostrils coming and

going with his breath, and a snaky undulation pervading his frame from

his chin to his boots, I decided in my own mind that I disliked him

intensely. It made me very uncomfortable to have him for a guest, for I

was young then, and unused to disguise what I so strongly felt.

'You have heard something, I des-say, of a change in my expectations,

Master Copperfield,--I should say, Mister Copperfield?' observed Uriah.

'Yes,' said I, 'something.'

'Ah! I thought Miss Agnes would know of it!' he quietly returned. 'I'm

glad to find Miss Agnes knows of it. Oh, thank you, Master--Mister

Copperfield!'

I could have thrown my bootjack at him (it lay ready on the rug), for

having entrapped me into the disclosure of anything concerning Agnes,

however immaterial. But I only drank my coffee.

'What a prophet you have shown yourself, Mister Copperfield!' pursued

Uriah. 'Dear me, what a prophet you have proved yourself to be! Don't

you remember saying to me once, that perhaps I should be a partner in

Mr. Wickfield's business, and perhaps it might be Wickfield and

Heep? You may not recollect it; but when a person is umble, Master

Copperfield, a person treasures such things up!'

'I recollect talking about it,' said I, 'though I certainly did not

think it very likely then.' 'Oh! who would have thought it likely,

Mister Copperfield!' returned Uriah, enthusiastically. 'I am sure I

didn't myself. I recollect saying with my own lips that I was much too

umble. So I considered myself really and truly.'

He sat, with that carved grin on his face, looking at the fire, as I

looked at him.

'But the umblest persons, Master Copperfield,' he presently resumed,

'may be the instruments of good. I am glad to think I have been the

instrument of good to Mr. Wickfield, and that I may be more so. Oh what

a worthy man he is, Mister Copperfield, but how imprudent he has been!'

'I am sorry to hear it,' said I. I could not help adding, rather

pointedly, 'on all accounts.'

'Decidedly so, Mister Copperfield,' replied Uriah. 'On all accounts.

Miss Agnes's above all! You don't remember your own eloquent

expressions, Master Copperfield; but I remember how you said one day

that everybody must admire her, and how I thanked you for it! You have

forgot that, I have no doubt, Master Copperfield?'

'No,' said I, drily.

'Oh how glad I am you have not!' exclaimed Uriah. 'To think that you

should be the first to kindle the sparks of ambition in my umble breast,

and that you've not forgot it! Oh!--Would you excuse me asking for a cup

more coffee?'

Something in the emphasis he laid upon the kindling of those sparks,

and something in the glance he directed at me as he said it, had made me

start as if I had seen him illuminated by a blaze of light. Recalled by

his request, preferred in quite another tone of voice, I did the honours

of the shaving-pot; but I did them with an unsteadiness of hand, a

sudden sense of being no match for him, and a perplexed suspicious

anxiety as to what he might be going to say next, which I felt could not

escape his observation.

He said nothing at all. He stirred his coffee round and round, he sipped

it, he felt his chin softly with his grisly hand, he looked at the fire,

he looked about the room, he gasped rather than smiled at me, he writhed

and undulated about, in his deferential servility, he stirred and sipped

again, but he left the renewal of the conversation to me.

'So, Mr. Wickfield,' said I, at last, 'who is worth five hundred of

you--or me'; for my life, I think, I could not have helped dividing that

part of the sentence with an awkward jerk; 'has been imprudent, has he,

Mr. Heep?'

'Oh, very imprudent indeed, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, sighing

modestly. 'Oh, very much so! But I wish you'd call me Uriah, if you

please. It's like old times.'

'Well! Uriah,' said I, bolting it out with some difficulty.

'Thank you,' he returned, with fervour. 'Thank you, Master Copperfield!

It's like the blowing of old breezes or the ringing of old bellses to

hear YOU say Uriah. I beg your pardon. Was I making any observation?'

'About Mr. Wickfield,' I suggested.

'Oh! Yes, truly,' said Uriah. 'Ah! Great imprudence, Master Copperfield.

It's a topic that I wouldn't touch upon, to any soul but you. Even to

you I can only touch upon it, and no more. If anyone else had been in

my place during the last few years, by this time he would have had Mr.

Wickfield (oh, what a worthy man he is, Master Copperfield, too!) under

his thumb. Un--der--his thumb,' said Uriah, very slowly, as he stretched

out his cruel-looking hand above my table, and pressed his own thumb

upon it, until it shook, and shook the room.

If I had been obliged to look at him with him splay foot on Mr.

Wickfield's head, I think I could scarcely have hated him more.

'Oh, dear, yes, Master Copperfield,' he proceeded, in a soft voice,

most remarkably contrasting with the action of his thumb, which did not

diminish its hard pressure in the least degree, 'there's no doubt of

it. There would have been loss, disgrace, I don't know what at all. Mr.

Wickfield knows it. I am the umble instrument of umbly serving him,

and he puts me on an eminence I hardly could have hoped to reach. How

thankful should I be!' With his face turned towards me, as he finished,

but without looking at me, he took his crooked thumb off the spot where

he had planted it, and slowly and thoughtfully scraped his lank jaw with

it, as if he were shaving himself.

I recollect well how indignantly my heart beat, as I saw his crafty

face, with the appropriately red light of the fire upon it, preparing

for something else.

'Master Copperfield,' he began--'but am I keeping you up?'

'You are not keeping me up. I generally go to bed late.'

'Thank you, Master Copperfield! I have risen from my umble station since

first you used to address me, it is true; but I am umble still. I hope I

never shall be otherwise than umble. You will not think the worse of

my umbleness, if I make a little confidence to you, Master Copperfield?

Will you?'

'Oh no,' said I, with an effort.

'Thank you!' He took out his pocket-handkerchief, and began wiping the

palms of his hands. 'Miss Agnes, Master Copperfield--' 'Well, Uriah?'

'Oh, how pleasant to be called Uriah, spontaneously!' he cried; and gave

himself a jerk, like a convulsive fish. 'You thought her looking very

beautiful tonight, Master Copperfield?'

'I thought her looking as she always does: superior, in all respects, to

everyone around her,' I returned.

'Oh, thank you! It's so true!' he cried. 'Oh, thank you very much for

that!'

'Not at all,' I said, loftily. 'There is no reason why you should thank

me.'

'Why that, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'is, in fact, the confidence

that I am going to take the liberty of reposing. Umble as I am,' he

wiped his hands harder, and looked at them and at the fire by turns,

'umble as my mother is, and lowly as our poor but honest roof has ever

been, the image of Miss Agnes (I don't mind trusting you with my secret,

Master Copperfield, for I have always overflowed towards you since the

first moment I had the pleasure of beholding you in a pony-shay) has

been in my breast for years. Oh, Master Copperfield, with what a pure

affection do I love the ground my Agnes walks on!'

I believe I had a delirious idea of seizing the red-hot poker out of

the fire, and running him through with it. It went from me with a shock,

like a ball fired from a rifle: but the image of Agnes, outraged by so

much as a thought of this red-headed animal's, remained in my mind when

I looked at him, sitting all awry as if his mean soul griped his body,

and made me giddy. He seemed to swell and grow before my eyes; the room

seemed full of the echoes of his voice; and the strange feeling (to

which, perhaps, no one is quite a stranger) that all this had occurred

before, at some indefinite time, and that I knew what he was going to

say next, took possession of me.

A timely observation of the sense of power that there was in his face,

did more to bring back to my remembrance the entreaty of Agnes, in

its full force, than any effort I could have made. I asked him, with

a better appearance of composure than I could have thought possible a

minute before, whether he had made his feelings known to Agnes.

'Oh no, Master Copperfield!' he returned; 'oh dear, no! Not to anyone

but you. You see I am only just emerging from my lowly station. I rest a

good deal of hope on her observing how useful I am to her father (for

I trust to be very useful to him indeed, Master Copperfield), and how I

smooth the way for him, and keep him straight. She's so much attached

to her father, Master Copperfield (oh, what a lovely thing it is in a

daughter!), that I think she may come, on his account, to be kind to

me.'

I fathomed the depth of the rascal's whole scheme, and understood why he

laid it bare.

'If you'll have the goodness to keep my secret, Master Copperfield,' he

pursued, 'and not, in general, to go against me, I shall take it as a

particular favour. You wouldn't wish to make unpleasantness. I know

what a friendly heart you've got; but having only known me on my umble

footing (on my umblest I should say, for I am very umble still), you

might, unbeknown, go against me rather, with my Agnes. I call her mine,

you see, Master Copperfield. There's a song that says, "I'd crowns

resign, to call her mine!" I hope to do it, one of these days.'

Dear Agnes! So much too loving and too good for anyone that I could

think of, was it possible that she was reserved to be the wife of such a

wretch as this!

'There's no hurry at present, you know, Master Copperfield,' Uriah

proceeded, in his slimy way, as I sat gazing at him, with this thought

in my mind. 'My Agnes is very young still; and mother and me will have

to work our way upwards, and make a good many new arrangements, before

it would be quite convenient. So I shall have time gradually to make her

familiar with my hopes, as opportunities offer. Oh, I'm so much obliged

to you for this confidence! Oh, it's such a relief, you can't think, to

know that you understand our situation, and are certain (as you wouldn't

wish to make unpleasantness in the family) not to go against me!'

He took the hand which I dared not withhold, and having given it a damp

squeeze, referred to his pale-faced watch.

'Dear me!' he said, 'it's past one. The moments slip away so, in the

confidence of old times, Master Copperfield, that it's almost half past

one!'

I answered that I had thought it was later. Not that I had really

thought so, but because my conversational powers were effectually

scattered.

'Dear me!' he said, considering. 'The ouse that I am stopping at--a sort

of a private hotel and boarding ouse, Master Copperfield, near the New

River ed--will have gone to bed these two hours.'

'I am sorry,' I returned, 'that there is only one bed here, and that

I--'

'Oh, don't think of mentioning beds, Master Copperfield!' he rejoined

ecstatically, drawing up one leg. 'But would you have any objections to

my laying down before the fire?'

'If it comes to that,' I said, 'pray take my bed, and I'll lie down

before the fire.'

His repudiation of this offer was almost shrill enough, in the excess of

its surprise and humility, to have penetrated to the ears of Mrs. Crupp,

then sleeping, I suppose, in a distant chamber, situated at about the

level of low-water mark, soothed in her slumbers by the ticking of an

incorrigible clock, to which she always referred me when we had any

little difference on the score of punctuality, and which was never less

than three-quarters of an hour too slow, and had always been put right

in the morning by the best authorities. As no arguments I could urge,

in my bewildered condition, had the least effect upon his modesty

in inducing him to accept my bedroom, I was obliged to make the best

arrangements I could, for his repose before the fire. The mattress of

the sofa (which was a great deal too short for his lank figure), the

sofa pillows, a blanket, the table-cover, a clean breakfast-cloth, and

a great-coat, made him a bed and covering, for which he was more than

thankful. Having lent him a night-cap, which he put on at once, and in

which he made such an awful figure, that I have never worn one since, I

left him to his rest.

I never shall forget that night. I never shall forget how I turned

and tumbled; how I wearied myself with thinking about Agnes and this

creature; how I considered what could I do, and what ought I to do; how

I could come to no other conclusion than that the best course for her

peace was to do nothing, and to keep to myself what I had heard. If

I went to sleep for a few moments, the image of Agnes with her tender

eyes, and of her father looking fondly on her, as I had so often seen

him look, arose before me with appealing faces, and filled me with vague

terrors. When I awoke, the recollection that Uriah was lying in the next

room, sat heavy on me like a waking nightmare; and oppressed me with a

leaden dread, as if I had had some meaner quality of devil for a lodger.

The poker got into my dozing thoughts besides, and wouldn't come out. I

thought, between sleeping and waking, that it was still red hot, and I

had snatched it out of the fire, and run him through the body. I was so

haunted at last by the idea, though I knew there was nothing in it, that

I stole into the next room to look at him. There I saw him, lying on his

back, with his legs extending to I don't know where, gurglings taking

place in his throat, stoppages in his nose, and his mouth open like

a post-office. He was so much worse in reality than in my distempered

fancy, that afterwards I was attracted to him in very repulsion, and

could not help wandering in and out every half-hour or so, and taking

another look at him. Still, the long, long night seemed heavy and

hopeless as ever, and no promise of day was in the murky sky.

When I saw him going downstairs early in the morning (for, thank Heaven!

he would not stay to breakfast), it appeared to me as if the night was

going away in his person. When I went out to the Commons, I charged

Mrs. Crupp with particular directions to leave the windows open, that my

sitting-room might be aired, and purged of his presence.

CHAPTER 26. I FALL INTO CAPTIVITY

I saw no more of Uriah Heep, until the day when Agnes left town. I was

at the coach office to take leave of her and see her go; and there was

he, returning to Canterbury by the same conveyance. It was some small

satisfaction to me to observe his spare, short-waisted, high-shouldered,

mulberry-coloured great-coat perched up, in company with an umbrella

like a small tent, on the edge of the back seat on the roof, while

Agnes was, of course, inside; but what I underwent in my efforts to be

friendly with him, while Agnes looked on, perhaps deserved that little

recompense. At the coach window, as at the dinner-party, he hovered

about us without a moment's intermission, like a great vulture: gorging

himself on every syllable that I said to Agnes, or Agnes said to me.

In the state of trouble into which his disclosure by my fire had thrown

me, I had thought very much of the words Agnes had used in reference to

the partnership. 'I did what I hope was right. Feeling sure that it

was necessary for papa's peace that the sacrifice should be made, I

entreated him to make it.' A miserable foreboding that she would

yield to, and sustain herself by, the same feeling in reference to any

sacrifice for his sake, had oppressed me ever since. I knew how she

loved him. I knew what the devotion of her nature was. I knew from her

own lips that she regarded herself as the innocent cause of his errors,

and as owing him a great debt she ardently desired to pay. I had no

consolation in seeing how different she was from this detestable Rufus

with the mulberry-coloured great-coat, for I felt that in the very

difference between them, in the self-denial of her pure soul and the

sordid baseness of his, the greatest danger lay. All this, doubtless, he

knew thoroughly, and had, in his cunning, considered well.

Yet I was so certain that the prospect of such a sacrifice afar off,

must destroy the happiness of Agnes; and I was so sure, from her manner,

of its being unseen by her then, and having cast no shadow on her yet;

that I could as soon have injured her, as given her any warning of what

impended. Thus it was that we parted without explanation: she waving

her hand and smiling farewell from the coach window; her evil genius

writhing on the roof, as if he had her in his clutches and triumphed.

I could not get over this farewell glimpse of them for a long time. When

Agnes wrote to tell me of her safe arrival, I was as miserable as when

I saw her going away. Whenever I fell into a thoughtful state, this

subject was sure to present itself, and all my uneasiness was sure to be

redoubled. Hardly a night passed without my dreaming of it. It became a

part of my life, and as inseparable from my life as my own head.

I had ample leisure to refine upon my uneasiness: for Steerforth was at

Oxford, as he wrote to me, and when I was not at the Commons, I was

very much alone. I believe I had at this time some lurking distrust of

Steerforth. I wrote to him most affectionately in reply to his, but I

think I was glad, upon the whole, that he could not come to London just

then. I suspect the truth to be, that the influence of Agnes was upon

me, undisturbed by the sight of him; and that it was the more powerful

with me, because she had so large a share in my thoughts and interest.

In the meantime, days and weeks slipped away. I was articled to Spenlow

and Jorkins. I had ninety pounds a year (exclusive of my house-rent

and sundry collateral matters) from my aunt. My rooms were engaged

for twelve months certain: and though I still found them dreary of an

evening, and the evenings long, I could settle down into a state of

equable low spirits, and resign myself to coffee; which I seem, on

looking back, to have taken by the gallon at about this period of my

existence. At about this time, too, I made three discoveries: first,

that Mrs. Crupp was a martyr to a curious disorder called 'the

spazzums', which was generally accompanied with inflammation of the

nose, and required to be constantly treated with peppermint; secondly,

that something peculiar in the temperature of my pantry, made the

brandy-bottles burst; thirdly, that I was alone in the world, and much

given to record that circumstance in fragments of English versification.

On the day when I was articled, no festivity took place, beyond my

having sandwiches and sherry into the office for the clerks, and going

alone to the theatre at night. I went to see The Stranger, as a Doctors'

Commons sort of play, and was so dreadfully cut up, that I hardly knew

myself in my own glass when I got home. Mr. Spenlow remarked, on this

occasion, when we concluded our business, that he should have been

happy to have seen me at his house at Norwood to celebrate our becoming

connected, but for his domestic arrangements being in some disorder,

on account of the expected return of his daughter from finishing her

education at Paris. But, he intimated that when she came home he should

hope to have the pleasure of entertaining me. I knew that he was a

widower with one daughter, and expressed my acknowledgements.

Mr. Spenlow was as good as his word. In a week or two, he referred to

this engagement, and said, that if I would do him the favour to come

down next Saturday, and stay till Monday, he would be extremely happy.

Of course I said I would do him the favour; and he was to drive me down

in his phaeton, and to bring me back.

When the day arrived, my very carpet-bag was an object of veneration

to the stipendiary clerks, to whom the house at Norwood was a sacred

mystery. One of them informed me that he had heard that Mr. Spenlow

ate entirely off plate and china; and another hinted at champagne being

constantly on draught, after the usual custom of table-beer. The old

clerk with the wig, whose name was Mr. Tiffey, had been down on business

several times in the course of his career, and had on each occasion

penetrated to the breakfast-parlour. He described it as an apartment of

the most sumptuous nature, and said that he had drunk brown East India

sherry there, of a quality so precious as to make a man wink. We had

an adjourned cause in the Consistory that day--about excommunicating a

baker who had been objecting in a vestry to a paving-rate--and as the

evidence was just twice the length of Robinson Crusoe, according to a

calculation I made, it was rather late in the day before we finished.

However, we got him excommunicated for six weeks, and sentenced in

no end of costs; and then the baker's proctor, and the judge, and the

advocates on both sides (who were all nearly related), went out of town

together, and Mr. Spenlow and I drove away in the phaeton.

The phaeton was a very handsome affair; the horses arched their necks

and lifted up their legs as if they knew they belonged to Doctors'

Commons. There was a good deal of competition in the Commons on all

points of display, and it turned out some very choice equipages then;

though I always have considered, and always shall consider, that in my

time the great article of competition there was starch: which I think

was worn among the proctors to as great an extent as it is in the nature

of man to bear.

We were very pleasant, going down, and Mr. Spenlow gave me some hints in

reference to my profession. He said it was the genteelest profession in

the world, and must on no account be confounded with the profession of a

solicitor: being quite another sort of thing, infinitely more exclusive,

less mechanical, and more profitable. We took things much more easily

in the Commons than they could be taken anywhere else, he observed, and

that set us, as a privileged class, apart. He said it was impossible

to conceal the disagreeable fact, that we were chiefly employed by

solicitors; but he gave me to understand that they were an inferior race

of men, universally looked down upon by all proctors of any pretensions.

I asked Mr. Spenlow what he considered the best sort of professional

business? He replied, that a good case of a disputed will, where there

was a neat little estate of thirty or forty thousand pounds, was,

perhaps, the best of all. In such a case, he said, not only were there

very pretty pickings, in the way of arguments at every stage of the

proceedings, and mountains upon mountains of evidence on interrogatory

and counter-interrogatory (to say nothing of an appeal lying, first to

the Delegates, and then to the Lords), but, the costs being pretty sure

to come out of the estate at last, both sides went at it in a lively

and spirited manner, and expense was no consideration. Then, he launched

into a general eulogium on the Commons. What was to be particularly

admired (he said) in the Commons, was its compactness. It was the most

conveniently organized place in the world. It was the complete idea of

snugness. It lay in a nutshell. For example: You brought a divorce case,

or a restitution case, into the Consistory. Very good. You tried it in

the Consistory. You made a quiet little round game of it, among a family

group, and you played it out at leisure. Suppose you were not satisfied

with the Consistory, what did you do then? Why, you went into the

Arches. What was the Arches? The same court, in the same room, with the

same bar, and the same practitioners, but another judge, for there the

Consistory judge could plead any court-day as an advocate. Well, you

played your round game out again. Still you were not satisfied. Very

good. What did you do then? Why, you went to the Delegates. Who were the

Delegates? Why, the Ecclesiastical Delegates were the advocates without

any business, who had looked on at the round game when it was playing in

both courts, and had seen the cards shuffled, and cut, and played, and

had talked to all the players about it, and now came fresh, as judges,

to settle the matter to the satisfaction of everybody! Discontented

people might talk of corruption in the Commons, closeness in the

Commons, and the necessity of reforming the Commons, said Mr. Spenlow

solemnly, in conclusion; but when the price of wheat per bushel had been

highest, the Commons had been busiest; and a man might lay his hand upon

his heart, and say this to the whole world,--'Touch the Commons, and

down comes the country!'

I listened to all this with attention; and though, I must say, I had my

doubts whether the country was quite as much obliged to the Commons as

Mr. Spenlow made out, I respectfully deferred to his opinion. That

about the price of wheat per bushel, I modestly felt was too much for

my strength, and quite settled the question. I have never, to this hour,

got the better of that bushel of wheat. It has reappeared to annihilate

me, all through my life, in connexion with all kinds of subjects. I

don't know now, exactly, what it has to do with me, or what right it has

to crush me, on an infinite variety of occasions; but whenever I see my

old friend the bushel brought in by the head and shoulders (as he always

is, I observe), I give up a subject for lost.

This is a digression. I was not the man to touch the Commons, and

bring down the country. I submissively expressed, by my silence, my

acquiescence in all I had heard from my superior in years and knowledge;

and we talked about The Stranger and the Drama, and the pairs of horses,

until we came to Mr. Spenlow's gate.

There was a lovely garden to Mr. Spenlow's house; and though that was

not the best time of the year for seeing a garden, it was so beautifully

kept, that I was quite enchanted. There was a charming lawn, there were

clusters of trees, and there were perspective walks that I could just

distinguish in the dark, arched over with trellis-work, on which shrubs

and flowers grew in the growing season. 'Here Miss Spenlow walks by

herself,' I thought. 'Dear me!'

We went into the house, which was cheerfully lighted up, and into a hall

where there were all sorts of hats, caps, great-coats, plaids, gloves,

whips, and walking-sticks. 'Where is Miss Dora?' said Mr. Spenlow to the

servant. 'Dora!' I thought. 'What a beautiful name!'

We turned into a room near at hand (I think it was the identical

breakfast-room, made memorable by the brown East Indian sherry), and I

heard a voice say, 'Mr. Copperfield, my daughter Dora, and my daughter

Dora's confidential friend!' It was, no doubt, Mr. Spenlow's voice,

but I didn't know it, and I didn't care whose it was. All was over in a

moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved

Dora Spenlow to distraction!

She was more than human to me. She was a Fairy, a Sylph, I don't

know what she was--anything that no one ever saw, and everything that

everybody ever wanted. I was swallowed up in an abyss of love in an

instant. There was no pausing on the brink; no looking down, or looking

back; I was gone, headlong, before I had sense to say a word to her.

'I,' observed a well-remembered voice, when I had bowed and murmured

something, 'have seen Mr. Copperfield before.'

The speaker was not Dora. No; the confidential friend, Miss Murdstone!

I don't think I was much astonished. To the best of my judgement,

no capacity of astonishment was left in me. There was nothing worth

mentioning in the material world, but Dora Spenlow, to be astonished

about. I said, 'How do you do, Miss Murdstone? I hope you are well.' She

answered, 'Very well.' I said, 'How is Mr. Murdstone?' She replied, 'My

brother is robust, I am obliged to you.'

Mr. Spenlow, who, I suppose, had been surprised to see us recognize each

other, then put in his word.

'I am glad to find,' he said, 'Copperfield, that you and Miss Murdstone

are already acquainted.'

'Mr. Copperfield and myself,' said Miss Murdstone, with severe

composure, 'are connexions. We were once slightly acquainted. It was in

his childish days. Circumstances have separated us since. I should not

have known him.'

I replied that I should have known her, anywhere. Which was true enough.

'Miss Murdstone has had the goodness,' said Mr. Spenlow to me, 'to

accept the office--if I may so describe it--of my daughter Dora's

confidential friend. My daughter Dora having, unhappily, no mother, Miss

Murdstone is obliging enough to become her companion and protector.'

A passing thought occurred to me that Miss Murdstone, like the pocket

instrument called a life-preserver, was not so much designed for

purposes of protection as of assault. But as I had none but passing

thoughts for any subject save Dora, I glanced at her, directly

afterwards, and was thinking that I saw, in her prettily pettish manner,

that she was not very much inclined to be particularly confidential to

her companion and protector, when a bell rang, which Mr. Spenlow said

was the first dinner-bell, and so carried me off to dress.

The idea of dressing one's self, or doing anything in the way of action,

in that state of love, was a little too ridiculous. I could only sit

down before my fire, biting the key of my carpet-bag, and think of the

captivating, girlish, bright-eyed lovely Dora. What a form she had, what

a face she had, what a graceful, variable, enchanting manner!

The bell rang again so soon that I made a mere scramble of my dressing,

instead of the careful operation I could have wished under the

circumstances, and went downstairs. There was some company. Dora was

talking to an old gentleman with a grey head. Grey as he was--and a

great-grandfather into the bargain, for he said so--I was madly jealous

of him.

What a state of mind I was in! I was jealous of everybody. I couldn't

bear the idea of anybody knowing Mr. Spenlow better than I did. It was

torturing to me to hear them talk of occurrences in which I had had no

share. When a most amiable person, with a highly polished bald head,

asked me across the dinner table, if that were the first occasion of my

seeing the grounds, I could have done anything to him that was savage

and revengeful.

I don't remember who was there, except Dora. I have not the least idea

what we had for dinner, besides Dora. My impression is, that I dined off

Dora, entirely, and sent away half-a-dozen plates untouched. I sat next

to her. I talked to her. She had the most delightful little voice, the

gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little

ways, that ever led a lost youth into hopeless slavery. She was rather

diminutive altogether. So much the more precious, I thought.

When she went out of the room with Miss Murdstone (no other ladies

were of the party), I fell into a reverie, only disturbed by the cruel

apprehension that Miss Murdstone would disparage me to her. The amiable

creature with the polished head told me a long story, which I think was

about gardening. I think I heard him say, 'my gardener', several times.

I seemed to pay the deepest attention to him, but I was wandering in a

garden of Eden all the while, with Dora.

My apprehensions of being disparaged to the object of my engrossing

affection were revived when we went into the drawing-room, by the grim

and distant aspect of Miss Murdstone. But I was relieved of them in an

unexpected manner.

'David Copperfield,' said Miss Murdstone, beckoning me aside into a

window. 'A word.'

I confronted Miss Murdstone alone.

'David Copperfield,' said Miss Murdstone, 'I need not enlarge upon

family circumstances. They are not a tempting subject.' 'Far from it,

ma'am,' I returned.

'Far from it,' assented Miss Murdstone. 'I do not wish to revive

the memory of past differences, or of past outrages. I have received

outrages from a person--a female I am sorry to say, for the credit of my

sex--who is not to be mentioned without scorn and disgust; and therefore

I would rather not mention her.'

I felt very fiery on my aunt's account; but I said it would certainly be

better, if Miss Murdstone pleased, not to mention her. I could not hear

her disrespectfully mentioned, I added, without expressing my opinion in

a decided tone.

Miss Murdstone shut her eyes, and disdainfully inclined her head; then,

slowly opening her eyes, resumed:

'David Copperfield, I shall not attempt to disguise the fact, that I

formed an unfavourable opinion of you in your childhood. It may have

been a mistaken one, or you may have ceased to justify it. That is not

in question between us now. I belong to a family remarkable, I believe,

for some firmness; and I am not the creature of circumstance or change.

I may have my opinion of you. You may have your opinion of me.'

I inclined my head, in my turn.

'But it is not necessary,' said Miss Murdstone, 'that these opinions

should come into collision here. Under existing circumstances, it is as

well on all accounts that they should not. As the chances of life have

brought us together again, and may bring us together on other occasions,

I would say, let us meet here as distant acquaintances. Family

circumstances are a sufficient reason for our only meeting on that

footing, and it is quite unnecessary that either of us should make the

other the subject of remark. Do you approve of this?'

'Miss Murdstone,' I returned, 'I think you and Mr. Murdstone used me

very cruelly, and treated my mother with great unkindness. I shall

always think so, as long as I live. But I quite agree in what you

propose.'

Miss Murdstone shut her eyes again, and bent her head. Then, just

touching the back of my hand with the tips of her cold, stiff fingers,

she walked away, arranging the little fetters on her wrists and round

her neck; which seemed to be the same set, in exactly the same state,

as when I had seen her last. These reminded me, in reference to Miss

Murdstone's nature, of the fetters over a jail door; suggesting on the

outside, to all beholders, what was to be expected within.

All I know of the rest of the evening is, that I heard the empress of

my heart sing enchanted ballads in the French language, generally to the

effect that, whatever was the matter, we ought always to dance, Ta ra

la, Ta ra la! accompanying herself on a glorified instrument, resembling

a guitar. That I was lost in blissful delirium. That I refused

refreshment. That my soul recoiled from punch particularly. That when

Miss Murdstone took her into custody and led her away, she smiled and

gave me her delicious hand. That I caught a view of myself in a mirror,

looking perfectly imbecile and idiotic. That I retired to bed in a most

maudlin state of mind, and got up in a crisis of feeble infatuation.

It was a fine morning, and early, and I thought I would go and take a

stroll down one of those wire-arched walks, and indulge my passion by

dwelling on her image. On my way through the hall, I encountered her

little dog, who was called Jip--short for Gipsy. I approached him

tenderly, for I loved even him; but he showed his whole set of teeth,

got under a chair expressly to snarl, and wouldn't hear of the least

familiarity.

The garden was cool and solitary. I walked about, wondering what my

feelings of happiness would be, if I could ever become engaged to this

dear wonder. As to marriage, and fortune, and all that, I believe I was

almost as innocently undesigning then, as when I loved little Em'ly. To

be allowed to call her 'Dora', to write to her, to dote upon and worship

her, to have reason to think that when she was with other people she was

yet mindful of me, seemed to me the summit of human ambition--I am

sure it was the summit of mine. There is no doubt whatever that I was

a lackadaisical young spooney; but there was a purity of heart in all

this, that prevents my having quite a contemptuous recollection of it,

let me laugh as I may.

I had not been walking long, when I turned a corner, and met her. I

tingle again from head to foot as my recollection turns that corner, and

my pen shakes in my hand.

'You--are--out early, Miss Spenlow,' said I.

'It's so stupid at home,' she replied, 'and Miss Murdstone is so absurd!

She talks such nonsense about its being necessary for the day to be

aired, before I come out. Aired!' (She laughed, here, in the most

melodious manner.) 'On a Sunday morning, when I don't practise, I must

do something. So I told papa last night I must come out. Besides, it's

the brightest time of the whole day. Don't you think so?'

I hazarded a bold flight, and said (not without stammering) that it

was very bright to me then, though it had been very dark to me a minute

before.

'Do you mean a compliment?' said Dora, 'or that the weather has really

changed?'

I stammered worse than before, in replying that I meant no compliment,

but the plain truth; though I was not aware of any change having taken

place in the weather. It was in the state of my own feelings, I added

bashfully: to clench the explanation.

I never saw such curls--how could I, for there never were such

curls!--as those she shook out to hide her blushes. As to the straw hat

and blue ribbons which was on the top of the curls, if I could only have

hung it up in my room in Buckingham Street, what a priceless possession

it would have been!

'You have just come home from Paris,' said I.

'Yes,' said she. 'Have you ever been there?'

'No.'

'Oh! I hope you'll go soon! You would like it so much!'

Traces of deep-seated anguish appeared in my countenance. That she

should hope I would go, that she should think it possible I could go,

was insupportable. I depreciated Paris; I depreciated France. I said I

wouldn't leave England, under existing circumstances, for any earthly

consideration. Nothing should induce me. In short, she was shaking the

curls again, when the little dog came running along the walk to our

relief.

He was mortally jealous of me, and persisted in barking at me. She took

him up in her arms--oh my goodness!--and caressed him, but he persisted

upon barking still. He wouldn't let me touch him, when I tried; and then

she beat him. It increased my sufferings greatly to see the pats she

gave him for punishment on the bridge of his blunt nose, while he winked

his eyes, and licked her hand, and still growled within himself like a

little double-bass. At length he was quiet--well he might be with her

dimpled chin upon his head!--and we walked away to look at a greenhouse.

'You are not very intimate with Miss Murdstone, are you?' said Dora.

--'My pet.'

(The two last words were to the dog. Oh, if they had only been to me!)

'No,' I replied. 'Not at all so.'

'She is a tiresome creature,' said Dora, pouting. 'I can't think what

papa can have been about, when he chose such a vexatious thing to be my

companion. Who wants a protector? I am sure I don't want a protector.

Jip can protect me a great deal better than Miss Murdstone,--can't you,

Jip, dear?'

He only winked lazily, when she kissed his ball of a head.

'Papa calls her my confidential friend, but I am sure she is no such

thing--is she, Jip? We are not going to confide in any such cross

people, Jip and I. We mean to bestow our confidence where we like,

and to find out our own friends, instead of having them found out for

us--don't we, Jip?'

Jip made a comfortable noise, in answer, a little like a tea-kettle when

it sings. As for me, every word was a new heap of fetters, riveted above

the last.

'It is very hard, because we have not a kind Mama, that we are to have,

instead, a sulky, gloomy old thing like Miss Murdstone, always following

us about--isn't it, Jip? Never mind, Jip. We won't be confidential, and

we'll make ourselves as happy as we can in spite of her, and we'll tease

her, and not please her--won't we, Jip?'

If it had lasted any longer, I think I must have gone down on my knees

on the gravel, with the probability before me of grazing them, and of

being presently ejected from the premises besides. But, by good fortune

the greenhouse was not far off, and these words brought us to it.

It contained quite a show of beautiful geraniums. We loitered along in

front of them, and Dora often stopped to admire this one or that one,

and I stopped to admire the same one, and Dora, laughing, held the dog

up childishly, to smell the flowers; and if we were not all three in

Fairyland, certainly I was. The scent of a geranium leaf, at this day,

strikes me with a half comical half serious wonder as to what change has

come over me in a moment; and then I see a straw hat and blue ribbons,

and a quantity of curls, and a little black dog being held up, in two

slender arms, against a bank of blossoms and bright leaves.

Miss Murdstone had been looking for us. She found us here; and presented

her uncongenial cheek, the little wrinkles in it filled with hair

powder, to Dora to be kissed. Then she took Dora's arm in hers, and

marched us into breakfast as if it were a soldier's funeral.

How many cups of tea I drank, because Dora made it, I don't know. But,

I perfectly remember that I sat swilling tea until my whole nervous

system, if I had had any in those days, must have gone by the board. By

and by we went to church. Miss Murdstone was between Dora and me in the

pew; but I heard her sing, and the congregation vanished. A sermon was

delivered--about Dora, of course--and I am afraid that is all I know of

the service.

We had a quiet day. No company, a walk, a family dinner of four, and an

evening of looking over books and pictures; Miss Murdstone with a homily

before her, and her eye upon us, keeping guard vigilantly. Ah! little

did Mr. Spenlow imagine, when he sat opposite to me after dinner that

day, with his pocket-handkerchief over his head, how fervently I was

embracing him, in my fancy, as his son-in-law! Little did he think, when

I took leave of him at night, that he had just given his full consent to

my being engaged to Dora, and that I was invoking blessings on his head!

We departed early in the morning, for we had a Salvage case coming on in

the Admiralty Court, requiring a rather accurate knowledge of the whole

science of navigation, in which (as we couldn't be expected to know

much about those matters in the Commons) the judge had entreated two old

Trinity Masters, for charity's sake, to come and help him out. Dora was

at the breakfast-table to make the tea again, however; and I had the

melancholy pleasure of taking off my hat to her in the phaeton, as she

stood on the door-step with Jip in her arms.

What the Admiralty was to me that day; what nonsense I made of our case

in my mind, as I listened to it; how I saw 'DORA' engraved upon the

blade of the silver oar which they lay upon the table, as the emblem

of that high jurisdiction; and how I felt when Mr. Spenlow went home

without me (I had had an insane hope that he might take me back again),

as if I were a mariner myself, and the ship to which I belonged had

sailed away and left me on a desert island; I shall make no fruitless

effort to describe. If that sleepy old court could rouse itself, and

present in any visible form the daydreams I have had in it about Dora,

it would reveal my truth.

I don't mean the dreams that I dreamed on that day alone, but day after

day, from week to week, and term to term. I went there, not to attend to

what was going on, but to think about Dora. If ever I bestowed a thought

upon the cases, as they dragged their slow length before me, it was only

to wonder, in the matrimonial cases (remembering Dora), how it was

that married people could ever be otherwise than happy; and, in the

Prerogative cases, to consider, if the money in question had been left

to me, what were the foremost steps I should immediately have taken

in regard to Dora. Within the first week of my passion, I bought four

sumptuous waistcoats--not for myself; I had no pride in them; for

Dora--and took to wearing straw-coloured kid gloves in the streets, and

laid the foundations of all the corns I have ever had. If the boots I

wore at that period could only be produced and compared with the natural

size of my feet, they would show what the state of my heart was, in a

most affecting manner.

And yet, wretched cripple as I made myself by this act of homage to

Dora, I walked miles upon miles daily in the hope of seeing her. Not

only was I soon as well known on the Norwood Road as the postmen on that

beat, but I pervaded London likewise. I walked about the streets where

the best shops for ladies were, I haunted the Bazaar like an unquiet

spirit, I fagged through the Park again and again, long after I was

quite knocked up. Sometimes, at long intervals and on rare occasions, I

saw her. Perhaps I saw her glove waved in a carriage window; perhaps I

met her, walked with her and Miss Murdstone a little way, and spoke to

her. In the latter case I was always very miserable afterwards, to think

that I had said nothing to the purpose; or that she had no idea of the

extent of my devotion, or that she cared nothing about me. I was always

looking out, as may be supposed, for another invitation to Mr. Spenlow's

house. I was always being disappointed, for I got none.

Mrs. Crupp must have been a woman of penetration; for when this

attachment was but a few weeks old, and I had not had the courage

to write more explicitly even to Agnes, than that I had been to Mr.

Spenlow's house, 'whose family,' I added, 'consists of one daughter';--I

say Mrs. Crupp must have been a woman of penetration, for, even in that

early stage, she found it out. She came up to me one evening, when I

was very low, to ask (she being then afflicted with the disorder I have

mentioned) if I could oblige her with a little tincture of cardamums

mixed with rhubarb, and flavoured with seven drops of the essence of

cloves, which was the best remedy for her complaint;--or, if I had not

such a thing by me, with a little brandy, which was the next best. It

was not, she remarked, so palatable to her, but it was the next best. As

I had never even heard of the first remedy, and always had the second in

the closet, I gave Mrs. Crupp a glass of the second, which (that I might

have no suspicion of its being devoted to any improper use) she began to

take in my presence.

'Cheer up, sir,' said Mrs. Crupp. 'I can't abear to see you so, sir: I'm

a mother myself.'

I did not quite perceive the application of this fact to myself, but I

smiled on Mrs. Crupp, as benignly as was in my power.

'Come, sir,' said Mrs. Crupp. 'Excuse me. I know what it is, sir.

There's a lady in the case.'

'Mrs. Crupp?' I returned, reddening.

'Oh, bless you! Keep a good heart, sir!' said Mrs. Crupp, nodding

encouragement. 'Never say die, sir! If She don't smile upon you,

there's a many as will. You are a young gentleman to be smiled on, Mr.

Copperfull, and you must learn your walue, sir.'

Mrs. Crupp always called me Mr. Copperfull: firstly, no doubt, because

it was not my name; and secondly, I am inclined to think, in some

indistinct association with a washing-day.

'What makes you suppose there is any young lady in the case, Mrs.

Crupp?' said I.

'Mr. Copperfull,' said Mrs. Crupp, with a great deal of feeling, 'I'm a

mother myself.'

For some time Mrs. Crupp could only lay her hand upon her nankeen bosom,

and fortify herself against returning pain with sips of her medicine. At

length she spoke again.

'When the present set were took for you by your dear aunt, Mr.

Copperfull,' said Mrs. Crupp, 'my remark were, I had now found summun

I could care for. "Thank Ev'in!" were the expression, "I have now found

summun I can care for!"--You don't eat enough, sir, nor yet drink.'

'Is that what you found your supposition on, Mrs. Crupp?' said I.

'Sir,' said Mrs. Crupp, in a tone approaching to severity, 'I've

laundressed other young gentlemen besides yourself. A young gentleman

may be over-careful of himself, or he may be under-careful of himself.

He may brush his hair too regular, or too un-regular. He may wear his

boots much too large for him, or much too small. That is according as

the young gentleman has his original character formed. But let him go to

which extreme he may, sir, there's a young lady in both of 'em.'

Mrs. Crupp shook her head in such a determined manner, that I had not an

inch of vantage-ground left.

'It was but the gentleman which died here before yourself,' said Mrs.

Crupp, 'that fell in love--with a barmaid--and had his waistcoats took

in directly, though much swelled by drinking.'

'Mrs. Crupp,' said I, 'I must beg you not to connect the young lady in

my case with a barmaid, or anything of that sort, if you please.'

'Mr. Copperfull,' returned Mrs. Crupp, 'I'm a mother myself, and not

likely. I ask your pardon, sir, if I intrude. I should never wish to

intrude where I were not welcome. But you are a young gentleman, Mr.

Copperfull, and my adwice to you is, to cheer up, sir, to keep a good

heart, and to know your own walue. If you was to take to something,

sir,' said Mrs. Crupp, 'if you was to take to skittles, now, which is

healthy, you might find it divert your mind, and do you good.'

With these words, Mrs. Crupp, affecting to be very careful of the

brandy--which was all gone--thanked me with a majestic curtsey, and

retired. As her figure disappeared into the gloom of the entry, this

counsel certainly presented itself to my mind in the light of a slight

liberty on Mrs. Crupp's part; but, at the same time, I was content

to receive it, in another point of view, as a word to the wise, and a

warning in future to keep my secret better.

CHAPTER 27. TOMMY TRADDLES

It may have been in consequence of Mrs. Crupp's advice, and, perhaps,

for no better reason than because there was a certain similarity in the

sound of the word skittles and Traddles, that it came into my head, next

day, to go and look after Traddles. The time he had mentioned was more

than out, and he lived in a little street near the Veterinary College

at Camden Town, which was principally tenanted, as one of our clerks who

lived in that direction informed me, by gentlemen students, who bought

live donkeys, and made experiments on those quadrupeds in their private

apartments. Having obtained from this clerk a direction to the academic

grove in question, I set out, the same afternoon, to visit my old

schoolfellow.

I found that the street was not as desirable a one as I could have

wished it to be, for the sake of Traddles. The inhabitants appeared to

have a propensity to throw any little trifles they were not in want of,

into the road: which not only made it rank and sloppy, but untidy too,

on account of the cabbage-leaves. The refuse was not wholly vegetable

either, for I myself saw a shoe, a doubled-up saucepan, a black bonnet,

and an umbrella, in various stages of decomposition, as I was looking

out for the number I wanted.

The general air of the place reminded me forcibly of the days when I

lived with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. An indescribable character of faded

gentility that attached to the house I sought, and made it unlike

all the other houses in the street--though they were all built on one

monotonous pattern, and looked like the early copies of a blundering boy

who was learning to make houses, and had not yet got out of his cramped

brick-and-mortar pothooks--reminded me still more of Mr. and Mrs.

Micawber. Happening to arrive at the door as it was opened to the

afternoon milkman, I was reminded of Mr. and Mrs. Micawber more forcibly

yet.

'Now,' said the milkman to a very youthful servant girl. 'Has that there

little bill of mine been heerd on?'

'Oh, master says he'll attend to it immediate,' was the reply.

'Because,' said the milkman, going on as if he had received no answer,

and speaking, as I judged from his tone, rather for the edification of

somebody within the house, than of the youthful servant--an

impression which was strengthened by his manner of glaring down the

passage--'because that there little bill has been running so long, that

I begin to believe it's run away altogether, and never won't be heerd

of. Now, I'm not a going to stand it, you know!' said the milkman, still

throwing his voice into the house, and glaring down the passage.

As to his dealing in the mild article of milk, by the by, there never

was a greater anomaly. His deportment would have been fierce in a

butcher or a brandy-merchant.

The voice of the youthful servant became faint, but she seemed to me,

from the action of her lips, again to murmur that it would be attended

to immediate.

'I tell you what,' said the milkman, looking hard at her for the first

time, and taking her by the chin, 'are you fond of milk?'

'Yes, I likes it,' she replied. 'Good,' said the milkman. 'Then you

won't have none tomorrow. D'ye hear? Not a fragment of milk you won't

have tomorrow.'

I thought she seemed, upon the whole, relieved by the prospect of having

any today. The milkman, after shaking his head at her darkly, released

her chin, and with anything rather than good-will opened his can, and

deposited the usual quantity in the family jug. This done, he went away,

muttering, and uttered the cry of his trade next door, in a vindictive

shriek.

'Does Mr. Traddles live here?' I then inquired.

A mysterious voice from the end of the passage replied 'Yes.' Upon which

the youthful servant replied 'Yes.'

'Is he at home?' said I.

Again the mysterious voice replied in the affirmative, and again the

servant echoed it. Upon this, I walked in, and in pursuance of the

servant's directions walked upstairs; conscious, as I passed the

back parlour-door, that I was surveyed by a mysterious eye, probably

belonging to the mysterious voice.

When I got to the top of the stairs--the house was only a story high

above the ground floor--Traddles was on the landing to meet me. He was

delighted to see me, and gave me welcome, with great heartiness, to

his little room. It was in the front of the house, and extremely neat,

though sparely furnished. It was his only room, I saw; for there was a

sofa-bedstead in it, and his blacking-brushes and blacking were among

his books--on the top shelf, behind a dictionary. His table was covered

with papers, and he was hard at work in an old coat. I looked at

nothing, that I know of, but I saw everything, even to the prospect of

a church upon his china inkstand, as I sat down--and this, too, was a

faculty confirmed in me in the old Micawber times. Various ingenious

arrangements he had made, for the disguise of his chest of drawers,

and the accommodation of his boots, his shaving-glass, and so forth,

particularly impressed themselves upon me, as evidences of the same

Traddles who used to make models of elephants' dens in writing-paper to

put flies in; and to comfort himself under ill usage, with the memorable

works of art I have so often mentioned.

In a corner of the room was something neatly covered up with a large

white cloth. I could not make out what that was.

'Traddles,' said I, shaking hands with him again, after I had sat down,

'I am delighted to see you.'

'I am delighted to see YOU, Copperfield,' he returned. 'I am very glad

indeed to see you. It was because I was thoroughly glad to see you when

we met in Ely Place, and was sure you were thoroughly glad to see me,

that I gave you this address instead of my address at chambers.' 'Oh!

You have chambers?' said I.

'Why, I have the fourth of a room and a passage, and the fourth of a

clerk,' returned Traddles. 'Three others and myself unite to have a

set of chambers--to look business-like--and we quarter the clerk too.

Half-a-crown a week he costs me.'

His old simple character and good temper, and something of his old

unlucky fortune also, I thought, smiled at me in the smile with which he

made this explanation.

'It's not because I have the least pride, Copperfield, you understand,'

said Traddles, 'that I don't usually give my address here. It's only on

account of those who come to me, who might not like to come here. For

myself, I am fighting my way on in the world against difficulties, and

it would be ridiculous if I made a pretence of doing anything else.'

'You are reading for the bar, Mr. Waterbrook informed me?' said I.

'Why, yes,' said Traddles, rubbing his hands slowly over one another. 'I

am reading for the bar. The fact is, I have just begun to keep my terms,

after rather a long delay. It's some time since I was articled, but the

payment of that hundred pounds was a great pull. A great pull!' said

Traddles, with a wince, as if he had had a tooth out.

'Do you know what I can't help thinking of, Traddles, as I sit here

looking at you?' I asked him.

'No,' said he.

'That sky-blue suit you used to wear.'

'Lord, to be sure!' cried Traddles, laughing. 'Tight in the arms and

legs, you know? Dear me! Well! Those were happy times, weren't they?'

'I think our schoolmaster might have made them happier, without doing

any harm to any of us, I acknowledge,' I returned.

'Perhaps he might,' said Traddles. 'But dear me, there was a good deal

of fun going on. Do you remember the nights in the bedroom? When we used

to have the suppers? And when you used to tell the stories? Ha, ha,

ha! And do you remember when I got caned for crying about Mr. Mell? Old

Creakle! I should like to see him again, too!'

'He was a brute to you, Traddles,' said I, indignantly; for his good

humour made me feel as if I had seen him beaten but yesterday.

'Do you think so?' returned Traddles. 'Really? Perhaps he was rather.

But it's all over, a long while. Old Creakle!'

'You were brought up by an uncle, then?' said I.

'Of course I was!' said Traddles. 'The one I was always going to write

to. And always didn't, eh! Ha, ha, ha! Yes, I had an uncle then. He died

soon after I left school.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes. He was a retired--what do you call

it!--draper--cloth-merchant--and had made me his heir. But he didn't

like me when I grew up.'

'Do you really mean that?' said I. He was so composed, that I fancied he

must have some other meaning.

'Oh dear, yes, Copperfield! I mean it,' replied Traddles. 'It was an

unfortunate thing, but he didn't like me at all. He said I wasn't at all

what he expected, and so he married his housekeeper.'

'And what did you do?' I asked.

'I didn't do anything in particular,' said Traddles. 'I lived with them,

waiting to be put out in the world, until his gout unfortunately flew

to his stomach--and so he died, and so she married a young man, and so I

wasn't provided for.'

'Did you get nothing, Traddles, after all?'

'Oh dear, yes!' said Traddles. 'I got fifty pounds. I had never been

brought up to any profession, and at first I was at a loss what to

do for myself. However, I began, with the assistance of the son of a

professional man, who had been to Salem House--Yawler, with his nose on

one side. Do you recollect him?'

No. He had not been there with me; all the noses were straight in my

day.

'It don't matter,' said Traddles. 'I began, by means of his assistance,

to copy law writings. That didn't answer very well; and then I began to

state cases for them, and make abstracts, and that sort of work. For

I am a plodding kind of fellow, Copperfield, and had learnt the way of

doing such things pithily. Well! That put it in my head to enter myself

as a law student; and that ran away with all that was left of the fifty

pounds. Yawler recommended me to one or two other offices, however--Mr.

Waterbrook's for one--and I got a good many jobs. I was fortunate

enough, too, to become acquainted with a person in the publishing way,

who was getting up an Encyclopaedia, and he set me to work; and, indeed'

(glancing at his table), 'I am at work for him at this minute. I am not

a bad compiler, Copperfield,' said Traddles, preserving the same air of

cheerful confidence in all he said, 'but I have no invention at all; not

a particle. I suppose there never was a young man with less originality

than I have.'

As Traddles seemed to expect that I should assent to this as a matter

of course, I nodded; and he went on, with the same sprightly patience--I

can find no better expression--as before.

'So, by little and little, and not living high, I managed to scrape up

the hundred pounds at last,' said Traddles; 'and thank Heaven that's

paid--though it was--though it certainly was,' said Traddles, wincing

again as if he had had another tooth out, 'a pull. I am living by the

sort of work I have mentioned, still, and I hope, one of these days, to

get connected with some newspaper: which would almost be the making of

my fortune. Now, Copperfield, you are so exactly what you used to

be, with that agreeable face, and it's so pleasant to see you, that I

sha'n't conceal anything. Therefore you must know that I am engaged.'

Engaged! Oh, Dora!

'She is a curate's daughter,' said Traddles; 'one of ten, down in

Devonshire. Yes!' For he saw me glance, involuntarily, at the prospect

on the inkstand. 'That's the church! You come round here to the left,

out of this gate,' tracing his finger along the inkstand, 'and exactly

where I hold this pen, there stands the house--facing, you understand,

towards the church.'

The delight with which he entered into these particulars, did not fully

present itself to me until afterwards; for my selfish thoughts were

making a ground-plan of Mr. Spenlow's house and garden at the same

moment.

'She is such a dear girl!' said Traddles; 'a little older than me, but

the dearest girl! I told you I was going out of town? I have been down

there. I walked there, and I walked back, and I had the most delightful

time! I dare say ours is likely to be a rather long engagement, but our

motto is "Wait and hope!" We always say that. "Wait and hope," we always

say. And she would wait, Copperfield, till she was sixty--any age you

can mention--for me!'

Traddles rose from his chair, and, with a triumphant smile, put his hand

upon the white cloth I had observed.

'However,' he said, 'it's not that we haven't made a beginning towards

housekeeping. No, no; we have begun. We must get on by degrees, but we

have begun. Here,' drawing the cloth off with great pride and care, 'are

two pieces of furniture to commence with. This flower-pot and stand,

she bought herself. You put that in a parlour window,' said Traddles,

falling a little back from it to survey it with the greater admiration,

'with a plant in it, and--and there you are! This little round table

with the marble top (it's two feet ten in circumference), I bought. You

want to lay a book down, you know, or somebody comes to see you or your

wife, and wants a place to stand a cup of tea upon, and--and there you

are again!' said Traddles. 'It's an admirable piece of workmanship--firm

as a rock!' I praised them both, highly, and Traddles replaced the

covering as carefully as he had removed it.

'It's not a great deal towards the furnishing,' said Traddles, 'but

it's something. The table-cloths, and pillow-cases, and articles of

that kind, are what discourage me most, Copperfield. So does

the ironmongery--candle-boxes, and gridirons, and that sort of

necessaries--because those things tell, and mount up. However, "wait and

hope!" And I assure you she's the dearest girl!'

'I am quite certain of it,' said I.

'In the meantime,' said Traddles, coming back to his chair; 'and this is

the end of my prosing about myself, I get on as well as I can. I don't

make much, but I don't spend much. In general, I board with the people

downstairs, who are very agreeable people indeed. Both Mr. and Mrs.

Micawber have seen a good deal of life, and are excellent company.'

'My dear Traddles!' I quickly exclaimed. 'What are you talking about?'

Traddles looked at me, as if he wondered what I was talking about.

'Mr. and Mrs. Micawber!' I repeated. 'Why, I am intimately acquainted

with them!'

An opportune double knock at the door, which I knew well from old

experience in Windsor Terrace, and which nobody but Mr. Micawber could

ever have knocked at that door, resolved any doubt in my mind as to

their being my old friends. I begged Traddles to ask his landlord

to walk up. Traddles accordingly did so, over the banister; and Mr.

Micawber, not a bit changed--his tights, his stick, his shirt-collar,

and his eye-glass, all the same as ever--came into the room with a

genteel and youthful air.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Traddles,' said Mr. Micawber, with the old roll

in his voice, as he checked himself in humming a soft tune. 'I was not

aware that there was any individual, alien to this tenement, in your

sanctum.'

Mr. Micawber slightly bowed to me, and pulled up his shirt-collar.

'How do you do, Mr. Micawber?' said I.

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you are exceedingly obliging. I am in statu

quo.'

'And Mrs. Micawber?' I pursued.

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'she is also, thank God, in statu quo.'

'And the children, Mr. Micawber?'

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I rejoice to reply that they are, likewise,

in the enjoyment of salubrity.'

All this time, Mr. Micawber had not known me in the least, though he

had stood face to face with me. But now, seeing me smile, he examined my

features with more attention, fell back, cried, 'Is it possible! Have I

the pleasure of again beholding Copperfield!' and shook me by both hands

with the utmost fervour.

'Good Heaven, Mr. Traddles!' said Mr. Micawber, 'to think that I should

find you acquainted with the friend of my youth, the companion of

earlier days! My dear!' calling over the banisters to Mrs. Micawber,

while Traddles looked (with reason) not a little amazed at this

description of me. 'Here is a gentleman in Mr. Traddles's apartment,

whom he wishes to have the pleasure of presenting to you, my love!'

Mr. Micawber immediately reappeared, and shook hands with me again.

'And how is our good friend the Doctor, Copperfield?' said Mr. Micawber,

'and all the circle at Canterbury?'

'I have none but good accounts of them,' said I.

'I am most delighted to hear it,' said Mr. Micawber. 'It was at

Canterbury where we last met. Within the shadow, I may figuratively say,

of that religious edifice immortalized by Chaucer, which was anciently

the resort of Pilgrims from the remotest corners of--in short,' said Mr.

Micawber, 'in the immediate neighbourhood of the Cathedral.'

I replied that it was. Mr. Micawber continued talking as volubly as he

could; but not, I thought, without showing, by some marks of concern in

his countenance, that he was sensible of sounds in the next room, as

of Mrs. Micawber washing her hands, and hurriedly opening and shutting

drawers that were uneasy in their action.

'You find us, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, with one eye on Traddles,

'at present established, on what may be designated as a small and

unassuming scale; but, you are aware that I have, in the course of my

career, surmounted difficulties, and conquered obstacles. You are no

stranger to the fact, that there have been periods of my life, when it

has been requisite that I should pause, until certain expected events

should turn up; when it has been necessary that I should fall back,

before making what I trust I shall not be accused of presumption in

terming--a spring. The present is one of those momentous stages in the

life of man. You find me, fallen back, FOR a spring; and I have every

reason to believe that a vigorous leap will shortly be the result.'

I was expressing my satisfaction, when Mrs. Micawber came in; a little

more slatternly than she used to be, or so she seemed now, to my

unaccustomed eyes, but still with some preparation of herself for

company, and with a pair of brown gloves on.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, leading her towards me, 'here is

a gentleman of the name of Copperfield, who wishes to renew his

acquaintance with you.'

It would have been better, as it turned out, to have led gently up

to this announcement, for Mrs. Micawber, being in a delicate state of

health, was overcome by it, and was taken so unwell, that Mr. Micawber

was obliged, in great trepidation, to run down to the water-butt in

the backyard, and draw a basinful to lave her brow with. She

presently revived, however, and was really pleased to see me. We had

half-an-hour's talk, all together; and I asked her about the twins,

who, she said, were 'grown great creatures'; and after Master and Miss

Micawber, whom she described as 'absolute giants', but they were not

produced on that occasion.

Mr. Micawber was very anxious that I should stay to dinner. I should not

have been averse to do so, but that I imagined I detected trouble, and

calculation relative to the extent of the cold meat, in Mrs. Micawber's

eye. I therefore pleaded another engagement; and observing that Mrs.

Micawber's spirits were immediately lightened, I resisted all persuasion

to forego it.

But I told Traddles, and Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, that before I could

think of leaving, they must appoint a day when they would come and dine

with me. The occupations to which Traddles stood pledged, rendered it

necessary to fix a somewhat distant one; but an appointment was made for

the purpose, that suited us all, and then I took my leave.

Mr. Micawber, under pretence of showing me a nearer way than that by

which I had come, accompanied me to the corner of the street; being

anxious (he explained to me) to say a few words to an old friend, in

confidence.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I need hardly tell you that

to have beneath our roof, under existing circumstances, a mind like that

which gleams--if I may be allowed the expression--which gleams--in your

friend Traddles, is an unspeakable comfort. With a washerwoman, who

exposes hard-bake for sale in her parlour-window, dwelling next door,

and a Bow-street officer residing over the way, you may imagine that his

society is a source of consolation to myself and to Mrs. Micawber. I

am at present, my dear Copperfield, engaged in the sale of corn upon

commission. It is not an avocation of a remunerative description--in

other words, it does not pay--and some temporary embarrassments of a

pecuniary nature have been the consequence. I am, however, delighted to

add that I have now an immediate prospect of something turning up (I am

not at liberty to say in what direction), which I trust will enable me

to provide, permanently, both for myself and for your friend Traddles,

in whom I have an unaffected interest. You may, perhaps, be prepared

to hear that Mrs. Micawber is in a state of health which renders it

not wholly improbable that an addition may be ultimately made to those

pledges of affection which--in short, to the infantine group. Mrs.

Micawber's family have been so good as to express their dissatisfaction

at this state of things. I have merely to observe, that I am not aware

that it is any business of theirs, and that I repel that exhibition of

feeling with scorn, and with defiance!'

Mr. Micawber then shook hands with me again, and left me.

CHAPTER 28. Mr. MICAWBER'S GAUNTLET

Until the day arrived on which I was to entertain my newly-found

old friends, I lived principally on Dora and coffee. In my love-lorn

condition, my appetite languished; and I was glad of it, for I felt

as though it would have been an act of perfidy towards Dora to have a

natural relish for my dinner. The quantity of walking exercise I took,

was not in this respect attended with its usual consequence, as the

disappointment counteracted the fresh air. I have my doubts, too,

founded on the acute experience acquired at this period of my life,

whether a sound enjoyment of animal food can develop itself freely in

any human subject who is always in torment from tight boots. I think

the extremities require to be at peace before the stomach will conduct

itself with vigour.

On the occasion of this domestic little party, I did not repeat my

former extensive preparations. I merely provided a pair of soles,

a small leg of mutton, and a pigeon-pie. Mrs. Crupp broke out into

rebellion on my first bashful hint in reference to the cooking of the

fish and joint, and said, with a dignified sense of injury, 'No! No,

sir! You will not ask me sich a thing, for you are better acquainted

with me than to suppose me capable of doing what I cannot do with ampial

satisfaction to my own feelings!' But, in the end, a compromise was

effected; and Mrs. Crupp consented to achieve this feat, on condition

that I dined from home for a fortnight afterwards.

And here I may remark, that what I underwent from Mrs. Crupp, in

consequence of the tyranny she established over me, was dreadful. I

never was so much afraid of anyone. We made a compromise of everything.

If I hesitated, she was taken with that wonderful disorder which was

always lying in ambush in her system, ready, at the shortest notice, to

prey upon her vitals. If I rang the bell impatiently, after half-a-dozen

unavailing modest pulls, and she appeared at last--which was not by any

means to be relied upon--she would appear with a reproachful aspect,

sink breathless on a chair near the door, lay her hand upon her nankeen

bosom, and become so ill, that I was glad, at any sacrifice of brandy or

anything else, to get rid of her. If I objected to having my bed made at

five o'clock in the afternoon--which I do still think an uncomfortable

arrangement--one motion of her hand towards the same nankeen region of

wounded sensibility was enough to make me falter an apology. In short,

I would have done anything in an honourable way rather than give Mrs.

Crupp offence; and she was the terror of my life.

I bought a second-hand dumb-waiter for this dinner-party, in preference

to re-engaging the handy young man; against whom I had conceived a

prejudice, in consequence of meeting him in the Strand, one Sunday

morning, in a waistcoat remarkably like one of mine, which had been

missing since the former occasion. The 'young gal' was re-engaged; but

on the stipulation that she should only bring in the dishes, and then

withdraw to the landing-place, beyond the outer door; where a habit of

sniffing she had contracted would be lost upon the guests, and where her

retiring on the plates would be a physical impossibility.

Having laid in the materials for a bowl of punch, to be compounded

by Mr. Micawber; having provided a bottle of lavender-water, two

wax-candles, a paper of mixed pins, and a pincushion, to assist Mrs.

Micawber in her toilette at my dressing-table; having also caused the

fire in my bedroom to be lighted for Mrs. Micawber's convenience; and

having laid the cloth with my own hands, I awaited the result with

composure.

At the appointed time, my three visitors arrived together. Mr. Micawber

with more shirt-collar than usual, and a new ribbon to his eye-glass;

Mrs. Micawber with her cap in a whitey-brown paper parcel; Traddles

carrying the parcel, and supporting Mrs. Micawber on his arm. They were

all delighted with my residence. When I conducted Mrs. Micawber to my

dressing-table, and she saw the scale on which it was prepared for her,

she was in such raptures, that she called Mr. Micawber to come in and

look.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'this is luxurious. This is a

way of life which reminds me of the period when I was myself in a state

of celibacy, and Mrs. Micawber had not yet been solicited to plight her

faith at the Hymeneal altar.'

'He means, solicited by him, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber,

archly. 'He cannot answer for others.'

'My dear,' returned Mr. Micawber with sudden seriousness, 'I have no

desire to answer for others. I am too well aware that when, in the

inscrutable decrees of Fate, you were reserved for me, it is possible

you may have been reserved for one, destined, after a protracted

struggle, at length to fall a victim to pecuniary involvements of a

complicated nature. I understand your allusion, my love. I regret it,

but I can bear it.'

'Micawber!' exclaimed Mrs. Micawber, in tears. 'Have I deserved this! I,

who never have deserted you; who never WILL desert you, Micawber!' 'My

love,' said Mr. Micawber, much affected, 'you will forgive, and our old

and tried friend Copperfield will, I am sure, forgive, the momentary

laceration of a wounded spirit, made sensitive by a recent collision

with the Minion of Power--in other words, with a ribald Turncock

attached to the water-works--and will pity, not condemn, its excesses.'

Mr. Micawber then embraced Mrs. Micawber, and pressed my hand; leaving

me to infer from this broken allusion that his domestic supply of

water had been cut off that afternoon, in consequence of default in the

payment of the company's rates.

To divert his thoughts from this melancholy subject, I informed Mr.

Micawber that I relied upon him for a bowl of punch, and led him to

the lemons. His recent despondency, not to say despair, was gone in a

moment. I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself amid the fragrance

of lemon-peel and sugar, the odour of burning rum, and the steam of

boiling water, as Mr. Micawber did that afternoon. It was wonderful to

see his face shining at us out of a thin cloud of these delicate fumes,

as he stirred, and mixed, and tasted, and looked as if he were making,

instead of punch, a fortune for his family down to the latest posterity.

As to Mrs. Micawber, I don't know whether it was the effect of the cap,

or the lavender-water, or the pins, or the fire, or the wax-candles, but

she came out of my room, comparatively speaking, lovely. And the lark

was never gayer than that excellent woman.

I suppose--I never ventured to inquire, but I suppose--that Mrs. Crupp,

after frying the soles, was taken ill. Because we broke down at that

point. The leg of mutton came up very red within, and very pale without:

besides having a foreign substance of a gritty nature sprinkled over

it, as if if had had a fall into the ashes of that remarkable kitchen

fireplace. But we were not in condition to judge of this fact from the

appearance of the gravy, forasmuch as the 'young gal' had dropped it all

upon the stairs--where it remained, by the by, in a long train, until it

was worn out. The pigeon-pie was not bad, but it was a delusive pie: the

crust being like a disappointing head, phrenologically speaking: full

of lumps and bumps, with nothing particular underneath. In short, the

banquet was such a failure that I should have been quite unhappy--about

the failure, I mean, for I was always unhappy about Dora--if I had not

been relieved by the great good humour of my company, and by a bright

suggestion from Mr. Micawber.

'My dear friend Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'accidents will occur

in the best-regulated families; and in families not regulated by that

pervading influence which sanctifies while it enhances the--a--I would

say, in short, by the influence of Woman, in the lofty character of

Wife, they may be expected with confidence, and must be borne with

philosophy. If you will allow me to take the liberty of remarking that

there are few comestibles better, in their way, than a Devil, and that

I believe, with a little division of labour, we could accomplish a good

one if the young person in attendance could produce a gridiron, I would

put it to you, that this little misfortune may be easily repaired.'

There was a gridiron in the pantry, on which my morning rasher of

bacon was cooked. We had it in, in a twinkling, and immediately applied

ourselves to carrying Mr. Micawber's idea into effect. The division of

labour to which he had referred was this:--Traddles cut the mutton into

slices; Mr. Micawber (who could do anything of this sort to perfection)

covered them with pepper, mustard, salt, and cayenne; I put them on

the gridiron, turned them with a fork, and took them off, under Mr.

Micawber's direction; and Mrs. Micawber heated, and continually stirred,

some mushroom ketchup in a little saucepan. When we had slices enough

done to begin upon, we fell-to, with our sleeves still tucked up at the

wrist, more slices sputtering and blazing on the fire, and our attention

divided between the mutton on our plates, and the mutton then preparing.

What with the novelty of this cookery, the excellence of it, the bustle

of it, the frequent starting up to look after it, the frequent sitting

down to dispose of it as the crisp slices came off the gridiron hot and

hot, the being so busy, so flushed with the fire, so amused, and in the

midst of such a tempting noise and savour, we reduced the leg of mutton

to the bone. My own appetite came back miraculously. I am ashamed to

record it, but I really believe I forgot Dora for a little while. I am

satisfied that Mr. and Mrs. Micawber could not have enjoyed the

feast more, if they had sold a bed to provide it. Traddles laughed as

heartily, almost the whole time, as he ate and worked. Indeed we all

did, all at once; and I dare say there was never a greater success.

We were at the height of our enjoyment, and were all busily engaged, in

our several departments, endeavouring to bring the last batch of slices

to a state of perfection that should crown the feast, when I was aware

of a strange presence in the room, and my eyes encountered those of the

staid Littimer, standing hat in hand before me.

'What's the matter?' I involuntarily asked.

'I beg your pardon, sir, I was directed to come in. Is my master not

here, sir?'

'No.'

'Have you not seen him, sir?'

'No; don't you come from him?'

'Not immediately so, sir.'

'Did he tell you you would find him here?'

'Not exactly so, sir. But I should think he might be here tomorrow, as

he has not been here today.' 'Is he coming up from Oxford?'

'I beg, sir,' he returned respectfully, 'that you will be seated, and

allow me to do this.' With which he took the fork from my unresisting

hand, and bent over the gridiron, as if his whole attention were

concentrated on it.

We should not have been much discomposed, I dare say, by the appearance

of Steerforth himself, but we became in a moment the meekest of the meek

before his respectable serving-man. Mr. Micawber, humming a tune, to

show that he was quite at ease, subsided into his chair, with the handle

of a hastily concealed fork sticking out of the bosom of his coat, as

if he had stabbed himself. Mrs. Micawber put on her brown gloves, and

assumed a genteel languor. Traddles ran his greasy hands through

his hair, and stood it bolt upright, and stared in confusion on the

table-cloth. As for me, I was a mere infant at the head of my own table;

and hardly ventured to glance at the respectable phenomenon, who had

come from Heaven knows where, to put my establishment to rights.

Meanwhile he took the mutton off the gridiron, and gravely handed it

round. We all took some, but our appreciation of it was gone, and we

merely made a show of eating it. As we severally pushed away our plates,

he noiselessly removed them, and set on the cheese. He took that off,

too, when it was done with; cleared the table; piled everything on the

dumb-waiter; gave us our wine-glasses; and, of his own accord, wheeled

the dumb-waiter into the pantry. All this was done in a perfect manner,

and he never raised his eyes from what he was about. Yet his very

elbows, when he had his back towards me, seemed to teem with the

expression of his fixed opinion that I was extremely young.

'Can I do anything more, sir?'

I thanked him and said, No; but would he take no dinner himself?

'None, I am obliged to you, sir.'

'Is Mr. Steerforth coming from Oxford?'

'I beg your pardon, sir?'

'Is Mr. Steerforth coming from Oxford?'

'I should imagine that he might be here tomorrow, sir. I rather thought

he might have been here today, sir. The mistake is mine, no doubt, sir.'

'If you should see him first--' said I.

'If you'll excuse me, sir, I don't think I shall see him first.'

'In case you do,' said I, 'pray say that I am sorry he was not here

today, as an old schoolfellow of his was here.'

'Indeed, sir!' and he divided a bow between me and Traddles, with a

glance at the latter.

He was moving softly to the door, when, in a forlorn hope of saying

something naturally--which I never could, to this man--I said:

'Oh! Littimer!'

'Sir!'

'Did you remain long at Yarmouth, that time?'

'Not particularly so, sir.'

'You saw the boat completed?'

'Yes, sir. I remained behind on purpose to see the boat completed.'

'I know!' He raised his eyes to mine respectfully.

'Mr. Steerforth has not seen it yet, I suppose?'

'I really can't say, sir. I think--but I really can't say, sir. I wish

you good night, sir.'

He comprehended everybody present, in the respectful bow with which he

followed these words, and disappeared. My visitors seemed to breathe

more freely when he was gone; but my own relief was very great, for

besides the constraint, arising from that extraordinary sense of

being at a disadvantage which I always had in this man's presence, my

conscience had embarrassed me with whispers that I had mistrusted his

master, and I could not repress a vague uneasy dread that he might

find it out. How was it, having so little in reality to conceal, that I

always DID feel as if this man were finding me out?

Mr. Micawber roused me from this reflection, which was blended with

a certain remorseful apprehension of seeing Steerforth himself, by

bestowing many encomiums on the absent Littimer as a most respectable

fellow, and a thoroughly admirable servant. Mr. Micawber, I may remark,

had taken his full share of the general bow, and had received it with

infinite condescension.

'But punch, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, tasting it, 'like

time and tide, waits for no man. Ah! it is at the present moment in high

flavour. My love, will you give me your opinion?'

Mrs. Micawber pronounced it excellent.

'Then I will drink,' said Mr. Micawber, 'if my friend Copperfield

will permit me to take that social liberty, to the days when my friend

Copperfield and myself were younger, and fought our way in the world

side by side. I may say, of myself and Copperfield, in words we have

sung together before now, that

We twa hae run about the braes

And pu'd the gowans' fine

--in a figurative point of view--on several occasions. I am not exactly

aware,' said Mr. Micawber, with the old roll in his voice, and the old

indescribable air of saying something genteel, 'what gowans may be, but

I have no doubt that Copperfield and myself would frequently have taken

a pull at them, if it had been feasible.'

Mr. Micawber, at the then present moment, took a pull at his punch. So

we all did: Traddles evidently lost in wondering at what distant time

Mr. Micawber and I could have been comrades in the battle of the world.

'Ahem!' said Mr. Micawber, clearing his throat, and warming with the

punch and with the fire. 'My dear, another glass?'

Mrs. Micawber said it must be very little; but we couldn't allow that,

so it was a glassful.

'As we are quite confidential here, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs.

Micawber, sipping her punch, 'Mr. Traddles being a part of our

domesticity, I should much like to have your opinion on Mr. Micawber's

prospects. For corn,' said Mrs. Micawber argumentatively, 'as I have

repeatedly said to Mr. Micawber, may be gentlemanly, but it is not

remunerative. Commission to the extent of two and ninepence in

a fortnight cannot, however limited our ideas, be considered

remunerative.'

We were all agreed upon that.

'Then,' said Mrs. Micawber, who prided herself on taking a clear view of

things, and keeping Mr. Micawber straight by her woman's wisdom, when he

might otherwise go a little crooked, 'then I ask myself this question.

If corn is not to be relied upon, what is? Are coals to be relied upon?

Not at all. We have turned our attention to that experiment, on the

suggestion of my family, and we find it fallacious.'

Mr. Micawber, leaning back in his chair with his hands in his pockets,

eyed us aside, and nodded his head, as much as to say that the case was

very clearly put.

'The articles of corn and coals,' said Mrs. Micawber, still more

argumentatively, 'being equally out of the question, Mr. Copperfield,

I naturally look round the world, and say, "What is there in which a

person of Mr. Micawber's talent is likely to succeed?" And I exclude

the doing anything on commission, because commission is not a certainty.

What is best suited to a person of Mr. Micawber's peculiar temperament

is, I am convinced, a certainty.'

Traddles and I both expressed, by a feeling murmur, that this great

discovery was no doubt true of Mr. Micawber, and that it did him much

credit.

'I will not conceal from you, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs.

Micawber, 'that I have long felt the Brewing business to be particularly

adapted to Mr. Micawber. Look at Barclay and Perkins! Look at Truman,

Hanbury, and Buxton! It is on that extensive footing that Mr. Micawber,

I know from my own knowledge of him, is calculated to shine; and the

profits, I am told, are e-NOR-MOUS! But if Mr. Micawber cannot get into

those firms--which decline to answer his letters, when he offers his

services even in an inferior capacity--what is the use of dwelling upon

that idea? None. I may have a conviction that Mr. Micawber's manners--'

'Hem! Really, my dear,' interposed Mr. Micawber.

'My love, be silent,' said Mrs. Micawber, laying her brown glove on his

hand. 'I may have a conviction, Mr. Copperfield, that Mr. Micawber's

manners peculiarly qualify him for the Banking business. I may argue

within myself, that if I had a deposit at a banking-house, the manners

of Mr. Micawber, as representing that banking-house, would inspire

confidence, and must extend the connexion. But if the various

banking-houses refuse to avail themselves of Mr. Micawber's abilities,

or receive the offer of them with contumely, what is the use of dwelling

upon THAT idea? None. As to originating a banking-business, I may know

that there are members of my family who, if they chose to place their

money in Mr. Micawber's hands, might found an establishment of that

description. But if they do NOT choose to place their money in Mr.

Micawber's hands--which they don't--what is the use of that? Again I

contend that we are no farther advanced than we were before.'

I shook my head, and said, 'Not a bit.' Traddles also shook his head,

and said, 'Not a bit.'

'What do I deduce from this?' Mrs. Micawber went on to say, still with

the same air of putting a case lucidly. 'What is the conclusion, my

dear Mr. Copperfield, to which I am irresistibly brought? Am I wrong in

saying, it is clear that we must live?'

I answered 'Not at all!' and Traddles answered 'Not at all!' and I found

myself afterwards sagely adding, alone, that a person must either live

or die.

'Just so,' returned Mrs. Micawber, 'It is precisely that. And the fact

is, my dear Mr. Copperfield, that we can not live without something

widely different from existing circumstances shortly turning up. Now

I am convinced, myself, and this I have pointed out to Mr. Micawber

several times of late, that things cannot be expected to turn up of

themselves. We must, in a measure, assist to turn them up. I may be

wrong, but I have formed that opinion.'

Both Traddles and I applauded it highly.

'Very well,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'Then what do I recommend? Here is Mr.

Micawber with a variety of qualifications--with great talent--'

'Really, my love,' said Mr. Micawber.

'Pray, my dear, allow me to conclude. Here is Mr. Micawber, with a

variety of qualifications, with great talent--I should say, with genius,

but that may be the partiality of a wife--'

Traddles and I both murmured 'No.'

'And here is Mr. Micawber without any suitable position or employment.

Where does that responsibility rest? Clearly on society. Then I would

make a fact so disgraceful known, and boldly challenge society to set it

right. It appears to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber,

forcibly, 'that what Mr. Micawber has to do, is to throw down the

gauntlet to society, and say, in effect, "Show me who will take that up.

Let the party immediately step forward."'

I ventured to ask Mrs. Micawber how this was to be done.

'By advertising,' said Mrs. Micawber--'in all the papers. It appears to

me, that what Mr. Micawber has to do, in justice to himself, in justice

to his family, and I will even go so far as to say in justice to

society, by which he has been hitherto overlooked, is to advertise in

all the papers; to describe himself plainly as so-and-so, with such and

such qualifications and to put it thus: "Now employ me, on remunerative

terms, and address, post-paid, to W. M., Post Office, Camden Town."'

'This idea of Mrs. Micawber's, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber,

making his shirt-collar meet in front of his chin, and glancing at me

sideways, 'is, in fact, the Leap to which I alluded, when I last had the

pleasure of seeing you.'

'Advertising is rather expensive,' I remarked, dubiously.

'Exactly so!' said Mrs. Micawber, preserving the same logical air.

'Quite true, my dear Mr. Copperfield! I have made the identical

observation to Mr. Micawber. It is for that reason especially, that I

think Mr. Micawber ought (as I have already said, in justice to himself,

in justice to his family, and in justice to society) to raise a certain

sum of money--on a bill.'

Mr. Micawber, leaning back in his chair, trifled with his eye-glass

and cast his eyes up at the ceiling; but I thought him observant of

Traddles, too, who was looking at the fire.

'If no member of my family,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'is possessed of

sufficient natural feeling to negotiate that bill--I believe there is a

better business-term to express what I mean--'

Mr. Micawber, with his eyes still cast up at the ceiling, suggested

'Discount.'

'To discount that bill,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'then my opinion is, that

Mr. Micawber should go into the City, should take that bill into the

Money Market, and should dispose of it for what he can get. If the

individuals in the Money Market oblige Mr. Micawber to sustain a great

sacrifice, that is between themselves and their consciences. I view

it, steadily, as an investment. I recommend Mr. Micawber, my dear Mr.

Copperfield, to do the same; to regard it as an investment which is sure

of return, and to make up his mind to any sacrifice.'

I felt, but I am sure I don't know why, that this was self-denying

and devoted in Mrs. Micawber, and I uttered a murmur to that effect.

Traddles, who took his tone from me, did likewise, still looking at the

fire.

'I will not,' said Mrs. Micawber, finishing her punch, and gathering her

scarf about her shoulders, preparatory to her withdrawal to my bedroom:

'I will not protract these remarks on the subject of Mr. Micawber's

pecuniary affairs. At your fireside, my dear Mr. Copperfield, and in the

presence of Mr. Traddles, who, though not so old a friend, is quite one

of ourselves, I could not refrain from making you acquainted with the

course I advise Mr. Micawber to take. I feel that the time is arrived

when Mr. Micawber should exert himself and--I will add--assert himself,

and it appears to me that these are the means. I am aware that I am

merely a female, and that a masculine judgement is usually considered

more competent to the discussion of such questions; still I must not

forget that, when I lived at home with my papa and mama, my papa was in

the habit of saying, "Emma's form is fragile, but her grasp of a subject

is inferior to none." That my papa was too partial, I well know; but

that he was an observer of character in some degree, my duty and my

reason equally forbid me to doubt.'

With these words, and resisting our entreaties that she would grace

the remaining circulation of the punch with her presence, Mrs. Micawber

retired to my bedroom. And really I felt that she was a noble woman--the

sort of woman who might have been a Roman matron, and done all manner of

heroic things, in times of public trouble.

In the fervour of this impression, I congratulated Mr. Micawber on the

treasure he possessed. So did Traddles. Mr. Micawber extended his

hand to each of us in succession, and then covered his face with his

pocket-handkerchief, which I think had more snuff upon it than he

was aware of. He then returned to the punch, in the highest state of

exhilaration.

He was full of eloquence. He gave us to understand that in our children

we lived again, and that, under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties,

any accession to their number was doubly welcome. He said that Mrs.

Micawber had latterly had her doubts on this point, but that he had

dispelled them, and reassured her. As to her family, they were totally

unworthy of her, and their sentiments were utterly indifferent to him,

and they might--I quote his own expression--go to the Devil.

Mr. Micawber then delivered a warm eulogy on Traddles. He said

Traddles's was a character, to the steady virtues of which he (Mr.

Micawber) could lay no claim, but which, he thanked Heaven, he could

admire. He feelingly alluded to the young lady, unknown, whom Traddles

had honoured with his affection, and who had reciprocated that affection

by honouring and blessing Traddles with her affection. Mr. Micawber

pledged her. So did I. Traddles thanked us both, by saying, with a

simplicity and honesty I had sense enough to be quite charmed with,

'I am very much obliged to you indeed. And I do assure you, she's the

dearest girl!--'

Mr. Micawber took an early opportunity, after that, of hinting, with the

utmost delicacy and ceremony, at the state of MY affections. Nothing

but the serious assurance of his friend Copperfield to the contrary,

he observed, could deprive him of the impression that his friend

Copperfield loved and was beloved. After feeling very hot and

uncomfortable for some time, and after a good deal of blushing,

stammering, and denying, I said, having my glass in my hand, 'Well! I

would give them D.!' which so excited and gratified Mr. Micawber,

that he ran with a glass of punch into my bedroom, in order that Mrs.

Micawber might drink D., who drank it with enthusiasm, crying from

within, in a shrill voice, 'Hear, hear! My dear Mr. Copperfield, I am

delighted. Hear!' and tapping at the wall, by way of applause.

Our conversation, afterwards, took a more worldly turn; Mr. Micawber

telling us that he found Camden Town inconvenient, and that the first

thing he contemplated doing, when the advertisement should have been the

cause of something satisfactory turning up, was to move. He mentioned

a terrace at the western end of Oxford Street, fronting Hyde Park, on

which he had always had his eye, but which he did not expect to attain

immediately, as it would require a large establishment. There would

probably be an interval, he explained, in which he should content

himself with the upper part of a house, over some respectable place of

business--say in Piccadilly,--which would be a cheerful situation for

Mrs. Micawber; and where, by throwing out a bow-window, or carrying up

the roof another story, or making some little alteration of that sort,

they might live, comfortably and reputably, for a few years. Whatever

was reserved for him, he expressly said, or wherever his abode might be,

we might rely on this--there would always be a room for Traddles, and a

knife and fork for me. We acknowledged his kindness; and he begged us

to forgive his having launched into these practical and business-like

details, and to excuse it as natural in one who was making entirely new

arrangements in life.

Mrs. Micawber, tapping at the wall again to know if tea were ready,

broke up this particular phase of our friendly conversation. She made

tea for us in a most agreeable manner; and, whenever I went near her, in

handing about the tea-cups and bread-and-butter, asked me, in a whisper,

whether D. was fair, or dark, or whether she was short, or tall: or

something of that kind; which I think I liked. After tea, we discussed a

variety of topics before the fire; and Mrs. Micawber was good enough

to sing us (in a small, thin, flat voice, which I remembered to have

considered, when I first knew her, the very table-beer of acoustics) the

favourite ballads of 'The Dashing White Sergeant', and 'Little Tafflin'.

For both of these songs Mrs. Micawber had been famous when she lived at

home with her papa and mama. Mr. Micawber told us, that when he heard

her sing the first one, on the first occasion of his seeing her beneath

the parental roof, she had attracted his attention in an extraordinary

degree; but that when it came to Little Tafflin, he had resolved to win

that woman or perish in the attempt.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock when Mrs. Micawber rose to replace

her cap in the whitey-brown paper parcel, and to put on her bonnet. Mr.

Micawber took the opportunity of Traddles putting on his great-coat, to

slip a letter into my hand, with a whispered request that I would read

it at my leisure. I also took the opportunity of my holding a candle

over the banisters to light them down, when Mr. Micawber was going

first, leading Mrs. Micawber, and Traddles was following with the cap,

to detain Traddles for a moment on the top of the stairs.

'Traddles,' said I, 'Mr. Micawber don't mean any harm, poor fellow: but,

if I were you, I wouldn't lend him anything.'

'My dear Copperfield,' returned Traddles, smiling, 'I haven't got

anything to lend.'

'You have got a name, you know,' said I.

'Oh! You call THAT something to lend?' returned Traddles, with a

thoughtful look.

'Certainly.'

'Oh!' said Traddles. 'Yes, to be sure! I am very much obliged to you,

Copperfield; but--I am afraid I have lent him that already.'

'For the bill that is to be a certain investment?' I inquired.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Not for that one. This is the first I have heard

of that one. I have been thinking that he will most likely propose that

one, on the way home. Mine's another.'

'I hope there will be nothing wrong about it,' said I. 'I hope not,'

said Traddles. 'I should think not, though, because he told me, only the

other day, that it was provided for. That was Mr. Micawber's expression,

"Provided for."'

Mr. Micawber looking up at this juncture to where we were standing, I

had only time to repeat my caution. Traddles thanked me, and descended.

But I was much afraid, when I observed the good-natured manner in which

he went down with the cap in his hand, and gave Mrs. Micawber his arm,

that he would be carried into the Money Market neck and heels.

I returned to my fireside, and was musing, half gravely and half

laughing, on the character of Mr. Micawber and the old relations between

us, when I heard a quick step ascending the stairs. At first, I thought

it was Traddles coming back for something Mrs. Micawber had left behind;

but as the step approached, I knew it, and felt my heart beat high, and

the blood rush to my face, for it was Steerforth's.

I was never unmindful of Agnes, and she never left that sanctuary in my

thoughts--if I may call it so--where I had placed her from the first.

But when he entered, and stood before me with his hand out, the darkness

that had fallen on him changed to light, and I felt confounded and

ashamed of having doubted one I loved so heartily. I loved her none the

less; I thought of her as the same benignant, gentle angel in my life; I

reproached myself, not her, with having done him an injury; and I would

have made him any atonement if I had known what to make, and how to make

it.

'Why, Daisy, old boy, dumb-foundered!' laughed Steerforth, shaking

my hand heartily, and throwing it gaily away. 'Have I detected you in

another feast, you Sybarite! These Doctors' Commons fellows are the

gayest men in town, I believe, and beat us sober Oxford people all to

nothing!' His bright glance went merrily round the room, as he took

the seat on the sofa opposite to me, which Mrs. Micawber had recently

vacated, and stirred the fire into a blaze.

'I was so surprised at first,' said I, giving him welcome with all

the cordiality I felt, 'that I had hardly breath to greet you with,

Steerforth.'

'Well, the sight of me is good for sore eyes, as the Scotch say,'

replied Steerforth, 'and so is the sight of you, Daisy, in full bloom.

How are you, my Bacchanal?'

'I am very well,' said I; 'and not at all Bacchanalian tonight, though I

confess to another party of three.'

'All of whom I met in the street, talking loud in your praise,' returned

Steerforth. 'Who's our friend in the tights?'

I gave him the best idea I could, in a few words, of Mr. Micawber. He

laughed heartily at my feeble portrait of that gentleman, and said he

was a man to know, and he must know him. 'But who do you suppose our

other friend is?' said I, in my turn.

'Heaven knows,' said Steerforth. 'Not a bore, I hope? I thought he

looked a little like one.'

'Traddles!' I replied, triumphantly.

'Who's he?' asked Steerforth, in his careless way.

'Don't you remember Traddles? Traddles in our room at Salem House?'

'Oh! That fellow!' said Steerforth, beating a lump of coal on the top

of the fire, with the poker. 'Is he as soft as ever? And where the deuce

did you pick him up?'

I extolled Traddles in reply, as highly as I could; for I felt that

Steerforth rather slighted him. Steerforth, dismissing the subject with

a light nod, and a smile, and the remark that he would be glad to see

the old fellow too, for he had always been an odd fish, inquired if I

could give him anything to eat? During most of this short dialogue, when

he had not been speaking in a wild vivacious manner, he had sat idly

beating on the lump of coal with the poker. I observed that he did the

same thing while I was getting out the remains of the pigeon-pie, and so

forth.

'Why, Daisy, here's a supper for a king!' he exclaimed, starting out of

his silence with a burst, and taking his seat at the table. 'I shall do

it justice, for I have come from Yarmouth.'

'I thought you came from Oxford?' I returned.

'Not I,' said Steerforth. 'I have been seafaring--better employed.'

'Littimer was here today, to inquire for you,' I remarked, 'and I

understood him that you were at Oxford; though, now I think of it, he

certainly did not say so.'

'Littimer is a greater fool than I thought him, to have been inquiring

for me at all,' said Steerforth, jovially pouring out a glass of wine,

and drinking to me. 'As to understanding him, you are a cleverer fellow

than most of us, Daisy, if you can do that.'

'That's true, indeed,' said I, moving my chair to the table. 'So you

have been at Yarmouth, Steerforth!' interested to know all about it.

'Have you been there long?'

'No,' he returned. 'An escapade of a week or so.'

'And how are they all? Of course, little Emily is not married yet?'

'Not yet. Going to be, I believe--in so many weeks, or months, or

something or other. I have not seen much of 'em. By the by'; he laid

down his knife and fork, which he had been using with great diligence,

and began feeling in his pockets; 'I have a letter for you.'

'From whom?'

'Why, from your old nurse,' he returned, taking some papers out of his

breast pocket. "'J. Steerforth, Esquire, debtor, to The Willing

Mind"; that's not it. Patience, and we'll find it presently. Old

what's-his-name's in a bad way, and it's about that, I believe.'

'Barkis, do you mean?'

'Yes!' still feeling in his pockets, and looking over their contents:

'it's all over with poor Barkis, I am afraid. I saw a little apothecary

there--surgeon, or whatever he is--who brought your worship into the

world. He was mighty learned about the case, to me; but the upshot of

his opinion was, that the carrier was making his last journey rather

fast.---Put your hand into the breast pocket of my great-coat on the

chair yonder, and I think you'll find the letter. Is it there?'

'Here it is!' said I.

'That's right!'

It was from Peggotty; something less legible than usual, and brief. It

informed me of her husband's hopeless state, and hinted at his being

'a little nearer' than heretofore, and consequently more difficult

to manage for his own comfort. It said nothing of her weariness

and watching, and praised him highly. It was written with a plain,

unaffected, homely piety that I knew to be genuine, and ended with 'my

duty to my ever darling'--meaning myself.

While I deciphered it, Steerforth continued to eat and drink.

'It's a bad job,' he said, when I had done; 'but the sun sets every day,

and people die every minute, and we mustn't be scared by the common lot.

If we failed to hold our own, because that equal foot at all men's doors

was heard knocking somewhere, every object in this world would slip from

us. No! Ride on! Rough-shod if need be, smooth-shod if that will do, but

ride on! Ride on over all obstacles, and win the race!'

'And win what race?' said I.

'The race that one has started in,' said he. 'Ride on!'

I noticed, I remember, as he paused, looking at me with his handsome

head a little thrown back, and his glass raised in his hand, that,

though the freshness of the sea-wind was on his face, and it was ruddy,

there were traces in it, made since I last saw it, as if he had applied

himself to some habitual strain of the fervent energy which, when

roused, was so passionately roused within him. I had it in my thoughts

to remonstrate with him upon his desperate way of pursuing any fancy

that he took--such as this buffeting of rough seas, and braving of hard

weather, for example--when my mind glanced off to the immediate subject

of our conversation again, and pursued that instead.

'I tell you what, Steerforth,' said I, 'if your high spirits will listen

to me--'

'They are potent spirits, and will do whatever you like,' he answered,

moving from the table to the fireside again.

'Then I tell you what, Steerforth. I think I will go down and see my

old nurse. It is not that I can do her any good, or render her any real

service; but she is so attached to me that my visit will have as much

effect on her, as if I could do both. She will take it so kindly that it

will be a comfort and support to her. It is no great effort to make,

I am sure, for such a friend as she has been to me. Wouldn't you go a

day's journey, if you were in my place?'

His face was thoughtful, and he sat considering a little before he

answered, in a low voice, 'Well! Go. You can do no harm.'

'You have just come back,' said I, 'and it would be in vain to ask you

to go with me?'

'Quite,' he returned. 'I am for Highgate tonight. I have not seen

my mother this long time, and it lies upon my conscience, for

it's something to be loved as she loves her prodigal son.---Bah!

Nonsense!--You mean to go tomorrow, I suppose?' he said, holding me out

at arm's length, with a hand on each of my shoulders.

'Yes, I think so.'

'Well, then, don't go till next day. I wanted you to come and stay a

few days with us. Here I am, on purpose to bid you, and you fly off to

Yarmouth!'

'You are a nice fellow to talk of flying off, Steerforth, who are always

running wild on some unknown expedition or other!'

He looked at me for a moment without speaking, and then rejoined, still

holding me as before, and giving me a shake:

'Come! Say the next day, and pass as much of tomorrow as you can with

us! Who knows when we may meet again, else? Come! Say the next day! I

want you to stand between Rosa Dartle and me, and keep us asunder.'

'Would you love each other too much, without me?'

'Yes; or hate,' laughed Steerforth; 'no matter which. Come! Say the next

day!'

I said the next day; and he put on his great-coat and lighted his cigar,

and set off to walk home. Finding him in this intention, I put on my own

great-coat (but did not light my own cigar, having had enough of that

for one while) and walked with him as far as the open road: a dull road,

then, at night. He was in great spirits all the way; and when we parted,

and I looked after him going so gallantly and airily homeward, I thought

of his saying, 'Ride on over all obstacles, and win the race!' and

wished, for the first time, that he had some worthy race to run.

I was undressing in my own room, when Mr. Micawber's letter tumbled on

the floor. Thus reminded of it, I broke the seal and read as follows. It

was dated an hour and a half before dinner. I am not sure whether I

have mentioned that, when Mr. Micawber was at any particularly desperate

crisis, he used a sort of legal phraseology, which he seemed to think

equivalent to winding up his affairs.

'SIR--for I dare not say my dear Copperfield,

'It is expedient that I should inform you that the undersigned is

Crushed. Some flickering efforts to spare you the premature knowledge of

his calamitous position, you may observe in him this day; but hope has

sunk beneath the horizon, and the undersigned is Crushed.

'The present communication is penned within the personal range (I cannot

call it the society) of an individual, in a state closely bordering

on intoxication, employed by a broker. That individual is in legal

possession of the premises, under a distress for rent. His inventory

includes, not only the chattels and effects of every description

belonging to the undersigned, as yearly tenant of this habitation, but

also those appertaining to Mr. Thomas Traddles, lodger, a member of the

Honourable Society of the Inner Temple.

'If any drop of gloom were wanting in the overflowing cup, which is now

"commended" (in the language of an immortal Writer) to the lips of the

undersigned, it would be found in the fact, that a friendly acceptance

granted to the undersigned, by the before-mentioned Mr. Thomas Traddles,

for the sum Of 23l 4s 9 1/2d is over due, and is NOT provided for. Also,

in the fact that the living responsibilities clinging to the undersigned

will, in the course of nature, be increased by the sum of one more

helpless victim; whose miserable appearance may be looked for--in round

numbers--at the expiration of a period not exceeding six lunar months

from the present date.

'After premising thus much, it would be a work of supererogation to add,

that dust and ashes are for ever scattered

'On

'The

'Head

'Of

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

Poor Traddles! I knew enough of Mr. Micawber by this time, to foresee

that he might be expected to recover the blow; but my night's rest was

sorely distressed by thoughts of Traddles, and of the curate's daughter,

who was one of ten, down in Devonshire, and who was such a dear girl,

and who would wait for Traddles (ominous praise!) until she was sixty,

or any age that could be mentioned.

CHAPTER 29. I VISIT STEERFORTH AT HIS HOME, AGAIN

I mentioned to Mr. Spenlow in the morning, that I wanted leave of

absence for a short time; and as I was not in the receipt of any salary,

and consequently was not obnoxious to the implacable Jorkins, there was

no difficulty about it. I took that opportunity, with my voice sticking

in my throat, and my sight failing as I uttered the words, to express

my hope that Miss Spenlow was quite well; to which Mr. Spenlow replied,

with no more emotion than if he had been speaking of an ordinary human

being, that he was much obliged to me, and she was very well.

We articled clerks, as germs of the patrician order of proctors, were

treated with so much consideration, that I was almost my own master at

all times. As I did not care, however, to get to Highgate before one

or two o'clock in the day, and as we had another little excommunication

case in court that morning, which was called The office of the judge

promoted by Tipkins against Bullock for his soul's correction, I passed

an hour or two in attendance on it with Mr. Spenlow very agreeably.

It arose out of a scuffle between two churchwardens, one of whom was

alleged to have pushed the other against a pump; the handle of which

pump projecting into a school-house, which school-house was under a

gable of the church-roof, made the push an ecclesiastical offence.

It was an amusing case; and sent me up to Highgate, on the box of the

stage-coach, thinking about the Commons, and what Mr. Spenlow had said

about touching the Commons and bringing down the country.

Mrs. Steerforth was pleased to see me, and so was Rosa Dartle. I was

agreeably surprised to find that Littimer was not there, and that we

were attended by a modest little parlour-maid, with blue ribbons in her

cap, whose eye it was much more pleasant, and much less disconcerting,

to catch by accident, than the eye of that respectable man. But what I

particularly observed, before I had been half-an-hour in the house, was

the close and attentive watch Miss Dartle kept upon me; and the lurking

manner in which she seemed to compare my face with Steerforth's, and

Steerforth's with mine, and to lie in wait for something to come out

between the two. So surely as I looked towards her, did I see that eager

visage, with its gaunt black eyes and searching brow, intent on mine; or

passing suddenly from mine to Steerforth's; or comprehending both of us

at once. In this lynx-like scrutiny she was so far from faltering when

she saw I observed it, that at such a time she only fixed her piercing

look upon me with a more intent expression still. Blameless as I was,

and knew that I was, in reference to any wrong she could possibly

suspect me of, I shrunk before her strange eyes, quite unable to endure

their hungry lustre.

All day, she seemed to pervade the whole house. If I talked to

Steerforth in his room, I heard her dress rustle in the little gallery

outside. When he and I engaged in some of our old exercises on the lawn

behind the house, I saw her face pass from window to window, like a

wandering light, until it fixed itself in one, and watched us. When we

all four went out walking in the afternoon, she closed her thin hand on

my arm like a spring, to keep me back, while Steerforth and his mother

went on out of hearing: and then spoke to me.

'You have been a long time,' she said, 'without coming here. Is your

profession really so engaging and interesting as to absorb your whole

attention? I ask because I always want to be informed, when I am

ignorant. Is it really, though?'

I replied that I liked it well enough, but that I certainly could not

claim so much for it.

'Oh! I am glad to know that, because I always like to be put right when

I am wrong,' said Rosa Dartle. 'You mean it is a little dry, perhaps?'

'Well,' I replied; 'perhaps it was a little dry.'

'Oh! and that's a reason why you want relief and change--excitement and

all that?' said she. 'Ah! very true! But isn't it a little--Eh?--for

him; I don't mean you?'

A quick glance of her eye towards the spot where Steerforth was walking,

with his mother leaning on his arm, showed me whom she meant; but beyond

that, I was quite lost. And I looked so, I have no doubt.

'Don't it--I don't say that it does, mind I want to know--don't it

rather engross him? Don't it make him, perhaps, a little more remiss

than usual in his visits to his blindly-doting--eh?' With another

quick glance at them, and such a glance at me as seemed to look into my

innermost thoughts.

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'pray do not think--'

'I don't!' she said. 'Oh dear me, don't suppose that I think anything!

I am not suspicious. I only ask a question. I don't state any opinion. I

want to found an opinion on what you tell me. Then, it's not so? Well! I

am very glad to know it.'

'It certainly is not the fact,' said I, perplexed, 'that I am

accountable for Steerforth's having been away from home longer than

usual--if he has been: which I really don't know at this moment, unless

I understand it from you. I have not seen him this long while, until

last night.'

'No?'

'Indeed, Miss Dartle, no!'

As she looked full at me, I saw her face grow sharper and paler, and the

marks of the old wound lengthen out until it cut through the disfigured

lip, and deep into the nether lip, and slanted down the face. There was

something positively awful to me in this, and in the brightness of her

eyes, as she said, looking fixedly at me:

'What is he doing?'

I repeated the words, more to myself than her, being so amazed.

'What is he doing?' she said, with an eagerness that seemed enough to

consume her like a fire. 'In what is that man assisting him, who never

looks at me without an inscrutable falsehood in his eyes? If you are

honourable and faithful, I don't ask you to betray your friend. I ask

you only to tell me, is it anger, is it hatred, is it pride, is it

restlessness, is it some wild fancy, is it love, what is it, that is

leading him?'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'how shall I tell you, so that you will

believe me, that I know of nothing in Steerforth different from what

there was when I first came here? I can think of nothing. I firmly

believe there is nothing. I hardly understand even what you mean.'

As she still stood looking fixedly at me, a twitching or throbbing,

from which I could not dissociate the idea of pain, came into that cruel

mark; and lifted up the corner of her lip as if with scorn, or with a

pity that despised its object. She put her hand upon it hurriedly--a

hand so thin and delicate, that when I had seen her hold it up before

the fire to shade her face, I had compared it in my thoughts to fine

porcelain--and saying, in a quick, fierce, passionate way, 'I swear you

to secrecy about this!' said not a word more.

Mrs. Steerforth was particularly happy in her son's society, and

Steerforth was, on this occasion, particularly attentive and respectful

to her. It was very interesting to me to see them together, not only on

account of their mutual affection, but because of the strong personal

resemblance between them, and the manner in which what was haughty or

impetuous in him was softened by age and sex, in her, to a gracious

dignity. I thought, more than once, that it was well no serious cause of

division had ever come between them; or two such natures--I ought rather

to express it, two such shades of the same nature--might have been

harder to reconcile than the two extremest opposites in creation. The

idea did not originate in my own discernment, I am bound to confess, but

in a speech of Rosa Dartle's.

She said at dinner:

'Oh, but do tell me, though, somebody, because I have been thinking

about it all day, and I want to know.'

'You want to know what, Rosa?' returned Mrs. Steerforth. 'Pray, pray,

Rosa, do not be mysterious.'

'Mysterious!' she cried. 'Oh! really? Do you consider me so?'

'Do I constantly entreat you,' said Mrs. Steerforth, 'to speak plainly,

in your own natural manner?'

'Oh! then this is not my natural manner?' she rejoined. 'Now you must

really bear with me, because I ask for information. We never know

ourselves.'

'It has become a second nature,' said Mrs. Steerforth, without any

displeasure; 'but I remember,--and so must you, I think,--when your

manner was different, Rosa; when it was not so guarded, and was more

trustful.'

'I am sure you are right,' she returned; 'and so it is that bad habits

grow upon one! Really? Less guarded and more trustful? How can I,

imperceptibly, have changed, I wonder! Well, that's very odd! I must

study to regain my former self.'

'I wish you would,' said Mrs. Steerforth, with a smile.

'Oh! I really will, you know!' she answered. 'I will learn frankness

from--let me see--from James.'

'You cannot learn frankness, Rosa,' said Mrs. Steerforth quickly--for

there was always some effect of sarcasm in what Rosa Dartle said,

though it was said, as this was, in the most unconscious manner in the

world--'in a better school.'

'That I am sure of,' she answered, with uncommon fervour. 'If I am sure

of anything, of course, you know, I am sure of that.'

Mrs. Steerforth appeared to me to regret having been a little nettled;

for she presently said, in a kind tone:

'Well, my dear Rosa, we have not heard what it is that you want to be

satisfied about?'

'That I want to be satisfied about?' she replied, with provoking

coldness. 'Oh! It was only whether people, who are like each other in

their moral constitution--is that the phrase?'

'It's as good a phrase as another,' said Steerforth.

'Thank you:--whether people, who are like each other in their moral

constitution, are in greater danger than people not so circumstanced,

supposing any serious cause of variance to arise between them, of being

divided angrily and deeply?'

'I should say yes,' said Steerforth.

'Should you?' she retorted. 'Dear me! Supposing then, for instance--any

unlikely thing will do for a supposition--that you and your mother were

to have a serious quarrel.'

'My dear Rosa,' interposed Mrs. Steerforth, laughing good-naturedly,

'suggest some other supposition! James and I know our duty to each other

better, I pray Heaven!'

'Oh!' said Miss Dartle, nodding her head thoughtfully. 'To be sure. That

would prevent it? Why, of course it would. Exactly. Now, I am glad I

have been so foolish as to put the case, for it is so very good to know

that your duty to each other would prevent it! Thank you very much.'

One other little circumstance connected with Miss Dartle I must

not omit; for I had reason to remember it thereafter, when all the

irremediable past was rendered plain. During the whole of this day, but

especially from this period of it, Steerforth exerted himself with his

utmost skill, and that was with his utmost ease, to charm this singular

creature into a pleasant and pleased companion. That he should succeed,

was no matter of surprise to me. That she should struggle against the

fascinating influence of his delightful art--delightful nature I thought

it then--did not surprise me either; for I knew that she was sometimes

jaundiced and perverse. I saw her features and her manner slowly change;

I saw her look at him with growing admiration; I saw her try, more and

more faintly, but always angrily, as if she condemned a weakness in

herself, to resist the captivating power that he possessed; and finally,

I saw her sharp glance soften, and her smile become quite gentle, and I

ceased to be afraid of her as I had really been all day, and we all sat

about the fire, talking and laughing together, with as little reserve as

if we had been children.

Whether it was because we had sat there so long, or because Steerforth

was resolved not to lose the advantage he had gained, I do not know; but

we did not remain in the dining-room more than five minutes after her

departure. 'She is playing her harp,' said Steerforth, softly, at the

drawing-room door, 'and nobody but my mother has heard her do that, I

believe, these three years.' He said it with a curious smile, which was

gone directly; and we went into the room and found her alone.

'Don't get up,' said Steerforth (which she had already done)' my dear

Rosa, don't! Be kind for once, and sing us an Irish song.'

'What do you care for an Irish song?' she returned.

'Much!' said Steerforth. 'Much more than for any other. Here is Daisy,

too, loves music from his soul. Sing us an Irish song, Rosa! and let me

sit and listen as I used to do.'

He did not touch her, or the chair from which she had risen, but sat

himself near the harp. She stood beside it for some little while, in a

curious way, going through the motion of playing it with her right hand,

but not sounding it. At length she sat down, and drew it to her with one

sudden action, and played and sang.

I don't know what it was, in her touch or voice, that made that song the

most unearthly I have ever heard in my life, or can imagine. There was

something fearful in the reality of it. It was as if it had never been

written, or set to music, but sprung out of passion within her; which

found imperfect utterance in the low sounds of her voice, and crouched

again when all was still. I was dumb when she leaned beside the harp

again, playing it, but not sounding it, with her right hand.

A minute more, and this had roused me from my trance:--Steerforth had

left his seat, and gone to her, and had put his arm laughingly about

her, and had said, 'Come, Rosa, for the future we will love each other

very much!' And she had struck him, and had thrown him off with the fury

of a wild cat, and had burst out of the room.

'What is the matter with Rosa?' said Mrs. Steerforth, coming in.

'She has been an angel, mother,' returned Steerforth, 'for a little

while; and has run into the opposite extreme, since, by way of

compensation.'

'You should be careful not to irritate her, James. Her temper has been

soured, remember, and ought not to be tried.'

Rosa did not come back; and no other mention was made of her, until I

went with Steerforth into his room to say Good night. Then he laughed

about her, and asked me if I had ever seen such a fierce little piece of

incomprehensibility.

I expressed as much of my astonishment as was then capable of

expression, and asked if he could guess what it was that she had taken

so much amiss, so suddenly.

'Oh, Heaven knows,' said Steerforth. 'Anything you like--or nothing!

I told you she took everything, herself included, to a grindstone, and

sharpened it. She is an edge-tool, and requires great care in dealing

with. She is always dangerous. Good night!'

'Good night!' said I, 'my dear Steerforth! I shall be gone before you

wake in the morning. Good night!'

He was unwilling to let me go; and stood, holding me out, with a hand on

each of my shoulders, as he had done in my own room.

'Daisy,' he said, with a smile--'for though that's not the name your

godfathers and godmothers gave you, it's the name I like best to call

you by--and I wish, I wish, I wish, you could give it to me!'

'Why so I can, if I choose,' said I.

'Daisy, if anything should ever separate us, you must think of me at my

best, old boy. Come! Let us make that bargain. Think of me at my best,

if circumstances should ever part us!'

'You have no best to me, Steerforth,' said I, 'and no worst. You are

always equally loved, and cherished in my heart.'

So much compunction for having ever wronged him, even by a shapeless

thought, did I feel within me, that the confession of having done so was

rising to my lips. But for the reluctance I had to betray the confidence

of Agnes, but for my uncertainty how to approach the subject with no

risk of doing so, it would have reached them before he said, 'God bless

you, Daisy, and good night!' In my doubt, it did NOT reach them; and we

shook hands, and we parted.

I was up with the dull dawn, and, having dressed as quietly as I could,

looked into his room. He was fast asleep; lying, easily, with his head

upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.

The time came in its season, and that was very soon, when I almost

wondered that nothing troubled his repose, as I looked at him. But he

slept--let me think of him so again--as I had often seen him sleep at

school; and thus, in this silent hour, I left him. --Never more, oh

God forgive you, Steerforth! to touch that passive hand in love and

friendship. Never, never more!

CHAPTER 30. A LOSS

I got down to Yarmouth in the evening, and went to the inn. I knew that

Peggotty's spare room--my room--was likely to have occupation enough

in a little while, if that great Visitor, before whose presence all

the living must give place, were not already in the house; so I betook

myself to the inn, and dined there, and engaged my bed.

It was ten o'clock when I went out. Many of the shops were shut, and the

town was dull. When I came to Omer and Joram's, I found the shutters up,

but the shop door standing open. As I could obtain a perspective view

of Mr. Omer inside, smoking his pipe by the parlour door, I entered, and

asked him how he was.

'Why, bless my life and soul!' said Mr. Omer, 'how do you find yourself?

Take a seat.---Smoke not disagreeable, I hope?'

'By no means,' said I. 'I like it--in somebody else's pipe.'

'What, not in your own, eh?' Mr. Omer returned, laughing. 'All the

better, sir. Bad habit for a young man. Take a seat. I smoke, myself,

for the asthma.'

Mr. Omer had made room for me, and placed a chair. He now sat down again

very much out of breath, gasping at his pipe as if it contained a supply

of that necessary, without which he must perish.

'I am sorry to have heard bad news of Mr. Barkis,' said I.

Mr. Omer looked at me, with a steady countenance, and shook his head.

'Do you know how he is tonight?' I asked.

'The very question I should have put to you, sir,' returned Mr. Omer,

'but on account of delicacy. It's one of the drawbacks of our line of

business. When a party's ill, we can't ask how the party is.'

The difficulty had not occurred to me; though I had had my apprehensions

too, when I went in, of hearing the old tune. On its being mentioned, I

recognized it, however, and said as much.

'Yes, yes, you understand,' said Mr. Omer, nodding his head. 'We dursn't

do it. Bless you, it would be a shock that the generality of parties

mightn't recover, to say "Omer and Joram's compliments, and how do you

find yourself this morning?"--or this afternoon--as it may be.'

Mr. Omer and I nodded at each other, and Mr. Omer recruited his wind by

the aid of his pipe.

'It's one of the things that cut the trade off from attentions they

could often wish to show,' said Mr. Omer. 'Take myself. If I have known

Barkis a year, to move to as he went by, I have known him forty years.

But I can't go and say, "how is he?"'

I felt it was rather hard on Mr. Omer, and I told him so.

'I'm not more self-interested, I hope, than another man,' said Mr. Omer.

'Look at me! My wind may fail me at any moment, and it ain't

likely that, to my own knowledge, I'd be self-interested under such

circumstances. I say it ain't likely, in a man who knows his wind will

go, when it DOES go, as if a pair of bellows was cut open; and that man

a grandfather,' said Mr. Omer.

I said, 'Not at all.'

'It ain't that I complain of my line of business,' said Mr. Omer. 'It

ain't that. Some good and some bad goes, no doubt, to all callings. What

I wish is, that parties was brought up stronger-minded.'

Mr. Omer, with a very complacent and amiable face, took several puffs in

silence; and then said, resuming his first point:

'Accordingly we're obleeged, in ascertaining how Barkis goes on, to

limit ourselves to Em'ly. She knows what our real objects are, and she

don't have any more alarms or suspicions about us, than if we was so

many lambs. Minnie and Joram have just stepped down to the house, in

fact (she's there, after hours, helping her aunt a bit), to ask her how

he is tonight; and if you was to please to wait till they come back,

they'd give you full partic'lers. Will you take something? A glass of

srub and water, now? I smoke on srub and water, myself,' said Mr. Omer,

taking up his glass, 'because it's considered softening to the passages,

by which this troublesome breath of mine gets into action. But, Lord

bless you,' said Mr. Omer, huskily, 'it ain't the passages that's out of

order! "Give me breath enough," said I to my daughter Minnie, "and I'll

find passages, my dear."'

He really had no breath to spare, and it was very alarming to see him

laugh. When he was again in a condition to be talked to, I thanked

him for the proffered refreshment, which I declined, as I had just had

dinner; and, observing that I would wait, since he was so good as to

invite me, until his daughter and his son-in-law came back, I inquired

how little Emily was?

'Well, sir,' said Mr. Omer, removing his pipe, that he might rub his

chin: 'I tell you truly, I shall be glad when her marriage has taken

place.'

'Why so?' I inquired.

'Well, she's unsettled at present,' said Mr. Omer. 'It ain't that she's

not as pretty as ever, for she's prettier--I do assure you, she is

prettier. It ain't that she don't work as well as ever, for she does.

She WAS worth any six, and she IS worth any six. But somehow she wants

heart. If you understand,' said Mr. Omer, after rubbing his chin again,

and smoking a little, 'what I mean in a general way by the expression,

"A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether, my hearties,

hurrah!" I should say to you, that that was--in a general way--what I

miss in Em'ly.'

Mr. Omer's face and manner went for so much, that I could

conscientiously nod my head, as divining his meaning. My quickness of

apprehension seemed to please him, and he went on: 'Now I consider this

is principally on account of her being in an unsettled state, you

see. We have talked it over a good deal, her uncle and myself, and her

sweetheart and myself, after business; and I consider it is principally

on account of her being unsettled. You must always recollect of Em'ly,'

said Mr. Omer, shaking his head gently, 'that she's a most extraordinary

affectionate little thing. The proverb says, "You can't make a silk

purse out of a sow's ear." Well, I don't know about that. I rather think

you may, if you begin early in life. She has made a home out of that old

boat, sir, that stone and marble couldn't beat.'

'I am sure she has!' said I.

'To see the clinging of that pretty little thing to her uncle,' said

Mr. Omer; 'to see the way she holds on to him, tighter and tighter, and

closer and closer, every day, is to see a sight. Now, you know, there's

a struggle going on when that's the case. Why should it be made a longer

one than is needful?'

I listened attentively to the good old fellow, and acquiesced, with all

my heart, in what he said.

'Therefore, I mentioned to them,' said Mr. Omer, in a comfortable,

easy-going tone, 'this. I said, "Now, don't consider Em'ly nailed down

in point of time, at all. Make it your own time. Her services have been

more valuable than was supposed; her learning has been quicker than was

supposed; Omer and Joram can run their pen through what remains; and

she's free when you wish. If she likes to make any little arrangement,

afterwards, in the way of doing any little thing for us at home,

very well. If she don't, very well still. We're no losers, anyhow."

For--don't you see,' said Mr. Omer, touching me with his pipe, 'it ain't

likely that a man so short of breath as myself, and a grandfather too,

would go and strain points with a little bit of a blue-eyed blossom,

like her?'

'Not at all, I am certain,' said I.

'Not at all! You're right!' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir, her cousin--you

know it's a cousin she's going to be married to?'

'Oh yes,' I replied. 'I know him well.'

'Of course you do,' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir! Her cousin being, as it

appears, in good work, and well to do, thanked me in a very manly sort

of manner for this (conducting himself altogether, I must say, in a way

that gives me a high opinion of him), and went and took as comfortable

a little house as you or I could wish to clap eyes on. That little

house is now furnished right through, as neat and complete as a doll's

parlour; and but for Barkis's illness having taken this bad turn, poor

fellow, they would have been man and wife--I dare say, by this time. As

it is, there's a postponement.'

'And Emily, Mr. Omer?' I inquired. 'Has she become more settled?'

'Why that, you know,' he returned, rubbing his double chin again, 'can't

naturally be expected. The prospect of the change and separation, and

all that, is, as one may say, close to her and far away from her, both

at once. Barkis's death needn't put it off much, but his lingering

might. Anyway, it's an uncertain state of matters, you see.'

'I see,' said I.

'Consequently,' pursued Mr. Omer, 'Em'ly's still a little down, and a

little fluttered; perhaps, upon the whole, she's more so than she was.

Every day she seems to get fonder and fonder of her uncle, and more loth

to part from all of us. A kind word from me brings the tears into her

eyes; and if you was to see her with my daughter Minnie's little girl,

you'd never forget it. Bless my heart alive!' said Mr. Omer, pondering,

'how she loves that child!'

Having so favourable an opportunity, it occurred to me to ask Mr. Omer,

before our conversation should be interrupted by the return of his

daughter and her husband, whether he knew anything of Martha.

'Ah!' he rejoined, shaking his head, and looking very much dejected.

'No good. A sad story, sir, however you come to know it. I never thought

there was harm in the girl. I wouldn't wish to mention it before my

daughter Minnie--for she'd take me up directly--but I never did. None of

us ever did.'

Mr. Omer, hearing his daughter's footstep before I heard it, touched me

with his pipe, and shut up one eye, as a caution. She and her husband

came in immediately afterwards.

Their report was, that Mr. Barkis was 'as bad as bad could be'; that he

was quite unconscious; and that Mr. Chillip had mournfully said in the

kitchen, on going away just now, that the College of Physicians, the

College of Surgeons, and Apothecaries' Hall, if they were all called

in together, couldn't help him. He was past both Colleges, Mr. Chillip

said, and the Hall could only poison him.

Hearing this, and learning that Mr. Peggotty was there, I determined to

go to the house at once. I bade good night to Mr. Omer, and to Mr. and

Mrs. Joram; and directed my steps thither, with a solemn feeling, which

made Mr. Barkis quite a new and different creature.

My low tap at the door was answered by Mr. Peggotty. He was not so much

surprised to see me as I had expected. I remarked this in Peggotty,

too, when she came down; and I have seen it since; and I think, in the

expectation of that dread surprise, all other changes and surprises

dwindle into nothing.

I shook hands with Mr. Peggotty, and passed into the kitchen, while he

softly closed the door. Little Emily was sitting by the fire, with her

hands before her face. Ham was standing near her.

We spoke in whispers; listening, between whiles, for any sound in the

room above. I had not thought of it on the occasion of my last visit,

but how strange it was to me, now, to miss Mr. Barkis out of the

kitchen!

'This is very kind of you, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'It's oncommon kind,' said Ham.

'Em'ly, my dear,' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'See here! Here's Mas'r Davy come!

What, cheer up, pretty! Not a wured to Mas'r Davy?'

There was a trembling upon her, that I can see now. The coldness of her

hand when I touched it, I can feel yet. Its only sign of animation was

to shrink from mine; and then she glided from the chair, and creeping

to the other side of her uncle, bowed herself, silently and trembling

still, upon his breast.

'It's such a loving art,' said Mr. Peggotty, smoothing her rich hair

with his great hard hand, 'that it can't abear the sorrer of this.

It's nat'ral in young folk, Mas'r Davy, when they're new to these here

trials, and timid, like my little bird,--it's nat'ral.'

She clung the closer to him, but neither lifted up her face, nor spoke a

word.

'It's getting late, my dear,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and here's Ham come

fur to take you home. Theer! Go along with t'other loving art! What'

Em'ly? Eh, my pretty?'

The sound of her voice had not reached me, but he bent his head as if he

listened to her, and then said:

'Let you stay with your uncle? Why, you doen't mean to ask me that! Stay

with your uncle, Moppet? When your husband that'll be so soon, is here

fur to take you home? Now a person wouldn't think it, fur to see this

little thing alongside a rough-weather chap like me,' said Mr. Peggotty,

looking round at both of us, with infinite pride; 'but the sea ain't

more salt in it than she has fondness in her for her uncle--a foolish

little Em'ly!'

'Em'ly's in the right in that, Mas'r Davy!' said Ham. 'Lookee here! As

Em'ly wishes of it, and as she's hurried and frightened, like, besides,

I'll leave her till morning. Let me stay too!'

'No, no,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'You doen't ought--a married man like

you--or what's as good--to take and hull away a day's work. And you

doen't ought to watch and work both. That won't do. You go home and turn

in. You ain't afeerd of Em'ly not being took good care on, I know.'

Ham yielded to this persuasion, and took his hat to go. Even when he

kissed her--and I never saw him approach her, but I felt that nature

had given him the soul of a gentleman--she seemed to cling closer to

her uncle, even to the avoidance of her chosen husband. I shut the

door after him, that it might cause no disturbance of the quiet that

prevailed; and when I turned back, I found Mr. Peggotty still talking to

her.

'Now, I'm a going upstairs to tell your aunt as Mas'r Davy's here, and

that'll cheer her up a bit,' he said. 'Sit ye down by the fire, the

while, my dear, and warm those mortal cold hands. You doen't need to be

so fearsome, and take on so much. What? You'll go along with me?--Well!

come along with me--come! If her uncle was turned out of house and home,

and forced to lay down in a dyke, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty, with

no less pride than before, 'it's my belief she'd go along with him, now!

But there'll be someone else, soon,--someone else, soon, Em'ly!'

Afterwards, when I went upstairs, as I passed the door of my little

chamber, which was dark, I had an indistinct impression of her being

within it, cast down upon the floor. But, whether it was really she, or

whether it was a confusion of the shadows in the room, I don't know now.

I had leisure to think, before the kitchen fire, of pretty little

Emily's dread of death--which, added to what Mr. Omer had told me, I

took to be the cause of her being so unlike herself--and I had leisure,

before Peggotty came down, even to think more leniently of the weakness

of it: as I sat counting the ticking of the clock, and deepening my

sense of the solemn hush around me. Peggotty took me in her arms, and

blessed and thanked me over and over again for being such a comfort to

her (that was what she said) in her distress. She then entreated me to

come upstairs, sobbing that Mr. Barkis had always liked me and admired

me; that he had often talked of me, before he fell into a stupor; and

that she believed, in case of his coming to himself again, he would

brighten up at sight of me, if he could brighten up at any earthly

thing.

The probability of his ever doing so, appeared to me, when I saw him, to

be very small. He was lying with his head and shoulders out of bed, in

an uncomfortable attitude, half resting on the box which had cost him so

much pain and trouble. I learned, that, when he was past creeping out of

bed to open it, and past assuring himself of its safety by means of the

divining rod I had seen him use, he had required to have it placed on

the chair at the bed-side, where he had ever since embraced it, night

and day. His arm lay on it now. Time and the world were slipping from

beneath him, but the box was there; and the last words he had uttered

were (in an explanatory tone) 'Old clothes!'

'Barkis, my dear!' said Peggotty, almost cheerfully: bending over him,

while her brother and I stood at the bed's foot. 'Here's my dear boy--my

dear boy, Master Davy, who brought us together, Barkis! That you sent

messages by, you know! Won't you speak to Master Davy?'

He was as mute and senseless as the box, from which his form derived the

only expression it had.

'He's a going out with the tide,' said Mr. Peggotty to me, behind his

hand.

My eyes were dim and so were Mr. Peggotty's; but I repeated in a

whisper, 'With the tide?'

'People can't die, along the coast,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'except when

the tide's pretty nigh out. They can't be born, unless it's pretty nigh

in--not properly born, till flood. He's a going out with the tide. It's

ebb at half-arter three, slack water half an hour. If he lives till it

turns, he'll hold his own till past the flood, and go out with the next

tide.'

We remained there, watching him, a long time--hours. What mysterious

influence my presence had upon him in that state of his senses, I shall

not pretend to say; but when he at last began to wander feebly, it is

certain he was muttering about driving me to school.

'He's coming to himself,' said Peggotty.

Mr. Peggotty touched me, and whispered with much awe and reverence.

'They are both a-going out fast.'

'Barkis, my dear!' said Peggotty.

'C. P. Barkis,' he cried faintly. 'No better woman anywhere!'

'Look! Here's Master Davy!' said Peggotty. For he now opened his eyes.

I was on the point of asking him if he knew me, when he tried to stretch

out his arm, and said to me, distinctly, with a pleasant smile:

'Barkis is willin'!'

And, it being low water, he went out with the tide.

CHAPTER 31. A GREATER LOSS

It was not difficult for me, on Peggotty's solicitation, to resolve to

stay where I was, until after the remains of the poor carrier should

have made their last journey to Blunderstone. She had long ago bought,

out of her own savings, a little piece of ground in our old churchyard

near the grave of 'her sweet girl', as she always called my mother; and

there they were to rest.

In keeping Peggotty company, and doing all I could for her (little

enough at the utmost), I was as grateful, I rejoice to think, as even

now I could wish myself to have been. But I am afraid I had a supreme

satisfaction, of a personal and professional nature, in taking charge of

Mr. Barkis's will, and expounding its contents.

I may claim the merit of having originated the suggestion that the will

should be looked for in the box. After some search, it was found in the

box, at the bottom of a horse's nose-bag; wherein (besides hay) there

was discovered an old gold watch, with chain and seals, which Mr. Barkis

had worn on his wedding-day, and which had never been seen before or

since; a silver tobacco-stopper, in the form of a leg; an imitation

lemon, full of minute cups and saucers, which I have some idea Mr.

Barkis must have purchased to present to me when I was a child, and

afterwards found himself unable to part with; eighty-seven guineas and

a half, in guineas and half-guineas; two hundred and ten pounds, in

perfectly clean Bank notes; certain receipts for Bank of England

stock; an old horseshoe, a bad shilling, a piece of camphor, and an

oyster-shell. From the circumstance of the latter article having

been much polished, and displaying prismatic colours on the inside,

I conclude that Mr. Barkis had some general ideas about pearls, which

never resolved themselves into anything definite.

For years and years, Mr. Barkis had carried this box, on all his

journeys, every day. That it might the better escape notice, he had

invented a fiction that it belonged to 'Mr. Blackboy', and was 'to be

left with Barkis till called for'; a fable he had elaborately written on

the lid, in characters now scarcely legible.

He had hoarded, all these years, I found, to good purpose. His property

in money amounted to nearly three thousand pounds. Of this he bequeathed

the interest of one thousand to Mr. Peggotty for his life; on his

decease, the principal to be equally divided between Peggotty, little

Emily, and me, or the survivor or survivors of us, share and share

alike. All the rest he died possessed of, he bequeathed to Peggotty;

whom he left residuary legatee, and sole executrix of that his last will

and testament.

I felt myself quite a proctor when I read this document aloud with all

possible ceremony, and set forth its provisions, any number of times,

to those whom they concerned. I began to think there was more in the

Commons than I had supposed. I examined the will with the deepest

attention, pronounced it perfectly formal in all respects, made a

pencil-mark or so in the margin, and thought it rather extraordinary

that I knew so much.

In this abstruse pursuit; in making an account for Peggotty, of all the

property into which she had come; in arranging all the affairs in an

orderly manner; and in being her referee and adviser on every point, to

our joint delight; I passed the week before the funeral. I did not see

little Emily in that interval, but they told me she was to be quietly

married in a fortnight.

I did not attend the funeral in character, if I may venture to say so.

I mean I was not dressed up in a black coat and a streamer, to frighten

the birds; but I walked over to Blunderstone early in the morning, and

was in the churchyard when it came, attended only by Peggotty and her

brother. The mad gentleman looked on, out of my little window; Mr.

Chillip's baby wagged its heavy head, and rolled its goggle eyes, at

the clergyman, over its nurse's shoulder; Mr. Omer breathed short in

the background; no one else was there; and it was very quiet. We walked

about the churchyard for an hour, after all was over; and pulled some

young leaves from the tree above my mother's grave.

A dread falls on me here. A cloud is lowering on the distant town,

towards which I retraced my solitary steps. I fear to approach it. I

cannot bear to think of what did come, upon that memorable night; of

what must come again, if I go on.

It is no worse, because I write of it. It would be no better, if I

stopped my most unwilling hand. It is done. Nothing can undo it; nothing

can make it otherwise than as it was.

My old nurse was to go to London with me next day, on the business of

the will. Little Emily was passing that day at Mr. Omer's. We were all

to meet in the old boathouse that night. Ham would bring Emily at the

usual hour. I would walk back at my leisure. The brother and sister

would return as they had come, and be expecting us, when the day closed

in, at the fireside.

I parted from them at the wicket-gate, where visionary Strap had rested

with Roderick Random's knapsack in the days of yore; and, instead of

going straight back, walked a little distance on the road to Lowestoft.

Then I turned, and walked back towards Yarmouth. I stayed to dine at

a decent alehouse, some mile or two from the Ferry I have mentioned

before; and thus the day wore away, and it was evening when I reached

it. Rain was falling heavily by that time, and it was a wild night; but

there was a moon behind the clouds, and it was not dark.

I was soon within sight of Mr. Peggotty's house, and of the light within

it shining through the window. A little floundering across the sand,

which was heavy, brought me to the door, and I went in.

It looked very comfortable indeed. Mr. Peggotty had smoked his evening

pipe and there were preparations for some supper by and by. The fire was

bright, the ashes were thrown up, the locker was ready for little Emily

in her old place. In her own old place sat Peggotty, once more, looking

(but for her dress) as if she had never left it. She had fallen back,

already, on the society of the work-box with St. Paul's upon the lid,

the yard-measure in the cottage, and the bit of wax-candle; and there

they all were, just as if they had never been disturbed. Mrs. Gummidge

appeared to be fretting a little, in her old corner; and consequently

looked quite natural, too.

'You're first of the lot, Mas'r Davy!' said Mr. Peggotty with a happy

face. 'Doen't keep in that coat, sir, if it's wet.'

'Thank you, Mr. Peggotty,' said I, giving him my outer coat to hang up.

'It's quite dry.'

'So 'tis!' said Mr. Peggotty, feeling my shoulders. 'As a chip! Sit ye

down, sir. It ain't o' no use saying welcome to you, but you're welcome,

kind and hearty.'

'Thank you, Mr. Peggotty, I am sure of that. Well, Peggotty!' said I,

giving her a kiss. 'And how are you, old woman?'

'Ha, ha!' laughed Mr. Peggotty, sitting down beside us, and rubbing his

hands in his sense of relief from recent trouble, and in the genuine

heartiness of his nature; 'there's not a woman in the wureld, sir--as I

tell her--that need to feel more easy in her mind than her! She done her

dooty by the departed, and the departed know'd it; and the departed

done what was right by her, as she done what was right by the

departed;--and--and--and it's all right!'

Mrs. Gummidge groaned.

'Cheer up, my pritty mawther!' said Mr. Peggotty. (But he shook his head

aside at us, evidently sensible of the tendency of the late occurrences

to recall the memory of the old one.) 'Doen't be down! Cheer up, for

your own self, on'y a little bit, and see if a good deal more doen't

come nat'ral!'

'Not to me, Dan'l,' returned Mrs. Gummidge. 'Nothink's nat'ral to me but

to be lone and lorn.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Peggotty, soothing her sorrows.

'Yes, yes, Dan'l!' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'I ain't a person to live with

them as has had money left. Thinks go too contrary with me. I had better

be a riddance.'

'Why, how should I ever spend it without you?' said Mr. Peggotty, with

an air of serious remonstrance. 'What are you a talking on? Doen't I

want you more now, than ever I did?'

'I know'd I was never wanted before!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, with a

pitiable whimper, 'and now I'm told so! How could I expect to be wanted,

being so lone and lorn, and so contrary!'

Mr. Peggotty seemed very much shocked at himself for having made a

speech capable of this unfeeling construction, but was prevented from

replying, by Peggotty's pulling his sleeve, and shaking her head. After

looking at Mrs. Gummidge for some moments, in sore distress of mind, he

glanced at the Dutch clock, rose, snuffed the candle, and put it in the

window.

'Theer!'said Mr. Peggotty, cheerily.'Theer we are, Missis Gummidge!'

Mrs. Gummidge slightly groaned. 'Lighted up, accordin' to custom! You're

a wonderin' what that's fur, sir! Well, it's fur our little Em'ly. You

see, the path ain't over light or cheerful arter dark; and when I'm

here at the hour as she's a comin' home, I puts the light in the winder.

That, you see,' said Mr. Peggotty, bending over me with great glee,

'meets two objects. She says, says Em'ly, "Theer's home!" she says. And

likewise, says Em'ly, "My uncle's theer!" Fur if I ain't theer, I never

have no light showed.'

'You're a baby!' said Peggotty; very fond of him for it, if she thought

so.

'Well,' returned Mr. Peggotty, standing with his legs pretty wide apart,

and rubbing his hands up and down them in his comfortable satisfaction,

as he looked alternately at us and at the fire. 'I doen't know but I am.

Not, you see, to look at.'

'Not azackly,' observed Peggotty.

'No,' laughed Mr. Peggotty, 'not to look at, but to--to consider on, you

know. I doen't care, bless you! Now I tell you. When I go a looking and

looking about that theer pritty house of our Em'ly's, I'm--I'm Gormed,'

said Mr. Peggotty, with sudden emphasis--'theer! I can't say more--if

I doen't feel as if the littlest things was her, a'most. I takes 'em up

and I put 'em down, and I touches of 'em as delicate as if they was our

Em'ly. So 'tis with her little bonnets and that. I couldn't see one on

'em rough used a purpose--not fur the whole wureld. There's a babby fur

you, in the form of a great Sea Porkypine!' said Mr. Peggotty, relieving

his earnestness with a roar of laughter.

Peggotty and I both laughed, but not so loud.

'It's my opinion, you see,' said Mr. Peggotty, with a delighted face,

after some further rubbing of his legs, 'as this is along of my havin'

played with her so much, and made believe as we was Turks, and French,

and sharks, and every wariety of forinners--bless you, yes; and lions

and whales, and I doen't know what all!--when she warn't no higher than

my knee. I've got into the way on it, you know. Why, this here candle,

now!' said Mr. Peggotty, gleefully holding out his hand towards it,

'I know wery well that arter she's married and gone, I shall put that

candle theer, just the same as now. I know wery well that when I'm

here o' nights (and where else should I live, bless your arts, whatever

fortun' I come into!) and she ain't here or I ain't theer, I shall

put the candle in the winder, and sit afore the fire, pretending I'm

expecting of her, like I'm a doing now. THERE'S a babby for you,' said

Mr. Peggotty, with another roar, 'in the form of a Sea Porkypine! Why,

at the present minute, when I see the candle sparkle up, I says to

myself, "She's a looking at it! Em'ly's a coming!" THERE'S a babby

for you, in the form of a Sea Porkypine! Right for all that,' said Mr.

Peggotty, stopping in his roar, and smiting his hands together; 'fur

here she is!'

It was only Ham. The night should have turned more wet since I came in,

for he had a large sou'wester hat on, slouched over his face.

'Wheer's Em'ly?' said Mr. Peggotty.

Ham made a motion with his head, as if she were outside. Mr. Peggotty

took the light from the window, trimmed it, put it on the table, and was

busily stirring the fire, when Ham, who had not moved, said:

'Mas'r Davy, will you come out a minute, and see what Em'ly and me has

got to show you?'

We went out. As I passed him at the door, I saw, to my astonishment and

fright, that he was deadly pale. He pushed me hastily into the open air,

and closed the door upon us. Only upon us two.

'Ham! what's the matter?'

'Mas'r Davy!--' Oh, for his broken heart, how dreadfully he wept!

I was paralysed by the sight of such grief. I don't know what I thought,

or what I dreaded. I could only look at him.

'Ham! Poor good fellow! For Heaven's sake, tell me what's the matter!'

'My love, Mas'r Davy--the pride and hope of my art--her that I'd have

died for, and would die for now--she's gone!'

'Gone!'

'Em'ly's run away! Oh, Mas'r Davy, think HOW she's run away, when I

pray my good and gracious God to kill her (her that is so dear above all

things) sooner than let her come to ruin and disgrace!'

The face he turned up to the troubled sky, the quivering of his clasped

hands, the agony of his figure, remain associated with the lonely waste,

in my remembrance, to this hour. It is always night there, and he is the

only object in the scene.

'You're a scholar,' he said, hurriedly, 'and know what's right and

best. What am I to say, indoors? How am I ever to break it to him, Mas'r

Davy?'

I saw the door move, and instinctively tried to hold the latch on the

outside, to gain a moment's time. It was too late. Mr. Peggotty thrust

forth his face; and never could I forget the change that came upon it

when he saw us, if I were to live five hundred years.

I remember a great wail and cry, and the women hanging about him, and we

all standing in the room; I with a paper in my hand, which Ham had given

me; Mr. Peggotty, with his vest torn open, his hair wild, his face and

lips quite white, and blood trickling down his bosom (it had sprung from

his mouth, I think), looking fixedly at me.

'Read it, sir,' he said, in a low shivering voice. 'Slow, please. I

doen't know as I can understand.'

In the midst of the silence of death, I read thus, from a blotted

letter:

'"When you, who love me so much better than I ever have deserved, even

when my mind was innocent, see this, I shall be far away."'

'I shall be fur away,' he repeated slowly. 'Stop! Em'ly fur away. Well!'

'"When I leave my dear home--my dear home--oh, my dear home!--in the

morning,"'

the letter bore date on the previous night:

'"--it will be never to come back, unless he brings me back a lady. This

will be found at night, many hours after, instead of me. Oh, if you knew

how my heart is torn. If even you, that I have wronged so much, that

never can forgive me, could only know what I suffer! I am too wicked to

write about myself! Oh, take comfort in thinking that I am so bad. Oh,

for mercy's sake, tell uncle that I never loved him half so dear as

now. Oh, don't remember how affectionate and kind you have all been to

me--don't remember we were ever to be married--but try to think as if I

died when I was little, and was buried somewhere. Pray Heaven that I

am going away from, have compassion on my uncle! Tell him that I never

loved him half so dear. Be his comfort. Love some good girl that will

be what I was once to uncle, and be true to you, and worthy of you, and

know no shame but me. God bless all! I'll pray for all, often, on my

knees. If he don't bring me back a lady, and I don't pray for my own

self, I'll pray for all. My parting love to uncle. My last tears, and my

last thanks, for uncle!"'

That was all.

He stood, long after I had ceased to read, still looking at me. At

length I ventured to take his hand, and to entreat him, as well as

I could, to endeavour to get some command of himself. He replied, 'I

thankee, sir, I thankee!' without moving.

Ham spoke to him. Mr. Peggotty was so far sensible of HIS affliction,

that he wrung his hand; but, otherwise, he remained in the same state,

and no one dared to disturb him.

Slowly, at last, he moved his eyes from my face, as if he were waking

from a vision, and cast them round the room. Then he said, in a low

voice:

'Who's the man? I want to know his name.'

Ham glanced at me, and suddenly I felt a shock that struck me back.

'There's a man suspected,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Who is it?'

'Mas'r Davy!' implored Ham. 'Go out a bit, and let me tell him what I

must. You doen't ought to hear it, sir.'

I felt the shock again. I sank down in a chair, and tried to utter some

reply; but my tongue was fettered, and my sight was weak.

'I want to know his name!' I heard said once more.

'For some time past,' Ham faltered, 'there's been a servant about here,

at odd times. There's been a gen'lm'n too. Both of 'em belonged to one

another.'

Mr. Peggotty stood fixed as before, but now looking at him.

'The servant,' pursued Ham, 'was seen along with--our poor girl--last

night. He's been in hiding about here, this week or over. He was thought

to have gone, but he was hiding. Doen't stay, Mas'r Davy, doen't!'

I felt Peggotty's arm round my neck, but I could not have moved if the

house had been about to fall upon me.

'A strange chay and hosses was outside town, this morning, on the

Norwich road, a'most afore the day broke,' Ham went on. 'The servant

went to it, and come from it, and went to it again. When he went to it

again, Em'ly was nigh him. The t'other was inside. He's the man.'

'For the Lord's love,' said Mr. Peggotty, falling back, and putting out

his hand, as if to keep off what he dreaded. 'Doen't tell me his name's

Steerforth!'

'Mas'r Davy,' exclaimed Ham, in a broken voice, 'it ain't no fault

of yourn--and I am far from laying of it to you--but his name is

Steerforth, and he's a damned villain!'

Mr. Peggotty uttered no cry, and shed no tear, and moved no more, until

he seemed to wake again, all at once, and pulled down his rough coat

from its peg in a corner.

'Bear a hand with this! I'm struck of a heap, and can't do it,' he said,

impatiently. 'Bear a hand and help me. Well!' when somebody had done so.

'Now give me that theer hat!'

Ham asked him whither he was going.

'I'm a going to seek my niece. I'm a going to seek my Em'ly. I'm a

going, first, to stave in that theer boat, and sink it where I would

have drownded him, as I'm a living soul, if I had had one thought of

what was in him! As he sat afore me,' he said, wildly, holding out his

clenched right hand, 'as he sat afore me, face to face, strike me down

dead, but I'd have drownded him, and thought it right!--I'm a going to

seek my niece.'

'Where?' cried Ham, interposing himself before the door.

'Anywhere! I'm a going to seek my niece through the wureld. I'm a going

to find my poor niece in her shame, and bring her back. No one stop me!

I tell you I'm a going to seek my niece!'

'No, no!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, coming between them, in a fit of crying.

'No, no, Dan'l, not as you are now. Seek her in a little while, my lone

lorn Dan'l, and that'll be but right! but not as you are now. Sit ye

down, and give me your forgiveness for having ever been a worrit to you,

Dan'l--what have my contraries ever been to this!--and let us speak a

word about them times when she was first an orphan, and when Ham was

too, and when I was a poor widder woman, and you took me in. It'll

soften your poor heart, Dan'l,' laying her head upon his shoulder, 'and

you'll bear your sorrow better; for you know the promise, Dan'l, "As

you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto

me",--and that can never fail under this roof, that's been our shelter

for so many, many year!'

He was quite passive now; and when I heard him crying, the impulse that

had been upon me to go down upon my knees, and ask their pardon for the

desolation I had caused, and curse Steer--forth, yielded to a better

feeling, My overcharged heart found the same relief, and I cried too.

CHAPTER 32. THE BEGINNING OF A LONG JOURNEY

What is natural in me, is natural in many other men, I infer, and so

I am not afraid to write that I never had loved Steerforth better than

when the ties that bound me to him were broken. In the keen distress

of the discovery of his unworthiness, I thought more of all that was

brilliant in him, I softened more towards all that was good in him, I

did more justice to the qualities that might have made him a man of a

noble nature and a great name, than ever I had done in the height of

my devotion to him. Deeply as I felt my own unconscious part in his

pollution of an honest home, I believed that if I had been brought face

to face with him, I could not have uttered one reproach. I should have

loved him so well still--though he fascinated me no longer--I should

have held in so much tenderness the memory of my affection for him, that

I think I should have been as weak as a spirit-wounded child, in all

but the entertainment of a thought that we could ever be re-united.

That thought I never had. I felt, as he had felt, that all was at an end

between us. What his remembrances of me were, I have never known--they

were light enough, perhaps, and easily dismissed--but mine of him were

as the remembrances of a cherished friend, who was dead.

Yes, Steerforth, long removed from the scenes of this poor history! My

sorrow may bear involuntary witness against you at the judgement Throne;

but my angry thoughts or my reproaches never will, I know!

The news of what had happened soon spread through the town; insomuch

that as I passed along the streets next morning, I overheard the people

speaking of it at their doors. Many were hard upon her, some few were

hard upon him, but towards her second father and her lover there was

but one sentiment. Among all kinds of people a respect for them in

their distress prevailed, which was full of gentleness and delicacy. The

seafaring men kept apart, when those two were seen early, walking with

slow steps on the beach; and stood in knots, talking compassionately

among themselves.

It was on the beach, close down by the sea, that I found them. It would

have been easy to perceive that they had not slept all last night, even

if Peggotty had failed to tell me of their still sitting just as I

left them, when it was broad day. They looked worn; and I thought Mr.

Peggotty's head was bowed in one night more than in all the years I had

known him. But they were both as grave and steady as the sea itself,

then lying beneath a dark sky, waveless--yet with a heavy roll upon it,

as if it breathed in its rest--and touched, on the horizon, with a strip

of silvery light from the unseen sun.

'We have had a mort of talk, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty to me, when we had

all three walked a little while in silence, 'of what we ought and doen't

ought to do. But we see our course now.'

I happened to glance at Ham, then looking out to sea upon the distant

light, and a frightful thought came into my mind--not that his face

was angry, for it was not; I recall nothing but an expression of stern

determination in it--that if ever he encountered Steerforth, he would

kill him.

'My dooty here, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'is done. I'm a going to seek

my--' he stopped, and went on in a firmer voice: 'I'm a going to seek

her. That's my dooty evermore.'

He shook his head when I asked him where he would seek her, and inquired

if I were going to London tomorrow? I told him I had not gone today,

fearing to lose the chance of being of any service to him; but that I

was ready to go when he would.

'I'll go along with you, sir,' he rejoined, 'if you're agreeable,

tomorrow.'

We walked again, for a while, in silence.

'Ham,'he presently resumed,'he'll hold to his present work, and go and

live along with my sister. The old boat yonder--'

'Will you desert the old boat, Mr. Peggotty?' I gently interposed.

'My station, Mas'r Davy,' he returned, 'ain't there no longer; and if

ever a boat foundered, since there was darkness on the face of the deep,

that one's gone down. But no, sir, no; I doen't mean as it should be

deserted. Fur from that.'

We walked again for a while, as before, until he explained:

'My wishes is, sir, as it shall look, day and night, winter and summer,

as it has always looked, since she fust know'd it. If ever she should

come a wandering back, I wouldn't have the old place seem to cast her

off, you understand, but seem to tempt her to draw nigher to 't, and to

peep in, maybe, like a ghost, out of the wind and rain, through the old

winder, at the old seat by the fire. Then, maybe, Mas'r Davy, seein'

none but Missis Gummidge there, she might take heart to creep in,

trembling; and might come to be laid down in her old bed, and rest her

weary head where it was once so gay.'

I could not speak to him in reply, though I tried.

'Every night,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'as reg'lar as the night comes, the

candle must be stood in its old pane of glass, that if ever she should

see it, it may seem to say "Come back, my child, come back!" If ever

there's a knock, Ham (partic'ler a soft knock), arter dark, at your

aunt's door, doen't you go nigh it. Let it be her--not you--that sees my

fallen child!'

He walked a little in front of us, and kept before us for some minutes.

During this interval, I glanced at Ham again, and observing the same

expression on his face, and his eyes still directed to the distant

light, I touched his arm.

Twice I called him by his name, in the tone in which I might have tried

to rouse a sleeper, before he heeded me. When I at last inquired on what

his thoughts were so bent, he replied:

'On what's afore me, Mas'r Davy; and over yon.' 'On the life before you,

do you mean?' He had pointed confusedly out to sea.

'Ay, Mas'r Davy. I doen't rightly know how 'tis, but from over yon there

seemed to me to come--the end of it like,' looking at me as if he were

waking, but with the same determined face.

'What end?' I asked, possessed by my former fear.

'I doen't know,'he said, thoughtfully; 'I was calling to mind that the

beginning of it all did take place here--and then the end come. But it's

gone! Mas'r Davy,' he added; answering, as I think, my look; 'you han't

no call to be afeerd of me: but I'm kiender muddled; I don't fare to

feel no matters,'--which was as much as to say that he was not himself,

and quite confounded.

Mr. Peggotty stopping for us to join him: we did so, and said no more.

The remembrance of this, in connexion with my former thought, however,

haunted me at intervals, even until the inexorable end came at its

appointed time.

We insensibly approached the old boat, and entered. Mrs. Gummidge, no

longer moping in her especial corner, was busy preparing breakfast.

She took Mr. Peggotty's hat, and placed his seat for him, and spoke so

comfortably and softly, that I hardly knew her.

'Dan'l, my good man,' said she, 'you must eat and drink, and keep up

your strength, for without it you'll do nowt. Try, that's a dear soul!

An if I disturb you with my clicketten,' she meant her chattering, 'tell

me so, Dan'l, and I won't.'

When she had served us all, she withdrew to the window, where she

sedulously employed herself in repairing some shirts and other clothes

belonging to Mr. Peggotty, and neatly folding and packing them in an old

oilskin bag, such as sailors carry. Meanwhile, she continued talking, in

the same quiet manner:

'All times and seasons, you know, Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge, 'I shall

be allus here, and everythink will look accordin' to your wishes. I'm a

poor scholar, but I shall write to you, odd times, when you're away, and

send my letters to Mas'r Davy. Maybe you'll write to me too, Dan'l, odd

times, and tell me how you fare to feel upon your lone lorn journies.'

'You'll be a solitary woman heer, I'm afeerd!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'No, no, Dan'l,' she returned, 'I shan't be that. Doen't you mind me. I

shall have enough to do to keep a Beein for you' (Mrs. Gummidge meant a

home), 'again you come back--to keep a Beein here for any that may hap

to come back, Dan'l. In the fine time, I shall set outside the door as I

used to do. If any should come nigh, they shall see the old widder woman

true to 'em, a long way off.'

What a change in Mrs. Gummidge in a little time! She was another woman.

She was so devoted, she had such a quick perception of what it would

be well to say, and what it would be well to leave unsaid; she was so

forgetful of herself, and so regardful of the sorrow about her, that I

held her in a sort of veneration. The work she did that day! There

were many things to be brought up from the beach and stored in the

outhouse--as oars, nets, sails, cordage, spars, lobster-pots, bags of

ballast, and the like; and though there was abundance of assistance

rendered, there being not a pair of working hands on all that shore but

would have laboured hard for Mr. Peggotty, and been well paid in being

asked to do it, yet she persisted, all day long, in toiling under

weights that she was quite unequal to, and fagging to and fro on all

sorts of unnecessary errands. As to deploring her misfortunes, she

appeared to have entirely lost the recollection of ever having had any.

She preserved an equable cheerfulness in the midst of her sympathy,

which was not the least astonishing part of the change that had come

over her. Querulousness was out of the question. I did not even observe

her voice to falter, or a tear to escape from her eyes, the whole day

through, until twilight; when she and I and Mr. Peggotty being alone

together, and he having fallen asleep in perfect exhaustion, she broke

into a half-suppressed fit of sobbing and crying, and taking me to the

door, said, 'Ever bless you, Mas'r Davy, be a friend to him, poor dear!'

Then, she immediately ran out of the house to wash her face, in order

that she might sit quietly beside him, and be found at work there, when

he should awake. In short I left her, when I went away at night, the

prop and staff of Mr. Peggotty's affliction; and I could not meditate

enough upon the lesson that I read in Mrs. Gummidge, and the new

experience she unfolded to me.

It was between nine and ten o'clock when, strolling in a melancholy

manner through the town, I stopped at Mr. Omer's door. Mr. Omer had

taken it so much to heart, his daughter told me, that he had been very

low and poorly all day, and had gone to bed without his pipe.

'A deceitful, bad-hearted girl,' said Mrs. Joram. 'There was no good in

her, ever!'

'Don't say so,' I returned. 'You don't think so.'

'Yes, I do!' cried Mrs. Joram, angrily.

'No, no,' said I.

Mrs. Joram tossed her head, endeavouring to be very stern and cross; but

she could not command her softer self, and began to cry. I was young,

to be sure; but I thought much the better of her for this sympathy, and

fancied it became her, as a virtuous wife and mother, very well indeed.

'What will she ever do!' sobbed Minnie. 'Where will she go! What will

become of her! Oh, how could she be so cruel, to herself and him!'

I remembered the time when Minnie was a young and pretty girl; and I was

glad she remembered it too, so feelingly.

'My little Minnie,' said Mrs. Joram, 'has only just now been got to

sleep. Even in her sleep she is sobbing for Em'ly. All day long, little

Minnie has cried for her, and asked me, over and over again, whether

Em'ly was wicked? What can I say to her, when Em'ly tied a ribbon off

her own neck round little Minnie's the last night she was here, and laid

her head down on the pillow beside her till she was fast asleep! The

ribbon's round my little Minnie's neck now. It ought not to be, perhaps,

but what can I do? Em'ly is very bad, but they were fond of one another.

And the child knows nothing!'

Mrs. Joram was so unhappy that her husband came out to take care of

her. Leaving them together, I went home to Peggotty's; more melancholy

myself, if possible, than I had been yet.

That good creature--I mean Peggotty--all untired by her late anxieties

and sleepless nights, was at her brother's, where she meant to stay till

morning. An old woman, who had been employed about the house for some

weeks past, while Peggotty had been unable to attend to it, was the

house's only other occupant besides myself. As I had no occasion for her

services, I sent her to bed, by no means against her will, and sat down

before the kitchen fire a little while, to think about all this.

I was blending it with the deathbed of the late Mr. Barkis, and was

driving out with the tide towards the distance at which Ham had looked

so singularly in the morning, when I was recalled from my wanderings by

a knock at the door. There was a knocker upon the door, but it was not

that which made the sound. The tap was from a hand, and low down upon

the door, as if it were given by a child.

It made me start as much as if it had been the knock of a footman to a

person of distinction. I opened the door; and at first looked down,

to my amazement, on nothing but a great umbrella that appeared to be

walking about of itself. But presently I discovered underneath it, Miss

Mowcher.

I might not have been prepared to give the little creature a very kind

reception, if, on her removing the umbrella, which her utmost efforts

were unable to shut up, she had shown me the 'volatile' expression of

face which had made so great an impression on me at our first and last

meeting. But her face, as she turned it up to mine, was so earnest;

and when I relieved her of the umbrella (which would have been an

inconvenient one for the Irish Giant), she wrung her little hands in

such an afflicted manner; that I rather inclined towards her.

'Miss Mowcher!' said I, after glancing up and down the empty street,

without distinctly knowing what I expected to see besides; 'how do you

come here? What is the matter?' She motioned to me with her short right

arm, to shut the umbrella for her; and passing me hurriedly, went into

the kitchen. When I had closed the door, and followed, with the umbrella

in my hand, I found her sitting on the corner of the fender--it was a

low iron one, with two flat bars at top to stand plates upon--in the

shadow of the boiler, swaying herself backwards and forwards, and

chafing her hands upon her knees like a person in pain.

Quite alarmed at being the only recipient of this untimely visit, and

the only spectator of this portentous behaviour, I exclaimed again,

'Pray tell me, Miss Mowcher, what is the matter! are you ill?'

'My dear young soul,' returned Miss Mowcher, squeezing her hands upon

her heart one over the other. 'I am ill here, I am very ill. To think

that it should come to this, when I might have known it and perhaps

prevented it, if I hadn't been a thoughtless fool!'

Again her large bonnet (very disproportionate to the figure) went

backwards and forwards, in her swaying of her little body to and fro;

while a most gigantic bonnet rocked, in unison with it, upon the wall.

'I am surprised,' I began, 'to see you so distressed and serious'-when

she interrupted me.

'Yes, it's always so!' she said. 'They are all surprised, these

inconsiderate young people, fairly and full grown, to see any natural

feeling in a little thing like me! They make a plaything of me, use me

for their amusement, throw me away when they are tired, and wonder that

I feel more than a toy horse or a wooden soldier! Yes, yes, that's the

way. The old way!'

'It may be, with others,' I returned, 'but I do assure you it is not

with me. Perhaps I ought not to be at all surprised to see you as you

are now: I know so little of you. I said, without consideration, what I

thought.'

'What can I do?' returned the little woman, standing up, and holding out

her arms to show herself. 'See! What I am, my father was; and my sister

is; and my brother is. I have worked for sister and brother these many

years--hard, Mr. Copperfield--all day. I must live. I do no harm. If

there are people so unreflecting or so cruel, as to make a jest of

me, what is left for me to do but to make a jest of myself, them, and

everything? If I do so, for the time, whose fault is that? Mine?'

No. Not Miss Mowcher's, I perceived.

'If I had shown myself a sensitive dwarf to your false friend,' pursued

the little woman, shaking her head at me, with reproachful earnestness,

'how much of his help or good will do you think I should ever have had?

If little Mowcher (who had no hand, young gentleman, in the making of

herself) addressed herself to him, or the like of him, because of her

misfortunes, when do you suppose her small voice would have been heard?

Little Mowcher would have as much need to live, if she was the bitterest

and dullest of pigmies; but she couldn't do it. No. She might whistle

for her bread and butter till she died of Air.'

Miss Mowcher sat down on the fender again, and took out her

handkerchief, and wiped her eyes.

'Be thankful for me, if you have a kind heart, as I think you have,' she

said, 'that while I know well what I am, I can be cheerful and endure it

all. I am thankful for myself, at any rate, that I can find my tiny way

through the world, without being beholden to anyone; and that in return

for all that is thrown at me, in folly or vanity, as I go along, I can

throw bubbles back. If I don't brood over all I want, it is the better

for me, and not the worse for anyone. If I am a plaything for you

giants, be gentle with me.'

Miss Mowcher replaced her handkerchief in her pocket, looking at me with

very intent expression all the while, and pursued:

'I saw you in the street just now. You may suppose I am not able to

walk as fast as you, with my short legs and short breath, and I couldn't

overtake you; but I guessed where you came, and came after you. I have

been here before, today, but the good woman wasn't at home.'

'Do you know her?' I demanded.

'I know of her, and about her,' she replied, 'from Omer and Joram. I

was there at seven o'clock this morning. Do you remember what Steerforth

said to me about this unfortunate girl, that time when I saw you both at

the inn?'

The great bonnet on Miss Mowcher's head, and the greater bonnet on

the wall, began to go backwards and forwards again when she asked this

question.

I remembered very well what she referred to, having had it in my

thoughts many times that day. I told her so.

'May the Father of all Evil confound him,' said the little woman,

holding up her forefinger between me and her sparkling eyes, 'and ten

times more confound that wicked servant; but I believed it was YOU who

had a boyish passion for her!'

'I?' I repeated.

'Child, child! In the name of blind ill-fortune,' cried Miss Mowcher,

wringing her hands impatiently, as she went to and fro again upon the

fender, 'why did you praise her so, and blush, and look disturbed?'

I could not conceal from myself that I had done this, though for a

reason very different from her supposition.

'What did I know?' said Miss Mowcher, taking out her handkerchief again,

and giving one little stamp on the ground whenever, at short intervals,

she applied it to her eyes with both hands at once. 'He was crossing you

and wheedling you, I saw; and you were soft wax in his hands, I saw. Had

I left the room a minute, when his man told me that "Young Innocence"

(so he called you, and you may call him "Old Guilt" all the days of your

life) had set his heart upon her, and she was giddy and liked him, but

his master was resolved that no harm should come of it--more for your

sake than for hers--and that that was their business here? How could I

BUT believe him? I saw Steerforth soothe and please you by his praise

of her! You were the first to mention her name. You owned to an old

admiration of her. You were hot and cold, and red and white, all at once

when I spoke to you of her. What could I think--what DID I think--but

that you were a young libertine in everything but experience, and had

fallen into hands that had experience enough, and could manage you

(having the fancy) for your own good? Oh! oh! oh! They were afraid of my

finding out the truth,' exclaimed Miss Mowcher, getting off the

fender, and trotting up and down the kitchen with her two short arms

distressfully lifted up, 'because I am a sharp little thing--I need be,

to get through the world at all!--and they deceived me altogether, and

I gave the poor unfortunate girl a letter, which I fully believe was

the beginning of her ever speaking to Littimer, who was left behind on

purpose!'

I stood amazed at the revelation of all this perfidy, looking at Miss

Mowcher as she walked up and down the kitchen until she was out of

breath: when she sat upon the fender again, and, drying her face with

her handkerchief, shook her head for a long time, without otherwise

moving, and without breaking silence.

'My country rounds,' she added at length, 'brought me to Norwich, Mr.

Copperfield, the night before last. What I happened to find there,

about their secret way of coming and going, without you--which was

strange--led to my suspecting something wrong. I got into the coach

from London last night, as it came through Norwich, and was here this

morning. Oh, oh, oh! too late!'

Poor little Mowcher turned so chilly after all her crying and fretting,

that she turned round on the fender, putting her poor little wet feet in

among the ashes to warm them, and sat looking at the fire, like a large

doll. I sat in a chair on the other side of the hearth, lost in unhappy

reflections, and looking at the fire too, and sometimes at her.

'I must go,' she said at last, rising as she spoke. 'It's late. You

don't mistrust me?'

Meeting her sharp glance, which was as sharp as ever when she asked me,

I could not on that short challenge answer no, quite frankly.

'Come!' said she, accepting the offer of my hand to help her over the

fender, and looking wistfully up into my face, 'you know you wouldn't

mistrust me, if I was a full-sized woman!'

I felt that there was much truth in this; and I felt rather ashamed of

myself.

'You are a young man,' she said, nodding. 'Take a word of advice,

even from three foot nothing. Try not to associate bodily defects with

mental, my good friend, except for a solid reason.'

She had got over the fender now, and I had got over my suspicion. I told

her that I believed she had given me a faithful account of herself,

and that we had both been hapless instruments in designing hands. She

thanked me, and said I was a good fellow.

'Now, mind!' she exclaimed, turning back on her way to the door, and

looking shrewdly at me, with her forefinger up again.--'I have some

reason to suspect, from what I have heard--my ears are always open; I

can't afford to spare what powers I have--that they are gone abroad. But

if ever they return, if ever any one of them returns, while I am alive,

I am more likely than another, going about as I do, to find it out soon.

Whatever I know, you shall know. If ever I can do anything to serve the

poor betrayed girl, I will do it faithfully, please Heaven! And Littimer

had better have a bloodhound at his back, than little Mowcher!'

I placed implicit faith in this last statement, when I marked the look

with which it was accompanied.

'Trust me no more, but trust me no less, than you would trust a

full-sized woman,' said the little creature, touching me appealingly

on the wrist. 'If ever you see me again, unlike what I am now, and like

what I was when you first saw me, observe what company I am in. Call to

mind that I am a very helpless and defenceless little thing. Think of

me at home with my brother like myself and sister like myself, when my

day's work is done. Perhaps you won't, then, be very hard upon me, or

surprised if I can be distressed and serious. Good night!'

I gave Miss Mowcher my hand, with a very different opinion of her from

that which I had hitherto entertained, and opened the door to let her

out. It was not a trifling business to get the great umbrella up, and

properly balanced in her grasp; but at last I successfully accomplished

this, and saw it go bobbing down the street through the rain, without

the least appearance of having anybody underneath it, except when a

heavier fall than usual from some over-charged water-spout sent it

toppling over, on one side, and discovered Miss Mowcher struggling

violently to get it right. After making one or two sallies to her

relief, which were rendered futile by the umbrella's hopping on again,

like an immense bird, before I could reach it, I came in, went to bed,

and slept till morning.

In the morning I was joined by Mr. Peggotty and by my old nurse, and we

went at an early hour to the coach office, where Mrs. Gummidge and Ham

were waiting to take leave of us.

'Mas'r Davy,' Ham whispered, drawing me aside, while Mr. Peggotty was

stowing his bag among the luggage, 'his life is quite broke up. He

doen't know wheer he's going; he doen't know--what's afore him; he's

bound upon a voyage that'll last, on and off, all the rest of his days,

take my wured for 't, unless he finds what he's a seeking of. I am sure

you'll be a friend to him, Mas'r Davy?'

'Trust me, I will indeed,' said I, shaking hands with Ham earnestly.

'Thankee. Thankee, very kind, sir. One thing furder. I'm in good employ,

you know, Mas'r Davy, and I han't no way now of spending what I gets.

Money's of no use to me no more, except to live. If you can lay it out

for him, I shall do my work with a better art. Though as to that, sir,'

and he spoke very steadily and mildly, 'you're not to think but I shall

work at all times, like a man, and act the best that lays in my power!'

I told him I was well convinced of it; and I hinted that I hoped the

time might even come, when he would cease to lead the lonely life he

naturally contemplated now.

'No, sir,' he said, shaking his head, 'all that's past and over with me,

sir. No one can never fill the place that's empty. But you'll bear in

mind about the money, as theer's at all times some laying by for him?'

Reminding him of the fact, that Mr. Peggotty derived a steady,

though certainly a very moderate income from the bequest of his late

brother-in-law, I promised to do so. We then took leave of each other. I

cannot leave him even now, without remembering with a pang, at once his

modest fortitude and his great sorrow.

As to Mrs. Gummidge, if I were to endeavour to describe how she ran down

the street by the side of the coach, seeing nothing but Mr. Peggotty on

the roof, through the tears she tried to repress, and dashing herself

against the people who were coming in the opposite direction, I should

enter on a task of some difficulty. Therefore I had better leave her

sitting on a baker's door-step, out of breath, with no shape at all

remaining in her bonnet, and one of her shoes off, lying on the pavement

at a considerable distance.

When we got to our journey's end, our first pursuit was to look about

for a little lodging for Peggotty, where her brother could have a

bed. We were so fortunate as to find one, of a very clean and cheap

description, over a chandler's shop, only two streets removed from

me. When we had engaged this domicile, I bought some cold meat at an

eating-house, and took my fellow-travellers home to tea; a proceeding,

I regret to state, which did not meet with Mrs. Crupp's approval, but

quite the contrary. I ought to observe, however, in explanation of that

lady's state of mind, that she was much offended by Peggotty's tucking

up her widow's gown before she had been ten minutes in the place, and

setting to work to dust my bedroom. This Mrs. Crupp regarded in the

light of a liberty, and a liberty, she said, was a thing she never

allowed.

Mr. Peggotty had made a communication to me on the way to London for

which I was not unprepared. It was, that he purposed first seeing Mrs.

Steerforth. As I felt bound to assist him in this, and also to mediate

between them; with the view of sparing the mother's feelings as much

as possible, I wrote to her that night. I told her as mildly as I could

what his wrong was, and what my own share in his injury. I said he was a

man in very common life, but of a most gentle and upright character; and

that I ventured to express a hope that she would not refuse to see him

in his heavy trouble. I mentioned two o'clock in the afternoon as the

hour of our coming, and I sent the letter myself by the first coach in

the morning.

At the appointed time, we stood at the door--the door of that house

where I had been, a few days since, so happy: where my youthful

confidence and warmth of heart had been yielded up so freely: which was

closed against me henceforth: which was now a waste, a ruin.

No Littimer appeared. The pleasanter face which had replaced his, on the

occasion of my last visit, answered to our summons, and went before

us to the drawing-room. Mrs. Steerforth was sitting there. Rosa Dartle

glided, as we went in, from another part of the room and stood behind

her chair.

I saw, directly, in his mother's face, that she knew from himself what

he had done. It was very pale; and bore the traces of deeper emotion

than my letter alone, weakened by the doubts her fondness would have

raised upon it, would have been likely to create. I thought her more

like him than ever I had thought her; and I felt, rather than saw, that

the resemblance was not lost on my companion.

She sat upright in her arm-chair, with a stately, immovable, passionless

air, that it seemed as if nothing could disturb. She looked very

steadfastly at Mr. Peggotty when he stood before her; and he looked

quite as steadfastly at her. Rosa Dartle's keen glance comprehended all

of us. For some moments not a word was spoken.

She motioned to Mr. Peggotty to be seated. He said, in a low voice, 'I

shouldn't feel it nat'ral, ma'am, to sit down in this house. I'd sooner

stand.' And this was succeeded by another silence, which she broke thus:

'I know, with deep regret, what has brought you here. What do you want

of me? What do you ask me to do?'

He put his hat under his arm, and feeling in his breast for Emily's

letter, took it out, unfolded it, and gave it to her. 'Please to read

that, ma'am. That's my niece's hand!'

She read it, in the same stately and impassive way,--untouched by its

contents, as far as I could see,--and returned it to him.

'"Unless he brings me back a lady,"' said Mr. Peggotty, tracing out that

part with his finger. 'I come to know, ma'am, whether he will keep his

wured?'

'No,' she returned.

'Why not?' said Mr. Peggotty.

'It is impossible. He would disgrace himself. You cannot fail to know

that she is far below him.'

'Raise her up!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'She is uneducated and ignorant.'

'Maybe she's not; maybe she is,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I think not, ma'am;

but I'm no judge of them things. Teach her better!'

'Since you oblige me to speak more plainly, which I am very unwilling

to do, her humble connexions would render such a thing impossible, if

nothing else did.'

'Hark to this, ma'am,' he returned, slowly and quietly. 'You know what

it is to love your child. So do I. If she was a hundred times my child,

I couldn't love her more. You doen't know what it is to lose your child.

I do. All the heaps of riches in the wureld would be nowt to me (if they

was mine) to buy her back! But, save her from this disgrace, and she

shall never be disgraced by us. Not one of us that she's growed up

among, not one of us that's lived along with her and had her for their

all in all, these many year, will ever look upon her pritty face again.

We'll be content to let her be; we'll be content to think of her, far

off, as if she was underneath another sun and sky; we'll be content to

trust her to her husband,--to her little children, p'raps,--and bide the

time when all of us shall be alike in quality afore our God!'

The rugged eloquence with which he spoke, was not devoid of all effect.

She still preserved her proud manner, but there was a touch of softness

in her voice, as she answered:

'I justify nothing. I make no counter-accusations. But I am sorry to

repeat, it is impossible. Such a marriage would irretrievably blight my

son's career, and ruin his prospects. Nothing is more certain than

that it never can take place, and never will. If there is any other

compensation--'

'I am looking at the likeness of the face,' interrupted Mr. Peggotty,

with a steady but a kindling eye, 'that has looked at me, in my home, at

my fireside, in my boat--wheer not?---smiling and friendly, when it was

so treacherous, that I go half wild when I think of it. If the likeness

of that face don't turn to burning fire, at the thought of offering

money to me for my child's blight and ruin, it's as bad. I doen't know,

being a lady's, but what it's worse.'

She changed now, in a moment. An angry flush overspread her features;

and she said, in an intolerant manner, grasping the arm-chair tightly

with her hands:

'What compensation can you make to ME for opening such a pit between me

and my son? What is your love to mine? What is your separation to ours?'

Miss Dartle softly touched her, and bent down her head to whisper, but

she would not hear a word.

'No, Rosa, not a word! Let the man listen to what I say! My son, who has

been the object of my life, to whom its every thought has been devoted,

whom I have gratified from a child in every wish, from whom I have had

no separate existence since his birth,--to take up in a moment with a

miserable girl, and avoid me! To repay my confidence with systematic

deception, for her sake, and quit me for her! To set this wretched

fancy, against his mother's claims upon his duty, love, respect,

gratitude--claims that every day and hour of his life should have

strengthened into ties that nothing could be proof against! Is this no

injury?'

Again Rosa Dartle tried to soothe her; again ineffectually.

'I say, Rosa, not a word! If he can stake his all upon the lightest

object, I can stake my all upon a greater purpose. Let him go where he

will, with the means that my love has secured to him! Does he think to

reduce me by long absence? He knows his mother very little if he does.

Let him put away his whim now, and he is welcome back. Let him not put

her away now, and he never shall come near me, living or dying, while

I can raise my hand to make a sign against it, unless, being rid of her

for ever, he comes humbly to me and begs for my forgiveness. This is my

right. This is the acknowledgement I WILL HAVE. This is the separation

that there is between us! And is this,' she added, looking at her

visitor with the proud intolerant air with which she had begun, 'no

injury?'

While I heard and saw the mother as she said these words, I seemed to

hear and see the son, defying them. All that I had ever seen in him of

an unyielding, wilful spirit, I saw in her. All the understanding that

I had now of his misdirected energy, became an understanding of her

character too, and a perception that it was, in its strongest springs,

the same.

She now observed to me, aloud, resuming her former restraint, that it

was useless to hear more, or to say more, and that she begged to put an

end to the interview. She rose with an air of dignity to leave the room,

when Mr. Peggotty signified that it was needless.

'Doen't fear me being any hindrance to you, I have no more to say,

ma'am,' he remarked, as he moved towards the door. 'I come beer with no

hope, and I take away no hope. I have done what I thowt should be done,

but I never looked fur any good to come of my stan'ning where I do.

This has been too evil a house fur me and mine, fur me to be in my right

senses and expect it.'

With this, we departed; leaving her standing by her elbow-chair, a

picture of a noble presence and a handsome face.

We had, on our way out, to cross a paved hall, with glass sides and

roof, over which a vine was trained. Its leaves and shoots were green

then, and the day being sunny, a pair of glass doors leading to the

garden were thrown open. Rosa Dartle, entering this way with a noiseless

step, when we were close to them, addressed herself to me:

'You do well,' she said, 'indeed, to bring this fellow here!'

Such a concentration of rage and scorn as darkened her face, and flashed

in her jet-black eyes, I could not have thought compressible even into

that face. The scar made by the hammer was, as usual in this excited

state of her features, strongly marked. When the throbbing I had seen

before, came into it as I looked at her, she absolutely lifted up her

hand, and struck it.

'This is a fellow,' she said, 'to champion and bring here, is he not?

You are a true man!'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'you are surely not so unjust as to condemn

ME!'

'Why do you bring division between these two mad creatures?' she

returned. 'Don't you know that they are both mad with their own

self-will and pride?'

'Is it my doing?' I returned.

'Is it your doing!' she retorted. 'Why do you bring this man here?'

'He is a deeply-injured man, Miss Dartle,' I replied. 'You may not know

it.'

'I know that James Steerforth,' she said, with her hand on her bosom, as

if to prevent the storm that was raging there, from being loud, 'has

a false, corrupt heart, and is a traitor. But what need I know or care

about this fellow, and his common niece?'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'you deepen the injury. It is sufficient

already. I will only say, at parting, that you do him a great wrong.'

'I do him no wrong,' she returned. 'They are a depraved, worthless set.

I would have her whipped!'

Mr. Peggotty passed on, without a word, and went out at the door.

'Oh, shame, Miss Dartle! shame!' I said indignantly. 'How can you bear

to trample on his undeserved affliction!'

'I would trample on them all,' she answered. 'I would have his house

pulled down. I would have her branded on the face, dressed in rags,

and cast out in the streets to starve. If I had the power to sit in

judgement on her, I would see it done. See it done? I would do it! I

detest her. If I ever could reproach her with her infamous condition, I

would go anywhere to do so. If I could hunt her to her grave, I would.

If there was any word of comfort that would be a solace to her in her

dying hour, and only I possessed it, I wouldn't part with it for Life

itself.'

The mere vehemence of her words can convey, I am sensible, but a weak

impression of the passion by which she was possessed, and which made

itself articulate in her whole figure, though her voice, instead of

being raised, was lower than usual. No description I could give of her

would do justice to my recollection of her, or to her entire deliverance

of herself to her anger. I have seen passion in many forms, but I have

never seen it in such a form as that.

When I joined Mr. Peggotty, he was walking slowly and thoughtfully down

the hill. He told me, as soon as I came up with him, that having now

discharged his mind of what he had purposed doing in London, he meant

'to set out on his travels', that night. I asked him where he meant to

go? He only answered, 'I'm a going, sir, to seek my niece.'

We went back to the little lodging over the chandler's shop, and there

I found an opportunity of repeating to Peggotty what he had said to

me. She informed me, in return, that he had said the same to her that

morning. She knew no more than I did, where he was going, but she

thought he had some project shaped out in his mind.

I did not like to leave him, under such circumstances, and we all three

dined together off a beefsteak pie--which was one of the many good

things for which Peggotty was famous--and which was curiously flavoured

on this occasion, I recollect well, by a miscellaneous taste of tea,

coffee, butter, bacon, cheese, new loaves, firewood, candles, and walnut

ketchup, continually ascending from the shop. After dinner we sat for an

hour or so near the window, without talking much; and then Mr. Peggotty

got up, and brought his oilskin bag and his stout stick, and laid them

on the table.

He accepted, from his sister's stock of ready money, a small sum on

account of his legacy; barely enough, I should have thought, to keep him

for a month. He promised to communicate with me, when anything befell

him; and he slung his bag about him, took his hat and stick, and bade us

both 'Good-bye!'

'All good attend you, dear old woman,' he said, embracing Peggotty, 'and

you too, Mas'r Davy!' shaking hands with me. 'I'm a-going to seek her,

fur and wide. If she should come home while I'm away--but ah, that ain't

like to be!--or if I should bring her back, my meaning is, that she

and me shall live and die where no one can't reproach her. If any hurt

should come to me, remember that the last words I left for her was, "My

unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her!"'

He said this solemnly, bare-headed; then, putting on his hat, he went

down the stairs, and away. We followed to the door. It was a warm, dusty

evening, just the time when, in the great main thoroughfare out of which

that by-way turned, there was a temporary lull in the eternal tread of

feet upon the pavement, and a strong red sunshine. He turned, alone, at

the corner of our shady street, into a glow of light, in which we lost

him.

Rarely did that hour of the evening come, rarely did I wake at night,

rarely did I look up at the moon, or stars, or watch the falling rain,

or hear the wind, but I thought of his solitary figure toiling on, poor

pilgrim, and recalled the words:

'I'm a going to seek her, fur and wide. If any hurt should come to me,

remember that the last words I left for her was, "My unchanged love is

with my darling child, and I forgive her!"'

CHAPTER 33. BLISSFUL

All this time, I had gone on loving Dora, harder than ever. Her idea was

my refuge in disappointment and distress, and made some amends to me,

even for the loss of my friend. The more I pitied myself, or pitied

others, the more I sought for consolation in the image of Dora. The

greater the accumulation of deceit and trouble in the world, the

brighter and the purer shone the star of Dora high above the world. I

don't think I had any definite idea where Dora came from, or in what

degree she was related to a higher order of beings; but I am quite sure

I should have scouted the notion of her being simply human, like any

other young lady, with indignation and contempt.

If I may so express it, I was steeped in Dora. I was not merely over

head and ears in love with her, but I was saturated through and through.

Enough love might have been wrung out of me, metaphorically speaking,

to drown anybody in; and yet there would have remained enough within me,

and all over me, to pervade my entire existence.

The first thing I did, on my own account, when I came back, was to take

a night-walk to Norwood, and, like the subject of a venerable riddle of

my childhood, to go 'round and round the house, without ever

touching the house', thinking about Dora. I believe the theme of this

incomprehensible conundrum was the moon. No matter what it was, I, the

moon-struck slave of Dora, perambulated round and round the house and

garden for two hours, looking through crevices in the palings, getting

my chin by dint of violent exertion above the rusty nails on the top,

blowing kisses at the lights in the windows, and romantically calling

on the night, at intervals, to shield my Dora--I don't exactly know what

from, I suppose from fire. Perhaps from mice, to which she had a great

objection.

My love was so much in my mind and it was so natural to me to confide in

Peggotty, when I found her again by my side of an evening with the old

set of industrial implements, busily making the tour of my wardrobe,

that I imparted to her, in a sufficiently roundabout way, my great

secret. Peggotty was strongly interested, but I could not get her into

my view of the case at all. She was audaciously prejudiced in my favour,

and quite unable to understand why I should have any misgivings, or be

low-spirited about it. 'The young lady might think herself well off,'

she observed, 'to have such a beau. And as to her Pa,' she said, 'what

did the gentleman expect, for gracious sake!'

I observed, however, that Mr. Spenlow's proctorial gown and stiff cravat

took Peggotty down a little, and inspired her with a greater reverence

for the man who was gradually becoming more and more etherealized in my

eyes every day, and about whom a reflected radiance seemed to me to beam

when he sat erect in Court among his papers, like a little lighthouse in

a sea of stationery. And by the by, it used to be uncommonly strange

to me to consider, I remember, as I sat in Court too, how those dim old

judges and doctors wouldn't have cared for Dora, if they had known

her; how they wouldn't have gone out of their senses with rapture, if

marriage with Dora had been proposed to them; how Dora might have sung,

and played upon that glorified guitar, until she led me to the verge of

madness, yet not have tempted one of those slow-goers an inch out of his

road!

I despised them, to a man. Frozen-out old gardeners in the flower-beds

of the heart, I took a personal offence against them all. The Bench

was nothing to me but an insensible blunderer. The Bar had no more

tenderness or poetry in it, than the bar of a public-house.

Taking the management of Peggotty's affairs into my own hands, with

no little pride, I proved the will, and came to a settlement with the

Legacy Duty-office, and took her to the Bank, and soon got everything

into an orderly train. We varied the legal character of these

proceedings by going to see some perspiring Wax-work, in Fleet Street

(melted, I should hope, these twenty years); and by visiting Miss

Linwood's Exhibition, which I remember as a Mausoleum of needlework,

favourable to self-examination and repentance; and by inspecting the

Tower of London; and going to the top of St. Paul's. All these wonders

afforded Peggotty as much pleasure as she was able to enjoy, under

existing circumstances: except, I think, St. Paul's, which, from her

long attachment to her work-box, became a rival of the picture on the

lid, and was, in some particulars, vanquished, she considered, by that

work of art.

Peggotty's business, which was what we used to call 'common-form

business' in the Commons (and very light and lucrative the common-form

business was), being settled, I took her down to the office one morning

to pay her bill. Mr. Spenlow had stepped out, old Tiffey said, to get a

gentleman sworn for a marriage licence; but as I knew he would be

back directly, our place lying close to the Surrogate's, and to the

Vicar-General's office too, I told Peggotty to wait.

We were a little like undertakers, in the Commons, as regarded Probate

transactions; generally making it a rule to look more or less cut up,

when we had to deal with clients in mourning. In a similar feeling

of delicacy, we were always blithe and light-hearted with the licence

clients. Therefore I hinted to Peggotty that she would find Mr. Spenlow

much recovered from the shock of Mr. Barkis's decease; and indeed he

came in like a bridegroom.

But neither Peggotty nor I had eyes for him, when we saw, in company

with him, Mr. Murdstone. He was very little changed. His hair looked as

thick, and was certainly as black, as ever; and his glance was as little

to be trusted as of old.

'Ah, Copperfield?' said Mr. Spenlow. 'You know this gentleman, I

believe?'

I made my gentleman a distant bow, and Peggotty barely recognized him.

He was, at first, somewhat disconcerted to meet us two together; but

quickly decided what to do, and came up to me.

'I hope,' he said, 'that you are doing well?'

'It can hardly be interesting to you,' said I. 'Yes, if you wish to

know.'

We looked at each other, and he addressed himself to Peggotty.

'And you,' said he. 'I am sorry to observe that you have lost your

husband.'

'It's not the first loss I have had in my life, Mr. Murdstone,' replied

Peggotty, trembling from head to foot. 'I am glad to hope that there is

nobody to blame for this one,--nobody to answer for it.'

'Ha!' said he; 'that's a comfortable reflection. You have done your

duty?'

'I have not worn anybody's life away,' said Peggotty, 'I am thankful to

think! No, Mr. Murdstone, I have not worrited and frightened any sweet

creetur to an early grave!'

He eyed her gloomily--remorsefully I thought--for an instant; and said,

turning his head towards me, but looking at my feet instead of my face:

'We are not likely to encounter soon again;--a source of satisfaction to

us both, no doubt, for such meetings as this can never be agreeable. I

do not expect that you, who always rebelled against my just authority,

exerted for your benefit and reformation, should owe me any good-will

now. There is an antipathy between us--'

'An old one, I believe?' said I, interrupting him.

He smiled, and shot as evil a glance at me as could come from his dark

eyes.

'It rankled in your baby breast,' he said. 'It embittered the life of

your poor mother. You are right. I hope you may do better, yet; I hope

you may correct yourself.'

Here he ended the dialogue, which had been carried on in a low voice,

in a corner of the outer office, by passing into Mr. Spenlow's room, and

saying aloud, in his smoothest manner:

'Gentlemen of Mr. Spenlow's profession are accustomed to family

differences, and know how complicated and difficult they always are!'

With that, he paid the money for his licence; and, receiving it neatly

folded from Mr. Spenlow, together with a shake of the hand, and a polite

wish for his happiness and the lady's, went out of the office.

I might have had more difficulty in constraining myself to be silent

under his words, if I had had less difficulty in impressing upon

Peggotty (who was only angry on my account, good creature!) that we were

not in a place for recrimination, and that I besought her to hold her

peace. She was so unusually roused, that I was glad to compound for

an affectionate hug, elicited by this revival in her mind of our old

injuries, and to make the best I could of it, before Mr. Spenlow and the

clerks.

Mr. Spenlow did not appear to know what the connexion between Mr.

Murdstone and myself was; which I was glad of, for I could not bear to

acknowledge him, even in my own breast, remembering what I did of the

history of my poor mother. Mr. Spenlow seemed to think, if he thought

anything about the matter, that my aunt was the leader of the state

party in our family, and that there was a rebel party commanded by

somebody else--so I gathered at least from what he said, while we were

waiting for Mr. Tiffey to make out Peggotty's bill of costs.

'Miss Trotwood,' he remarked, 'is very firm, no doubt, and not likely

to give way to opposition. I have an admiration for her character, and

I may congratulate you, Copperfield, on being on the right side.

Differences between relations are much to be deplored--but they are

extremely general--and the great thing is, to be on the right side':

meaning, I take it, on the side of the moneyed interest.

'Rather a good marriage this, I believe?' said Mr. Spenlow.

I explained that I knew nothing about it.

'Indeed!' he said. 'Speaking from the few words Mr. Murdstone

dropped--as a man frequently does on these occasions--and from what Miss

Murdstone let fall, I should say it was rather a good marriage.'

'Do you mean that there is money, sir?' I asked.

'Yes,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'I understand there's money. Beauty too, I am

told.'

'Indeed! Is his new wife young?'

'Just of age,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'So lately, that I should think they

had been waiting for that.'

'Lord deliver her!' said Peggotty. So very emphatically and

unexpectedly, that we were all three discomposed; until Tiffey came in

with the bill.

Old Tiffey soon appeared, however, and handed it to Mr. Spenlow, to

look over. Mr. Spenlow, settling his chin in his cravat and rubbing it

softly, went over the items with a deprecatory air--as if it were all

Jorkins's doing--and handed it back to Tiffey with a bland sigh.

'Yes,' he said. 'That's right. Quite right. I should have been extremely

happy, Copperfield, to have limited these charges to the actual

expenditure out of pocket, but it is an irksome incident in my

professional life, that I am not at liberty to consult my own wishes. I

have a partner--Mr. Jorkins.'

As he said this with a gentle melancholy, which was the next thing to

making no charge at all, I expressed my acknowledgements on Peggotty's

behalf, and paid Tiffey in banknotes. Peggotty then retired to

her lodging, and Mr. Spenlow and I went into Court, where we had a

divorce-suit coming on, under an ingenious little statute (repealed

now, I believe, but in virtue of which I have seen several marriages

annulled), of which the merits were these. The husband, whose name was

Thomas Benjamin, had taken out his marriage licence as Thomas only;

suppressing the Benjamin, in case he should not find himself as

comfortable as he expected. NOT finding himself as comfortable as he

expected, or being a little fatigued with his wife, poor fellow, he

now came forward, by a friend, after being married a year or two, and

declared that his name was Thomas Benjamin, and therefore he was not

married at all. Which the Court confirmed, to his great satisfaction.

I must say that I had my doubts about the strict justice of this,

and was not even frightened out of them by the bushel of wheat which

reconciles all anomalies. But Mr. Spenlow argued the matter with me. He

said, Look at the world, there was good and evil in that; look at the

ecclesiastical law, there was good and evil in THAT. It was all part of

a system. Very good. There you were!

I had not the hardihood to suggest to Dora's father that possibly

we might even improve the world a little, if we got up early in the

morning, and took off our coats to the work; but I confessed that I

thought we might improve the Commons. Mr. Spenlow replied that he would

particularly advise me to dismiss that idea from my mind, as not being

worthy of my gentlemanly character; but that he would be glad to hear

from me of what improvement I thought the Commons susceptible?

Taking that part of the Commons which happened to be nearest to us--for

our man was unmarried by this time, and we were out of Court, and

strolling past the Prerogative Office--I submitted that I thought the

Prerogative Office rather a queerly managed institution. Mr. Spenlow

inquired in what respect? I replied, with all due deference to his

experience (but with more deference, I am afraid, to his being Dora's

father), that perhaps it was a little nonsensical that the Registry of

that Court, containing the original wills of all persons leaving effects

within the immense province of Canterbury, for three whole centuries,

should be an accidental building, never designed for the purpose, leased

by the registrars for their Own private emolument, unsafe, not even

ascertained to be fire-proof, choked with the important documents

it held, and positively, from the roof to the basement, a mercenary

speculation of the registrars, who took great fees from the public, and

crammed the public's wills away anyhow and anywhere, having no other

object than to get rid of them cheaply. That, perhaps, it was a little

unreasonable that these registrars in the receipt of profits amounting

to eight or nine thousand pounds a year (to say nothing of the profits

of the deputy registrars, and clerks of seats), should not be obliged to

spend a little of that money, in finding a reasonably safe place for the

important documents which all classes of people were compelled to hand

over to them, whether they would or no. That, perhaps, it was a little

unjust, that all the great offices in this great office should be

magnificent sinecures, while the unfortunate working-clerks in the cold

dark room upstairs were the worst rewarded, and the least considered

men, doing important services, in London. That perhaps it was a little

indecent that the principal registrar of all, whose duty it was to

find the public, constantly resorting to this place, all needful

accommodation, should be an enormous sinecurist in virtue of that post

(and might be, besides, a clergyman, a pluralist, the holder of a

staff in a cathedral, and what not),--while the public was put to the

inconvenience of which we had a specimen every afternoon when the office

was busy, and which we knew to be quite monstrous. That, perhaps,

in short, this Prerogative Office of the diocese of Canterbury was

altogether such a pestilent job, and such a pernicious absurdity, that

but for its being squeezed away in a corner of St. Paul's Churchyard,

which few people knew, it must have been turned completely inside out,

and upside down, long ago.

Mr. Spenlow smiled as I became modestly warm on the subject, and then

argued this question with me as he had argued the other. He said, what

was it after all? It was a question of feeling. If the public felt

that their wills were in safe keeping, and took it for granted that the

office was not to be made better, who was the worse for it? Nobody. Who

was the better for it? All the Sinecurists. Very well. Then the good

predominated. It might not be a perfect system; nothing was perfect;

but what he objected to, was, the insertion of the wedge. Under the

Prerogative Office, the country had been glorious. Insert the wedge into

the Prerogative Office, and the country would cease to be glorious. He

considered it the principle of a gentleman to take things as he found

them; and he had no doubt the Prerogative Office would last our time. I

deferred to his opinion, though I had great doubts of it myself. I find

he was right, however; for it has not only lasted to the present moment,

but has done so in the teeth of a great parliamentary report made (not

too willingly) eighteen years ago, when all these objections of mine

were set forth in detail, and when the existing stowage for wills was

described as equal to the accumulation of only two years and a half

more. What they have done with them since; whether they have lost many,

or whether they sell any, now and then, to the butter shops; I don't

know. I am glad mine is not there, and I hope it may not go there, yet

awhile.

I have set all this down, in my present blissful chapter, because here

it comes into its natural place. Mr. Spenlow and I falling into this

conversation, prolonged it and our saunter to and fro, until we diverged

into general topics. And so it came about, in the end, that Mr. Spenlow

told me this day week was Dora's birthday, and he would be glad if I

would come down and join a little picnic on the occasion. I went out of

my senses immediately; became a mere driveller next day, on receipt of

a little lace-edged sheet of note-paper, 'Favoured by papa. To remind';

and passed the intervening period in a state of dotage.

I think I committed every possible absurdity in the way of preparation

for this blessed event. I turn hot when I remember the cravat I bought.

My boots might be placed in any collection of instruments of torture.

I provided, and sent down by the Norwood coach the night before, a

delicate little hamper, amounting in itself, I thought, almost to a

declaration. There were crackers in it with the tenderest mottoes that

could be got for money. At six in the morning, I was in Covent Garden

Market, buying a bouquet for Dora. At ten I was on horseback (I hired a

gallant grey, for the occasion), with the bouquet in my hat, to keep it

fresh, trotting down to Norwood.

I suppose that when I saw Dora in the garden and pretended not to see

her, and rode past the house pretending to be anxiously looking for

it, I committed two small fooleries which other young gentlemen in my

circumstances might have committed--because they came so very natural

to me. But oh! when I DID find the house, and DID dismount at the

garden-gate, and drag those stony-hearted boots across the lawn to Dora

sitting on a garden-seat under a lilac tree, what a spectacle she was,

upon that beautiful morning, among the butterflies, in a white chip

bonnet and a dress of celestial blue! There was a young lady with

her--comparatively stricken in years--almost twenty, I should say. Her

name was Miss Mills. And Dora called her Julia. She was the bosom friend

of Dora. Happy Miss Mills!

Jip was there, and Jip WOULD bark at me again. When I presented my

bouquet, he gnashed his teeth with jealousy. Well he might. If he had

the least idea how I adored his mistress, well he might!

'Oh, thank you, Mr. Copperfield! What dear flowers!' said Dora.

I had had an intention of saying (and had been studying the best form of

words for three miles) that I thought them beautiful before I saw them

so near HER. But I couldn't manage it. She was too bewildering. To see

her lay the flowers against her little dimpled chin, was to lose all

presence of mind and power of language in a feeble ecstasy. I wonder I

didn't say, 'Kill me, if you have a heart, Miss Mills. Let me die here!'

Then Dora held my flowers to Jip to smell. Then Jip growled, and

wouldn't smell them. Then Dora laughed, and held them a little closer

to Jip, to make him. Then Jip laid hold of a bit of geranium with his

teeth, and worried imaginary cats in it. Then Dora beat him, and pouted,

and said, 'My poor beautiful flowers!' as compassionately, I thought, as

if Jip had laid hold of me. I wished he had!

'You'll be so glad to hear, Mr. Copperfield,' said Dora, 'that that

cross Miss Murdstone is not here. She has gone to her brother's

marriage, and will be away at least three weeks. Isn't that delightful?'

I said I was sure it must be delightful to her, and all that was

delightful to her was delightful to me. Miss Mills, with an air of

superior wisdom and benevolence, smiled upon us.

'She is the most disagreeable thing I ever saw,' said Dora. 'You can't

believe how ill-tempered and shocking she is, Julia.'

'Yes, I can, my dear!' said Julia.

'YOU can, perhaps, love,' returned Dora, with her hand on julia's.

'Forgive my not excepting you, my dear, at first.'

I learnt, from this, that Miss Mills had had her trials in the course

of a chequered existence; and that to these, perhaps, I might refer that

wise benignity of manner which I had already noticed. I found, in

the course of the day, that this was the case: Miss Mills having been

unhappy in a misplaced affection, and being understood to have retired

from the world on her awful stock of experience, but still to take a

calm interest in the unblighted hopes and loves of youth.

But now Mr. Spenlow came out of the house, and Dora went to him,

saying, 'Look, papa, what beautiful flowers!' And Miss Mills smiled

thoughtfully, as who should say, 'Ye Mayflies, enjoy your brief

existence in the bright morning of life!' And we all walked from the

lawn towards the carriage, which was getting ready.

I shall never have such a ride again. I have never had such another.

There were only those three, their hamper, my hamper, and the

guitar-case, in the phaeton; and, of course, the phaeton was open; and

I rode behind it, and Dora sat with her back to the horses, looking

towards me. She kept the bouquet close to her on the cushion, and

wouldn't allow Jip to sit on that side of her at all, for fear he should

crush it. She often carried it in her hand, often refreshed herself

with its fragrance. Our eyes at those times often met; and my great

astonishment is that I didn't go over the head of my gallant grey into

the carriage.

There was dust, I believe. There was a good deal of dust, I believe. I

have a faint impression that Mr. Spenlow remonstrated with me for riding

in it; but I knew of none. I was sensible of a mist of love and beauty

about Dora, but of nothing else. He stood up sometimes, and asked me

what I thought of the prospect. I said it was delightful, and I dare

say it was; but it was all Dora to me. The sun shone Dora, and the birds

sang Dora. The south wind blew Dora, and the wild flowers in the hedges

were all Doras, to a bud. My comfort is, Miss Mills understood me. Miss

Mills alone could enter into my feelings thoroughly.

I don't know how long we were going, and to this hour I know as little

where we went. Perhaps it was near Guildford. Perhaps some Arabian-night

magician, opened up the place for the day, and shut it up for ever when

we came away. It was a green spot, on a hill, carpeted with soft turf.

There were shady trees, and heather, and, as far as the eye could see, a

rich landscape.

It was a trying thing to find people here, waiting for us; and my

jealousy, even of the ladies, knew no bounds. But all of my own

sex--especially one impostor, three or four years my elder, with a red

whisker, on which he established an amount of presumption not to be

endured--were my mortal foes.

We all unpacked our baskets, and employed ourselves in getting dinner

ready. Red Whisker pretended he could make a salad (which I don't

believe), and obtruded himself on public notice. Some of the young

ladies washed the lettuces for him, and sliced them under his

directions. Dora was among these. I felt that fate had pitted me against

this man, and one of us must fall.

Red Whisker made his salad (I wondered how they could eat it. Nothing

should have induced ME to touch it!) and voted himself into the charge

of the wine-cellar, which he constructed, being an ingenious beast, in

the hollow trunk of a tree. By and by, I saw him, with the majority of a

lobster on his plate, eating his dinner at the feet of Dora!

I have but an indistinct idea of what happened for some time after this

baleful object presented itself to my view. I was very merry, I know;

but it was hollow merriment. I attached myself to a young creature in

pink, with little eyes, and flirted with her desperately. She received

my attentions with favour; but whether on my account solely, or because

she had any designs on Red Whisker, I can't say. Dora's health was

drunk. When I drank it, I affected to interrupt my conversation for that

purpose, and to resume it immediately afterwards. I caught Dora's eye as

I bowed to her, and I thought it looked appealing. But it looked at me

over the head of Red Whisker, and I was adamant.

The young creature in pink had a mother in green; and I rather think the

latter separated us from motives of policy. Howbeit, there was a general

breaking up of the party, while the remnants of the dinner were being

put away; and I strolled off by myself among the trees, in a raging and

remorseful state. I was debating whether I should pretend that I was not

well, and fly--I don't know where--upon my gallant grey, when Dora and

Miss Mills met me.

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Miss Mills, 'you are dull.'

I begged her pardon. Not at all.

'And Dora,' said Miss Mills, 'YOU are dull.'

Oh dear no! Not in the least.

'Mr. Copperfield and Dora,' said Miss Mills, with an almost venerable

air. 'Enough of this. Do not allow a trivial misunderstanding to wither

the blossoms of spring, which, once put forth and blighted, cannot be

renewed. I speak,' said Miss Mills, 'from experience of the past--the

remote, irrevocable past. The gushing fountains which sparkle in the

sun, must not be stopped in mere caprice; the oasis in the desert of

Sahara must not be plucked up idly.'

I hardly knew what I did, I was burning all over to that extraordinary

extent; but I took Dora's little hand and kissed it--and she let me!

I kissed Miss Mills's hand; and we all seemed, to my thinking, to go

straight up to the seventh heaven. We did not come down again. We stayed

up there all the evening. At first we strayed to and fro among the

trees: I with Dora's shy arm drawn through mine: and Heaven knows,

folly as it all was, it would have been a happy fate to have been struck

immortal with those foolish feelings, and have stayed among the trees

for ever!

But, much too soon, we heard the others laughing and talking, and

calling 'where's Dora?' So we went back, and they wanted Dora to sing.

Red Whisker would have got the guitar-case out of the carriage, but Dora

told him nobody knew where it was, but I. So Red Whisker was done for

in a moment; and I got it, and I unlocked it, and I took the guitar out,

and I sat by her, and I held her handkerchief and gloves, and I drank in

every note of her dear voice, and she sang to ME who loved her, and all

the others might applaud as much as they liked, but they had nothing to

do with it!

I was intoxicated with joy. I was afraid it was too happy to be real,

and that I should wake in Buckingham Street presently, and hear Mrs.

Crupp clinking the teacups in getting breakfast ready. But Dora sang,

and others sang, and Miss Mills sang--about the slumbering echoes in the

caverns of Memory; as if she were a hundred years old--and the evening

came on; and we had tea, with the kettle boiling gipsy-fashion; and I

was still as happy as ever.

I was happier than ever when the party broke up, and the other people,

defeated Red Whisker and all, went their several ways, and we went ours

through the still evening and the dying light, with sweet scents

rising up around us. Mr. Spenlow being a little drowsy after the

champagne--honour to the soil that grew the grape, to the grape that

made the wine, to the sun that ripened it, and to the merchant who

adulterated it!--and being fast asleep in a corner of the carriage, I

rode by the side and talked to Dora. She admired my horse and patted

him--oh, what a dear little hand it looked upon a horse!--and her shawl

would not keep right, and now and then I drew it round her with my arm;

and I even fancied that Jip began to see how it was, and to understand

that he must make up his mind to be friends with me.

That sagacious Miss Mills, too; that amiable, though quite used up,

recluse; that little patriarch of something less than twenty, who had

done with the world, and mustn't on any account have the slumbering

echoes in the caverns of Memory awakened; what a kind thing she did!

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Miss Mills, 'come to this side of the carriage a

moment--if you can spare a moment. I want to speak to you.'

Behold me, on my gallant grey, bending at the side of Miss Mills, with

my hand upon the carriage door!

'Dora is coming to stay with me. She is coming home with me the day

after tomorrow. If you would like to call, I am sure papa would be

happy to see you.' What could I do but invoke a silent blessing on Miss

Mills's head, and store Miss Mills's address in the securest corner of

my memory! What could I do but tell Miss Mills, with grateful looks

and fervent words, how much I appreciated her good offices, and what an

inestimable value I set upon her friendship!

Then Miss Mills benignantly dismissed me, saying, 'Go back to Dora!' and

I went; and Dora leaned out of the carriage to talk to me, and we talked

all the rest of the way; and I rode my gallant grey so close to the

wheel that I grazed his near fore leg against it, and 'took the bark

off', as his owner told me, 'to the tune of three pun' sivin'--which I

paid, and thought extremely cheap for so much joy. What time Miss Mills

sat looking at the moon, murmuring verses--and recalling, I suppose, the

ancient days when she and earth had anything in common.

Norwood was many miles too near, and we reached it many hours too soon;

but Mr. Spenlow came to himself a little short of it, and said,

'You must come in, Copperfield, and rest!' and I consenting, we had

sandwiches and wine-and-water. In the light room, Dora blushing looked

so lovely, that I could not tear myself away, but sat there staring, in

a dream, until the snoring of Mr. Spenlow inspired me with sufficient

consciousness to take my leave. So we parted; I riding all the way

to London with the farewell touch of Dora's hand still light on mine,

recalling every incident and word ten thousand times; lying down in my

own bed at last, as enraptured a young noodle as ever was carried out of

his five wits by love.

When I awoke next morning, I was resolute to declare my passion to Dora,

and know my fate. Happiness or misery was now the question. There was no

other question that I knew of in the world, and only Dora could give the

answer to it. I passed three days in a luxury of wretchedness, torturing

myself by putting every conceivable variety of discouraging construction

on all that ever had taken place between Dora and me. At last, arrayed

for the purpose at a vast expense, I went to Miss Mills's, fraught with

a declaration.

How many times I went up and down the street, and round the

square--painfully aware of being a much better answer to the old riddle

than the original one--before I could persuade myself to go up the steps

and knock, is no matter now. Even when, at last, I had knocked, and was

waiting at the door, I had some flurried thought of asking if that

were Mr. Blackboy's (in imitation of poor Barkis), begging pardon, and

retreating. But I kept my ground.

Mr. Mills was not at home. I did not expect he would be. Nobody wanted

HIM. Miss Mills was at home. Miss Mills would do.

I was shown into a room upstairs, where Miss Mills and Dora were. Jip

was there. Miss Mills was copying music (I recollect, it was a new song,

called 'Affection's Dirge'), and Dora was painting flowers. What were my

feelings, when I recognized my own flowers; the identical Covent Garden

Market purchase! I cannot say that they were very like, or that

they particularly resembled any flowers that have ever come under my

observation; but I knew from the paper round them which was accurately

copied, what the composition was.

Miss Mills was very glad to see me, and very sorry her papa was not at

home: though I thought we all bore that with fortitude. Miss Mills was

conversational for a few minutes, and then, laying down her pen upon

'Affection's Dirge', got up, and left the room.

I began to think I would put it off till tomorrow.

'I hope your poor horse was not tired, when he got home at night,' said

Dora, lifting up her beautiful eyes. 'It was a long way for him.'

I began to think I would do it today.

'It was a long way for him,' said I, 'for he had nothing to uphold him

on the journey.'

'Wasn't he fed, poor thing?' asked Dora.

I began to think I would put it off till tomorrow.

'Ye-yes,' I said, 'he was well taken care of. I mean he had not the

unutterable happiness that I had in being so near you.'

Dora bent her head over her drawing and said, after a little while--I

had sat, in the interval, in a burning fever, and with my legs in a very

rigid state--

'You didn't seem to be sensible of that happiness yourself, at one time

of the day.'

I saw now that I was in for it, and it must be done on the spot.

'You didn't care for that happiness in the least,' said Dora, slightly

raising her eyebrows, and shaking her head, 'when you were sitting by

Miss Kitt.'

Kitt, I should observe, was the name of the creature in pink, with the

little eyes.

'Though certainly I don't know why you should,' said Dora, or why you

should call it a happiness at all. But of course you don't mean what you

say. And I am sure no one doubts your being at liberty to do whatever

you like. Jip, you naughty boy, come here!'

I don't know how I did it. I did it in a moment. I intercepted Jip.

I had Dora in my arms. I was full of eloquence. I never stopped for a

word. I told her how I loved her. I told her I should die without her.

I told her that I idolized and worshipped her. Jip barked madly all the

time.

When Dora hung her head and cried, and trembled, my eloquence increased

so much the more. If she would like me to die for her, she had but to

say the word, and I was ready. Life without Dora's love was not a thing

to have on any terms. I couldn't bear it, and I wouldn't. I had loved

her every minute, day and night, since I first saw her. I loved her at

that minute to distraction. I should always love her, every minute, to

distraction. Lovers had loved before, and lovers would love again; but

no lover had loved, might, could, would, or should ever love, as I loved

Dora. The more I raved, the more Jip barked. Each of us, in his own way,

got more mad every moment.

Well, well! Dora and I were sitting on the sofa by and by, quiet enough,

and Jip was lying in her lap, winking peacefully at me. It was off my

mind. I was in a state of perfect rapture. Dora and I were engaged.

I suppose we had some notion that this was to end in marriage. We must

have had some, because Dora stipulated that we were never to be married

without her papa's consent. But, in our youthful ecstasy, I don't think

that we really looked before us or behind us; or had any aspiration

beyond the ignorant present. We were to keep our secret from Mr.

Spenlow; but I am sure the idea never entered my head, then, that there

was anything dishonourable in that.

Miss Mills was more than usually pensive when Dora, going to find her,

brought her back;--I apprehend, because there was a tendency in what had

passed to awaken the slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory. But she

gave us her blessing, and the assurance of her lasting friendship, and

spoke to us, generally, as became a Voice from the Cloister.

What an idle time it was! What an insubstantial, happy, foolish time it

was!

When I measured Dora's finger for a ring that was to be made of

Forget-me-nots, and when the jeweller, to whom I took the measure, found

me out, and laughed over his order-book, and charged me anything he

liked for the pretty little toy, with its blue stones--so associated

in my remembrance with Dora's hand, that yesterday, when I saw such

another, by chance, on the finger of my own daughter, there was a

momentary stirring in my heart, like pain!

When I walked about, exalted with my secret, and full of my own

interest, and felt the dignity of loving Dora, and of being beloved, so

much, that if I had walked the air, I could not have been more above the

people not so situated, who were creeping on the earth!

When we had those meetings in the garden of the square, and sat within

the dingy summer-house, so happy, that I love the London sparrows to

this hour, for nothing else, and see the plumage of the tropics in their

smoky feathers! When we had our first great quarrel (within a week

of our betrothal), and when Dora sent me back the ring, enclosed in a

despairing cocked-hat note, wherein she used the terrible expression

that 'our love had begun in folly, and ended in madness!' which dreadful

words occasioned me to tear my hair, and cry that all was over!

When, under cover of the night, I flew to Miss Mills, whom I saw by

stealth in a back kitchen where there was a mangle, and implored Miss

Mills to interpose between us and avert insanity. When Miss Mills

undertook the office and returned with Dora, exhorting us, from the

pulpit of her own bitter youth, to mutual concession, and the avoidance

of the Desert of Sahara!

When we cried, and made it up, and were so blest again, that the back

kitchen, mangle and all, changed to Love's own temple, where we arranged

a plan of correspondence through Miss Mills, always to comprehend at

least one letter on each side every day!

What an idle time! What an insubstantial, happy, foolish time! Of all

the times of mine that Time has in his grip, there is none that in one

retrospect I can smile at half so much, and think of half so tenderly.

CHAPTER 34. MY AUNT ASTONISHES ME

I wrote to Agnes as soon as Dora and I were engaged. I wrote her a long

letter, in which I tried to make her comprehend how blest I was, and

what a darling Dora was. I entreated Agnes not to regard this as a

thoughtless passion which could ever yield to any other, or had the

least resemblance to the boyish fancies that we used to joke about. I

assured her that its profundity was quite unfathomable, and expressed my

belief that nothing like it had ever been known.

Somehow, as I wrote to Agnes on a fine evening by my open window, and

the remembrance of her clear calm eyes and gentle face came stealing

over me, it shed such a peaceful influence upon the hurry and agitation

in which I had been living lately, and of which my very happiness

partook in some degree, that it soothed me into tears. I remember that

I sat resting my head upon my hand, when the letter was half done,

cherishing a general fancy as if Agnes were one of the elements of my

natural home. As if, in the retirement of the house made almost sacred

to me by her presence, Dora and I must be happier than anywhere. As if,

in love, joy, sorrow, hope, or disappointment; in all emotions; my heart

turned naturally there, and found its refuge and best friend.

Of Steerforth I said nothing. I only told her there had been sad grief

at Yarmouth, on account of Emily's flight; and that on me it made a

double wound, by reason of the circumstances attending it. I knew how

quick she always was to divine the truth, and that she would never be

the first to breathe his name.

To this letter, I received an answer by return of post. As I read it, I

seemed to hear Agnes speaking to me. It was like her cordial voice in my

ears. What can I say more!

While I had been away from home lately, Traddles had called twice or

thrice. Finding Peggotty within, and being informed by Peggotty (who

always volunteered that information to whomsoever would receive

it), that she was my old nurse, he had established a good-humoured

acquaintance with her, and had stayed to have a little chat with her

about me. So Peggotty said; but I am afraid the chat was all on her

own side, and of immoderate length, as she was very difficult indeed to

stop, God bless her! when she had me for her theme.

This reminds me, not only that I expected Traddles on a certain

afternoon of his own appointing, which was now come, but that Mrs. Crupp

had resigned everything appertaining to her office (the salary excepted)

until Peggotty should cease to present herself. Mrs. Crupp, after

holding divers conversations respecting Peggotty, in a very high-pitched

voice, on the staircase--with some invisible Familiar it would appear,

for corporeally speaking she was quite alone at those times--addressed a

letter to me, developing her views. Beginning it with that statement

of universal application, which fitted every occurrence of her life,

namely, that she was a mother herself, she went on to inform me that

she had once seen very different days, but that at all periods of her

existence she had had a constitutional objection to spies, intruders,

and informers. She named no names, she said; let them the cap fitted,

wear it; but spies, intruders, and informers, especially in widders'

weeds (this clause was underlined), she had ever accustomed herself to

look down upon. If a gentleman was the victim of spies, intruders, and

informers (but still naming no names), that was his own pleasure. He

had a right to please himself; so let him do. All that she, Mrs. Crupp,

stipulated for, was, that she should not be 'brought in contract'

with such persons. Therefore she begged to be excused from any further

attendance on the top set, until things were as they formerly was, and

as they could be wished to be; and further mentioned that her little

book would be found upon the breakfast-table every Saturday morning,

when she requested an immediate settlement of the same, with the

benevolent view of saving trouble 'and an ill-conwenience' to all

parties.

After this, Mrs. Crupp confined herself to making pitfalls on the

stairs, principally with pitchers, and endeavouring to delude Peggotty

into breaking her legs. I found it rather harassing to live in this

state of siege, but was too much afraid of Mrs. Crupp to see any way out

of it.

'My dear Copperfield,' cried Traddles, punctually appearing at my door,

in spite of all these obstacles, 'how do you do?'

'My dear Traddles,' said I, 'I am delighted to see you at last, and very

sorry I have not been at home before. But I have been so much engaged--'

'Yes, yes, I know,' said Traddles, 'of course. Yours lives in London, I

think.'

'What did you say?'

'She--excuse me--Miss D., you know,' said Traddles, colouring in his

great delicacy, 'lives in London, I believe?'

'Oh yes. Near London.'

'Mine, perhaps you recollect,' said Traddles, with a serious look,

'lives down in Devonshire--one of ten. Consequently, I am not so much

engaged as you--in that sense.'

'I wonder you can bear,' I returned, 'to see her so seldom.'

'Hah!' said Traddles, thoughtfully. 'It does seem a wonder. I suppose it

is, Copperfield, because there is no help for it?'

'I suppose so,' I replied with a smile, and not without a blush. 'And

because you have so much constancy and patience, Traddles.'

'Dear me!' said Traddles, considering about it, 'do I strike you in that

way, Copperfield? Really I didn't know that I had. But she is such

an extraordinarily dear girl herself, that it's possible she may

have imparted something of those virtues to me. Now you mention it,

Copperfield, I shouldn't wonder at all. I assure you she is always

forgetting herself, and taking care of the other nine.'

'Is she the eldest?' I inquired.

'Oh dear, no,' said Traddles. 'The eldest is a Beauty.'

He saw, I suppose, that I could not help smiling at the simplicity of

this reply; and added, with a smile upon his own ingenuous face:

'Not, of course, but that my Sophy--pretty name, Copperfield, I always

think?'

'Very pretty!' said I.

'Not, of course, but that Sophy is beautiful too in my eyes, and would

be one of the dearest girls that ever was, in anybody's eyes (I should

think). But when I say the eldest is a Beauty, I mean she really is

a--' he seemed to be describing clouds about himself, with both hands:

'Splendid, you know,' said Traddles, energetically. 'Indeed!' said I.

'Oh, I assure you,' said Traddles, 'something very uncommon, indeed!

Then, you know, being formed for society and admiration, and not being

able to enjoy much of it in consequence of their limited means, she

naturally gets a little irritable and exacting, sometimes. Sophy puts

her in good humour!'

'Is Sophy the youngest?' I hazarded.

'Oh dear, no!' said Traddles, stroking his chin. 'The two youngest are

only nine and ten. Sophy educates 'em.'

'The second daughter, perhaps?' I hazarded.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Sarah's the second. Sarah has something the matter

with her spine, poor girl. The malady will wear out by and by, the

doctors say, but in the meantime she has to lie down for a twelvemonth.

Sophy nurses her. Sophy's the fourth.'

'Is the mother living?' I inquired.

'Oh yes,' said Traddles, 'she is alive. She is a very superior woman

indeed, but the damp country is not adapted to her constitution, and--in

fact, she has lost the use of her limbs.'

'Dear me!' said I.

'Very sad, is it not?' returned Traddles. 'But in a merely domestic view

it is not so bad as it might be, because Sophy takes her place. She is

quite as much a mother to her mother, as she is to the other nine.'

I felt the greatest admiration for the virtues of this young lady; and,

honestly with the view of doing my best to prevent the good-nature

of Traddles from being imposed upon, to the detriment of their joint

prospects in life, inquired how Mr. Micawber was?

'He is quite well, Copperfield, thank you,' said Traddles. 'I am not

living with him at present.'

'No?'

'No. You see the truth is,' said Traddles, in a whisper, 'he had changed

his name to Mortimer, in consequence of his temporary embarrassments;

and he don't come out till after dark--and then in spectacles. There was

an execution put into our house, for rent. Mrs. Micawber was in such

a dreadful state that I really couldn't resist giving my name to that

second bill we spoke of here. You may imagine how delightful it was to

my feelings, Copperfield, to see the matter settled with it, and Mrs.

Micawber recover her spirits.'

'Hum!' said I. 'Not that her happiness was of long duration,' pursued

Traddles, 'for, unfortunately, within a week another execution came

in. It broke up the establishment. I have been living in a furnished

apartment since then, and the Mortimers have been very private indeed.

I hope you won't think it selfish, Copperfield, if I mention that

the broker carried off my little round table with the marble top, and

Sophy's flower-pot and stand?'

'What a hard thing!' I exclaimed indignantly.

'It was a--it was a pull,' said Traddles, with his usual wince at that

expression. 'I don't mention it reproachfully, however, but with a

motive. The fact is, Copperfield, I was unable to repurchase them at the

time of their seizure; in the first place, because the broker, having an

idea that I wanted them, ran the price up to an extravagant extent; and,

in the second place, because I--hadn't any money. Now, I have kept

my eye since, upon the broker's shop,' said Traddles, with a great

enjoyment of his mystery, 'which is up at the top of Tottenham Court

Road, and, at last, today I find them put out for sale. I have only

noticed them from over the way, because if the broker saw me, bless you,

he'd ask any price for them! What has occurred to me, having now the

money, is, that perhaps you wouldn't object to ask that good nurse of

yours to come with me to the shop--I can show it her from round the

corner of the next street--and make the best bargain for them, as if

they were for herself, that she can!'

The delight with which Traddles propounded this plan to me, and the

sense he had of its uncommon artfulness, are among the freshest things

in my remembrance.

I told him that my old nurse would be delighted to assist him, and that

we would all three take the field together, but on one condition. That

condition was, that he should make a solemn resolution to grant no more

loans of his name, or anything else, to Mr. Micawber.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, 'I have already done so, because

I begin to feel that I have not only been inconsiderate, but that I have

been positively unjust to Sophy. My word being passed to myself, there

is no longer any apprehension; but I pledge it to you, too, with the

greatest readiness. That first unlucky obligation, I have paid. I have

no doubt Mr. Micawber would have paid it if he could, but he could not.

One thing I ought to mention, which I like very much in Mr. Micawber,

Copperfield. It refers to the second obligation, which is not yet due.

He don't tell me that it is provided for, but he says it WILL BE. Now, I

think there is something very fair and honest about that!'

I was unwilling to damp my good friend's confidence, and therefore

assented. After a little further conversation, we went round to the

chandler's shop, to enlist Peggotty; Traddles declining to pass the

evening with me, both because he endured the liveliest apprehensions

that his property would be bought by somebody else before he could

re-purchase it, and because it was the evening he always devoted to

writing to the dearest girl in the world.

I never shall forget him peeping round the corner of the street in

Tottenham Court Road, while Peggotty was bargaining for the precious

articles; or his agitation when she came slowly towards us after vainly

offering a price, and was hailed by the relenting broker, and went back

again. The end of the negotiation was, that she bought the property on

tolerably easy terms, and Traddles was transported with pleasure.

'I am very much obliged to you, indeed,' said Traddles, on hearing it

was to be sent to where he lived, that night. 'If I might ask one other

favour, I hope you would not think it absurd, Copperfield?'

I said beforehand, certainly not.

'Then if you WOULD be good enough,' said Traddles to Peggotty, 'to

get the flower-pot now, I think I should like (it being Sophy's,

Copperfield) to carry it home myself!'

Peggotty was glad to get it for him, and he overwhelmed her with thanks,

and went his way up Tottenham Court Road, carrying the flower-pot

affectionately in his arms, with one of the most delighted expressions

of countenance I ever saw.

We then turned back towards my chambers. As the shops had charms for

Peggotty which I never knew them possess in the same degree for anybody

else, I sauntered easily along, amused by her staring in at the windows,

and waiting for her as often as she chose. We were thus a good while in

getting to the Adelphi.

On our way upstairs, I called her attention to the sudden disappearance

of Mrs. Crupp's pitfalls, and also to the prints of recent footsteps. We

were both very much surprised, coming higher up, to find my outer door

standing open (which I had shut) and to hear voices inside.

We looked at one another, without knowing what to make of this, and went

into the sitting-room. What was my amazement to find, of all people upon

earth, my aunt there, and Mr. Dick! My aunt sitting on a quantity of

luggage, with her two birds before her, and her cat on her knee, like a

female Robinson Crusoe, drinking tea. Mr. Dick leaning thoughtfully on

a great kite, such as we had often been out together to fly, with more

luggage piled about him!

'My dear aunt!' cried I. 'Why, what an unexpected pleasure!'

We cordially embraced; and Mr. Dick and I cordially shook hands; and

Mrs. Crupp, who was busy making tea, and could not be too attentive,

cordially said she had knowed well as Mr. Copperfull would have his

heart in his mouth, when he see his dear relations.

'Holloa!' said my aunt to Peggotty, who quailed before her awful

presence. 'How are YOU?'

'You remember my aunt, Peggotty?' said I.

'For the love of goodness, child,' exclaimed my aunt, 'don't call the

woman by that South Sea Island name! If she married and got rid of

it, which was the best thing she could do, why don't you give her the

benefit of the change? What's your name now,--P?' said my aunt, as a

compromise for the obnoxious appellation.

'Barkis, ma'am,' said Peggotty, with a curtsey.

'Well! That's human,' said my aunt. 'It sounds less as if you wanted a

missionary. How d'ye do, Barkis? I hope you're well?'

Encouraged by these gracious words, and by my aunt's extending her

hand, Barkis came forward, and took the hand, and curtseyed her

acknowledgements.

'We are older than we were, I see,' said my aunt. 'We have only met each

other once before, you know. A nice business we made of it then! Trot,

my dear, another cup.'

I handed it dutifully to my aunt, who was in her usual inflexible state

of figure; and ventured a remonstrance with her on the subject of her

sitting on a box.

'Let me draw the sofa here, or the easy-chair, aunt,' said I. 'Why

should you be so uncomfortable?'

'Thank you, Trot,' replied my aunt, 'I prefer to sit upon my property.'

Here my aunt looked hard at Mrs. Crupp, and observed, 'We needn't

trouble you to wait, ma'am.'

'Shall I put a little more tea in the pot afore I go, ma'am?' said Mrs.

Crupp.

'No, I thank you, ma'am,' replied my aunt.

'Would you let me fetch another pat of butter, ma'am?' said Mrs. Crupp.

'Or would you be persuaded to try a new-laid hegg? or should I brile

a rasher? Ain't there nothing I could do for your dear aunt, Mr.

Copperfull?'

'Nothing, ma'am,' returned my aunt. 'I shall do very well, I thank you.'

Mrs. Crupp, who had been incessantly smiling to express sweet temper,

and incessantly holding her head on one side, to express a general

feebleness of constitution, and incessantly rubbing her hands, to

express a desire to be of service to all deserving objects, gradually

smiled herself, one-sided herself, and rubbed herself, out of the room.

'Dick!' said my aunt. 'You know what I told you about time-servers and

wealth-worshippers?'

Mr. Dick--with rather a scared look, as if he had forgotten it--returned

a hasty answer in the affirmative.

'Mrs. Crupp is one of them,' said my aunt. 'Barkis, I'll trouble you to

look after the tea, and let me have another cup, for I don't fancy that

woman's pouring-out!'

I knew my aunt sufficiently well to know that she had something of

importance on her mind, and that there was far more matter in this

arrival than a stranger might have supposed. I noticed how her eye

lighted on me, when she thought my attention otherwise occupied; and

what a curious process of hesitation appeared to be going on within

her, while she preserved her outward stiffness and composure. I began

to reflect whether I had done anything to offend her; and my conscience

whispered me that I had not yet told her about Dora. Could it by any

means be that, I wondered!

As I knew she would only speak in her own good time, I sat down near

her, and spoke to the birds, and played with the cat, and was as easy

as I could be. But I was very far from being really easy; and I should

still have been so, even if Mr. Dick, leaning over the great kite behind

my aunt, had not taken every secret opportunity of shaking his head

darkly at me, and pointing at her.

'Trot,' said my aunt at last, when she had finished her tea, and

carefully smoothed down her dress, and wiped her lips--'you needn't go,

Barkis!--Trot, have you got to be firm and self-reliant?'

'I hope so, aunt.'

'What do you think?' inquired Miss Betsey.

'I think so, aunt.'

'Then why, my love,' said my aunt, looking earnestly at me, 'why do you

think I prefer to sit upon this property of mine tonight?'

I shook my head, unable to guess.

'Because,' said my aunt, 'it's all I have. Because I'm ruined, my dear!'

If the house, and every one of us, had tumbled out into the river

together, I could hardly have received a greater shock.

'Dick knows it,' said my aunt, laying her hand calmly on my shoulder. 'I

am ruined, my dear Trot! All I have in the world is in this room, except

the cottage; and that I have left Janet to let. Barkis, I want to get a

bed for this gentleman tonight. To save expense, perhaps you can make

up something here for myself. Anything will do. It's only for tonight.

We'll talk about this, more, tomorrow.'

I was roused from my amazement, and concern for her--I am sure, for

her--by her falling on my neck, for a moment, and crying that she only

grieved for me. In another moment she suppressed this emotion; and said

with an aspect more triumphant than dejected:

'We must meet reverses boldly, and not suffer them to frighten us, my

dear. We must learn to act the play out. We must live misfortune down,

Trot!'

CHAPTER 35. DEPRESSION

As soon as I could recover my presence of mind, which quite deserted me

in the first overpowering shock of my aunt's intelligence, I proposed

to Mr. Dick to come round to the chandler's shop, and take possession of

the bed which Mr. Peggotty had lately vacated. The chandler's shop being

in Hungerford Market, and Hungerford Market being a very different place

in those days, there was a low wooden colonnade before the door (not

very unlike that before the house where the little man and woman used

to live, in the old weather-glass), which pleased Mr. Dick mightily. The

glory of lodging over this structure would have compensated him, I dare

say, for many inconveniences; but, as there were really few to bear,

beyond the compound of flavours I have already mentioned, and perhaps

the want of a little more elbow-room, he was perfectly charmed with his

accommodation. Mrs. Crupp had indignantly assured him that there wasn't

room to swing a cat there; but, as Mr. Dick justly observed to me,

sitting down on the foot of the bed, nursing his leg, 'You know,

Trotwood, I don't want to swing a cat. I never do swing a cat.

Therefore, what does that signify to ME!'

I tried to ascertain whether Mr. Dick had any understanding of the

causes of this sudden and great change in my aunt's affairs. As I might

have expected, he had none at all. The only account he could give of it

was, that my aunt had said to him, the day before yesterday, 'Now, Dick,

are you really and truly the philosopher I take you for?' That then

he had said, Yes, he hoped so. That then my aunt had said, 'Dick, I

am ruined.' That then he had said, 'Oh, indeed!' That then my aunt had

praised him highly, which he was glad of. And that then they had come to

me, and had had bottled porter and sandwiches on the road.

Mr. Dick was so very complacent, sitting on the foot of the bed, nursing

his leg, and telling me this, with his eyes wide open and a surprised

smile, that I am sorry to say I was provoked into explaining to him

that ruin meant distress, want, and starvation; but I was soon bitterly

reproved for this harshness, by seeing his face turn pale, and tears

course down his lengthened cheeks, while he fixed upon me a look of such

unutterable woe, that it might have softened a far harder heart than

mine. I took infinitely greater pains to cheer him up again than I had

taken to depress him; and I soon understood (as I ought to have known at

first) that he had been so confident, merely because of his faith in

the wisest and most wonderful of women, and his unbounded reliance on my

intellectual resources. The latter, I believe, he considered a match for

any kind of disaster not absolutely mortal.

'What can we do, Trotwood?' said Mr. Dick. 'There's the Memorial-'

'To be sure there is,' said I. 'But all we can do just now, Mr. Dick,

is to keep a cheerful countenance, and not let my aunt see that we are

thinking about it.'

He assented to this in the most earnest manner; and implored me, if I

should see him wandering an inch out of the right course, to recall him

by some of those superior methods which were always at my command. But I

regret to state that the fright I had given him proved too much for his

best attempts at concealment. All the evening his eyes wandered to my

aunt's face, with an expression of the most dismal apprehension, as if

he saw her growing thin on the spot. He was conscious of this, and put

a constraint upon his head; but his keeping that immovable, and sitting

rolling his eyes like a piece of machinery, did not mend the matter at

all. I saw him look at the loaf at supper (which happened to be a small

one), as if nothing else stood between us and famine; and when my aunt

insisted on his making his customary repast, I detected him in the act

of pocketing fragments of his bread and cheese; I have no doubt for the

purpose of reviving us with those savings, when we should have reached

an advanced stage of attenuation.

My aunt, on the other hand, was in a composed frame of mind, which was

a lesson to all of us--to me, I am sure. She was extremely gracious

to Peggotty, except when I inadvertently called her by that name; and,

strange as I knew she felt in London, appeared quite at home. She was

to have my bed, and I was to lie in the sitting-room, to keep guard over

her. She made a great point of being so near the river, in case of a

conflagration; and I suppose really did find some satisfaction in that

circumstance.

'Trot, my dear,' said my aunt, when she saw me making preparations for

compounding her usual night-draught, 'No!'

'Nothing, aunt?'

'Not wine, my dear. Ale.'

'But there is wine here, aunt. And you always have it made of wine.'

'Keep that, in case of sickness,' said my aunt. 'We mustn't use it

carelessly, Trot. Ale for me. Half a pint.'

I thought Mr. Dick would have fallen, insensible. My aunt being

resolute, I went out and got the ale myself. As it was growing late,

Peggotty and Mr. Dick took that opportunity of repairing to the

chandler's shop together. I parted from him, poor fellow, at the corner

of the street, with his great kite at his back, a very monument of human

misery.

My aunt was walking up and down the room when I returned, crimping the

borders of her nightcap with her fingers. I warmed the ale and made the

toast on the usual infallible principles. When it was ready for her, she

was ready for it, with her nightcap on, and the skirt of her gown turned

back on her knees.

'My dear,' said my aunt, after taking a spoonful of it; 'it's a great

deal better than wine. Not half so bilious.'

I suppose I looked doubtful, for she added:

'Tut, tut, child. If nothing worse than Ale happens to us, we are well

off.'

'I should think so myself, aunt, I am sure,' said I.

'Well, then, why DON'T you think so?' said my aunt.

'Because you and I are very different people,' I returned.

'Stuff and nonsense, Trot!' replied my aunt.

MY aunt went on with a quiet enjoyment, in which there was very little

affectation, if any; drinking the warm ale with a tea-spoon, and soaking

her strips of toast in it.

'Trot,' said she, 'I don't care for strange faces in general, but I

rather like that Barkis of yours, do you know!'

'It's better than a hundred pounds to hear you say so!' said I.

'It's a most extraordinary world,' observed my aunt, rubbing her nose;

'how that woman ever got into it with that name, is unaccountable to me.

It would be much more easy to be born a Jackson, or something of that

sort, one would think.'

'Perhaps she thinks so, too; it's not her fault,' said I.

'I suppose not,' returned my aunt, rather grudging the admission; 'but

it's very aggravating. However, she's Barkis now. That's some comfort.

Barkis is uncommonly fond of you, Trot.'

'There is nothing she would leave undone to prove it,' said I.

'Nothing, I believe,' returned my aunt. 'Here, the poor fool has been

begging and praying about handing over some of her money--because she

has got too much of it. A simpleton!'

My aunt's tears of pleasure were positively trickling down into the warm

ale.

'She's the most ridiculous creature that ever was born,' said my aunt.

'I knew, from the first moment when I saw her with that poor dear

blessed baby of a mother of yours, that she was the most ridiculous of

mortals. But there are good points in Barkis!'

Affecting to laugh, she got an opportunity of putting her hand to

her eyes. Having availed herself of it, she resumed her toast and her

discourse together.

'Ah! Mercy upon us!' sighed my aunt. 'I know all about it, Trot! Barkis

and myself had quite a gossip while you were out with Dick. I know all

about it. I don't know where these wretched girls expect to go to, for

my part. I wonder they don't knock out their brains against--against

mantelpieces,' said my aunt; an idea which was probably suggested to her

by her contemplation of mine.

'Poor Emily!' said I.

'Oh, don't talk to me about poor,' returned my aunt. 'She should have

thought of that, before she caused so much misery! Give me a kiss, Trot.

I am sorry for your early experience.'

As I bent forward, she put her tumbler on my knee to detain me, and

said:

'Oh, Trot, Trot! And so you fancy yourself in love! Do you?'

'Fancy, aunt!' I exclaimed, as red as I could be. 'I adore her with my

whole soul!'

'Dora, indeed!' returned my aunt. 'And you mean to say the little thing

is very fascinating, I suppose?'

'My dear aunt,' I replied, 'no one can form the least idea what she is!'

'Ah! And not silly?' said my aunt.

'Silly, aunt!'

I seriously believe it had never once entered my head for a single

moment, to consider whether she was or not. I resented the idea, of

course; but I was in a manner struck by it, as a new one altogether.

'Not light-headed?' said my aunt.

'Light-headed, aunt!' I could only repeat this daring speculation

with the same kind of feeling with which I had repeated the preceding

question.

'Well, well!' said my aunt. 'I only ask. I don't depreciate her. Poor

little couple! And so you think you were formed for one another, and are

to go through a party-supper-table kind of life, like two pretty pieces

of confectionery, do you, Trot?'

She asked me this so kindly, and with such a gentle air, half playful

and half sorrowful, that I was quite touched.

'We are young and inexperienced, aunt, I know,' I replied; 'and I dare

say we say and think a good deal that is rather foolish. But we love

one another truly, I am sure. If I thought Dora could ever love anybody

else, or cease to love me; or that I could ever love anybody else, or

cease to love her; I don't know what I should do--go out of my mind, I

think!'

'Ah, Trot!' said my aunt, shaking her head, and smiling gravely; 'blind,

blind, blind!'

'Someone that I know, Trot,' my aunt pursued, after a pause, 'though of

a very pliant disposition, has an earnestness of affection in him that

reminds me of poor Baby. Earnestness is what that Somebody must look

for, to sustain him and improve him, Trot. Deep, downright, faithful

earnestness.'

'If you only knew the earnestness of Dora, aunt!' I cried.

'Oh, Trot!' she said again; 'blind, blind!' and without knowing why,

I felt a vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a

cloud.

'However,' said my aunt, 'I don't want to put two young creatures out

of conceit with themselves, or to make them unhappy; so, though it is a

girl and boy attachment, and girl and boy attachments very often--mind!

I don't say always!--come to nothing, still we'll be serious about it,

and hope for a prosperous issue one of these days. There's time enough

for it to come to anything!'

This was not upon the whole very comforting to a rapturous lover; but

I was glad to have my aunt in my confidence, and I was mindful of

her being fatigued. So I thanked her ardently for this mark of her

affection, and for all her other kindnesses towards me; and after a

tender good night, she took her nightcap into my bedroom.

How miserable I was, when I lay down! How I thought and thought about my

being poor, in Mr. Spenlow's eyes; about my not being what I thought I

was, when I proposed to Dora; about the chivalrous necessity of

telling Dora what my worldly condition was, and releasing her from her

engagement if she thought fit; about how I should contrive to live,

during the long term of my articles, when I was earning nothing; about

doing something to assist my aunt, and seeing no way of doing anything;

about coming down to have no money in my pocket, and to wear a shabby

coat, and to be able to carry Dora no little presents, and to ride no

gallant greys, and to show myself in no agreeable light! Sordid and

selfish as I knew it was, and as I tortured myself by knowing that it

was, to let my mind run on my own distress so much, I was so devoted

to Dora that I could not help it. I knew that it was base in me not to

think more of my aunt, and less of myself; but, so far, selfishness

was inseparable from Dora, and I could not put Dora on one side for any

mortal creature. How exceedingly miserable I was, that night!

As to sleep, I had dreams of poverty in all sorts of shapes, but I

seemed to dream without the previous ceremony of going to sleep. Now I

was ragged, wanting to sell Dora matches, six bundles for a halfpenny;

now I was at the office in a nightgown and boots, remonstrated with by

Mr. Spenlow on appearing before the clients in that airy attire; now

I was hungrily picking up the crumbs that fell from old Tiffey's

daily biscuit, regularly eaten when St. Paul's struck one; now I was

hopelessly endeavouring to get a licence to marry Dora, having nothing

but one of Uriah Heep's gloves to offer in exchange, which the whole

Commons rejected; and still, more or less conscious of my own room, I

was always tossing about like a distressed ship in a sea of bed-clothes.

My aunt was restless, too, for I frequently heard her walking to and

fro. Two or three times in the course of the night, attired in a long

flannel wrapper in which she looked seven feet high, she appeared, like

a disturbed ghost, in my room, and came to the side of the sofa on which

I lay. On the first occasion I started up in alarm, to learn that she

inferred from a particular light in the sky, that Westminster Abbey

was on fire; and to be consulted in reference to the probability of its

igniting Buckingham Street, in case the wind changed. Lying still, after

that, I found that she sat down near me, whispering to herself 'Poor

boy!' And then it made me twenty times more wretched, to know how

unselfishly mindful she was of me, and how selfishly mindful I was of

myself.

It was difficult to believe that a night so long to me, could be short

to anybody else. This consideration set me thinking and thinking of an

imaginary party where people were dancing the hours away, until that

became a dream too, and I heard the music incessantly playing one tune,

and saw Dora incessantly dancing one dance, without taking the least

notice of me. The man who had been playing the harp all night, was

trying in vain to cover it with an ordinary-sized nightcap, when I

awoke; or I should rather say, when I left off trying to go to sleep,

and saw the sun shining in through the window at last.

There was an old Roman bath in those days at the bottom of one of the

streets out of the Strand--it may be there still--in which I have had

many a cold plunge. Dressing myself as quietly as I could, and leaving

Peggotty to look after my aunt, I tumbled head foremost into it,

and then went for a walk to Hampstead. I had a hope that this brisk

treatment might freshen my wits a little; and I think it did them good,

for I soon came to the conclusion that the first step I ought to take

was, to try if my articles could be cancelled and the premium recovered.

I got some breakfast on the Heath, and walked back to Doctors' Commons,

along the watered roads and through a pleasant smell of summer flowers,

growing in gardens and carried into town on hucksters' heads, intent on

this first effort to meet our altered circumstances.

I arrived at the office so soon, after all, that I had half an hour's

loitering about the Commons, before old Tiffey, who was always first,

appeared with his key. Then I sat down in my shady corner, looking up

at the sunlight on the opposite chimney-pots, and thinking about Dora;

until Mr. Spenlow came in, crisp and curly.

'How are you, Copperfield?' said he. 'Fine morning!'

'Beautiful morning, sir,' said I. 'Could I say a word to you before you

go into Court?'

'By all means,' said he. 'Come into my room.'

I followed him into his room, and he began putting on his gown, and

touching himself up before a little glass he had, hanging inside a

closet door.

'I am sorry to say,' said I, 'that I have some rather disheartening

intelligence from my aunt.'

'No!' said he. 'Dear me! Not paralysis, I hope?'

'It has no reference to her health, sir,' I replied. 'She has met with

some large losses. In fact, she has very little left, indeed.'

'You as-tound me, Copperfield!' cried Mr. Spenlow.

I shook my head. 'Indeed, sir,' said I, 'her affairs are so changed,

that I wished to ask you whether it would be possible--at a sacrifice on

our part of some portion of the premium, of course,' I put in this, on

the spur of the moment, warned by the blank expression of his face--'to

cancel my articles?'

What it cost me to make this proposal, nobody knows. It was like asking,

as a favour, to be sentenced to transportation from Dora.

'To cancel your articles, Copperfield? Cancel?'

I explained with tolerable firmness, that I really did not know where

my means of subsistence were to come from, unless I could earn them for

myself. I had no fear for the future, I said--and I laid great emphasis

on that, as if to imply that I should still be decidedly eligible for a

son-in-law one of these days--but, for the present, I was thrown upon

my own resources. 'I am extremely sorry to hear this, Copperfield,' said

Mr. Spenlow. 'Extremely sorry. It is not usual to cancel articles for

any such reason. It is not a professional course of proceeding. It is

not a convenient precedent at all. Far from it. At the same time--'

'You are very good, sir,' I murmured, anticipating a concession.

'Not at all. Don't mention it,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'At the same time, I

was going to say, if it had been my lot to have my hands unfettered--if

I had not a partner--Mr. Jorkins--'

My hopes were dashed in a moment, but I made another effort.

'Do you think, sir,' said I, 'if I were to mention it to Mr. Jorkins--'

Mr. Spenlow shook his head discouragingly. 'Heaven forbid, Copperfield,'

he replied, 'that I should do any man an injustice: still less, Mr.

jorkins. But I know my partner, Copperfield. Mr. jorkins is not a man

to respond to a proposition of this peculiar nature. Mr. jorkins is very

difficult to move from the beaten track. You know what he is!'

I am sure I knew nothing about him, except that he had originally been

alone in the business, and now lived by himself in a house near Montagu

Square, which was fearfully in want of painting; that he came very

late of a day, and went away very early; that he never appeared to be

consulted about anything; and that he had a dingy little black-hole of

his own upstairs, where no business was ever done, and where there was

a yellow old cartridge-paper pad upon his desk, unsoiled by ink, and

reported to be twenty years of age.

'Would you object to my mentioning it to him, sir?' I asked.

'By no means,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'But I have some experience of Mr.

jorkins, Copperfield. I wish it were otherwise, for I should be happy

to meet your views in any respect. I cannot have the objection to your

mentioning it to Mr. jorkins, Copperfield, if you think it worth while.'

Availing myself of this permission, which was given with a warm shake

of the hand, I sat thinking about Dora, and looking at the sunlight

stealing from the chimney-pots down the wall of the opposite house,

until Mr. jorkins came. I then went up to Mr. jorkins's room, and

evidently astonished Mr. jorkins very much by making my appearance

there.

'Come in, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. jorkins. 'Come in!'

I went in, and sat down; and stated my case to Mr. jorkins pretty much

as I had stated it to Mr. Spenlow. Mr. Jorkins was not by any means the

awful creature one might have expected, but a large, mild, smooth-faced

man of sixty, who took so much snuff that there was a tradition in the

Commons that he lived principally on that stimulant, having little room

in his system for any other article of diet.

'You have mentioned this to Mr. Spenlow, I suppose?' said Mr. jorkins;

when he had heard me, very restlessly, to an end.

I answered Yes, and told him that Mr. Spenlow had introduced his name.

'He said I should object?' asked Mr. jorkins.

I was obliged to admit that Mr. Spenlow had considered it probable.

'I am sorry to say, Mr. Copperfield, I can't advance your object,' said

Mr. jorkins, nervously. 'The fact is--but I have an appointment at the

Bank, if you'll have the goodness to excuse me.'

With that he rose in a great hurry, and was going out of the room, when

I made bold to say that I feared, then, there was no way of arranging

the matter?

'No!' said Mr. jorkins, stopping at the door to shake his head. 'Oh, no!

I object, you know,' which he said very rapidly, and went out. 'You must

be aware, Mr. Copperfield,' he added, looking restlessly in at the door

again, 'if Mr. Spenlow objects--'

'Personally, he does not object, sir,' said I.

'Oh! Personally!' repeated Mr. Jorkins, in an impatient manner. 'I

assure you there's an objection, Mr. Copperfield. Hopeless! What you

wish to be done, can't be done. I--I really have got an appointment

at the Bank.' With that he fairly ran away; and to the best of my

knowledge, it was three days before he showed himself in the Commons

again.

Being very anxious to leave no stone unturned, I waited until Mr.

Spenlow came in, and then described what had passed; giving him to

understand that I was not hopeless of his being able to soften the

adamantine jorkins, if he would undertake the task.

'Copperfield,' returned Mr. Spenlow, with a gracious smile, 'you have

not known my partner, Mr. jorkins, as long as I have. Nothing is

farther from my thoughts than to attribute any degree of artifice to Mr.

jorkins. But Mr. jorkins has a way of stating his objections which often

deceives people. No, Copperfield!' shaking his head. 'Mr. jorkins is not

to be moved, believe me!'

I was completely bewildered between Mr. Spenlow and Mr. jorkins, as

to which of them really was the objecting partner; but I saw with

sufficient clearness that there was obduracy somewhere in the firm, and

that the recovery of my aunt's thousand pounds was out of the

question. In a state of despondency, which I remember with anything

but satisfaction, for I know it still had too much reference to myself

(though always in connexion with Dora), I left the office, and went

homeward.

I was trying to familiarize my mind with the worst, and to present to

myself the arrangements we should have to make for the future in their

sternest aspect, when a hackney-chariot coming after me, and stopping at

my very feet, occasioned me to look up. A fair hand was stretched forth

to me from the window; and the face I had never seen without a feeling

of serenity and happiness, from the moment when it first turned back

on the old oak staircase with the great broad balustrade, and when I

associated its softened beauty with the stained-glass window in the

church, was smiling on me.

'Agnes!' I joyfully exclaimed. 'Oh, my dear Agnes, of all people in the

world, what a pleasure to see you!'

'Is it, indeed?' she said, in her cordial voice.

'I want to talk to you so much!' said I. 'It's such a lightening of my

heart, only to look at you! If I had had a conjuror's cap, there is no

one I should have wished for but you!'

'What?' returned Agnes.

'Well! perhaps Dora first,' I admitted, with a blush.

'Certainly, Dora first, I hope,' said Agnes, laughing.

'But you next!' said I. 'Where are you going?'

She was going to my rooms to see my aunt. The day being very fine, she

was glad to come out of the chariot, which smelt (I had my head in it

all this time) like a stable put under a cucumber-frame. I dismissed the

coachman, and she took my arm, and we walked on together. She was like

Hope embodied, to me. How different I felt in one short minute, having

Agnes at my side!

My aunt had written her one of the odd, abrupt notes--very little longer

than a Bank note--to which her epistolary efforts were usually limited.

She had stated therein that she had fallen into adversity, and was

leaving Dover for good, but had quite made up her mind to it, and was

so well that nobody need be uncomfortable about her. Agnes had come to

London to see my aunt, between whom and herself there had been a mutual

liking these many years: indeed, it dated from the time of my taking up

my residence in Mr. Wickfield's house. She was not alone, she said. Her

papa was with her--and Uriah Heep.

'And now they are partners,' said I. 'Confound him!'

'Yes,' said Agnes. 'They have some business here; and I took advantage

of their coming, to come too. You must not think my visit all friendly

and disinterested, Trotwood, for--I am afraid I may be cruelly

prejudiced--I do not like to let papa go away alone, with him.' 'Does he

exercise the same influence over Mr. Wickfield still, Agnes?'

Agnes shook her head. 'There is such a change at home,' said she, 'that

you would scarcely know the dear old house. They live with us now.'

'They?' said I.

'Mr. Heep and his mother. He sleeps in your old room,' said Agnes,

looking up into my face.

'I wish I had the ordering of his dreams,' said I. 'He wouldn't sleep

there long.'

'I keep my own little room,' said Agnes, 'where I used to learn my

lessons. How the time goes! You remember? The little panelled room that

opens from the drawing-room?'

'Remember, Agnes? When I saw you, for the first time, coming out at the

door, with your quaint little basket of keys hanging at your side?'

'It is just the same,' said Agnes, smiling. 'I am glad you think of it

so pleasantly. We were very happy.'

'We were, indeed,' said I.

'I keep that room to myself still; but I cannot always desert Mrs. Heep,

you know. And so,' said Agnes, quietly, 'I feel obliged to bear her

company, when I might prefer to be alone. But I have no other reason to

complain of her. If she tires me, sometimes, by her praises of her son,

it is only natural in a mother. He is a very good son to her.'

I looked at Agnes when she said these words, without detecting in her

any consciousness of Uriah's design. Her mild but earnest eyes met

mine with their own beautiful frankness, and there was no change in her

gentle face.

'The chief evil of their presence in the house,' said Agnes, 'is that I

cannot be as near papa as I could wish--Uriah Heep being so much between

us--and cannot watch over him, if that is not too bold a thing to say,

as closely as I would. But if any fraud or treachery is practising

against him, I hope that simple love and truth will be strong in the

end. I hope that real love and truth are stronger in the end than any

evil or misfortune in the world.'

A certain bright smile, which I never saw on any other face, died away,

even while I thought how good it was, and how familiar it had once been

to me; and she asked me, with a quick change of expression (we were

drawing very near my street), if I knew how the reverse in my aunt's

circumstances had been brought about. On my replying no, she had not

told me yet, Agnes became thoughtful, and I fancied I felt her arm

tremble in mine.

We found my aunt alone, in a state of some excitement. A difference

of opinion had arisen between herself and Mrs. Crupp, on an abstract

question (the propriety of chambers being inhabited by the gentler sex);

and my aunt, utterly indifferent to spasms on the part of Mrs. Crupp,

had cut the dispute short, by informing that lady that she smelt of

my brandy, and that she would trouble her to walk out. Both of these

expressions Mrs. Crupp considered actionable, and had expressed her

intention of bringing before a 'British Judy'--meaning, it was supposed,

the bulwark of our national liberties.

MY aunt, however, having had time to cool, while Peggotty was out

showing Mr. Dick the soldiers at the Horse Guards--and being, besides,

greatly pleased to see Agnes--rather plumed herself on the affair than

otherwise, and received us with unimpaired good humour. When Agnes laid

her bonnet on the table, and sat down beside her, I could not but think,

looking on her mild eyes and her radiant forehead, how natural it

seemed to have her there; how trustfully, although she was so young and

inexperienced, my aunt confided in her; how strong she was, indeed, in

simple love and truth.

We began to talk about my aunt's losses, and I told them what I had

tried to do that morning.

'Which was injudicious, Trot,' said my aunt, 'but well meant. You are

a generous boy--I suppose I must say, young man, now--and I am proud of

you, my dear. So far, so good. Now, Trot and Agnes, let us look the case

of Betsey Trotwood in the face, and see how it stands.'

I observed Agnes turn pale, as she looked very attentively at my aunt.

My aunt, patting her cat, looked very attentively at Agnes.

'Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt, who had always kept her money matters

to herself. '--I don't mean your sister, Trot, my dear, but myself--had

a certain property. It don't matter how much; enough to live on. More;

for she had saved a little, and added to it. Betsey funded her property

for some time, and then, by the advice of her man of business, laid

it out on landed security. That did very well, and returned very good

interest, till Betsey was paid off. I am talking of Betsey as if she

was a man-of-war. Well! Then, Betsey had to look about her, for a new

investment. She thought she was wiser, now, than her man of business,

who was not such a good man of business by this time, as he used to

be--I am alluding to your father, Agnes--and she took it into her head

to lay it out for herself. So she took her pigs,' said my aunt, 'to a

foreign market; and a very bad market it turned out to be. First, she

lost in the mining way, and then she lost in the diving way--fishing up

treasure, or some such Tom Tiddler nonsense,' explained my aunt, rubbing

her nose; 'and then she lost in the mining way again, and, last of all,

to set the thing entirely to rights, she lost in the banking way. I

don't know what the Bank shares were worth for a little while,' said my

aunt; 'cent per cent was the lowest of it, I believe; but the Bank was

at the other end of the world, and tumbled into space, for what I know;

anyhow, it fell to pieces, and never will and never can pay sixpence;

and Betsey's sixpences were all there, and there's an end of them. Least

said, soonest mended!'

My aunt concluded this philosophical summary, by fixing her eyes with a

kind of triumph on Agnes, whose colour was gradually returning.

'Dear Miss Trotwood, is that all the history?' said Agnes.

'I hope it's enough, child,' said my aunt. 'If there had been more

money to lose, it wouldn't have been all, I dare say. Betsey would have

contrived to throw that after the rest, and make another chapter, I have

little doubt. But there was no more money, and there's no more story.'

Agnes had listened at first with suspended breath. Her colour still came

and went, but she breathed more freely. I thought I knew why. I thought

she had had some fear that her unhappy father might be in some way to

blame for what had happened. My aunt took her hand in hers, and laughed.

'Is that all?' repeated my aunt. 'Why, yes, that's all, except, "And she

lived happy ever afterwards." Perhaps I may add that of Betsey yet, one

of these days. Now, Agnes, you have a wise head. So have you, Trot, in

some things, though I can't compliment you always'; and here my aunt

shook her own at me, with an energy peculiar to herself. 'What's to be

done? Here's the cottage, taking one time with another, will produce

say seventy pounds a year. I think we may safely put it down at

that. Well!--That's all we've got,' said my aunt; with whom it was an

idiosyncrasy, as it is with some horses, to stop very short when she

appeared to be in a fair way of going on for a long while.

'Then,' said my aunt, after a rest, 'there's Dick. He's good for a

hundred a-year, but of course that must be expended on himself. I would

sooner send him away, though I know I am the only person who appreciates

him, than have him, and not spend his money on himself. How can Trot and

I do best, upon our means? What do you say, Agnes?'

'I say, aunt,' I interposed, 'that I must do something!'

'Go for a soldier, do you mean?' returned my aunt, alarmed; 'or go to

sea? I won't hear of it. You are to be a proctor. We're not going to

have any knockings on the head in THIS family, if you please, sir.'

I was about to explain that I was not desirous of introducing that mode

of provision into the family, when Agnes inquired if my rooms were held

for any long term?

'You come to the point, my dear,' said my aunt. 'They are not to be got

rid of, for six months at least, unless they could be underlet, and that

I don't believe. The last man died here. Five people out of six would

die--of course--of that woman in nankeen with the flannel petticoat. I

have a little ready money; and I agree with you, the best thing we can

do, is, to live the term out here, and get a bedroom hard by.'

I thought it my duty to hint at the discomfort my aunt would sustain,

from living in a continual state of guerilla warfare with Mrs. Crupp;

but she disposed of that objection summarily by declaring that, on the

first demonstration of hostilities, she was prepared to astonish Mrs.

Crupp for the whole remainder of her natural life.

'I have been thinking, Trotwood,' said Agnes, diffidently, 'that if you

had time--'

'I have a good deal of time, Agnes. I am always disengaged after four

or five o'clock, and I have time early in the morning. In one way and

another,' said I, conscious of reddening a little as I thought of the

hours and hours I had devoted to fagging about town, and to and fro upon

the Norwood Road, 'I have abundance of time.'

'I know you would not mind,' said Agnes, coming to me, and speaking in

a low voice, so full of sweet and hopeful consideration that I hear it

now, 'the duties of a secretary.'

'Mind, my dear Agnes?'

'Because,' continued Agnes, 'Doctor Strong has acted on his intention of

retiring, and has come to live in London; and he asked papa, I know,

if he could recommend him one. Don't you think he would rather have his

favourite old pupil near him, than anybody else?'

'Dear Agnes!' said I. 'What should I do without you! You are always my

good angel. I told you so. I never think of you in any other light.'

Agnes answered with her pleasant laugh, that one good Angel (meaning

Dora) was enough; and went on to remind me that the Doctor had been

used to occupy himself in his study, early in the morning, and in the

evening--and that probably my leisure would suit his requirements very

well. I was scarcely more delighted with the prospect of earning my own

bread, than with the hope of earning it under my old master; in short,

acting on the advice of Agnes, I sat down and wrote a letter to the

Doctor, stating my object, and appointing to call on him next day at

ten in the forenoon. This I addressed to Highgate--for in that place, so

memorable to me, he lived--and went and posted, myself, without losing a

minute.

Wherever Agnes was, some agreeable token of her noiseless presence

seemed inseparable from the place. When I came back, I found my aunt's

birds hanging, just as they had hung so long in the parlour window of

the cottage; and my easy-chair imitating my aunt's much easier chair in

its position at the open window; and even the round green fan, which my

aunt had brought away with her, screwed on to the window-sill. I knew

who had done all this, by its seeming to have quietly done itself; and I

should have known in a moment who had arranged my neglected books in the

old order of my school days, even if I had supposed Agnes to be miles

away, instead of seeing her busy with them, and smiling at the disorder

into which they had fallen.

My aunt was quite gracious on the subject of the Thames (it really did

look very well with the sun upon it, though not like the sea before the

cottage), but she could not relent towards the London smoke, which, she

said, 'peppered everything'. A complete revolution, in which Peggotty

bore a prominent part, was being effected in every corner of my rooms,

in regard of this pepper; and I was looking on, thinking how little even

Peggotty seemed to do with a good deal of bustle, and how much Agnes did

without any bustle at all, when a knock came at the door.

'I think,' said Agnes, turning pale, 'it's papa. He promised me that he

would come.'

I opened the door, and admitted, not only Mr. Wickfield, but Uriah Heep.

I had not seen Mr. Wickfield for some time. I was prepared for a great

change in him, after what I had heard from Agnes, but his appearance

shocked me.

It was not that he looked many years older, though still dressed

with the old scrupulous cleanliness; or that there was an unwholesome

ruddiness upon his face; or that his eyes were full and bloodshot; or

that there was a nervous trembling in his hand, the cause of which I

knew, and had for some years seen at work. It was not that he had lost

his good looks, or his old bearing of a gentleman--for that he had

not--but the thing that struck me most, was, that with the evidences of

his native superiority still upon him, he should submit himself to that

crawling impersonation of meanness, Uriah Heep. The reversal of the

two natures, in their relative positions, Uriah's of power and Mr.

Wickfield's of dependence, was a sight more painful to me than I can

express. If I had seen an Ape taking command of a Man, I should hardly

have thought it a more degrading spectacle.

He appeared to be only too conscious of it himself. When he came in, he

stood still; and with his head bowed, as if he felt it. This was

only for a moment; for Agnes softly said to him, 'Papa! Here is Miss

Trotwood--and Trotwood, whom you have not seen for a long while!' and

then he approached, and constrainedly gave my aunt his hand, and shook

hands more cordially with me. In the moment's pause I speak of, I saw

Uriah's countenance form itself into a most ill-favoured smile. Agnes

saw it too, I think, for she shrank from him.

What my aunt saw, or did not see, I defy the science of physiognomy

to have made out, without her own consent. I believe there never was

anybody with such an imperturbable countenance when she chose. Her face

might have been a dead-wall on the occasion in question, for any light

it threw upon her thoughts; until she broke silence with her usual

abruptness.

'Well, Wickfield!' said my aunt; and he looked up at her for the first

time. 'I have been telling your daughter how well I have been disposing

of my money for myself, because I couldn't trust it to you, as you were

growing rusty in business matters. We have been taking counsel together,

and getting on very well, all things considered. Agnes is worth the

whole firm, in my opinion.'

'If I may umbly make the remark,' said Uriah Heep, with a writhe, 'I

fully agree with Miss Betsey Trotwood, and should be only too appy if

Miss Agnes was a partner.'

'You're a partner yourself, you know,' returned my aunt, 'and that's

about enough for you, I expect. How do you find yourself, sir?'

In acknowledgement of this question, addressed to him with extraordinary

curtness, Mr. Heep, uncomfortably clutching the blue bag he carried,

replied that he was pretty well, he thanked my aunt, and hoped she was

the same.

'And you, Master--I should say, Mister Copperfield,' pursued Uriah. 'I

hope I see you well! I am rejoiced to see you, Mister Copperfield, even

under present circumstances.' I believed that; for he seemed to relish

them very much. 'Present circumstances is not what your friends would

wish for you, Mister Copperfield, but it isn't money makes the man:

it's--I am really unequal with my umble powers to express what it is,'

said Uriah, with a fawning jerk, 'but it isn't money!'

Here he shook hands with me: not in the common way, but standing at

a good distance from me, and lifting my hand up and down like a pump

handle, that he was a little afraid of.

'And how do you think we are looking, Master Copperfield,--I should

say, Mister?' fawned Uriah. 'Don't you find Mr. Wickfield blooming, sir?

Years don't tell much in our firm, Master Copperfield, except in raising

up the umble, namely, mother and self--and in developing,' he added, as

an afterthought, 'the beautiful, namely, Miss Agnes.'

He jerked himself about, after this compliment, in such an intolerable

manner, that my aunt, who had sat looking straight at him, lost all

patience.

'Deuce take the man!' said my aunt, sternly, 'what's he about? Don't be

galvanic, sir!'

'I ask your pardon, Miss Trotwood,' returned Uriah; 'I'm aware you're

nervous.'

'Go along with you, sir!' said my aunt, anything but appeased. 'Don't

presume to say so! I am nothing of the sort. If you're an eel, sir,

conduct yourself like one. If you're a man, control your limbs, sir!

Good God!' said my aunt, with great indignation, 'I am not going to be

serpentined and corkscrewed out of my senses!'

Mr. Heep was rather abashed, as most people might have been, by this

explosion; which derived great additional force from the indignant

manner in which my aunt afterwards moved in her chair, and shook her

head as if she were making snaps or bounces at him. But he said to me

aside in a meek voice:

'I am well aware, Master Copperfield, that Miss Trotwood, though an

excellent lady, has a quick temper (indeed I think I had the pleasure

of knowing her, when I was a numble clerk, before you did, Master

Copperfield), and it's only natural, I am sure, that it should be made

quicker by present circumstances. The wonder is, that it isn't much

worse! I only called to say that if there was anything we could do, in

present circumstances, mother or self, or Wickfield and Heep,--we should

be really glad. I may go so far?' said Uriah, with a sickly smile at his

partner.

'Uriah Heep,' said Mr. Wickfield, in a monotonous forced way, 'is active

in the business, Trotwood. What he says, I quite concur in. You know

I had an old interest in you. Apart from that, what Uriah says I quite

concur in!'

'Oh, what a reward it is,' said Uriah, drawing up one leg, at the risk

of bringing down upon himself another visitation from my aunt, 'to be so

trusted in! But I hope I am able to do something to relieve him from the

fatigues of business, Master Copperfield!'

'Uriah Heep is a great relief to me,' said Mr. Wickfield, in the same

dull voice. 'It's a load off my mind, Trotwood, to have such a partner.'

The red fox made him say all this, I knew, to exhibit him to me in the

light he had indicated on the night when he poisoned my rest. I saw the

same ill-favoured smile upon his face again, and saw how he watched me.

'You are not going, papa?' said Agnes, anxiously. 'Will you not walk

back with Trotwood and me?'

He would have looked to Uriah, I believe, before replying, if that

worthy had not anticipated him.

'I am bespoke myself,' said Uriah, 'on business; otherwise I should

have been appy to have kept with my friends. But I leave my partner to

represent the firm. Miss Agnes, ever yours! I wish you good-day, Master

Copperfield, and leave my umble respects for Miss Betsey Trotwood.'

With those words, he retired, kissing his great hand, and leering at us

like a mask.

We sat there, talking about our pleasant old Canterbury days, an hour

or two. Mr. Wickfield, left to Agnes, soon became more like his former

self; though there was a settled depression upon him, which he never

shook off. For all that, he brightened; and had an evident pleasure in

hearing us recall the little incidents of our old life, many of which he

remembered very well. He said it was like those times, to be alone with

Agnes and me again; and he wished to Heaven they had never changed. I am

sure there was an influence in the placid face of Agnes, and in the very

touch of her hand upon his arm, that did wonders for him.

My aunt (who was busy nearly all this while with Peggotty, in the inner

room) would not accompany us to the place where they were staying, but

insisted on my going; and I went. We dined together. After dinner, Agnes

sat beside him, as of old, and poured out his wine. He took what she

gave him, and no more--like a child--and we all three sat together at a

window as the evening gathered in. When it was almost dark, he lay down

on a sofa, Agnes pillowing his head and bending over him a little while;

and when she came back to the window, it was not so dark but I could see

tears glittering in her eyes.

I pray Heaven that I never may forget the dear girl in her love and

truth, at that time of my life; for if I should, I must be drawing near

the end, and then I would desire to remember her best! She filled my

heart with such good resolutions, strengthened my weakness so, by her

example, so directed--I know not how, she was too modest and gentle

to advise me in many words--the wandering ardour and unsettled purpose

within me, that all the little good I have done, and all the harm I have

forborne, I solemnly believe I may refer to her.

And how she spoke to me of Dora, sitting at the window in the dark;

listened to my praises of her; praised again; and round the little

fairy-figure shed some glimpses of her own pure light, that made it yet

more precious and more innocent to me! Oh, Agnes, sister of my boyhood,

if I had known then, what I knew long afterwards--!

There was a beggar in the street, when I went down; and as I turned my

head towards the window, thinking of her calm seraphic eyes, he made me

start by muttering, as if he were an echo of the morning: 'Blind! Blind!

Blind!'

CHAPTER 36. ENTHUSIASM

I began the next day with another dive into the Roman bath, and then

started for Highgate. I was not dispirited now. I was not afraid of the

shabby coat, and had no yearnings after gallant greys. My whole manner

of thinking of our late misfortune was changed. What I had to do, was,

to show my aunt that her past goodness to me had not been thrown away

on an insensible, ungrateful object. What I had to do, was, to turn the

painful discipline of my younger days to account, by going to work with

a resolute and steady heart. What I had to do, was, to take my woodman's

axe in my hand, and clear my own way through the forest of difficulty,

by cutting down the trees until I came to Dora. And I went on at a

mighty rate, as if it could be done by walking.

When I found myself on the familiar Highgate road, pursuing such a

different errand from that old one of pleasure, with which it was

associated, it seemed as if a complete change had come on my whole life.

But that did not discourage me. With the new life, came new purpose,

new intention. Great was the labour; priceless the reward. Dora was the

reward, and Dora must be won.

I got into such a transport, that I felt quite sorry my coat was not

a little shabby already. I wanted to be cutting at those trees in the

forest of difficulty, under circumstances that should prove my strength.

I had a good mind to ask an old man, in wire spectacles, who was

breaking stones upon the road, to lend me his hammer for a little while,

and let me begin to beat a path to Dora out of granite. I stimulated

myself into such a heat, and got so out of breath, that I felt as if I

had been earning I don't know how much.

In this state, I went into a cottage that I saw was to let, and examined

it narrowly,--for I felt it necessary to be practical. It would do for

me and Dora admirably: with a little front garden for Jip to run about

in, and bark at the tradespeople through the railings, and a capital

room upstairs for my aunt. I came out again, hotter and faster than

ever, and dashed up to Highgate, at such a rate that I was there an

hour too early; and, though I had not been, should have been obliged to

stroll about to cool myself, before I was at all presentable.

My first care, after putting myself under this necessary course of

preparation, was to find the Doctor's house. It was not in that part of

Highgate where Mrs. Steerforth lived, but quite on the opposite side

of the little town. When I had made this discovery, I went back, in

an attraction I could not resist, to a lane by Mrs. Steerforth's, and

looked over the corner of the garden wall. His room was shut up close.

The conservatory doors were standing open, and Rosa Dartle was walking,

bareheaded, with a quick, impetuous step, up and down a gravel walk on

one side of the lawn. She gave me the idea of some fierce thing, that

was dragging the length of its chain to and fro upon a beaten track, and

wearing its heart out.

I came softly away from my place of observation, and avoiding that part

of the neighbourhood, and wishing I had not gone near it, strolled about

until it was ten o'clock. The church with the slender spire, that stands

on the top of the hill now, was not there then to tell me the time. An

old red-brick mansion, used as a school, was in its place; and a fine

old house it must have been to go to school at, as I recollect it.

When I approached the Doctor's cottage--a pretty old place, on which

he seemed to have expended some money, if I might judge from the

embellishments and repairs that had the look of being just completed--I

saw him walking in the garden at the side, gaiters and all, as if he

had never left off walking since the days of my pupilage. He had his old

companions about him, too; for there were plenty of high trees in the

neighbourhood, and two or three rooks were on the grass, looking after

him, as if they had been written to about him by the Canterbury rooks,

and were observing him closely in consequence.

Knowing the utter hopelessness of attracting his attention from that

distance, I made bold to open the gate, and walk after him, so as to

meet him when he should turn round. When he did, and came towards me, he

looked at me thoughtfully for a few moments, evidently without thinking

about me at all; and then his benevolent face expressed extraordinary

pleasure, and he took me by both hands.

'Why, my dear Copperfield,' said the Doctor, 'you are a man! How do you

do? I am delighted to see you. My dear Copperfield, how very much you

have improved! You are quite--yes--dear me!'

I hoped he was well, and Mrs. Strong too.

'Oh dear, yes!' said the Doctor; 'Annie's quite well, and she'll be

delighted to see you. You were always her favourite. She said so,

last night, when I showed her your letter. And--yes, to be sure--you

recollect Mr. Jack Maldon, Copperfield?'

'Perfectly, sir.'

'Of course,' said the Doctor. 'To be sure. He's pretty well, too.'

'Has he come home, sir?' I inquired.

'From India?' said the Doctor. 'Yes. Mr. Jack Maldon couldn't bear

the climate, my dear. Mrs. Markleham--you have not forgotten Mrs.

Markleham?'

Forgotten the Old Soldier! And in that short time!

'Mrs. Markleham,' said the Doctor, 'was quite vexed about him, poor

thing; so we have got him at home again; and we have bought him a little

Patent place, which agrees with him much better.' I knew enough of Mr.

Jack Maldon to suspect from this account that it was a place where there

was not much to do, and which was pretty well paid. The Doctor, walking

up and down with his hand on my shoulder, and his kind face turned

encouragingly to mine, went on:

'Now, my dear Copperfield, in reference to this proposal of yours. It's

very gratifying and agreeable to me, I am sure; but don't you think you

could do better? You achieved distinction, you know, when you were with

us. You are qualified for many good things. You have laid a foundation

that any edifice may be raised upon; and is it not a pity that you

should devote the spring-time of your life to such a poor pursuit as I

can offer?'

I became very glowing again, and, expressing myself in a rhapsodical

style, I am afraid, urged my request strongly; reminding the Doctor that

I had already a profession.

'Well, well,' said the Doctor, 'that's true. Certainly, your having

a profession, and being actually engaged in studying it, makes a

difference. But, my good young friend, what's seventy pounds a year?'

'It doubles our income, Doctor Strong,' said I.

'Dear me!' replied the Doctor. 'To think of that! Not that I mean to

say it's rigidly limited to seventy pounds a-year, because I have always

contemplated making any young friend I might thus employ, a present too.

Undoubtedly,' said the Doctor, still walking me up and down with

his hand on my shoulder. 'I have always taken an annual present into

account.'

'My dear tutor,' said I (now, really, without any nonsense), 'to whom I

owe more obligations already than I ever can acknowledge--'

'No, no,' interposed the Doctor. 'Pardon me!'

'If you will take such time as I have, and that is my mornings and

evenings, and can think it worth seventy pounds a year, you will do me

such a service as I cannot express.'

'Dear me!' said the Doctor, innocently. 'To think that so little should

go for so much! Dear, dear! And when you can do better, you will? On

your word, now?' said the Doctor,--which he had always made a very grave

appeal to the honour of us boys.

'On my word, sir!' I returned, answering in our old school manner.

'Then be it so,' said the Doctor, clapping me on the shoulder, and still

keeping his hand there, as we still walked up and down.

'And I shall be twenty times happier, sir,' said I, with a little--I

hope innocent--flattery, 'if my employment is to be on the Dictionary.'

The Doctor stopped, smilingly clapped me on the shoulder again, and

exclaimed, with a triumph most delightful to behold, as if I had

penetrated to the profoundest depths of mortal sagacity, 'My dear young

friend, you have hit it. It IS the Dictionary!'

How could it be anything else! His pockets were as full of it as his

head. It was sticking out of him in all directions. He told me that

since his retirement from scholastic life, he had been advancing with

it wonderfully; and that nothing could suit him better than the proposed

arrangements for morning and evening work, as it was his custom to walk

about in the daytime with his considering cap on. His papers were in

a little confusion, in consequence of Mr. Jack Maldon having lately

proffered his occasional services as an amanuensis, and not being

accustomed to that occupation; but we should soon put right what was

amiss, and go on swimmingly. Afterwards, when we were fairly at our

work, I found Mr. Jack Maldon's efforts more troublesome to me than

I had expected, as he had not confined himself to making numerous

mistakes, but had sketched so many soldiers, and ladies' heads, over

the Doctor's manuscript, that I often became involved in labyrinths of

obscurity.

The Doctor was quite happy in the prospect of our going to work together

on that wonderful performance, and we settled to begin next morning at

seven o'clock. We were to work two hours every morning, and two or three

hours every night, except on Saturdays, when I was to rest. On Sundays,

of course, I was to rest also, and I considered these very easy terms.

Our plans being thus arranged to our mutual satisfaction, the Doctor

took me into the house to present me to Mrs. Strong, whom we found in

the Doctor's new study, dusting his books,--a freedom which he never

permitted anybody else to take with those sacred favourites.

They had postponed their breakfast on my account, and we sat down to

table together. We had not been seated long, when I saw an approaching

arrival in Mrs. Strong's face, before I heard any sound of it. A

gentleman on horseback came to the gate, and leading his horse into the

little court, with the bridle over his arm, as if he were quite at home,

tied him to a ring in the empty coach-house wall, and came into the

breakfast parlour, whip in hand. It was Mr. Jack Maldon; and Mr. Jack

Maldon was not at all improved by India, I thought. I was in a state

of ferocious virtue, however, as to young men who were not cutting down

trees in the forest of difficulty; and my impression must be received

with due allowance.

'Mr. Jack!' said the Doctor. 'Copperfield!'

Mr. Jack Maldon shook hands with me; but not very warmly, I believed;

and with an air of languid patronage, at which I secretly took great

umbrage. But his languor altogether was quite a wonderful sight; except

when he addressed himself to his cousin Annie. 'Have you breakfasted

this morning, Mr. Jack?' said the Doctor.

'I hardly ever take breakfast, sir,' he replied, with his head thrown

back in an easy-chair. 'I find it bores me.'

'Is there any news today?' inquired the Doctor.

'Nothing at all, sir,' replied Mr. Maldon. 'There's an account about

the people being hungry and discontented down in the North, but they are

always being hungry and discontented somewhere.'

The Doctor looked grave, and said, as though he wished to change the

subject, 'Then there's no news at all; and no news, they say, is good

news.'

'There's a long statement in the papers, sir, about a murder,' observed

Mr. Maldon. 'But somebody is always being murdered, and I didn't read

it.'

A display of indifference to all the actions and passions of mankind was

not supposed to be such a distinguished quality at that time, I think,

as I have observed it to be considered since. I have known it very

fashionable indeed. I have seen it displayed with such success, that I

have encountered some fine ladies and gentlemen who might as well have

been born caterpillars. Perhaps it impressed me the more then, because

it was new to me, but it certainly did not tend to exalt my opinion of,

or to strengthen my confidence in, Mr. Jack Maldon.

'I came out to inquire whether Annie would like to go to the opera

tonight,' said Mr. Maldon, turning to her. 'It's the last good night

there will be, this season; and there's a singer there, whom she really

ought to hear. She is perfectly exquisite. Besides which, she is so

charmingly ugly,' relapsing into languor.

The Doctor, ever pleased with what was likely to please his young wife,

turned to her and said:

'You must go, Annie. You must go.'

'I would rather not,' she said to the Doctor. 'I prefer to remain at

home. I would much rather remain at home.'

Without looking at her cousin, she then addressed me, and asked me about

Agnes, and whether she should see her, and whether she was not likely to

come that day; and was so much disturbed, that I wondered how even the

Doctor, buttering his toast, could be blind to what was so obvious.

But he saw nothing. He told her, good-naturedly, that she was young and

ought to be amused and entertained, and must not allow herself to be

made dull by a dull old fellow. Moreover, he said, he wanted to hear her

sing all the new singer's songs to him; and how could she do that well,

unless she went? So the Doctor persisted in making the engagement for

her, and Mr. Jack Maldon was to come back to dinner. This concluded, he

went to his Patent place, I suppose; but at all events went away on his

horse, looking very idle.

I was curious to find out next morning, whether she had been. She had

not, but had sent into London to put her cousin off; and had gone out in

the afternoon to see Agnes, and had prevailed upon the Doctor to go with

her; and they had walked home by the fields, the Doctor told me, the

evening being delightful. I wondered then, whether she would have gone

if Agnes had not been in town, and whether Agnes had some good influence

over her too!

She did not look very happy, I thought; but it was a good face, or a

very false one. I often glanced at it, for she sat in the window all the

time we were at work; and made our breakfast, which we took by snatches

as we were employed. When I left, at nine o'clock, she was kneeling on

the ground at the Doctor's feet, putting on his shoes and gaiters for

him. There was a softened shade upon her face, thrown from some green

leaves overhanging the open window of the low room; and I thought all

the way to Doctors' Commons, of the night when I had seen it looking at

him as he read.

I was pretty busy now; up at five in the morning, and home at nine

or ten at night. But I had infinite satisfaction in being so

closely engaged, and never walked slowly on any account, and felt

enthusiastically that the more I tired myself, the more I was doing to

deserve Dora. I had not revealed myself in my altered character to

Dora yet, because she was coming to see Miss Mills in a few days, and

I deferred all I had to tell her until then; merely informing her in

my letters (all our communications were secretly forwarded through Miss

Mills), that I had much to tell her. In the meantime, I put myself on

a short allowance of bear's grease, wholly abandoned scented soap and

lavender water, and sold off three waistcoats at a prodigious sacrifice,

as being too luxurious for my stern career.

Not satisfied with all these proceedings, but burning with impatience

to do something more, I went to see Traddles, now lodging up behind the

parapet of a house in Castle Street, Holborn. Mr. Dick, who had been

with me to Highgate twice already, and had resumed his companionship

with the Doctor, I took with me.

I took Mr. Dick with me, because, acutely sensitive to my aunt's

reverses, and sincerely believing that no galley-slave or convict worked

as I did, he had begun to fret and worry himself out of spirits and

appetite, as having nothing useful to do. In this condition, he felt

more incapable of finishing the Memorial than ever; and the harder he

worked at it, the oftener that unlucky head of King Charles the First

got into it. Seriously apprehending that his malady would increase,

unless we put some innocent deception upon him and caused him to believe

that he was useful, or unless we could put him in the way of being

really useful (which would be better), I made up my mind to try

if Traddles could help us. Before we went, I wrote Traddles a full

statement of all that had happened, and Traddles wrote me back a capital

answer, expressive of his sympathy and friendship.

We found him hard at work with his inkstand and papers, refreshed by the

sight of the flower-pot stand and the little round table in a corner of

the small apartment. He received us cordially, and made friends with

Mr. Dick in a moment. Mr. Dick professed an absolute certainty of having

seen him before, and we both said, 'Very likely.'

The first subject on which I had to consult Traddles was this,--I had

heard that many men distinguished in various pursuits had begun life

by reporting the debates in Parliament. Traddles having mentioned

newspapers to me, as one of his hopes, I had put the two things

together, and told Traddles in my letter that I wished to know how I

could qualify myself for this pursuit. Traddles now informed me, as the

result of his inquiries, that the mere mechanical acquisition necessary,

except in rare cases, for thorough excellence in it, that is to say,

a perfect and entire command of the mystery of short-hand writing and

reading, was about equal in difficulty to the mastery of six languages;

and that it might perhaps be attained, by dint of perseverance, in the

course of a few years. Traddles reasonably supposed that this would

settle the business; but I, only feeling that here indeed were a few

tall trees to be hewn down, immediately resolved to work my way on to

Dora through this thicket, axe in hand.

'I am very much obliged to you, my dear Traddles!' said I. 'I'll begin

tomorrow.'

Traddles looked astonished, as he well might; but he had no notion as

yet of my rapturous condition.

'I'll buy a book,' said I, 'with a good scheme of this art in it; I'll

work at it at the Commons, where I haven't half enough to do; I'll take

down the speeches in our court for practice--Traddles, my dear fellow,

I'll master it!'

'Dear me,' said Traddles, opening his eyes, 'I had no idea you were such

a determined character, Copperfield!'

I don't know how he should have had, for it was new enough to me. I

passed that off, and brought Mr. Dick on the carpet.

'You see,' said Mr. Dick, wistfully, 'if I could exert myself, Mr.

Traddles--if I could beat a drum--or blow anything!'

Poor fellow! I have little doubt he would have preferred such an

employment in his heart to all others. Traddles, who would not have

smiled for the world, replied composedly:

'But you are a very good penman, sir. You told me so, Copperfield?'

'Excellent!' said I. And indeed he was. He wrote with extraordinary

neatness.

'Don't you think,' said Traddles, 'you could copy writings, sir, if I

got them for you?'

Mr. Dick looked doubtfully at me. 'Eh, Trotwood?'

I shook my head. Mr. Dick shook his, and sighed. 'Tell him about the

Memorial,' said Mr. Dick.

I explained to Traddles that there was a difficulty in keeping King

Charles the First out of Mr. Dick's manuscripts; Mr. Dick in the

meanwhile looking very deferentially and seriously at Traddles, and

sucking his thumb.

'But these writings, you know, that I speak of, are already drawn up

and finished,' said Traddles after a little consideration. 'Mr. Dick has

nothing to do with them. Wouldn't that make a difference, Copperfield?

At all events, wouldn't it be well to try?'

This gave us new hope. Traddles and I laying our heads together apart,

while Mr. Dick anxiously watched us from his chair, we concocted a

scheme in virtue of which we got him to work next day, with triumphant

success.

On a table by the window in Buckingham Street, we set out the work

Traddles procured for him--which was to make, I forget how many copies

of a legal document about some right of way--and on another table

we spread the last unfinished original of the great Memorial. Our

instructions to Mr. Dick were that he should copy exactly what he had

before him, without the least departure from the original; and that when

he felt it necessary to make the slightest allusion to King Charles the

First, he should fly to the Memorial. We exhorted him to be resolute

in this, and left my aunt to observe him. My aunt reported to us,

afterwards, that, at first, he was like a man playing the kettle-drums,

and constantly divided his attentions between the two; but that, finding

this confuse and fatigue him, and having his copy there, plainly before

his eyes, he soon sat at it in an orderly business-like manner, and

postponed the Memorial to a more convenient time. In a word, although we

took great care that he should have no more to do than was good for him,

and although he did not begin with the beginning of a week, he earned

by the following Saturday night ten shillings and nine-pence; and never,

while I live, shall I forget his going about to all the shops in the

neighbourhood to change this treasure into sixpences, or his bringing

them to my aunt arranged in the form of a heart upon a waiter, with

tears of joy and pride in his eyes. He was like one under the propitious

influence of a charm, from the moment of his being usefully employed;

and if there were a happy man in the world, that Saturday night, it was

the grateful creature who thought my aunt the most wonderful woman in

existence, and me the most wonderful young man.

'No starving now, Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, shaking hands with me in a

corner. 'I'll provide for her, Sir!' and he flourished his ten fingers

in the air, as if they were ten banks.

I hardly know which was the better pleased, Traddles or I. 'It really,'

said Traddles, suddenly, taking a letter out of his pocket, and giving

it to me, 'put Mr. Micawber quite out of my head!'

The letter (Mr. Micawber never missed any possible opportunity of

writing a letter) was addressed to me, 'By the kindness of T. Traddles,

Esquire, of the Inner Temple.' It ran thus:--

'MY DEAR COPPERFIELD,

'You may possibly not be unprepared to receive the intimation that

something has turned up. I may have mentioned to you on a former

occasion that I was in expectation of such an event.

'I am about to establish myself in one of the provincial towns of our

favoured island (where the society may be described as a happy admixture

of the agricultural and the clerical), in immediate connexion with

one of the learned professions. Mrs. Micawber and our offspring will

accompany me. Our ashes, at a future period, will probably be found

commingled in the cemetery attached to a venerable pile, for which the

spot to which I refer has acquired a reputation, shall I say from China

to Peru?

'In bidding adieu to the modern Babylon, where we have undergone many

vicissitudes, I trust not ignobly, Mrs. Micawber and myself cannot

disguise from our minds that we part, it may be for years and it may be

for ever, with an individual linked by strong associations to the altar

of our domestic life. If, on the eve of such a departure, you will

accompany our mutual friend, Mr. Thomas Traddles, to our present abode,

and there reciprocate the wishes natural to the occasion, you will

confer a Boon

'On

'One

'Who

'Is

'Ever yours,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

I was glad to find that Mr. Micawber had got rid of his dust and ashes,

and that something really had turned up at last. Learning from Traddles

that the invitation referred to the evening then wearing away, I

expressed my readiness to do honour to it; and we went off together to

the lodging which Mr. Micawber occupied as Mr. Mortimer, and which was

situated near the top of the Gray's Inn Road.

The resources of this lodging were so limited, that we found the twins,

now some eight or nine years old, reposing in a turn-up bedstead in

the family sitting-room, where Mr. Micawber had prepared, in a

wash-hand-stand jug, what he called 'a Brew' of the agreeable beverage

for which he was famous. I had the pleasure, on this occasion, of

renewing the acquaintance of Master Micawber, whom I found a promising

boy of about twelve or thirteen, very subject to that restlessness of

limb which is not an unfrequent phenomenon in youths of his age. I also

became once more known to his sister, Miss Micawber, in whom, as Mr.

Micawber told us, 'her mother renewed her youth, like the Phoenix'.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'yourself and Mr. Traddles

find us on the brink of migration, and will excuse any little

discomforts incidental to that position.'

Glancing round as I made a suitable reply, I observed that the family

effects were already packed, and that the amount of luggage was by no

means overwhelming. I congratulated Mrs. Micawber on the approaching

change.

'My dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'of your friendly

interest in all our affairs, I am well assured. My family may consider

it banishment, if they please; but I am a wife and mother, and I never

will desert Mr. Micawber.'

Traddles, appealed to by Mrs. Micawber's eye, feelingly acquiesced.

'That,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that, at least, is my view, my dear Mr.

Copperfield and Mr. Traddles, of the obligation which I took upon myself

when I repeated the irrevocable words, "I, Emma, take thee, Wilkins." I

read the service over with a flat-candle on the previous night, and

the conclusion I derived from it was, that I never could desert Mr.

Micawber. And,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'though it is possible I may be

mistaken in my view of the ceremony, I never will!'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, a little impatiently, 'I am not conscious

that you are expected to do anything of the sort.'

'I am aware, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' pursued Mrs. Micawber, 'that I am

now about to cast my lot among strangers; and I am also aware that the

various members of my family, to whom Mr. Micawber has written in the

most gentlemanly terms, announcing that fact, have not taken the least

notice of Mr. Micawber's communication. Indeed I may be superstitious,'

said Mrs. Micawber, 'but it appears to me that Mr. Micawber is destined

never to receive any answers whatever to the great majority of the

communications he writes. I may augur, from the silence of my family,

that they object to the resolution I have taken; but I should not allow

myself to be swerved from the path of duty, Mr. Copperfield, even by my

papa and mama, were they still living.'

I expressed my opinion that this was going in the right direction. 'It

may be a sacrifice,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'to immure one's-self in a

Cathedral town; but surely, Mr. Copperfield, if it is a sacrifice in me,

it is much more a sacrifice in a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities.'

'Oh! You are going to a Cathedral town?' said I.

Mr. Micawber, who had been helping us all, out of the wash-hand-stand

jug, replied:

'To Canterbury. In fact, my dear Copperfield, I have entered into

arrangements, by virtue of which I stand pledged and contracted to our

friend Heep, to assist and serve him in the capacity of--and to be--his

confidential clerk.'

I stared at Mr. Micawber, who greatly enjoyed my surprise.

'I am bound to state to you,' he said, with an official air, 'that the

business habits, and the prudent suggestions, of Mrs. Micawber, have

in a great measure conduced to this result. The gauntlet, to which Mrs.

Micawber referred upon a former occasion, being thrown down in the form

of an advertisement, was taken up by my friend Heep, and led to a mutual

recognition. Of my friend Heep,' said Mr. Micawber, 'who is a man of

remarkable shrewdness, I desire to speak with all possible respect.

My friend Heep has not fixed the positive remuneration at too high a

figure, but he has made a great deal, in the way of extrication from

the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, contingent on the value of

my services; and on the value of those services I pin my faith. Such

address and intelligence as I chance to possess,' said Mr. Micawber,

boastfully disparaging himself, with the old genteel air, 'will be

devoted to my friend Heep's service. I have already some acquaintance

with the law--as a defendant on civil process--and I shall immediately

apply myself to the Commentaries of one of the most eminent and

remarkable of our English jurists. I believe it is unnecessary to add

that I allude to Mr. justice Blackstone.'

These observations, and indeed the greater part of the observations

made that evening, were interrupted by Mrs. Micawber's discovering that

Master Micawber was sitting on his boots, or holding his head on with

both arms as if he felt it loose, or accidentally kicking Traddles under

the table, or shuffling his feet over one another, or producing them

at distances from himself apparently outrageous to nature, or lying

sideways with his hair among the wine-glasses, or developing his

restlessness of limb in some other form incompatible with the general

interests of society; and by Master Micawber's receiving those

discoveries in a resentful spirit. I sat all the while, amazed by Mr.

Micawber's disclosure, and wondering what it meant; until Mrs. Micawber

resumed the thread of the discourse, and claimed my attention.

'What I particularly request Mr. Micawber to be careful of, is,' said

Mrs. Micawber, 'that he does not, my dear Mr. Copperfield, in applying

himself to this subordinate branch of the law, place it out of his power

to rise, ultimately, to the top of the tree. I am convinced that Mr.

Micawber, giving his mind to a profession so adapted to his fertile

resources, and his flow of language, must distinguish himself. Now, for

example, Mr. Traddles,' said Mrs. Micawber, assuming a profound air, 'a

judge, or even say a Chancellor. Does an individual place himself beyond

the pale of those preferments by entering on such an office as Mr.

Micawber has accepted?'

'My dear,' observed Mr. Micawber--but glancing inquisitively at

Traddles, too; 'we have time enough before us, for the consideration of

those questions.'

'Micawber,' she returned, 'no! Your mistake in life is, that you do not

look forward far enough. You are bound, in justice to your family, if

not to yourself, to take in at a comprehensive glance the extremest

point in the horizon to which your abilities may lead you.'

Mr. Micawber coughed, and drank his punch with an air of exceeding

satisfaction--still glancing at Traddles, as if he desired to have his

opinion.

'Why, the plain state of the case, Mrs. Micawber,' said Traddles, mildly

breaking the truth to her. 'I mean the real prosaic fact, you know--'

'Just so,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'my dear Mr. Traddles, I wish to be as

prosaic and literal as possible on a subject of so much importance.'

'--Is,' said Traddles, 'that this branch of the law, even if Mr.

Micawber were a regular solicitor--'

'Exactly so,' returned Mrs. Micawber. ('Wilkins, you are squinting, and

will not be able to get your eyes back.')

'--Has nothing,' pursued Traddles, 'to do with that. Only a barrister

is eligible for such preferments; and Mr. Micawber could not be a

barrister, without being entered at an inn of court as a student, for

five years.'

'Do I follow you?' said Mrs. Micawber, with her most affable air

of business. 'Do I understand, my dear Mr. Traddles, that, at the

expiration of that period, Mr. Micawber would be eligible as a Judge or

Chancellor?'

'He would be ELIGIBLE,' returned Traddles, with a strong emphasis on

that word.

'Thank you,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'That is quite sufficient. If such is

the case, and Mr. Micawber forfeits no privilege by entering on these

duties, my anxiety is set at rest. I speak,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'as a

female, necessarily; but I have always been of opinion that Mr. Micawber

possesses what I have heard my papa call, when I lived at home, the

judicial mind; and I hope Mr. Micawber is now entering on a field where

that mind will develop itself, and take a commanding station.'

I quite believe that Mr. Micawber saw himself, in his judicial mind's

eye, on the woolsack. He passed his hand complacently over his bald

head, and said with ostentatious resignation:

'My dear, we will not anticipate the decrees of fortune. If I am

reserved to wear a wig, I am at least prepared, externally,' in allusion

to his baldness, 'for that distinction. I do not,' said Mr. Micawber,

'regret my hair, and I may have been deprived of it for a specific

purpose. I cannot say. It is my intention, my dear Copperfield, to

educate my son for the Church; I will not deny that I should be happy,

on his account, to attain to eminence.'

'For the Church?' said I, still pondering, between whiles, on Uriah

Heep.

'Yes,' said Mr. Micawber. 'He has a remarkable head-voice, and will

commence as a chorister. Our residence at Canterbury, and our local

connexion, will, no doubt, enable him to take advantage of any vacancy

that may arise in the Cathedral corps.'

On looking at Master Micawber again, I saw that he had a certain

expression of face, as if his voice were behind his eyebrows; where it

presently appeared to be, on his singing us (as an alternative between

that and bed) 'The Wood-Pecker tapping'. After many compliments on this

performance, we fell into some general conversation; and as I was too

full of my desperate intentions to keep my altered circumstances to

myself, I made them known to Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. I cannot express how

extremely delighted they both were, by the idea of my aunt's being in

difficulties; and how comfortable and friendly it made them.

When we were nearly come to the last round of the punch, I addressed

myself to Traddles, and reminded him that we must not separate, without

wishing our friends health, happiness, and success in their new career.

I begged Mr. Micawber to fill us bumpers, and proposed the toast in

due form: shaking hands with him across the table, and kissing Mrs.

Micawber, to commemorate that eventful occasion. Traddles imitated me

in the first particular, but did not consider himself a sufficiently old

friend to venture on the second.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, rising with one of his thumbs

in each of his waistcoat pockets, 'the companion of my youth: if I may

be allowed the expression--and my esteemed friend Traddles: if I may be

permitted to call him so--will allow me, on the part of Mrs. Micawber,

myself, and our offspring, to thank them in the warmest and most

uncompromising terms for their good wishes. It may be expected that

on the eve of a migration which will consign us to a perfectly new

existence,' Mr. Micawber spoke as if they were going five hundred

thousand miles, 'I should offer a few valedictory remarks to two such

friends as I see before me. But all that I have to say in this way, I

have said. Whatever station in society I may attain, through the medium

of the learned profession of which I am about to become an unworthy

member, I shall endeavour not to disgrace, and Mrs. Micawber will be

safe to adorn. Under the temporary pressure of pecuniary liabilities,

contracted with a view to their immediate liquidation, but remaining

unliquidated through a combination of circumstances, I have been

under the necessity of assuming a garb from which my natural instincts

recoil--I allude to spectacles--and possessing myself of a cognomen, to

which I can establish no legitimate pretensions. All I have to say on

that score is, that the cloud has passed from the dreary scene, and the

God of Day is once more high upon the mountain tops. On Monday next, on

the arrival of the four o'clock afternoon coach at Canterbury, my foot

will be on my native heath--my name, Micawber!'

Mr. Micawber resumed his seat on the close of these remarks, and

drank two glasses of punch in grave succession. He then said with much

solemnity:

'One thing more I have to do, before this separation is complete, and

that is to perform an act of justice. My friend Mr. Thomas Traddles

has, on two several occasions, "put his name", if I may use a common

expression, to bills of exchange for my accommodation. On the first

occasion Mr. Thomas Traddles was left--let me say, in short, in the

lurch. The fulfilment of the second has not yet arrived. The amount of

the first obligation,' here Mr. Micawber carefully referred to papers,

'was, I believe, twenty-three, four, nine and a half, of the second,

according to my entry of that transaction, eighteen, six, two. These

sums, united, make a total, if my calculation is correct, amounting to

forty-one, ten, eleven and a half. My friend Copperfield will perhaps do

me the favour to check that total?'

I did so and found it correct.

'To leave this metropolis,' said Mr. Micawber, 'and my friend Mr.

Thomas Traddles, without acquitting myself of the pecuniary part of this

obligation, would weigh upon my mind to an insupportable extent. I have,

therefore, prepared for my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles, and I now hold

in my hand, a document, which accomplishes the desired object. I beg

to hand to my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles my I.O.U. for forty-one, ten,

eleven and a half, and I am happy to recover my moral dignity, and to

know that I can once more walk erect before my fellow man!'

With this introduction (which greatly affected him), Mr. Micawber placed

his I.O.U. in the hands of Traddles, and said he wished him well in

every relation of life. I am persuaded, not only that this was quite

the same to Mr. Micawber as paying the money, but that Traddles himself

hardly knew the difference until he had had time to think about it. Mr.

Micawber walked so erect before his fellow man, on the strength of

this virtuous action, that his chest looked half as broad again when he

lighted us downstairs. We parted with great heartiness on both sides;

and when I had seen Traddles to his own door, and was going home alone,

I thought, among the other odd and contradictory things I mused upon,

that, slippery as Mr. Micawber was, I was probably indebted to some

compassionate recollection he retained of me as his boy-lodger, for

never having been asked by him for money. I certainly should not have

had the moral courage to refuse it; and I have no doubt he knew that (to

his credit be it written), quite as well as I did.

CHAPTER 37. A LITTLE COLD WATER

My new life had lasted for more than a week, and I was stronger than

ever in those tremendous practical resolutions that I felt the crisis

required. I continued to walk extremely fast, and to have a general idea

that I was getting on. I made it a rule to take as much out of myself

as I possibly could, in my way of doing everything to which I applied

my energies. I made a perfect victim of myself. I even entertained some

idea of putting myself on a vegetable diet, vaguely conceiving that, in

becoming a graminivorous animal, I should sacrifice to Dora.

As yet, little Dora was quite unconscious of my desperate firmness,

otherwise than as my letters darkly shadowed it forth. But another

Saturday came, and on that Saturday evening she was to be at Miss

Mills's; and when Mr. Mills had gone to his whist-club (telegraphed to

me in the street, by a bird-cage in the drawing-room middle window), I

was to go there to tea.

By this time, we were quite settled down in Buckingham Street, where Mr.

Dick continued his copying in a state of absolute felicity. My aunt had

obtained a signal victory over Mrs. Crupp, by paying her off, throwing

the first pitcher she planted on the stairs out of window, and

protecting in person, up and down the staircase, a supernumerary whom

she engaged from the outer world. These vigorous measures struck such

terror to the breast of Mrs. Crupp, that she subsided into her own

kitchen, under the impression that my aunt was mad. My aunt being

supremely indifferent to Mrs. Crupp's opinion and everybody else's, and

rather favouring than discouraging the idea, Mrs. Crupp, of late the

bold, became within a few days so faint-hearted, that rather than

encounter my aunt upon the staircase, she would endeavour to hide her

portly form behind doors--leaving visible, however, a wide margin of

flannel petticoat--or would shrink into dark corners. This gave my aunt

such unspeakable satisfaction, that I believe she took a delight in

prowling up and down, with her bonnet insanely perched on the top of her

head, at times when Mrs. Crupp was likely to be in the way.

My aunt, being uncommonly neat and ingenious, made so many little

improvements in our domestic arrangements, that I seemed to be richer

instead of poorer. Among the rest, she converted the pantry into a

dressing-room for me; and purchased and embellished a bedstead for my

occupation, which looked as like a bookcase in the daytime as a bedstead

could. I was the object of her constant solicitude; and my poor mother

herself could not have loved me better, or studied more how to make me

happy.

Peggotty had considered herself highly privileged in being allowed to

participate in these labours; and, although she still retained something

of her old sentiment of awe in reference to my aunt, had received so

many marks of encouragement and confidence, that they were the best

friends possible. But the time had now come (I am speaking of the

Saturday when I was to take tea at Miss Mills's) when it was necessary

for her to return home, and enter on the discharge of the duties she had

undertaken in behalf of Ham. 'So good-bye, Barkis,' said my aunt, 'and

take care of yourself! I am sure I never thought I could be sorry to

lose you!'

I took Peggotty to the coach office and saw her off. She cried at

parting, and confided her brother to my friendship as Ham had done. We

had heard nothing of him since he went away, that sunny afternoon.

'And now, my own dear Davy,' said Peggotty, 'if, while you're a

prentice, you should want any money to spend; or if, when you're out of

your time, my dear, you should want any to set you up (and you must do

one or other, or both, my darling); who has such a good right to ask

leave to lend it you, as my sweet girl's own old stupid me!'

I was not so savagely independent as to say anything in reply, but that

if ever I borrowed money of anyone, I would borrow it of her. Next to

accepting a large sum on the spot, I believe this gave Peggotty more

comfort than anything I could have done.

'And, my dear!' whispered Peggotty, 'tell the pretty little angel that

I should so have liked to see her, only for a minute! And tell her that

before she marries my boy, I'll come and make your house so beautiful

for you, if you'll let me!'

I declared that nobody else should touch it; and this gave Peggotty such

delight that she went away in good spirits.

I fatigued myself as much as I possibly could in the Commons all day, by

a variety of devices, and at the appointed time in the evening repaired

to Mr. Mills's street. Mr. Mills, who was a terrible fellow to fall

asleep after dinner, had not yet gone out, and there was no bird-cage in

the middle window.

He kept me waiting so long, that I fervently hoped the Club would fine

him for being late. At last he came out; and then I saw my own Dora hang

up the bird-cage, and peep into the balcony to look for me, and run

in again when she saw I was there, while Jip remained behind, to bark

injuriously at an immense butcher's dog in the street, who could have

taken him like a pill.

Dora came to the drawing-room door to meet me; and Jip came scrambling

out, tumbling over his own growls, under the impression that I was a

Bandit; and we all three went in, as happy and loving as could be. I

soon carried desolation into the bosom of our joys--not that I meant to

do it, but that I was so full of the subject--by asking Dora, without

the smallest preparation, if she could love a beggar?

My pretty, little, startled Dora! Her only association with the word was

a yellow face and a nightcap, or a pair of crutches, or a wooden leg, or

a dog with a decanter-stand in his mouth, or something of that kind; and

she stared at me with the most delightful wonder.

'How can you ask me anything so foolish?' pouted Dora. 'Love a beggar!'

'Dora, my own dearest!' said I. 'I am a beggar!'

'How can you be such a silly thing,' replied Dora, slapping my hand, 'as

to sit there, telling such stories? I'll make Jip bite you!'

Her childish way was the most delicious way in the world to me, but it

was necessary to be explicit, and I solemnly repeated:

'Dora, my own life, I am your ruined David!'

'I declare I'll make Jip bite you!' said Dora, shaking her curls, 'if

you are so ridiculous.'

But I looked so serious, that Dora left off shaking her curls, and laid

her trembling little hand upon my shoulder, and first looked scared

and anxious, then began to cry. That was dreadful. I fell upon my knees

before the sofa, caressing her, and imploring her not to rend my heart;

but, for some time, poor little Dora did nothing but exclaim Oh dear! Oh

dear! And oh, she was so frightened! And where was Julia Mills! And oh,

take her to Julia Mills, and go away, please! until I was almost beside

myself.

At last, after an agony of supplication and protestation, I got Dora

to look at me, with a horrified expression of face, which I gradually

soothed until it was only loving, and her soft, pretty cheek was lying

against mine. Then I told her, with my arms clasped round her, how I

loved her, so dearly, and so dearly; how I felt it right to offer to

release her from her engagement, because now I was poor; how I never

could bear it, or recover it, if I lost her; how I had no fears of

poverty, if she had none, my arm being nerved and my heart inspired by

her; how I was already working with a courage such as none but lovers

knew; how I had begun to be practical, and look into the future; how a

crust well earned was sweeter far than a feast inherited; and much

more to the same purpose, which I delivered in a burst of passionate

eloquence quite surprising to myself, though I had been thinking about

it, day and night, ever since my aunt had astonished me.

'Is your heart mine still, dear Dora?' said I, rapturously, for I knew

by her clinging to me that it was.

'Oh, yes!' cried Dora. 'Oh, yes, it's all yours. Oh, don't be dreadful!'

I dreadful! To Dora!

'Don't talk about being poor, and working hard!' said Dora, nestling

closer to me. 'Oh, don't, don't!'

'My dearest love,' said I, 'the crust well-earned--'

'Oh, yes; but I don't want to hear any more about crusts!' said Dora.

'And Jip must have a mutton-chop every day at twelve, or he'll die.'

I was charmed with her childish, winning way. I fondly explained to Dora

that Jip should have his mutton-chop with his accustomed regularity.

I drew a picture of our frugal home, made independent by my

labour--sketching in the little house I had seen at Highgate, and my

aunt in her room upstairs.

'I am not dreadful now, Dora?' said I, tenderly.

'Oh, no, no!' cried Dora. 'But I hope your aunt will keep in her own

room a good deal. And I hope she's not a scolding old thing!'

If it were possible for me to love Dora more than ever, I am sure I did.

But I felt she was a little impracticable. It damped my new-born ardour,

to find that ardour so difficult of communication to her. I made another

trial. When she was quite herself again, and was curling Jip's ears, as

he lay upon her lap, I became grave, and said:

'My own! May I mention something?'

'Oh, please don't be practical!' said Dora, coaxingly. 'Because it

frightens me so!'

'Sweetheart!' I returned; 'there is nothing to alarm you in all this. I

want you to think of it quite differently. I want to make it nerve you,

and inspire you, Dora!'

'Oh, but that's so shocking!' cried Dora.

'My love, no. Perseverance and strength of character will enable us to

bear much worse things.' 'But I haven't got any strength at all,'

said Dora, shaking her curls. 'Have I, Jip? Oh, do kiss Jip, and be

agreeable!'

It was impossible to resist kissing Jip, when she held him up to me for

that purpose, putting her own bright, rosy little mouth into kissing

form, as she directed the operation, which she insisted should be

performed symmetrically, on the centre of his nose. I did as she bade

me--rewarding myself afterwards for my obedience--and she charmed me out

of my graver character for I don't know how long.

'But, Dora, my beloved!' said I, at last resuming it; 'I was going to

mention something.'

The judge of the Prerogative Court might have fallen in love with her,

to see her fold her little hands and hold them up, begging and praying

me not to be dreadful any more.

'Indeed I am not going to be, my darling!' I assured her. 'But, Dora, my

love, if you will sometimes think,--not despondingly, you know; far from

that!--but if you will sometimes think--just to encourage yourself--that

you are engaged to a poor man--'

'Don't, don't! Pray don't!' cried Dora. 'It's so very dreadful!'

'My soul, not at all!' said I, cheerfully. 'If you will sometimes think

of that, and look about now and then at your papa's housekeeping, and

endeavour to acquire a little habit--of accounts, for instance--'

Poor little Dora received this suggestion with something that was half a

sob and half a scream.

'--It would be so useful to us afterwards,' I went on. 'And if you would

promise me to read a little--a little Cookery Book that I would send

you, it would be so excellent for both of us. For our path in life, my

Dora,' said I, warming with the subject, 'is stony and rugged now, and

it rests with us to smooth it. We must fight our way onward. We must be

brave. There are obstacles to be met, and we must meet, and crush them!'

I was going on at a great rate, with a clenched hand, and a most

enthusiastic countenance; but it was quite unnecessary to proceed. I had

said enough. I had done it again. Oh, she was so frightened! Oh, where

was Julia Mills! Oh, take her to Julia Mills, and go away, please!

So that, in short, I was quite distracted, and raved about the

drawing-room.

I thought I had killed her, this time. I sprinkled water on her face.

I went down on my knees. I plucked at my hair. I denounced myself as a

remorseless brute and a ruthless beast. I implored her forgiveness.

I besought her to look up. I ravaged Miss Mills's work-box for a

smelling-bottle, and in my agony of mind applied an ivory needle-case

instead, and dropped all the needles over Dora. I shook my fists at Jip,

who was as frantic as myself. I did every wild extravagance that could

be done, and was a long way beyond the end of my wits when Miss Mills

came into the room.

'Who has done this?' exclaimed Miss Mills, succouring her friend.

I replied, 'I, Miss Mills! I have done it! Behold the destroyer!'--or

words to that effect--and hid my face from the light, in the sofa

cushion.

At first Miss Mills thought it was a quarrel, and that we were verging

on the Desert of Sahara; but she soon found out how matters stood, for

my dear affectionate little Dora, embracing her, began exclaiming that I

was 'a poor labourer'; and then cried for me, and embraced me, and asked

me would I let her give me all her money to keep, and then fell on Miss

Mills's neck, sobbing as if her tender heart were broken.

Miss Mills must have been born to be a blessing to us. She ascertained

from me in a few words what it was all about, comforted Dora, and

gradually convinced her that I was not a labourer--from my manner of

stating the case I believe Dora concluded that I was a navigator,

and went balancing myself up and down a plank all day with a

wheelbarrow--and so brought us together in peace. When we were quite

composed, and Dora had gone up-stairs to put some rose-water to her

eyes, Miss Mills rang for tea. In the ensuing interval, I told Miss

Mills that she was evermore my friend, and that my heart must cease to

vibrate ere I could forget her sympathy.

I then expounded to Miss Mills what I had endeavoured, so very

unsuccessfully, to expound to Dora. Miss Mills replied, on general

principles, that the Cottage of content was better than the Palace of

cold splendour, and that where love was, all was.

I said to Miss Mills that this was very true, and who should know

it better than I, who loved Dora with a love that never mortal had

experienced yet? But on Miss Mills observing, with despondency, that

it were well indeed for some hearts if this were so, I explained that

I begged leave to restrict the observation to mortals of the masculine

gender.

I then put it to Miss Mills, to say whether she considered that there

was or was not any practical merit in the suggestion I had been anxious

to make, concerning the accounts, the housekeeping, and the Cookery

Book?

Miss Mills, after some consideration, thus replied:

'Mr. Copperfield, I will be plain with you. Mental suffering and trial

supply, in some natures, the place of years, and I will be as plain with

you as if I were a Lady Abbess. No. The suggestion is not appropriate

to our Dora. Our dearest Dora is a favourite child of nature. She is a

thing of light, and airiness, and joy. I am free to confess that if it

could be done, it might be well, but--' And Miss Mills shook her head.

I was encouraged by this closing admission on the part of Miss Mills to

ask her, whether, for Dora's sake, if she had any opportunity of luring

her attention to such preparations for an earnest life, she would avail

herself of it? Miss Mills replied in the affirmative so readily, that I

further asked her if she would take charge of the Cookery Book; and, if

she ever could insinuate it upon Dora's acceptance, without frightening

her, undertake to do me that crowning service. Miss Mills accepted this

trust, too; but was not sanguine.

And Dora returned, looking such a lovely little creature, that I really

doubted whether she ought to be troubled with anything so ordinary. And

she loved me so much, and was so captivating (particularly when she made

Jip stand on his hind legs for toast, and when she pretended to hold

that nose of his against the hot teapot for punishment because he

wouldn't), that I felt like a sort of Monster who had got into a Fairy's

bower, when I thought of having frightened her, and made her cry.

After tea we had the guitar; and Dora sang those same dear old French

songs about the impossibility of ever on any account leaving off

dancing, La ra la, La ra la, until I felt a much greater Monster than

before.

We had only one check to our pleasure, and that happened a little while

before I took my leave, when, Miss Mills chancing to make some allusion

to tomorrow morning, I unluckily let out that, being obliged to exert

myself now, I got up at five o'clock. Whether Dora had any idea that

I was a Private Watchman, I am unable to say; but it made a great

impression on her, and she neither played nor sang any more.

It was still on her mind when I bade her adieu; and she said to me, in

her pretty coaxing way--as if I were a doll, I used to think:

'Now don't get up at five o'clock, you naughty boy. It's so

nonsensical!'

'My love,' said I, 'I have work to do.'

'But don't do it!' returned Dora. 'Why should you?'

It was impossible to say to that sweet little surprised face, otherwise

than lightly and playfully, that we must work to live.

'Oh! How ridiculous!' cried Dora.

'How shall we live without, Dora?' said I.

'How? Any how!' said Dora.

She seemed to think she had quite settled the question, and gave me such

a triumphant little kiss, direct from her innocent heart, that I would

hardly have put her out of conceit with her answer, for a fortune.

Well! I loved her, and I went on loving her, most absorbingly, entirely,

and completely. But going on, too, working pretty hard, and busily

keeping red-hot all the irons I now had in the fire, I would sit

sometimes of a night, opposite my aunt, thinking how I had frightened

Dora that time, and how I could best make my way with a guitar-case

through the forest of difficulty, until I used to fancy that my head was

turning quite grey.

CHAPTER 38. A DISSOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP

I did not allow my resolution, with respect to the Parliamentary

Debates, to cool. It was one of the irons I began to heat immediately,

and one of the irons I kept hot, and hammered at, with a perseverance

I may honestly admire. I bought an approved scheme of the noble art and

mystery of stenography (which cost me ten and sixpence); and plunged

into a sea of perplexity that brought me, in a few weeks, to the

confines of distraction. The changes that were rung upon dots, which

in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position

something else, entirely different; the wonderful vagaries that were

played by circles; the unaccountable consequences that resulted from

marks like flies' legs; the tremendous effects of a curve in a wrong

place; not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in

my sleep. When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties,

and had mastered the alphabet, which was an Egyptian Temple in itself,

there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary

characters; the most despotic characters I have ever known; who

insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb,

meant expectation, and that a pen-and-ink sky-rocket, stood for

disadvantageous. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I found

that they had driven everything else out of it; then, beginning again, I

forgot them; while I was picking them up, I dropped the other fragments

of the system; in short, it was almost heart-breaking.

It might have been quite heart-breaking, but for Dora, who was the stay

and anchor of my tempest-driven bark. Every scratch in the scheme was

a gnarled oak in the forest of difficulty, and I went on cutting them

down, one after another, with such vigour, that in three or four months

I was in a condition to make an experiment on one of our crack speakers

in the Commons. Shall I ever forget how the crack speaker walked off

from me before I began, and left my imbecile pencil staggering about the

paper as if it were in a fit!

This would not do, it was quite clear. I was flying too high, and should

never get on, so. I resorted to Traddles for advice; who suggested

that he should dictate speeches to me, at a pace, and with occasional

stoppages, adapted to my weakness. Very grateful for this friendly aid,

I accepted the proposal; and night after night, almost every night, for

a long time, we had a sort of Private Parliament in Buckingham Street,

after I came home from the Doctor's.

I should like to see such a Parliament anywhere else! My aunt and Mr.

Dick represented the Government or the Opposition (as the case might

be), and Traddles, with the assistance of Enfield's Speakers, or a

volume of parliamentary orations, thundered astonishing invectives

against them. Standing by the table, with his finger in the page to keep

the place, and his right arm flourishing above his head, Traddles, as

Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Burke, Lord Castlereagh, Viscount

Sidmouth, or Mr. Canning, would work himself into the most violent

heats, and deliver the most withering denunciations of the profligacy

and corruption of my aunt and Mr. Dick; while I used to sit, at a little

distance, with my notebook on my knee, fagging after him with all my

might and main. The inconsistency and recklessness of Traddles were not

to be exceeded by any real politician. He was for any description of

policy, in the compass of a week; and nailed all sorts of colours to

every denomination of mast. My aunt, looking very like an immovable

Chancellor of the Exchequer, would occasionally throw in an interruption

or two, as 'Hear!' or 'No!' or 'Oh!' when the text seemed to require it:

which was always a signal to Mr. Dick (a perfect country gentleman)

to follow lustily with the same cry. But Mr. Dick got taxed with

such things in the course of his Parliamentary career, and was made

responsible for such awful consequences, that he became uncomfortable in

his mind sometimes. I believe he actually began to be afraid he really

had been doing something, tending to the annihilation of the British

constitution, and the ruin of the country.

Often and often we pursued these debates until the clock pointed to

midnight, and the candles were burning down. The result of so much good

practice was, that by and by I began to keep pace with Traddles pretty

well, and should have been quite triumphant if I had had the least idea

what my notes were about. But, as to reading them after I had got them,

I might as well have copied the Chinese inscriptions of an immense

collection of tea-chests, or the golden characters on all the great red

and green bottles in the chemists' shops!

There was nothing for it, but to turn back and begin all over again. It

was very hard, but I turned back, though with a heavy heart, and began

laboriously and methodically to plod over the same tedious ground at a

snail's pace; stopping to examine minutely every speck in the way, on

all sides, and making the most desperate efforts to know these elusive

characters by sight wherever I met them. I was always punctual at

the office; at the Doctor's too: and I really did work, as the common

expression is, like a cart-horse. One day, when I went to the Commons as

usual, I found Mr. Spenlow in the doorway looking extremely grave, and

talking to himself. As he was in the habit of complaining of pains in

his head--he had naturally a short throat, and I do seriously believe

he over-starched himself--I was at first alarmed by the idea that he was

not quite right in that direction; but he soon relieved my uneasiness.

Instead of returning my 'Good morning' with his usual affability, he

looked at me in a distant, ceremonious manner, and coldly requested me

to accompany him to a certain coffee-house, which, in those days, had

a door opening into the Commons, just within the little archway in St.

Paul's Churchyard. I complied, in a very uncomfortable state, and with a

warm shooting all over me, as if my apprehensions were breaking out into

buds. When I allowed him to go on a little before, on account of the

narrowness of the way, I observed that he carried his head with a lofty

air that was particularly unpromising; and my mind misgave me that he

had found out about my darling Dora.

If I had not guessed this, on the way to the coffee-house, I could

hardly have failed to know what was the matter when I followed him

into an upstairs room, and found Miss Murdstone there, supported by

a background of sideboard, on which were several inverted tumblers

sustaining lemons, and two of those extraordinary boxes, all corners and

flutings, for sticking knives and forks in, which, happily for mankind,

are now obsolete.

Miss Murdstone gave me her chilly finger-nails, and sat severely rigid.

Mr. Spenlow shut the door, motioned me to a chair, and stood on the

hearth-rug in front of the fireplace.

'Have the goodness to show Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Spenlow, what you

have in your reticule, Miss Murdstone.'

I believe it was the old identical steel-clasped reticule of my

childhood, that shut up like a bite. Compressing her lips, in sympathy

with the snap, Miss Murdstone opened it--opening her mouth a little

at the same time--and produced my last letter to Dora, teeming with

expressions of devoted affection.

'I believe that is your writing, Mr. Copperfield?' said Mr. Spenlow.

I was very hot, and the voice I heard was very unlike mine, when I said,

'It is, sir!'

'If I am not mistaken,' said Mr. Spenlow, as Miss Murdstone brought a

parcel of letters out of her reticule, tied round with the dearest bit

of blue ribbon, 'those are also from your pen, Mr. Copperfield?'

I took them from her with a most desolate sensation; and, glancing at

such phrases at the top, as 'My ever dearest and own Dora,' 'My best

beloved angel,' 'My blessed one for ever,' and the like, blushed deeply,

and inclined my head.

'No, thank you!' said Mr. Spenlow, coldly, as I mechanically offered

them back to him. 'I will not deprive you of them. Miss Murdstone, be so

good as to proceed!'

That gentle creature, after a moment's thoughtful survey of the carpet,

delivered herself with much dry unction as follows.

'I must confess to having entertained my suspicions of Miss Spenlow, in

reference to David Copperfield, for some time. I observed Miss Spenlow

and David Copperfield, when they first met; and the impression made upon

me then was not agreeable. The depravity of the human heart is such--'

'You will oblige me, ma'am,' interrupted Mr. Spenlow, 'by confining

yourself to facts.'

Miss Murdstone cast down her eyes, shook her head as if protesting

against this unseemly interruption, and with frowning dignity resumed:

'Since I am to confine myself to facts, I will state them as dryly as I

can. Perhaps that will be considered an acceptable course of proceeding.

I have already said, sir, that I have had my suspicions of Miss Spenlow,

in reference to David Copperfield, for some time. I have frequently

endeavoured to find decisive corroboration of those suspicions, but

without effect. I have therefore forborne to mention them to Miss

Spenlow's father'; looking severely at him--'knowing how little

disposition there usually is in such cases, to acknowledge the

conscientious discharge of duty.'

Mr. Spenlow seemed quite cowed by the gentlemanly sternness of Miss

Murdstone's manner, and deprecated her severity with a conciliatory

little wave of his hand.

'On my return to Norwood, after the period of absence occasioned by my

brother's marriage,' pursued Miss Murdstone in a disdainful voice, 'and

on the return of Miss Spenlow from her visit to her friend Miss Mills,

I imagined that the manner of Miss Spenlow gave me greater occasion for

suspicion than before. Therefore I watched Miss Spenlow closely.'

Dear, tender little Dora, so unconscious of this Dragon's eye!

'Still,' resumed Miss Murdstone, 'I found no proof until last night.

It appeared to me that Miss Spenlow received too many letters from her

friend Miss Mills; but Miss Mills being her friend with her father's

full concurrence,' another telling blow at Mr. Spenlow, 'it was not

for me to interfere. If I may not be permitted to allude to the natural

depravity of the human heart, at least I may--I must--be permitted, so

far to refer to misplaced confidence.'

Mr. Spenlow apologetically murmured his assent.

'Last evening after tea,' pursued Miss Murdstone, 'I observed the little

dog starting, rolling, and growling about the drawing-room, worrying

something. I said to Miss Spenlow, "Dora, what is that the dog has in

his mouth? It's paper." Miss Spenlow immediately put her hand to her

frock, gave a sudden cry, and ran to the dog. I interposed, and said,

"Dora, my love, you must permit me."'

Oh Jip, miserable Spaniel, this wretchedness, then, was your work!

'Miss Spenlow endeavoured,' said Miss Murdstone, 'to bribe me with

kisses, work-boxes, and small articles of jewellery--that, of course,

I pass over. The little dog retreated under the sofa on my approaching

him, and was with great difficulty dislodged by the fire-irons. Even

when dislodged, he still kept the letter in his mouth; and on my

endeavouring to take it from him, at the imminent risk of being bitten,

he kept it between his teeth so pertinaciously as to suffer himself

to be held suspended in the air by means of the document. At length I

obtained possession of it. After perusing it, I taxed Miss Spenlow with

having many such letters in her possession; and ultimately obtained from

her the packet which is now in David Copperfield's hand.'

Here she ceased; and snapping her reticule again, and shutting her

mouth, looked as if she might be broken, but could never be bent.

'You have heard Miss Murdstone,' said Mr. Spenlow, turning to me. 'I beg

to ask, Mr. Copperfield, if you have anything to say in reply?'

The picture I had before me, of the beautiful little treasure of my

heart, sobbing and crying all night--of her being alone, frightened,

and wretched, then--of her having so piteously begged and prayed that

stony-hearted woman to forgive her--of her having vainly offered her

those kisses, work-boxes, and trinkets--of her being in such grievous

distress, and all for me--very much impaired the little dignity I had

been able to muster. I am afraid I was in a tremulous state for a minute

or so, though I did my best to disguise it.

'There is nothing I can say, sir,' I returned, 'except that all the

blame is mine. Dora--'

'Miss Spenlow, if you please,' said her father, majestically.

'--was induced and persuaded by me,' I went on, swallowing that colder

designation, 'to consent to this concealment, and I bitterly regret it.'

'You are very much to blame, sir,' said Mr. Spenlow, walking to and fro

upon the hearth-rug, and emphasizing what he said with his whole body

instead of his head, on account of the stiffness of his cravat and

spine. 'You have done a stealthy and unbecoming action, Mr. Copperfield.

When I take a gentleman to my house, no matter whether he is nineteen,

twenty-nine, or ninety, I take him there in a spirit of confidence.

If he abuses my confidence, he commits a dishonourable action, Mr.

Copperfield.'

'I feel it, sir, I assure you,' I returned. 'But I never thought so,

before. Sincerely, honestly, indeed, Mr. Spenlow, I never thought so,

before. I love Miss Spenlow to that extent--'

'Pooh! nonsense!' said Mr. Spenlow, reddening. 'Pray don't tell me to my

face that you love my daughter, Mr. Copperfield!'

'Could I defend my conduct if I did not, sir?' I returned, with all

humility.

'Can you defend your conduct if you do, sir?' said Mr. Spenlow, stopping

short upon the hearth-rug. 'Have you considered your years, and my

daughter's years, Mr. Copperfield? Have you considered what it is to

undermine the confidence that should subsist between my daughter and

myself? Have you considered my daughter's station in life, the projects

I may contemplate for her advancement, the testamentary intentions I

may have with reference to her? Have you considered anything, Mr.

Copperfield?'

'Very little, sir, I am afraid;' I answered, speaking to him as

respectfully and sorrowfully as I felt; 'but pray believe me, I have

considered my own worldly position. When I explained it to you, we were

already engaged--'

'I BEG,' said Mr. Spenlow, more like Punch than I had ever seen him,

as he energetically struck one hand upon the other--I could not help

noticing that even in my despair; 'that YOU Will NOT talk to me of

engagements, Mr. Copperfield!'

The otherwise immovable Miss Murdstone laughed contemptuously in one

short syllable.

'When I explained my altered position to you, sir,' I began again,

substituting a new form of expression for what was so unpalatable to

him, 'this concealment, into which I am so unhappy as to have led Miss

Spenlow, had begun. Since I have been in that altered position, I have

strained every nerve, I have exerted every energy, to improve it. I am

sure I shall improve it in time. Will you grant me time--any length of

time? We are both so young, sir,--'

'You are right,' interrupted Mr. Spenlow, nodding his head a great

many times, and frowning very much, 'you are both very young. It's all

nonsense. Let there be an end of the nonsense. Take away those letters,

and throw them in the fire. Give me Miss Spenlow's letters to throw in

the fire; and although our future intercourse must, you are aware, be

restricted to the Commons here, we will agree to make no further mention

of the past. Come, Mr. Copperfield, you don't want sense; and this is

the sensible course.'

No. I couldn't think of agreeing to it. I was very sorry, but there

was a higher consideration than sense. Love was above all earthly

considerations, and I loved Dora to idolatry, and Dora loved me. I

didn't exactly say so; I softened it down as much as I could; but I

implied it, and I was resolute upon it. I don't think I made myself very

ridiculous, but I know I was resolute.

'Very well, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'I must try my influence

with my daughter.'

Miss Murdstone, by an expressive sound, a long drawn respiration, which

was neither a sigh nor a moan, but was like both, gave it as her opinion

that he should have done this at first.

'I must try,' said Mr. Spenlow, confirmed by this support, 'my

influence with my daughter. Do you decline to take those letters, Mr.

Copperfield?' For I had laid them on the table.

Yes. I told him I hoped he would not think it wrong, but I couldn't

possibly take them from Miss Murdstone.

'Nor from me?' said Mr. Spenlow.

No, I replied with the profoundest respect; nor from him.

'Very well!' said Mr. Spenlow.

A silence succeeding, I was undecided whether to go or stay. At length

I was moving quietly towards the door, with the intention of saying that

perhaps I should consult his feelings best by withdrawing: when he said,

with his hands in his coat pockets, into which it was as much as he

could do to get them; and with what I should call, upon the whole, a

decidedly pious air:

'You are probably aware, Mr. Copperfield, that I am not altogether

destitute of worldly possessions, and that my daughter is my nearest and

dearest relative?'

I hurriedly made him a reply to the effect, that I hoped the error into

which I had been betrayed by the desperate nature of my love, did not

induce him to think me mercenary too?

'I don't allude to the matter in that light,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'It

would be better for yourself, and all of us, if you WERE mercenary, Mr.

Copperfield--I mean, if you were more discreet and less influenced by

all this youthful nonsense. No. I merely say, with quite another view,

you are probably aware I have some property to bequeath to my child?'

I certainly supposed so.

'And you can hardly think,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'having experience of what

we see, in the Commons here, every day, of the various unaccountable

and negligent proceedings of men, in respect of their testamentary

arrangements--of all subjects, the one on which perhaps the strangest

revelations of human inconsistency are to be met with--but that mine are

made?'

I inclined my head in acquiescence.

'I should not allow,' said Mr. Spenlow, with an evident increase of

pious sentiment, and slowly shaking his head as he poised himself upon

his toes and heels alternately, 'my suitable provision for my child to

be influenced by a piece of youthful folly like the present. It is mere

folly. Mere nonsense. In a little while, it will weigh lighter than

any feather. But I might--I might--if this silly business were not

completely relinquished altogether, be induced in some anxious moment

to guard her from, and surround her with protections against, the

consequences of any foolish step in the way of marriage. Now, Mr.

Copperfield, I hope that you will not render it necessary for me to

open, even for a quarter of an hour, that closed page in the book of

life, and unsettle, even for a quarter of an hour, grave affairs long

since composed.'

There was a serenity, a tranquillity, a calm sunset air about him, which

quite affected me. He was so peaceful and resigned--clearly had his

affairs in such perfect train, and so systematically wound up--that he

was a man to feel touched in the contemplation of. I really think I saw

tears rise to his eyes, from the depth of his own feeling of all this.

But what could I do? I could not deny Dora and my own heart. When he

told me I had better take a week to consider of what he had said, how

could I say I wouldn't take a week, yet how could I fail to know that no

amount of weeks could influence such love as mine?

'In the meantime, confer with Miss Trotwood, or with any person with

any knowledge of life,' said Mr. Spenlow, adjusting his cravat with both

hands. 'Take a week, Mr. Copperfield.'

I submitted; and, with a countenance as expressive as I was able to

make it of dejected and despairing constancy, came out of the room. Miss

Murdstone's heavy eyebrows followed me to the door--I say her eyebrows

rather than her eyes, because they were much more important in her

face--and she looked so exactly as she used to look, at about that

hour of the morning, in our parlour at Blunderstone, that I could have

fancied I had been breaking down in my lessons again, and that the

dead weight on my mind was that horrible old spelling-book, with

oval woodcuts, shaped, to my youthful fancy, like the glasses out of

spectacles.

When I got to the office, and, shutting out old Tiffey and the rest of

them with my hands, sat at my desk, in my own particular nook, thinking

of this earthquake that had taken place so unexpectedly, and in the

bitterness of my spirit cursing Jip, I fell into such a state of torment

about Dora, that I wonder I did not take up my hat and rush insanely to

Norwood. The idea of their frightening her, and making her cry, and of

my not being there to comfort her, was so excruciating, that it impelled

me to write a wild letter to Mr. Spenlow, beseeching him not to visit

upon her the consequences of my awful destiny. I implored him to spare

her gentle nature--not to crush a fragile flower--and addressed him

generally, to the best of my remembrance, as if, instead of being her

father, he had been an Ogre, or the Dragon of Wantley.3 This letter I

sealed and laid upon his desk before he returned; and when he came in,

I saw him, through the half-opened door of his room, take it up and read

it.

He said nothing about it all the morning; but before he went away in the

afternoon he called me in, and told me that I need not make myself at

all uneasy about his daughter's happiness. He had assured her, he said,

that it was all nonsense; and he had nothing more to say to her. He

believed he was an indulgent father (as indeed he was), and I might

spare myself any solicitude on her account.

'You may make it necessary, if you are foolish or obstinate, Mr.

Copperfield,' he observed, 'for me to send my daughter abroad again,

for a term; but I have a better opinion of you. I hope you will be wiser

than that, in a few days. As to Miss Murdstone,' for I had alluded to

her in the letter, 'I respect that lady's vigilance, and feel obliged to

her; but she has strict charge to avoid the subject. All I desire, Mr.

Copperfield, is, that it should be forgotten. All you have got to do,

Mr. Copperfield, is to forget it.'

All! In the note I wrote to Miss Mills, I bitterly quoted this

sentiment. All I had to do, I said, with gloomy sarcasm, was to forget

Dora. That was all, and what was that! I entreated Miss Mills to see

me, that evening. If it could not be done with Mr. Mills's sanction

and concurrence, I besought a clandestine interview in the back kitchen

where the Mangle was. I informed her that my reason was tottering on

its throne, and only she, Miss Mills, could prevent its being deposed.

I signed myself, hers distractedly; and I couldn't help feeling, while

I read this composition over, before sending it by a porter, that it was

something in the style of Mr. Micawber.

However, I sent it. At night I repaired to Miss Mills's street, and

walked up and down, until I was stealthily fetched in by Miss Mills's

maid, and taken the area way to the back kitchen. I have since seen

reason to believe that there was nothing on earth to prevent my going in

at the front door, and being shown up into the drawing-room, except Miss

Mills's love of the romantic and mysterious.

In the back kitchen, I raved as became me. I went there, I suppose,

to make a fool of myself, and I am quite sure I did it. Miss Mills had

received a hasty note from Dora, telling her that all was discovered,

and saying. 'Oh pray come to me, Julia, do, do!' But Miss Mills,

mistrusting the acceptability of her presence to the higher powers, had

not yet gone; and we were all benighted in the Desert of Sahara.

Miss Mills had a wonderful flow of words, and liked to pour them out. I

could not help feeling, though she mingled her tears with mine, that she

had a dreadful luxury in our afflictions. She petted them, as I may say,

and made the most of them. A deep gulf, she observed, had opened between

Dora and me, and Love could only span it with its rainbow. Love must

suffer in this stern world; it ever had been so, it ever would be so. No

matter, Miss Mills remarked. Hearts confined by cobwebs would burst at

last, and then Love was avenged.

This was small consolation, but Miss Mills wouldn't encourage fallacious

hopes. She made me much more wretched than I was before, and I felt (and

told her with the deepest gratitude) that she was indeed a friend. We

resolved that she should go to Dora the first thing in the morning,

and find some means of assuring her, either by looks or words, of my

devotion and misery. We parted, overwhelmed with grief; and I think Miss

Mills enjoyed herself completely.

I confided all to my aunt when I got home; and in spite of all she could

say to me, went to bed despairing. I got up despairing, and went out

despairing. It was Saturday morning, and I went straight to the Commons.

I was surprised, when I came within sight of our office-door, to see the

ticket-porters standing outside talking together, and some half-dozen

stragglers gazing at the windows which were shut up. I quickened my

pace, and, passing among them, wondering at their looks, went hurriedly

in.

The clerks were there, but nobody was doing anything. Old Tiffey, for

the first time in his life I should think, was sitting on somebody

else's stool, and had not hung up his hat.

'This is a dreadful calamity, Mr. Copperfield,' said he, as I entered.

'What is?' I exclaimed. 'What's the matter?'

'Don't you know?' cried Tiffey, and all the rest of them, coming round

me.

'No!' said I, looking from face to face.

'Mr. Spenlow,' said Tiffey.

'What about him!'

'Dead!' I thought it was the office reeling, and not I, as one of

the clerks caught hold of me. They sat me down in a chair, untied my

neck-cloth, and brought me some water. I have no idea whether this took

any time.

'Dead?' said I.

'He dined in town yesterday, and drove down in the phaeton by himself,'

said Tiffey, 'having sent his own groom home by the coach, as he

sometimes did, you know--'

'Well?'

'The phaeton went home without him. The horses stopped at the

stable-gate. The man went out with a lantern. Nobody in the carriage.'

'Had they run away?'

'They were not hot,' said Tiffey, putting on his glasses; 'no hotter, I

understand, than they would have been, going down at the usual pace. The

reins were broken, but they had been dragging on the ground. The house

was roused up directly, and three of them went out along the road. They

found him a mile off.'

'More than a mile off, Mr. Tiffey,' interposed a junior.

'Was it? I believe you are right,' said Tiffey,--'more than a mile

off--not far from the church--lying partly on the roadside, and partly

on the path, upon his face. Whether he fell out in a fit, or got out,

feeling ill before the fit came on--or even whether he was quite dead

then, though there is no doubt he was quite insensible--no one appears

to know. If he breathed, certainly he never spoke. Medical assistance

was got as soon as possible, but it was quite useless.'

I cannot describe the state of mind into which I was thrown by this

intelligence. The shock of such an event happening so suddenly, and

happening to one with whom I had been in any respect at variance--the

appalling vacancy in the room he had occupied so lately, where his chair

and table seemed to wait for him, and his handwriting of yesterday was

like a ghost--the in--definable impossibility of separating him from the

place, and feeling, when the door opened, as if he might come in--the

lazy hush and rest there was in the office, and the insatiable relish

with which our people talked about it, and other people came in and

out all day, and gorged themselves with the subject--this is easily

intelligible to anyone. What I cannot describe is, how, in the innermost

recesses of my own heart, I had a lurking jealousy even of Death. How

I felt as if its might would push me from my ground in Dora's thoughts.

How I was, in a grudging way I have no words for, envious of her grief.

How it made me restless to think of her weeping to others, or being

consoled by others. How I had a grasping, avaricious wish to shut out

everybody from her but myself, and to be all in all to her, at that

unseasonable time of all times.

In the trouble of this state of mind--not exclusively my own, I hope,

but known to others--I went down to Norwood that night; and finding from

one of the servants, when I made my inquiries at the door, that Miss

Mills was there, got my aunt to direct a letter to her, which I wrote.

I deplored the untimely death of Mr. Spenlow, most sincerely, and shed

tears in doing so. I entreated her to tell Dora, if Dora were in a

state to hear it, that he had spoken to me with the utmost kindness and

consideration; and had coupled nothing but tenderness, not a single or

reproachful word, with her name. I know I did this selfishly, to have my

name brought before her; but I tried to believe it was an act of justice

to his memory. Perhaps I did believe it.

My aunt received a few lines next day in reply; addressed, outside, to

her; within, to me. Dora was overcome by grief; and when her friend had

asked her should she send her love to me, had only cried, as she was

always crying, 'Oh, dear papa! oh, poor papa!' But she had not said No,

and that I made the most of.

Mr. jorkins, who had been at Norwood since the occurrence, came to the

office a few days afterwards. He and Tiffey were closeted together for

some few moments, and then Tiffey looked out at the door and beckoned me

in.

'Oh!' said Mr. jorkins. 'Mr. Tiffey and myself, Mr. Copperfield, are

about to examine the desks, the drawers, and other such repositories

of the deceased, with the view of sealing up his private papers, and

searching for a Will. There is no trace of any, elsewhere. It may be as

well for you to assist us, if you please.'

I had been in agony to obtain some knowledge of the circumstances

in which my Dora would be placed--as, in whose guardianship, and so

forth--and this was something towards it. We began the search at once;

Mr. jorkins unlocking the drawers and desks, and we all taking out the

papers. The office-papers we placed on one side, and the private papers

(which were not numerous) on the other. We were very grave; and when we

came to a stray seal, or pencil-case, or ring, or any little article of

that kind which we associated personally with him, we spoke very low.

We had sealed up several packets; and were still going on dustily and

quietly, when Mr. jorkins said to us, applying exactly the same words to

his late partner as his late partner had applied to him:

'Mr. Spenlow was very difficult to move from the beaten track. You know

what he was! I am disposed to think he had made no will.'

'Oh, I know he had!' said I.

They both stopped and looked at me. 'On the very day when I last saw

him,' said I, 'he told me that he had, and that his affairs were long

since settled.'

Mr. jorkins and old Tiffey shook their heads with one accord.

'That looks unpromising,' said Tiffey.

'Very unpromising,' said Mr. jorkins.

'Surely you don't doubt--' I began.

'My good Mr. Copperfield!' said Tiffey, laying his hand upon my arm, and

shutting up both his eyes as he shook his head: 'if you had been in the

Commons as long as I have, you would know that there is no subject on

which men are so inconsistent, and so little to be trusted.'

'Why, bless my soul, he made that very remark!' I replied persistently.

'I should call that almost final,' observed Tiffey. 'My opinion is--no

will.'

It appeared a wonderful thing to me, but it turned out that there was

no will. He had never so much as thought of making one, so far as his

papers afforded any evidence; for there was no kind of hint, sketch, or

memorandum, of any testamentary intention whatever. What was scarcely

less astonishing to me, was, that his affairs were in a most disordered

state. It was extremely difficult, I heard, to make out what he owed, or

what he had paid, or of what he died possessed. It was considered likely

that for years he could have had no clear opinion on these subjects

himself. By little and little it came out, that, in the competition on

all points of appearance and gentility then running high in the Commons,

he had spent more than his professional income, which was not a very

large one, and had reduced his private means, if they ever had been

great (which was exceedingly doubtful), to a very low ebb indeed. There

was a sale of the furniture and lease, at Norwood; and Tiffey told me,

little thinking how interested I was in the story, that, paying all the

just debts of the deceased, and deducting his share of outstanding bad

and doubtful debts due to the firm, he wouldn't give a thousand pounds

for all the assets remaining.

This was at the expiration of about six weeks. I had suffered tortures

all the time; and thought I really must have laid violent hands upon

myself, when Miss Mills still reported to me, that my broken-hearted

little Dora would say nothing, when I was mentioned, but 'Oh, poor papa!

Oh, dear papa!' Also, that she had no other relations than two aunts,

maiden sisters of Mr. Spenlow, who lived at Putney, and who had not held

any other than chance communication with their brother for many years.

Not that they had ever quarrelled (Miss Mills informed me); but that

having been, on the occasion of Dora's christening, invited to tea, when

they considered themselves privileged to be invited to dinner, they

had expressed their opinion in writing, that it was 'better for the

happiness of all parties' that they should stay away. Since which they

had gone their road, and their brother had gone his.

These two ladies now emerged from their retirement, and proposed to

take Dora to live at Putney. Dora, clinging to them both, and weeping,

exclaimed, 'O yes, aunts! Please take Julia Mills and me and Jip to

Putney!' So they went, very soon after the funeral.

How I found time to haunt Putney, I am sure I don't know; but I

contrived, by some means or other, to prowl about the neighbourhood

pretty often. Miss Mills, for the more exact discharge of the duties of

friendship, kept a journal; and she used to meet me sometimes, on the

Common, and read it, or (if she had not time to do that) lend it to me.

How I treasured up the entries, of which I subjoin a sample--!

'Monday. My sweet D. still much depressed. Headache. Called attention to

J. as being beautifully sleek. D. fondled J. Associations thus awakened,

opened floodgates of sorrow. Rush of grief admitted. (Are tears the

dewdrops of the heart? J. M.)

'Tuesday. D. weak and nervous. Beautiful in pallor. (Do we not remark

this in moon likewise? J. M.) D., J. M. and J. took airing in carriage.

J. looking out of window, and barking violently at dustman, occasioned

smile to overspread features of D. (Of such slight links is chain of

life composed! J. M.)

'Wednesday. D. comparatively cheerful. Sang to her, as congenial melody,

"Evening Bells". Effect not soothing, but reverse. D. inexpressibly

affected. Found sobbing afterwards, in own room. Quoted verses

respecting self and young Gazelle. Ineffectually. Also referred to

Patience on Monument. (Qy. Why on monument? J. M.)

'Thursday. D. certainly improved. Better night. Slight tinge of damask

revisiting cheek. Resolved to mention name of D. C. Introduced same,

cautiously, in course of airing. D. immediately overcome. "Oh, dear,

dear Julia! Oh, I have been a naughty and undutiful child!" Soothed

and caressed. Drew ideal picture of D. C. on verge of tomb. D. again

overcome. "Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do? Oh, take me somewhere!"

Much alarmed. Fainting of D. and glass of water from public-house.

(Poetical affinity. Chequered sign on door-post; chequered human life.

Alas! J. M.)

'Friday. Day of incident. Man appears in kitchen, with blue bag, "for

lady's boots left out to heel". Cook replies, "No such orders." Man

argues point. Cook withdraws to inquire, leaving man alone with J. On

Cook's return, man still argues point, but ultimately goes. J. missing.

D. distracted. Information sent to police. Man to be identified by

broad nose, and legs like balustrades of bridge. Search made in

every direction. No J. D. weeping bitterly, and inconsolable. Renewed

reference to young Gazelle. Appropriate, but unavailing. Towards

evening, strange boy calls. Brought into parlour. Broad nose, but no

balustrades. Says he wants a pound, and knows a dog. Declines to explain

further, though much pressed. Pound being produced by D. takes Cook

to little house, where J. alone tied up to leg of table. Joy of D.

who dances round J. while he eats his supper. Emboldened by this happy

change, mention D. C. upstairs. D. weeps afresh, cries piteously, "Oh,

don't, don't, don't! It is so wicked to think of anything but poor

papa!"--embraces J. and sobs herself to sleep. (Must not D. C. confine

himself to the broad pinions of Time? J. M.)'

Miss Mills and her journal were my sole consolation at this period.

To see her, who had seen Dora but a little while before--to trace the

initial letter of Dora's name through her sympathetic pages--to be made

more and more miserable by her--were my only comforts. I felt as if I

had been living in a palace of cards, which had tumbled down, leaving

only Miss Mills and me among the ruins; I felt as if some grim enchanter

had drawn a magic circle round the innocent goddess of my heart, which

nothing indeed but those same strong pinions, capable of carrying so

many people over so much, would enable me to enter!

CHAPTER 39. WICKFIELD AND HEEP

My aunt, beginning, I imagine, to be made seriously uncomfortable by my

prolonged dejection, made a pretence of being anxious that I should go

to Dover, to see that all was working well at the cottage, which was

let; and to conclude an agreement, with the same tenant, for a longer

term of occupation. Janet was drafted into the service of Mrs. Strong,

where I saw her every day. She had been undecided, on leaving Dover,

whether or no to give the finishing touch to that renunciation of

mankind in which she had been educated, by marrying a pilot; but she

decided against that venture. Not so much for the sake of principle, I

believe, as because she happened not to like him.

Although it required an effort to leave Miss Mills, I fell rather

willingly into my aunt's pretence, as a means of enabling me to pass a

few tranquil hours with Agnes. I consulted the good Doctor relative

to an absence of three days; and the Doctor wishing me to take that

relaxation,--he wished me to take more; but my energy could not bear

that,--I made up my mind to go.

As to the Commons, I had no great occasion to be particular about my

duties in that quarter. To say the truth, we were getting in no very

good odour among the tip-top proctors, and were rapidly sliding down

to but a doubtful position. The business had been indifferent under Mr.

jorkins, before Mr. Spenlow's time; and although it had been quickened

by the infusion of new blood, and by the display which Mr. Spenlow made,

still it was not established on a sufficiently strong basis to bear,

without being shaken, such a blow as the sudden loss of its active

manager. It fell off very much. Mr. jorkins, notwithstanding his

reputation in the firm, was an easy-going, incapable sort of man, whose

reputation out of doors was not calculated to back it up. I was turned

over to him now, and when I saw him take his snuff and let the business

go, I regretted my aunt's thousand pounds more than ever.

But this was not the worst of it. There were a number of hangers-on and

outsiders about the Commons, who, without being proctors themselves,

dabbled in common-form business, and got it done by real proctors, who

lent their names in consideration of a share in the spoil;--and there

were a good many of these too. As our house now wanted business on any

terms, we joined this noble band; and threw out lures to the hangers-on

and outsiders, to bring their business to us. Marriage licences and

small probates were what we all looked for, and what paid us best;

and the competition for these ran very high indeed. Kidnappers and

inveiglers were planted in all the avenues of entrance to the Commons,

with instructions to do their utmost to cut off all persons in mourning,

and all gentlemen with anything bashful in their appearance, and entice

them to the offices in which their respective employers were interested;

which instructions were so well observed, that I myself, before I was

known by sight, was twice hustled into the premises of our principal

opponent. The conflicting interests of these touting gentlemen being of

a nature to irritate their feelings, personal collisions took place;

and the Commons was even scandalized by our principal inveigler (who

had formerly been in the wine trade, and afterwards in the sworn brokery

line) walking about for some days with a black eye. Any one of these

scouts used to think nothing of politely assisting an old lady in

black out of a vehicle, killing any proctor whom she inquired for,

representing his employer as the lawful successor and representative of

that proctor, and bearing the old lady off (sometimes greatly affected)

to his employer's office. Many captives were brought to me in this way.

As to marriage licences, the competition rose to such a pitch, that a

shy gentleman in want of one, had nothing to do but submit himself

to the first inveigler, or be fought for, and become the prey of the

strongest. One of our clerks, who was an outsider, used, in the height

of this contest, to sit with his hat on, that he might be ready to rush

out and swear before a surrogate any victim who was brought in. The

system of inveigling continues, I believe, to this day. The last time I

was in the Commons, a civil able-bodied person in a white apron pounced

out upon me from a doorway, and whispering the word 'Marriage-licence'

in my ear, was with great difficulty prevented from taking me up in

his arms and lifting me into a proctor's. From this digression, let me

proceed to Dover.

I found everything in a satisfactory state at the cottage; and was

enabled to gratify my aunt exceedingly by reporting that the tenant

inherited her feud, and waged incessant war against donkeys. Having

settled the little business I had to transact there, and slept there one

night, I walked on to Canterbury early in the morning. It was now

winter again; and the fresh, cold windy day, and the sweeping downland,

brightened up my hopes a little.

Coming into Canterbury, I loitered through the old streets with a sober

pleasure that calmed my spirits, and eased my heart. There were the old

signs, the old names over the shops, the old people serving in them. It

appeared so long, since I had been a schoolboy there, that I wondered

the place was so little changed, until I reflected how little I

was changed myself. Strange to say, that quiet influence which was

inseparable in my mind from Agnes, seemed to pervade even the city where

she dwelt. The venerable cathedral towers, and the old jackdaws and

rooks whose airy voices made them more retired than perfect silence

would have done; the battered gateways, one stuck full with statues,

long thrown down, and crumbled away, like the reverential pilgrims

who had gazed upon them; the still nooks, where the ivied growth of

centuries crept over gabled ends and ruined walls; the ancient houses,

the pastoral landscape of field, orchard, and garden; everywhere--on

everything--I felt the same serener air, the same calm, thoughtful,

softening spirit.

Arrived at Mr. Wickfield's house, I found, in the little lower room on

the ground floor, where Uriah Heep had been of old accustomed to sit,

Mr. Micawber plying his pen with great assiduity. He was dressed in a

legal-looking suit of black, and loomed, burly and large, in that small

office.

Mr. Micawber was extremely glad to see me, but a little confused too.

He would have conducted me immediately into the presence of Uriah, but I

declined.

'I know the house of old, you recollect,' said I, 'and will find my way

upstairs. How do you like the law, Mr. Micawber?'

'My dear Copperfield,' he replied. 'To a man possessed of the higher

imaginative powers, the objection to legal studies is the amount of

detail which they involve. Even in our professional correspondence,'

said Mr. Micawber, glancing at some letters he was writing, 'the mind is

not at liberty to soar to any exalted form of expression. Still, it is a

great pursuit. A great pursuit!'

He then told me that he had become the tenant of Uriah Heep's old house;

and that Mrs. Micawber would be delighted to receive me, once more,

under her own roof.

'It is humble,' said Mr. Micawber, '--to quote a favourite expression

of my friend Heep; but it may prove the stepping-stone to more ambitious

domiciliary accommodation.'

I asked him whether he had reason, so far, to be satisfied with his

friend Heep's treatment of him? He got up to ascertain if the door were

close shut, before he replied, in a lower voice:

'My dear Copperfield, a man who labours under the pressure of pecuniary

embarrassments, is, with the generality of people, at a disadvantage.

That disadvantage is not diminished, when that pressure necessitates the

drawing of stipendiary emoluments, before those emoluments are strictly

due and payable. All I can say is, that my friend Heep has responded

to appeals to which I need not more particularly refer, in a manner

calculated to redound equally to the honour of his head, and of his

heart.'

'I should not have supposed him to be very free with his money either,'

I observed.

'Pardon me!' said Mr. Micawber, with an air of constraint, 'I speak of

my friend Heep as I have experience.'

'I am glad your experience is so favourable,' I returned.

'You are very obliging, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber; and

hummed a tune.

'Do you see much of Mr. Wickfield?' I asked, to change the subject.

'Not much,' said Mr. Micawber, slightingly. 'Mr. Wickfield is, I dare

say, a man of very excellent intentions; but he is--in short, he is

obsolete.'

'I am afraid his partner seeks to make him so,' said I.

'My dear Copperfield!' returned Mr. Micawber, after some uneasy

evolutions on his stool, 'allow me to offer a remark! I am here, in

a capacity of confidence. I am here, in a position of trust. The

discussion of some topics, even with Mrs. Micawber herself (so long the

partner of my various vicissitudes, and a woman of a remarkable lucidity

of intellect), is, I am led to consider, incompatible with the functions

now devolving on me. I would therefore take the liberty of suggesting

that in our friendly intercourse--which I trust will never be

disturbed!--we draw a line. On one side of this line,' said Mr.

Micawber, representing it on the desk with the office ruler, 'is the

whole range of the human intellect, with a trifling exception; on

the other, IS that exception; that is to say, the affairs of Messrs

Wickfield and Heep, with all belonging and appertaining thereunto. I

trust I give no offence to the companion of my youth, in submitting this

proposition to his cooler judgement?'

Though I saw an uneasy change in Mr. Micawber, which sat tightly on

him, as if his new duties were a misfit, I felt I had no right to be

offended. My telling him so, appeared to relieve him; and he shook hands

with me.

'I am charmed, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'let me assure you, with

Miss Wickfield. She is a very superior young lady, of very remarkable

attractions, graces, and virtues. Upon my honour,' said Mr. Micawber,

indefinitely kissing his hand and bowing with his genteelest air, 'I do

Homage to Miss Wickfield! Hem!' 'I am glad of that, at least,' said I.

'If you had not assured us, my dear Copperfield, on the occasion of that

agreeable afternoon we had the happiness of passing with you, that D.

was your favourite letter,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I should unquestionably

have supposed that A. had been so.'

We have all some experience of a feeling, that comes over us

occasionally, of what we are saying and doing having been said and done

before, in a remote time--of our having been surrounded, dim ages ago,

by the same faces, objects, and circumstances--of our knowing perfectly

what will be said next, as if we suddenly remembered it! I never had

this mysterious impression more strongly in my life, than before he

uttered those words.

I took my leave of Mr. Micawber, for the time, charging him with my best

remembrances to all at home. As I left him, resuming his stool and his

pen, and rolling his head in his stock, to get it into easier writing

order, I clearly perceived that there was something interposed between

him and me, since he had come into his new functions, which prevented

our getting at each other as we used to do, and quite altered the

character of our intercourse.

There was no one in the quaint old drawing-room, though it presented

tokens of Mrs. Heep's whereabouts. I looked into the room still

belonging to Agnes, and saw her sitting by the fire, at a pretty

old-fashioned desk she had, writing.

My darkening the light made her look up. What a pleasure to be the cause

of that bright change in her attentive face, and the object of that

sweet regard and welcome!

'Ah, Agnes!' said I, when we were sitting together, side by side; 'I

have missed you so much, lately!'

'Indeed?' she replied. 'Again! And so soon?'

I shook my head.

'I don't know how it is, Agnes; I seem to want some faculty of mind that

I ought to have. You were so much in the habit of thinking for me, in

the happy old days here, and I came so naturally to you for counsel and

support, that I really think I have missed acquiring it.'

'And what is it?' said Agnes, cheerfully.

'I don't know what to call it,' I replied. 'I think I am earnest and

persevering?'

'I am sure of it,' said Agnes.

'And patient, Agnes?' I inquired, with a little hesitation.

'Yes,' returned Agnes, laughing. 'Pretty well.'

'And yet,' said I, 'I get so miserable and worried, and am so unsteady

and irresolute in my power of assuring myself, that I know I must

want--shall I call it--reliance, of some kind?'

'Call it so, if you will,' said Agnes.

'Well!' I returned. 'See here! You come to London, I rely on you, and I

have an object and a course at once. I am driven out of it, I come

here, and in a moment I feel an altered person. The circumstances that

distressed me are not changed, since I came into this room; but an

influence comes over me in that short interval that alters me, oh, how

much for the better! What is it? What is your secret, Agnes?'

Her head was bent down, looking at the fire.

'It's the old story,' said I. 'Don't laugh, when I say it was always

the same in little things as it is in greater ones. My old troubles were

nonsense, and now they are serious; but whenever I have gone away from

my adopted sister--'

Agnes looked up--with such a Heavenly face!--and gave me her hand, which

I kissed.

'Whenever I have not had you, Agnes, to advise and approve in the

beginning, I have seemed to go wild, and to get into all sorts of

difficulty. When I have come to you, at last (as I have always done),

I have come to peace and happiness. I come home, now, like a tired

traveller, and find such a blessed sense of rest!'

I felt so deeply what I said, it affected me so sincerely, that my voice

failed, and I covered my face with my hand, and broke into tears. I

write the truth. Whatever contradictions and inconsistencies there were

within me, as there are within so many of us; whatever might have been

so different, and so much better; whatever I had done, in which I had

perversely wandered away from the voice of my own heart; I knew nothing

of. I only knew that I was fervently in earnest, when I felt the rest

and peace of having Agnes near me.

In her placid sisterly manner; with her beaming eyes; with her tender

voice; and with that sweet composure, which had long ago made the house

that held her quite a sacred place to me; she soon won me from this

weakness, and led me on to tell all that had happened since our last

meeting.

'And there is not another word to tell, Agnes,' said I, when I had made

an end of my confidence. 'Now, my reliance is on you.'

'But it must not be on me, Trotwood,' returned Agnes, with a pleasant

smile. 'It must be on someone else.'

'On Dora?' said I.

'Assuredly.'

'Why, I have not mentioned, Agnes,' said I, a little embarrassed, 'that

Dora is rather difficult to--I would not, for the world, say, to rely

upon, because she is the soul of purity and truth--but rather difficult

to--I hardly know how to express it, really, Agnes. She is a timid

little thing, and easily disturbed and frightened. Some time ago, before

her father's death, when I thought it right to mention to her--but I'll

tell you, if you will bear with me, how it was.'

Accordingly, I told Agnes about my declaration of poverty, about the

cookery-book, the housekeeping accounts, and all the rest of it.

'Oh, Trotwood!' she remonstrated, with a smile. 'Just your old headlong

way! You might have been in earnest in striving to get on in the world,

without being so very sudden with a timid, loving, inexperienced girl.

Poor Dora!'

I never heard such sweet forbearing kindness expressed in a voice,

as she expressed in making this reply. It was as if I had seen her

admiringly and tenderly embracing Dora, and tacitly reproving me, by

her considerate protection, for my hot haste in fluttering that little

heart. It was as if I had seen Dora, in all her fascinating artlessness,

caressing Agnes, and thanking her, and coaxingly appealing against me,

and loving me with all her childish innocence.

I felt so grateful to Agnes, and admired her so! I saw those two

together, in a bright perspective, such well-associated friends, each

adorning the other so much!

'What ought I to do then, Agnes?' I inquired, after looking at the fire

a little while. 'What would it be right to do?'

'I think,' said Agnes, 'that the honourable course to take, would be to

write to those two ladies. Don't you think that any secret course is an

unworthy one?'

'Yes. If YOU think so,' said I.

'I am poorly qualified to judge of such matters,' replied Agnes, with

a modest hesitation, 'but I certainly feel--in short, I feel that your

being secret and clandestine, is not being like yourself.'

'Like myself, in the too high opinion you have of me, Agnes, I am

afraid,' said I.

'Like yourself, in the candour of your nature,' she returned; 'and

therefore I would write to those two ladies. I would relate, as plainly

and as openly as possible, all that has taken place; and I would ask

their permission to visit sometimes, at their house. Considering that

you are young, and striving for a place in life, I think it would be

well to say that you would readily abide by any conditions they might

impose upon you. I would entreat them not to dismiss your request,

without a reference to Dora; and to discuss it with her when they should

think the time suitable. I would not be too vehement,' said Agnes,

gently, 'or propose too much. I would trust to my fidelity and

perseverance--and to Dora.'

'But if they were to frighten Dora again, Agnes, by speaking to her,'

said I. 'And if Dora were to cry, and say nothing about me!'

'Is that likely?' inquired Agnes, with the same sweet consideration in

her face.

'God bless her, she is as easily scared as a bird,' said I. 'It might

be! Or if the two Miss Spenlows (elderly ladies of that sort are odd

characters sometimes) should not be likely persons to address in that

way!'

'I don't think, Trotwood,' returned Agnes, raising her soft eyes

to mine, 'I would consider that. Perhaps it would be better only to

consider whether it is right to do this; and, if it is, to do it.'

I had no longer any doubt on the subject. With a lightened heart, though

with a profound sense of the weighty importance of my task, I devoted

the whole afternoon to the composition of the draft of this letter; for

which great purpose, Agnes relinquished her desk to me. But first I went

downstairs to see Mr. Wickfield and Uriah Heep.

I found Uriah in possession of a new, plaster-smelling office, built out

in the garden; looking extraordinarily mean, in the midst of a quantity

of books and papers. He received me in his usual fawning way, and

pretended not to have heard of my arrival from Mr. Micawber; a

pretence I took the liberty of disbelieving. He accompanied me into Mr.

Wickfield's room, which was the shadow of its former self--having been

divested of a variety of conveniences, for the accommodation of the new

partner--and stood before the fire, warming his back, and shaving his

chin with his bony hand, while Mr. Wickfield and I exchanged greetings.

'You stay with us, Trotwood, while you remain in Canterbury?' said Mr.

Wickfield, not without a glance at Uriah for his approval.

'Is there room for me?' said I.

'I am sure, Master Copperfield--I should say Mister, but the other

comes so natural,' said Uriah,--'I would turn out of your old room with

pleasure, if it would be agreeable.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Why should you be inconvenienced? There's

another room. There's another room.' 'Oh, but you know,' returned Uriah,

with a grin, 'I should really be delighted!'

To cut the matter short, I said I would have the other room or none at

all; so it was settled that I should have the other room; and, taking my

leave of the firm until dinner, I went upstairs again.

I had hoped to have no other companion than Agnes. But Mrs. Heep had

asked permission to bring herself and her knitting near the fire, in

that room; on pretence of its having an aspect more favourable for

her rheumatics, as the wind then was, than the drawing-room or

dining-parlour. Though I could almost have consigned her to the mercies

of the wind on the topmost pinnacle of the Cathedral, without remorse, I

made a virtue of necessity, and gave her a friendly salutation.

'I'm umbly thankful to you, sir,' said Mrs. Heep, in acknowledgement of

my inquiries concerning her health, 'but I'm only pretty well. I haven't

much to boast of. If I could see my Uriah well settled in life, I

couldn't expect much more I think. How do you think my Ury looking,

sir?'

I thought him looking as villainous as ever, and I replied that I saw no

change in him.

'Oh, don't you think he's changed?' said Mrs. Heep. 'There I must umbly

beg leave to differ from you. Don't you see a thinness in him?'

'Not more than usual,' I replied.

'Don't you though!' said Mrs. Heep. 'But you don't take notice of him

with a mother's eye!'

His mother's eye was an evil eye to the rest of the world, I thought as

it met mine, howsoever affectionate to him; and I believe she and her

son were devoted to one another. It passed me, and went on to Agnes.

'Don't YOU see a wasting and a wearing in him, Miss Wickfield?' inquired

Mrs. Heep.

'No,' said Agnes, quietly pursuing the work on which she was engaged.

'You are too solicitous about him. He is very well.'

Mrs. Heep, with a prodigious sniff, resumed her knitting.

She never left off, or left us for a moment. I had arrived early in the

day, and we had still three or four hours before dinner; but she sat

there, plying her knitting-needles as monotonously as an hour-glass

might have poured out its sands. She sat on one side of the fire; I sat

at the desk in front of it; a little beyond me, on the other side, sat

Agnes. Whensoever, slowly pondering over my letter, I lifted up my

eyes, and meeting the thoughtful face of Agnes, saw it clear, and beam

encouragement upon me, with its own angelic expression, I was conscious

presently of the evil eye passing me, and going on to her, and coming

back to me again, and dropping furtively upon the knitting. What the

knitting was, I don't know, not being learned in that art; but it looked

like a net; and as she worked away with those Chinese chopsticks of

knitting-needles, she showed in the firelight like an ill-looking

enchantress, baulked as yet by the radiant goodness opposite, but

getting ready for a cast of her net by and by.

At dinner she maintained her watch, with the same unwinking eyes. After

dinner, her son took his turn; and when Mr. Wickfield, himself, and I

were left alone together, leered at me, and writhed until I could hardly

bear it. In the drawing-room, there was the mother knitting and watching

again. All the time that Agnes sang and played, the mother sat at the

piano. Once she asked for a particular ballad, which she said her Ury

(who was yawning in a great chair) doted on; and at intervals she looked

round at him, and reported to Agnes that he was in raptures with the

music. But she hardly ever spoke--I question if she ever did--without

making some mention of him. It was evident to me that this was the duty

assigned to her.

This lasted until bedtime. To have seen the mother and son, like two

great bats hanging over the whole house, and darkening it with their

ugly forms, made me so uncomfortable, that I would rather have remained

downstairs, knitting and all, than gone to bed. I hardly got any sleep.

Next day the knitting and watching began again, and lasted all day.

I had not an opportunity of speaking to Agnes, for ten minutes. I could

barely show her my letter. I proposed to her to walk out with me; but

Mrs. Heep repeatedly complaining that she was worse, Agnes charitably

remained within, to bear her company. Towards the twilight I went out

by myself, musing on what I ought to do, and whether I was justified

in withholding from Agnes, any longer, what Uriah Heep had told me in

London; for that began to trouble me again, very much.

I had not walked out far enough to be quite clear of the town, upon the

Ramsgate road, where there was a good path, when I was hailed, through

the dust, by somebody behind me. The shambling figure, and the scanty

great-coat, were not to be mistaken. I stopped, and Uriah Heep came up.

'Well?' said I.

'How fast you walk!' said he. 'My legs are pretty long, but you've given

'em quite a job.'

'Where are you going?' said I.

'I am going with you, Master Copperfield, if you'll allow me the

pleasure of a walk with an old acquaintance.' Saying this, with a jerk

of his body, which might have been either propitiatory or derisive, he

fell into step beside me.

'Uriah!' said I, as civilly as I could, after a silence.

'Master Copperfield!' said Uriah.

'To tell you the truth (at which you will not be offended), I came Out

to walk alone, because I have had so much company.'

He looked at me sideways, and said with his hardest grin, 'You mean

mother.'

'Why yes, I do,' said I.

'Ah! But you know we're so very umble,' he returned. 'And having such a

knowledge of our own umbleness, we must really take care that we're not

pushed to the wall by them as isn't umble. All stratagems are fair in

love, sir.'

Raising his great hands until they touched his chin, he rubbed them

softly, and softly chuckled; looking as like a malevolent baboon, I

thought, as anything human could look.

'You see,' he said, still hugging himself in that unpleasant way,

and shaking his head at me, 'you're quite a dangerous rival, Master

Copperfield. You always was, you know.'

'Do you set a watch upon Miss Wickfield, and make her home no home,

because of me?' said I.

'Oh! Master Copperfield! Those are very arsh words,' he replied.

'Put my meaning into any words you like,' said I. 'You know what it is,

Uriah, as well as I do.'

'Oh no! You must put it into words,' he said. 'Oh, really! I couldn't

myself.'

'Do you suppose,' said I, constraining myself to be very temperate

and quiet with him, on account of Agnes, 'that I regard Miss Wickfield

otherwise than as a very dear sister?'

'Well, Master Copperfield,' he replied, 'you perceive I am not bound

to answer that question. You may not, you know. But then, you see, you

may!'

Anything to equal the low cunning of his visage, and of his shadowless

eyes without the ghost of an eyelash, I never saw.

'Come then!' said I. 'For the sake of Miss Wickfield--'

'My Agnes!' he exclaimed, with a sickly, angular contortion of himself.

'Would you be so good as call her Agnes, Master Copperfield!'

'For the sake of Agnes Wickfield--Heaven bless her!'

'Thank you for that blessing, Master Copperfield!'he interposed.

'I will tell you what I should, under any other circumstances, as soon

have thought of telling to--Jack Ketch.'

'To who, sir?' said Uriah, stretching out his neck, and shading his ear

with his hand.

'To the hangman,' I returned. 'The most unlikely person I could think

of,'--though his own face had suggested the allusion quite as a natural

sequence. 'I am engaged to another young lady. I hope that contents

you.'

'Upon your soul?' said Uriah.

I was about indignantly to give my assertion the confirmation he

required, when he caught hold of my hand, and gave it a squeeze.

'Oh, Master Copperfield!' he said. 'If you had only had the

condescension to return my confidence when I poured out the fulness of

my art, the night I put you so much out of the way by sleeping before

your sitting-room fire, I never should have doubted you. As it is, I'm

sure I'll take off mother directly, and only too appy. I know you'll

excuse the precautions of affection, won't you? What a pity, Master

Copperfield, that you didn't condescend to return my confidence! I'm

sure I gave you every opportunity. But you never have condescended to

me, as much as I could have wished. I know you have never liked me, as I

have liked you!'

All this time he was squeezing my hand with his damp fishy fingers,

while I made every effort I decently could to get it away. But I was

quite unsuccessful. He drew it under the sleeve of his mulberry-coloured

great-coat, and I walked on, almost upon compulsion, arm-in-arm with

him.

'Shall we turn?' said Uriah, by and by wheeling me face about towards

the town, on which the early moon was now shining, silvering the distant

windows.

'Before we leave the subject, you ought to understand,' said I, breaking

a pretty long silence, 'that I believe Agnes Wickfield to be as far

above you, and as far removed from all your aspirations, as that moon

herself!'

'Peaceful! Ain't she!' said Uriah. 'Very! Now confess, Master

Copperfield, that you haven't liked me quite as I have liked you. All

along you've thought me too umble now, I shouldn't wonder?'

'I am not fond of professions of humility,' I returned, 'or professions

of anything else.' 'There now!' said Uriah, looking flabby and

lead-coloured in the moonlight. 'Didn't I know it! But how little

you think of the rightful umbleness of a person in my station, Master

Copperfield! Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school

for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of

charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness--not

much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to

this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and

to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves

before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters! Father got the

monitor-medal by being umble. So did I. Father got made a sexton by

being umble. He had the character, among the gentlefolks, of being

such a well-behaved man, that they were determined to bring him in. "Be

umble, Uriah," says father to me, "and you'll get on. It was what was

always being dinned into you and me at school; it's what goes down best.

Be umble," says father, "and you'll do!" And really it ain't done bad!'

It was the first time it had ever occurred to me, that this detestable

cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family. I

had seen the harvest, but had never thought of the seed.

'When I was quite a young boy,' said Uriah, 'I got to know what

umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I

stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, "Hold hard!" When

you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. "People like to be above

you," says father, "keep yourself down." I am very umble to the present

moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power!'

And he said all this--I knew, as I saw his face in the moonlight--that

I might understand he was resolved to recompense himself by using his

power. I had never doubted his meanness, his craft and malice; but I

fully comprehended now, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting,

and revengeful spirit, must have been engendered by this early, and this

long, suppression.

His account of himself was so far attended with an agreeable result,

that it led to his withdrawing his hand in order that he might have

another hug of himself under the chin. Once apart from him, I was

determined to keep apart; and we walked back, side by side, saying

very little more by the way. Whether his spirits were elevated by the

communication I had made to him, or by his having indulged in this

retrospect, I don't know; but they were raised by some influence. He

talked more at dinner than was usual with him; asked his mother (off

duty, from the moment of our re-entering the house) whether he was not

growing too old for a bachelor; and once looked at Agnes so, that I

would have given all I had, for leave to knock him down.

When we three males were left alone after dinner, he got into a more

adventurous state. He had taken little or no wine; and I presume it was

the mere insolence of triumph that was upon him, flushed perhaps by the

temptation my presence furnished to its exhibition.

I had observed yesterday, that he tried to entice Mr. Wickfield to

drink; and, interpreting the look which Agnes had given me as she went

out, had limited myself to one glass, and then proposed that we should

follow her. I would have done so again today; but Uriah was too quick

for me.

'We seldom see our present visitor, sir,' he said, addressing Mr.

Wickfield, sitting, such a contrast to him, at the end of the table,

'and I should propose to give him welcome in another glass or two

of wine, if you have no objections. Mr. Copperfield, your elth and

appiness!'

I was obliged to make a show of taking the hand he stretched across

to me; and then, with very different emotions, I took the hand of the

broken gentleman, his partner.

'Come, fellow-partner,' said Uriah, 'if I may take the liberty,--now,

suppose you give us something or another appropriate to Copperfield!'

I pass over Mr. Wickfield's proposing my aunt, his proposing Mr. Dick,

his proposing Doctors' Commons, his proposing Uriah, his drinking

everything twice; his consciousness of his own weakness, the ineffectual

effort that he made against it; the struggle between his shame in

Uriah's deportment, and his desire to conciliate him; the manifest

exultation with which Uriah twisted and turned, and held him up before

me. It made me sick at heart to see, and my hand recoils from writing

it.

'Come, fellow-partner!' said Uriah, at last, 'I'll give you another one,

and I umbly ask for bumpers, seeing I intend to make it the divinest of

her sex.'

Her father had his empty glass in his hand. I saw him set it down, look

at the picture she was so like, put his hand to his forehead, and shrink

back in his elbow-chair.

'I'm an umble individual to give you her elth,' proceeded Uriah, 'but I

admire--adore her.'

No physical pain that her father's grey head could have borne, I think,

could have been more terrible to me, than the mental endurance I saw

compressed now within both his hands.

'Agnes,' said Uriah, either not regarding him, or not knowing what the

nature of his action was, 'Agnes Wickfield is, I am safe to say, the

divinest of her sex. May I speak out, among friends? To be her father is

a proud distinction, but to be her usband--'

Spare me from ever again hearing such a cry, as that with which her

father rose up from the table! 'What's the matter?' said Uriah, turning

of a deadly colour. 'You are not gone mad, after all, Mr. Wickfield, I

hope? If I say I've an ambition to make your Agnes my Agnes, I have as

good a right to it as another man. I have a better right to it than any

other man!'

I had my arms round Mr. Wickfield, imploring him by everything that I

could think of, oftenest of all by his love for Agnes, to calm himself

a little. He was mad for the moment; tearing out his hair, beating his

head, trying to force me from him, and to force himself from me, not

answering a word, not looking at or seeing anyone; blindly striving

for he knew not what, his face all staring and distorted--a frightful

spectacle.

I conjured him, incoherently, but in the most impassioned manner, not

to abandon himself to this wildness, but to hear me. I besought him to

think of Agnes, to connect me with Agnes, to recollect how Agnes and I

had grown up together, how I honoured her and loved her, how she was his

pride and joy. I tried to bring her idea before him in any form; I even

reproached him with not having firmness to spare her the knowledge of

such a scene as this. I may have effected something, or his wildness may

have spent itself; but by degrees he struggled less, and began to look

at me--strangely at first, then with recognition in his eyes. At length

he said, 'I know, Trotwood! My darling child and you--I know! But look

at him!'

He pointed to Uriah, pale and glowering in a corner, evidently very much

out in his calculations, and taken by surprise.

'Look at my torturer,' he replied. 'Before him I have step by step

abandoned name and reputation, peace and quiet, house and home.'

'I have kept your name and reputation for you, and your peace and

quiet, and your house and home too,' said Uriah, with a sulky, hurried,

defeated air of compromise. 'Don't be foolish, Mr. Wickfield. If I

have gone a little beyond what you were prepared for, I can go back, I

suppose? There's no harm done.'

'I looked for single motives in everyone,' said Mr. Wickfield, and I was

satisfied I had bound him to me by motives of interest. But see what he

is--oh, see what he is!'

'You had better stop him, Copperfield, if you can,' cried Uriah,

with his long forefinger pointing towards me. 'He'll say something

presently--mind you!--he'll be sorry to have said afterwards, and you'll

be sorry to have heard!'

'I'll say anything!' cried Mr. Wickfield, with a desperate air. 'Why

should I not be in all the world's power if I am in yours?'

'Mind! I tell you!' said Uriah, continuing to warn me. 'If you don't

stop his mouth, you're not his friend! Why shouldn't you be in all the

world's power, Mr. Wickfield? Because you have got a daughter. You and

me know what we know, don't we? Let sleeping dogs lie--who wants to

rouse 'em? I don't. Can't you see I am as umble as I can be? I tell you,

if I've gone too far, I'm sorry. What would you have, sir?'

'Oh, Trotwood, Trotwood!'exclaimed Mr. Wickfield, wringing his hands.

'What I have come down to be, since I first saw you in this house! I was

on my downward way then, but the dreary, dreary road I have traversed

since! Weak indulgence has ruined me. Indulgence in remembrance, and

indulgence in forgetfulness. My natural grief for my child's mother

turned to disease; my natural love for my child turned to disease. I

have infected everything I touched. I have brought misery on what I

dearly love, I know--you know! I thought it possible that I could truly

love one creature in the world, and not love the rest; I thought it

possible that I could truly mourn for one creature gone out of the

world, and not have some part in the grief of all who mourned. Thus the

lessons of my life have been perverted! I have preyed on my own morbid

coward heart, and it has preyed on me. Sordid in my grief, sordid in my

love, sordid in my miserable escape from the darker side of both, oh see

the ruin I am, and hate me, shun me!'

He dropped into a chair, and weakly sobbed. The excitement into which he

had been roused was leaving him. Uriah came out of his corner.

'I don't know all I have done, in my fatuity,' said Mr. Wickfield,

putting out his hands, as if to deprecate my condemnation. 'He knows

best,' meaning Uriah Heep, 'for he has always been at my elbow,

whispering me. You see the millstone that he is about my neck. You

find him in my house, you find him in my business. You heard him, but a

little time ago. What need have I to say more!'

'You haven't need to say so much, nor half so much, nor anything at

all,' observed Uriah, half defiant, and half fawning. 'You wouldn't have

took it up so, if it hadn't been for the wine. You'll think better of

it tomorrow, sir. If I have said too much, or more than I meant, what of

it? I haven't stood by it!'

The door opened, and Agnes, gliding in, without a vestige of colour in

her face, put her arm round his neck, and steadily said, 'Papa, you are

not well. Come with me!'

He laid his head upon her shoulder, as if he were oppressed with heavy

shame, and went out with her. Her eyes met mine for but an instant, yet

I saw how much she knew of what had passed.

'I didn't expect he'd cut up so rough, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah.

'But it's nothing. I'll be friends with him tomorrow. It's for his good.

I'm umbly anxious for his good.'

I gave him no answer, and went upstairs into the quiet room where Agnes

had so often sat beside me at my books. Nobody came near me until late

at night. I took up a book, and tried to read. I heard the clocks strike

twelve, and was still reading, without knowing what I read, when Agnes

touched me.

'You will be going early in the morning, Trotwood! Let us say good-bye,

now!'

She had been weeping, but her face then was so calm and beautiful!

'Heaven bless you!' she said, giving me her hand.

'Dearest Agnes!' I returned, 'I see you ask me not to speak of

tonight--but is there nothing to be done?'

'There is God to trust in!' she replied.

'Can I do nothing--I, who come to you with my poor sorrows?'

'And make mine so much lighter,' she replied. 'Dear Trotwood, no!'

'Dear Agnes,' I said, 'it is presumptuous for me, who am so poor in all

in which you are so rich--goodness, resolution, all noble qualities--to

doubt or direct you; but you know how much I love you, and how much I

owe you. You will never sacrifice yourself to a mistaken sense of duty,

Agnes?'

More agitated for a moment than I had ever seen her, she took her hands

from me, and moved a step back.

'Say you have no such thought, dear Agnes! Much more than sister!

Think of the priceless gift of such a heart as yours, of such a love as

yours!'

Oh! long, long afterwards, I saw that face rise up before me, with its

momentary look, not wondering, not accusing, not regretting. Oh, long,

long afterwards, I saw that look subside, as it did now, into the lovely

smile, with which she told me she had no fear for herself--I need have

none for her--and parted from me by the name of Brother, and was gone!

It was dark in the morning, when I got upon the coach at the inn door.

The day was just breaking when we were about to start, and then, as

I sat thinking of her, came struggling up the coach side, through the

mingled day and night, Uriah's head.

'Copperfield!' said he, in a croaking whisper, as he hung by the iron

on the roof, 'I thought you'd be glad to hear before you went off, that

there are no squares broke between us. I've been into his room already,

and we've made it all smooth. Why, though I'm umble, I'm useful to him,

you know; and he understands his interest when he isn't in liquor! What

an agreeable man he is, after all, Master Copperfield!'

I obliged myself to say that I was glad he had made his apology.

'Oh, to be sure!' said Uriah. 'When a person's umble, you know, what's

an apology? So easy! I say! I suppose,' with a jerk, 'you have sometimes

plucked a pear before it was ripe, Master Copperfield?'

'I suppose I have,' I replied.

'I did that last night,' said Uriah; 'but it'll ripen yet! It only wants

attending to. I can wait!'

Profuse in his farewells, he got down again as the coachman got up. For

anything I know, he was eating something to keep the raw morning

air out; but he made motions with his mouth as if the pear were ripe

already, and he were smacking his lips over it.

CHAPTER 40. THE WANDERER

We had a very serious conversation in Buckingham Street that night,

about the domestic occurrences I have detailed in the last chapter. My

aunt was deeply interested in them, and walked up and down the room with

her arms folded, for more than two hours afterwards. Whenever she was

particularly discomposed, she always performed one of these pedestrian

feats; and the amount of her discomposure might always be estimated by

the duration of her walk. On this occasion she was so much disturbed in

mind as to find it necessary to open the bedroom door, and make a course

for herself, comprising the full extent of the bedrooms from wall to

wall; and while Mr. Dick and I sat quietly by the fire, she kept passing

in and out, along this measured track, at an unchanging pace, with the

regularity of a clock-pendulum.

When my aunt and I were left to ourselves by Mr. Dick's going out to

bed, I sat down to write my letter to the two old ladies. By that time

she was tired of walking, and sat by the fire with her dress tucked up

as usual. But instead of sitting in her usual manner, holding her glass

upon her knee, she suffered it to stand neglected on the chimney-piece;

and, resting her left elbow on her right arm, and her chin on her left

hand, looked thoughtfully at me. As often as I raised my eyes from what

I was about, I met hers. 'I am in the lovingest of tempers, my dear,'

she would assure me with a nod, 'but I am fidgeted and sorry!'

I had been too busy to observe, until after she was gone to bed, that

she had left her night-mixture, as she always called it, untasted on

the chimney-piece. She came to her door, with even more than her usual

affection of manner, when I knocked to acquaint her with this discovery;

but only said, 'I have not the heart to take it, Trot, tonight,' and

shook her head, and went in again.

She read my letter to the two old ladies, in the morning, and approved

of it. I posted it, and had nothing to do then, but wait, as patiently

as I could, for the reply. I was still in this state of expectation, and

had been, for nearly a week; when I left the Doctor's one snowy night,

to walk home.

It had been a bitter day, and a cutting north-east wind had blown for

some time. The wind had gone down with the light, and so the snow had

come on. It was a heavy, settled fall, I recollect, in great flakes; and

it lay thick. The noise of wheels and tread of people were as hushed, as

if the streets had been strewn that depth with feathers.

My shortest way home,--and I naturally took the shortest way on such a

night--was through St. Martin's Lane. Now, the church which gives its

name to the lane, stood in a less free situation at that time; there

being no open space before it, and the lane winding down to the Strand.

As I passed the steps of the portico, I encountered, at the corner,

a woman's face. It looked in mine, passed across the narrow lane,

and disappeared. I knew it. I had seen it somewhere. But I could not

remember where. I had some association with it, that struck upon my

heart directly; but I was thinking of anything else when it came upon

me, and was confused.

On the steps of the church, there was the stooping figure of a man, who

had put down some burden on the smooth snow, to adjust it; my seeing the

face, and my seeing him, were simultaneous. I don't think I had stopped

in my surprise; but, in any case, as I went on, he rose, turned, and

came down towards me. I stood face to face with Mr. Peggotty!

Then I remembered the woman. It was Martha, to whom Emily had given the

money that night in the kitchen. Martha Endell--side by side with whom,

he would not have seen his dear niece, Ham had told me, for all the

treasures wrecked in the sea.

We shook hands heartily. At first, neither of us could speak a word.

'Mas'r Davy!' he said, gripping me tight, 'it do my art good to see you,

sir. Well met, well met!'

'Well met, my dear old friend!' said I.

'I had my thowts o' coming to make inquiration for you, sir, tonight,'

he said, 'but knowing as your aunt was living along wi' you--fur I've

been down yonder--Yarmouth way--I was afeerd it was too late. I should

have come early in the morning, sir, afore going away.'

'Again?' said I.

'Yes, sir,' he replied, patiently shaking his head, 'I'm away tomorrow.'

'Where were you going now?' I asked.

'Well!' he replied, shaking the snow out of his long hair, 'I was

a-going to turn in somewheers.'

In those days there was a side-entrance to the stable-yard of the Golden

Cross, the inn so memorable to me in connexion with his misfortune,

nearly opposite to where we stood. I pointed out the gateway, put my arm

through his, and we went across. Two or three public-rooms opened out of

the stable-yard; and looking into one of them, and finding it empty, and

a good fire burning, I took him in there.

When I saw him in the light, I observed, not only that his hair was long

and ragged, but that his face was burnt dark by the sun. He was greyer,

the lines in his face and forehead were deeper, and he had every

appearance of having toiled and wandered through all varieties

of weather; but he looked very strong, and like a man upheld by

steadfastness of purpose, whom nothing could tire out. He shook the snow

from his hat and clothes, and brushed it away from his face, while I was

inwardly making these remarks. As he sat down opposite to me at a table,

with his back to the door by which we had entered, he put out his rough

hand again, and grasped mine warmly.

'I'll tell you, Mas'r Davy,' he said,--'wheer all I've been, and

what-all we've heerd. I've been fur, and we've heerd little; but I'll

tell you!'

I rang the bell for something hot to drink. He would have nothing

stronger than ale; and while it was being brought, and being warmed

at the fire, he sat thinking. There was a fine, massive gravity in his

face, I did not venture to disturb.

'When she was a child,' he said, lifting up his head soon after we were

left alone, 'she used to talk to me a deal about the sea, and about

them coasts where the sea got to be dark blue, and to lay a-shining and

a-shining in the sun. I thowt, odd times, as her father being drownded

made her think on it so much. I doen't know, you see, but maybe she

believed--or hoped--he had drifted out to them parts, where the flowers

is always a-blowing, and the country bright.'

'It is likely to have been a childish fancy,' I replied.

'When she was--lost,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I know'd in my mind, as he

would take her to them countries. I know'd in my mind, as he'd have told

her wonders of 'em, and how she was to be a lady theer, and how he got

her to listen to him fust, along o' sech like. When we see his mother,

I know'd quite well as I was right. I went across-channel to France, and

landed theer, as if I'd fell down from the sky.'

I saw the door move, and the snow drift in. I saw it move a little more,

and a hand softly interpose to keep it open.

'I found out an English gen'leman as was in authority,' said Mr.

Peggotty, 'and told him I was a-going to seek my niece. He got me them

papers as I wanted fur to carry me through--I doen't rightly know how

they're called--and he would have give me money, but that I was thankful

to have no need on. I thank him kind, for all he done, I'm sure! "I've

wrote afore you," he says to me, "and I shall speak to many as will come

that way, and many will know you, fur distant from here, when you're

a-travelling alone." I told him, best as I was able, what my gratitoode

was, and went away through France.'

'Alone, and on foot?' said I.

'Mostly a-foot,' he rejoined; 'sometimes in carts along with people

going to market; sometimes in empty coaches. Many mile a day a-foot, and

often with some poor soldier or another, travelling to see his friends.

I couldn't talk to him,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'nor he to me; but we was

company for one another, too, along the dusty roads.'

I should have known that by his friendly tone.

'When I come to any town,' he pursued, 'I found the inn, and waited

about the yard till someone turned up (someone mostly did) as know'd

English. Then I told how that I was on my way to seek my niece, and they

told me what manner of gentlefolks was in the house, and I waited to see

any as seemed like her, going in or out. When it warn't Em'ly, I went on

agen. By little and little, when I come to a new village or that, among

the poor people, I found they know'd about me. They would set me down at

their cottage doors, and give me what-not fur to eat and drink, and show

me where to sleep; and many a woman, Mas'r Davy, as has had a daughter

of about Em'ly's age, I've found a-waiting fur me, at Our Saviour's

Cross outside the village, fur to do me sim'lar kindnesses. Some has had

daughters as was dead. And God only knows how good them mothers was to

me!'

It was Martha at the door. I saw her haggard, listening face distinctly.

My dread was lest he should turn his head, and see her too.

'They would often put their children--particular their little girls,'

said Mr. Peggotty, 'upon my knee; and many a time you might have seen

me sitting at their doors, when night was coming in, a'most as if they'd

been my Darling's children. Oh, my Darling!'

Overpowered by sudden grief, he sobbed aloud. I laid my trembling hand

upon the hand he put before his face. 'Thankee, sir,' he said, 'doen't

take no notice.'

In a very little while he took his hand away and put it on his breast,

and went on with his story. 'They often walked with me,' he said, 'in

the morning, maybe a mile or two upon my road; and when we parted, and

I said, "I'm very thankful to you! God bless you!" they always seemed to

understand, and answered pleasant. At last I come to the sea. It warn't

hard, you may suppose, for a seafaring man like me to work his way

over to Italy. When I got theer, I wandered on as I had done afore. The

people was just as good to me, and I should have gone from town to town,

maybe the country through, but that I got news of her being seen among

them Swiss mountains yonder. One as know'd his servant see 'em there,

all three, and told me how they travelled, and where they was. I made

fur them mountains, Mas'r Davy, day and night. Ever so fur as I went,

ever so fur the mountains seemed to shift away from me. But I come up

with 'em, and I crossed 'em. When I got nigh the place as I had been

told of, I began to think within my own self, "What shall I do when I

see her?"'

The listening face, insensible to the inclement night, still drooped at

the door, and the hands begged me--prayed me--not to cast it forth.

'I never doubted her,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'No! Not a bit! On'y let her

see my face--on'y let her beer my voice--on'y let my stanning still

afore her bring to her thoughts the home she had fled away from, and the

child she had been--and if she had growed to be a royal lady, she'd have

fell down at my feet! I know'd it well! Many a time in my sleep had I

heerd her cry out, "Uncle!" and seen her fall like death afore me. Many

a time in my sleep had I raised her up, and whispered to her, "Em'ly, my

dear, I am come fur to bring forgiveness, and to take you home!"'

He stopped and shook his head, and went on with a sigh.

'He was nowt to me now. Em'ly was all. I bought a country dress to put

upon her; and I know'd that, once found, she would walk beside me over

them stony roads, go where I would, and never, never, leave me more. To

put that dress upon her, and to cast off what she wore--to take her on

my arm again, and wander towards home--to stop sometimes upon the road,

and heal her bruised feet and her worse-bruised heart--was all that I

thowt of now. I doen't believe I should have done so much as look at

him. But, Mas'r Davy, it warn't to be--not yet! I was too late, and they

was gone. Wheer, I couldn't learn. Some said beer, some said theer.

I travelled beer, and I travelled theer, but I found no Em'ly, and I

travelled home.'

'How long ago?' I asked.

'A matter o' fower days,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I sighted the old boat

arter dark, and the light a-shining in the winder. When I come nigh and

looked in through the glass, I see the faithful creetur Missis Gummidge

sittin' by the fire, as we had fixed upon, alone. I called out, "Doen't

be afeerd! It's Dan'l!" and I went in. I never could have thowt the old

boat would have been so strange!' From some pocket in his breast, he

took out, with a very careful hand a small paper bundle containing two

or three letters or little packets, which he laid upon the table.

'This fust one come,' he said, selecting it from the rest, 'afore I had

been gone a week. A fifty pound Bank note, in a sheet of paper, directed

to me, and put underneath the door in the night. She tried to hide her

writing, but she couldn't hide it from Me!'

He folded up the note again, with great patience and care, in exactly

the same form, and laid it on one side.

'This come to Missis Gummidge,' he said, opening another, 'two or three

months ago.'After looking at it for some moments, he gave it to me, and

added in a low voice, 'Be so good as read it, sir.'

I read as follows:

'Oh what will you feel when you see this writing, and know it comes from

my wicked hand! But try, try--not for my sake, but for uncle's goodness,

try to let your heart soften to me, only for a little little time! Try,

pray do, to relent towards a miserable girl, and write down on a bit of

paper whether he is well, and what he said about me before you left off

ever naming me among yourselves--and whether, of a night, when it is my

old time of coming home, you ever see him look as if he thought of one

he used to love so dear. Oh, my heart is breaking when I think about

it! I am kneeling down to you, begging and praying you not to be as

hard with me as I deserve--as I well, well, know I deserve--but to be so

gentle and so good, as to write down something of him, and to send it to

me. You need not call me Little, you need not call me by the name I have

disgraced; but oh, listen to my agony, and have mercy on me so far as to

write me some word of uncle, never, never to be seen in this world by my

eyes again!

'Dear, if your heart is hard towards me--justly hard, I know--but,

listen, if it is hard, dear, ask him I have wronged the most--him whose

wife I was to have been--before you quite decide against my poor poor

prayer! If he should be so compassionate as to say that you might write

something for me to read--I think he would, oh, I think he would, if you

would only ask him, for he always was so brave and so forgiving--tell

him then (but not else), that when I hear the wind blowing at night,

I feel as if it was passing angrily from seeing him and uncle, and was

going up to God against me. Tell him that if I was to die tomorrow (and

oh, if I was fit, I would be so glad to die!) I would bless him and

uncle with my last words, and pray for his happy home with my last

breath!'

Some money was enclosed in this letter also. Five pounds. It was

untouched like the previous sum, and he refolded it in the same way.

Detailed instructions were added relative to the address of a reply,

which, although they betrayed the intervention of several hands, and

made it difficult to arrive at any very probable conclusion in reference

to her place of concealment, made it at least not unlikely that she had

written from that spot where she was stated to have been seen.

'What answer was sent?' I inquired of Mr. Peggotty.

'Missis Gummidge,' he returned, 'not being a good scholar, sir, Ham

kindly drawed it out, and she made a copy on it. They told her I was

gone to seek her, and what my parting words was.'

'Is that another letter in your hand?' said I.

'It's money, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, unfolding it a little way. 'Ten

pound, you see. And wrote inside, "From a true friend," like the fust.

But the fust was put underneath the door, and this come by the post, day

afore yesterday. I'm a-going to seek her at the post-mark.'

He showed it to me. It was a town on the Upper Rhine. He had found out,

at Yarmouth, some foreign dealers who knew that country, and they had

drawn him a rude map on paper, which he could very well understand. He

laid it between us on the table; and, with his chin resting on one hand,

tracked his course upon it with the other.

I asked him how Ham was? He shook his head.

'He works,' he said, 'as bold as a man can. His name's as good, in all

that part, as any man's is, anywheres in the wureld. Anyone's hand is

ready to help him, you understand, and his is ready to help them. He's

never been heerd fur to complain. But my sister's belief is ('twixt

ourselves) as it has cut him deep.'

'Poor fellow, I can believe it!'

'He ain't no care, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty in a solemn

whisper--'kinder no care no-how for his life. When a man's wanted for

rough sarvice in rough weather, he's theer. When there's hard duty to

be done with danger in it, he steps for'ard afore all his mates. And yet

he's as gentle as any child. There ain't a child in Yarmouth that doen't

know him.'

He gathered up the letters thoughtfully, smoothing them with his hand;

put them into their little bundle; and placed it tenderly in his breast

again. The face was gone from the door. I still saw the snow drifting

in; but nothing else was there.

'Well!' he said, looking to his bag, 'having seen you tonight, Mas'r

Davy (and that doos me good!), I shall away betimes tomorrow morning.

You have seen what I've got heer'; putting his hand on where the little

packet lay; 'all that troubles me is, to think that any harm might come

to me, afore that money was give back. If I was to die, and it was lost,

or stole, or elseways made away with, and it was never know'd by him

but what I'd took it, I believe the t'other wureld wouldn't hold me! I

believe I must come back!'

He rose, and I rose too; we grasped each other by the hand again, before

going out.

'I'd go ten thousand mile,' he said, 'I'd go till I dropped dead, to lay

that money down afore him. If I do that, and find my Em'ly, I'm content.

If I doen't find her, maybe she'll come to hear, sometime, as her loving

uncle only ended his search for her when he ended his life; and if I

know her, even that will turn her home at last!'

As he went out into the rigorous night, I saw the lonely figure flit

away before us. I turned him hastily on some pretence, and held him in

conversation until it was gone.

He spoke of a traveller's house on the Dover Road, where he knew he

could find a clean, plain lodging for the night. I went with him over

Westminster Bridge, and parted from him on the Surrey shore. Everything

seemed, to my imagination, to be hushed in reverence for him, as he

resumed his solitary journey through the snow.

I returned to the inn yard, and, impressed by my remembrance of the

face, looked awfully around for it. It was not there. The snow had

covered our late footprints; my new track was the only one to be seen;

and even that began to die away (it snowed so fast) as I looked back

over my shoulder.

CHAPTER 41. DORA'S AUNTS

At last, an answer came from the two old ladies. They presented their

compliments to Mr. Copperfield, and informed him that they had given his

letter their best consideration, 'with a view to the happiness of

both parties'--which I thought rather an alarming expression, not

only because of the use they had made of it in relation to the family

difference before-mentioned, but because I had (and have all my life)

observed that conventional phrases are a sort of fireworks, easily let

off, and liable to take a great variety of shapes and colours not at

all suggested by their original form. The Misses Spenlow added that they

begged to forbear expressing, 'through the medium of correspondence', an

opinion on the subject of Mr. Copperfield's communication; but that if

Mr. Copperfield would do them the favour to call, upon a certain day

(accompanied, if he thought proper, by a confidential friend), they

would be happy to hold some conversation on the subject.

To this favour, Mr. Copperfield immediately replied, with his respectful

compliments, that he would have the honour of waiting on the Misses

Spenlow, at the time appointed; accompanied, in accordance with their

kind permission, by his friend Mr. Thomas Traddles of the Inner Temple.

Having dispatched which missive, Mr. Copperfield fell into a condition

of strong nervous agitation; and so remained until the day arrived.

It was a great augmentation of my uneasiness to be bereaved, at this

eventful crisis, of the inestimable services of Miss Mills. But Mr.

Mills, who was always doing something or other to annoy me--or I felt

as if he were, which was the same thing--had brought his conduct to a

climax, by taking it into his head that he would go to India. Why should

he go to India, except to harass me? To be sure he had nothing to do

with any other part of the world, and had a good deal to do with that

part; being entirely in the India trade, whatever that was (I had

floating dreams myself concerning golden shawls and elephants' teeth);

having been at Calcutta in his youth; and designing now to go out there

again, in the capacity of resident partner. But this was nothing to me.

However, it was so much to him that for India he was bound, and

Julia with him; and Julia went into the country to take leave of

her relations; and the house was put into a perfect suit of bills,

announcing that it was to be let or sold, and that the furniture (Mangle

and all) was to be taken at a valuation. So, here was another earthquake

of which I became the sport, before I had recovered from the shock of

its predecessor!

I was in several minds how to dress myself on the important day; being

divided between my desire to appear to advantage, and my apprehensions

of putting on anything that might impair my severely practical character

in the eyes of the Misses Spenlow. I endeavoured to hit a happy medium

between these two extremes; my aunt approved the result; and Mr. Dick

threw one of his shoes after Traddles and me, for luck, as we went

downstairs.

Excellent fellow as I knew Traddles to be, and warmly attached to him as

I was, I could not help wishing, on that delicate occasion, that he had

never contracted the habit of brushing his hair so very upright. It

gave him a surprised look--not to say a hearth-broomy kind of

expression--which, my apprehensions whispered, might be fatal to us.

I took the liberty of mentioning it to Traddles, as we were walking to

Putney; and saying that if he WOULD smooth it down a little--

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, lifting off his hat, and rubbing

his hair all kinds of ways, 'nothing would give me greater pleasure. But

it won't.'

'Won't be smoothed down?' said I.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Nothing will induce it. If I was to carry a

half-hundred-weight upon it, all the way to Putney, it would be up again

the moment the weight was taken off. You have no idea what obstinate

hair mine is, Copperfield. I am quite a fretful porcupine.'

I was a little disappointed, I must confess, but thoroughly charmed by

his good-nature too. I told him how I esteemed his good-nature; and said

that his hair must have taken all the obstinacy out of his character,

for he had none.

'Oh!' returned Traddles, laughing. 'I assure you, it's quite an old

story, my unfortunate hair. My uncle's wife couldn't bear it. She said

it exasperated her. It stood very much in my way, too, when I first fell

in love with Sophy. Very much!'

'Did she object to it?'

'SHE didn't,' rejoined Traddles; 'but her eldest sister--the one that's

the Beauty--quite made game of it, I understand. In fact, all the

sisters laugh at it.'

'Agreeable!' said I.

'Yes,' returned Traddles with perfect innocence, 'it's a joke for us.

They pretend that Sophy has a lock of it in her desk, and is obliged to

shut it in a clasped book, to keep it down. We laugh about it.'

'By the by, my dear Traddles,' said I, 'your experience may suggest

something to me. When you became engaged to the young lady whom you have

just mentioned, did you make a regular proposal to her family? Was there

anything like--what we are going through today, for instance?' I added,

nervously.

'Why,' replied Traddles, on whose attentive face a thoughtful shade had

stolen, 'it was rather a painful transaction, Copperfield, in my case.

You see, Sophy being of so much use in the family, none of them could

endure the thought of her ever being married. Indeed, they had quite

settled among themselves that she never was to be married, and they

called her the old maid. Accordingly, when I mentioned it, with the

greatest precaution, to Mrs. Crewler--'

'The mama?' said I.

'The mama,' said Traddles--'Reverend Horace Crewler--when I mentioned it

with every possible precaution to Mrs. Crewler, the effect upon her was

such that she gave a scream and became insensible. I couldn't approach

the subject again, for months.'

'You did at last?' said I.

'Well, the Reverend Horace did,' said Traddles. 'He is an excellent man,

most exemplary in every way; and he pointed out to her that she ought,

as a Christian, to reconcile herself to the sacrifice (especially as it

was so uncertain), and to bear no uncharitable feeling towards me. As to

myself, Copperfield, I give you my word, I felt a perfect bird of prey

towards the family.'

'The sisters took your part, I hope, Traddles?'

'Why, I can't say they did,' he returned. 'When we had comparatively

reconciled Mrs. Crewler to it, we had to break it to Sarah. You

recollect my mentioning Sarah, as the one that has something the matter

with her spine?'

'Perfectly!'

'She clenched both her hands,' said Traddles, looking at me in dismay;

'shut her eyes; turned lead-colour; became perfectly stiff; and

took nothing for two days but toast-and-water, administered with a

tea-spoon.'

'What a very unpleasant girl, Traddles!' I remarked.

'Oh, I beg your pardon, Copperfield!' said Traddles. 'She is a very

charming girl, but she has a great deal of feeling. In fact, they all

have. Sophy told me afterwards, that the self-reproach she underwent

while she was in attendance upon Sarah, no words could describe. I know

it must have been severe, by my own feelings, Copperfield; which were

like a criminal's. After Sarah was restored, we still had to break it

to the other eight; and it produced various effects upon them of a most

pathetic nature. The two little ones, whom Sophy educates, have only

just left off de-testing me.'

'At any rate, they are all reconciled to it now, I hope?' said I.

'Ye-yes, I should say they were, on the whole, resigned to it,' said

Traddles, doubtfully. 'The fact is, we avoid mentioning the subject;

and my unsettled prospects and indifferent circumstances are a great

consolation to them. There will be a deplorable scene, whenever we

are married. It will be much more like a funeral, than a wedding. And

they'll all hate me for taking her away!'

His honest face, as he looked at me with a serio-comic shake of his

head, impresses me more in the remembrance than it did in the reality,

for I was by this time in a state of such excessive trepidation

and wandering of mind, as to be quite unable to fix my attention on

anything. On our approaching the house where the Misses Spenlow lived,

I was at such a discount in respect of my personal looks and presence of

mind, that Traddles proposed a gentle stimulant in the form of a glass

of ale. This having been administered at a neighbouring public-house, he

conducted me, with tottering steps, to the Misses Spenlow's door.

I had a vague sensation of being, as it were, on view, when the maid

opened it; and of wavering, somehow, across a hall with a weather-glass

in it, into a quiet little drawing-room on the ground-floor, commanding

a neat garden. Also of sitting down here, on a sofa, and seeing

Traddles's hair start up, now his hat was removed, like one of those

obtrusive little figures made of springs, that fly out of fictitious

snuff-boxes when the lid is taken off. Also of hearing an old-fashioned

clock ticking away on the chimney-piece, and trying to make it keep time

to the jerking of my heart,--which it wouldn't. Also of looking round

the room for any sign of Dora, and seeing none. Also of thinking that

Jip once barked in the distance, and was instantly choked by somebody.

Ultimately I found myself backing Traddles into the fireplace, and

bowing in great confusion to two dry little elderly ladies, dressed in

black, and each looking wonderfully like a preparation in chip or tan of

the late Mr. Spenlow.

'Pray,' said one of the two little ladies, 'be seated.'

When I had done tumbling over Traddles, and had sat upon something which

was not a cat--my first seat was--I so far recovered my sight, as to

perceive that Mr. Spenlow had evidently been the youngest of the

family; that there was a disparity of six or eight years between the

two sisters; and that the younger appeared to be the manager of the

conference, inasmuch as she had my letter in her hand--so familiar as

it looked to me, and yet so odd!--and was referring to it through an

eye-glass. They were dressed alike, but this sister wore her dress with

a more youthful air than the other; and perhaps had a trifle more frill,

or tucker, or brooch, or bracelet, or some little thing of that kind,

which made her look more lively. They were both upright in their

carriage, formal, precise, composed, and quiet. The sister who had

not my letter, had her arms crossed on her breast, and resting on each

other, like an Idol.

'Mr. Copperfield, I believe,' said the sister who had got my letter,

addressing herself to Traddles.

This was a frightful beginning. Traddles had to indicate that I was Mr.

Copperfield, and I had to lay claim to myself, and they had to divest

themselves of a preconceived opinion that Traddles was Mr. Copperfield,

and altogether we were in a nice condition. To improve it, we all

distinctly heard Jip give two short barks, and receive another choke.

'Mr. Copperfield!' said the sister with the letter.

I did something--bowed, I suppose--and was all attention, when the other

sister struck in.

'My sister Lavinia,' said she 'being conversant with matters of this

nature, will state what we consider most calculated to promote the

happiness of both parties.'

I discovered afterwards that Miss Lavinia was an authority in affairs

of the heart, by reason of there having anciently existed a certain Mr.

Pidger, who played short whist, and was supposed to have been enamoured

of her. My private opinion is, that this was entirely a gratuitous

assumption, and that Pidger was altogether innocent of any such

sentiments--to which he had never given any sort of expression that

I could ever hear of. Both Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa had a

superstition, however, that he would have declared his passion, if he

had not been cut short in his youth (at about sixty) by over-drinking

his constitution, and over-doing an attempt to set it right again by

swilling Bath water. They had a lurking suspicion even, that he died of

secret love; though I must say there was a picture of him in the house

with a damask nose, which concealment did not appear to have ever preyed

upon.

'We will not,' said Miss Lavinia, 'enter on the past history of this

matter. Our poor brother Francis's death has cancelled that.'

'We had not,' said Miss Clarissa, 'been in the habit of frequent

association with our brother Francis; but there was no decided division

or disunion between us. Francis took his road; we took ours. We

considered it conducive to the happiness of all parties that it should

be so. And it was so.'

Each of the sisters leaned a little forward to speak, shook her head

after speaking, and became upright again when silent. Miss Clarissa

never moved her arms. She sometimes played tunes upon them with her

fingers--minuets and marches I should think--but never moved them.

'Our niece's position, or supposed position, is much changed by our

brother Francis's death,' said Miss Lavinia; 'and therefore we consider

our brother's opinions as regarded her position as being changed too. We

have no reason to doubt, Mr. Copperfield, that you are a young gentleman

possessed of good qualities and honourable character; or that you have

an affection--or are fully persuaded that you have an affection--for our

niece.'

I replied, as I usually did whenever I had a chance, that nobody had

ever loved anybody else as I loved Dora. Traddles came to my assistance

with a confirmatory murmur.

Miss Lavinia was going on to make some rejoinder, when Miss Clarissa,

who appeared to be incessantly beset by a desire to refer to her brother

Francis, struck in again:

'If Dora's mama,' she said, 'when she married our brother Francis, had

at once said that there was not room for the family at the dinner-table,

it would have been better for the happiness of all parties.'

'Sister Clarissa,' said Miss Lavinia. 'Perhaps we needn't mind that

now.'

'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, 'it belongs to the subject. With

your branch of the subject, on which alone you are competent to speak, I

should not think of interfering. On this branch of the subject I have a

voice and an opinion. It would have been better for the happiness of

all parties, if Dora's mama, when she married our brother Francis, had

mentioned plainly what her intentions were. We should then have known

what we had to expect. We should have said "Pray do not invite us,

at any time"; and all possibility of misunderstanding would have been

avoided.'

When Miss Clarissa had shaken her head, Miss Lavinia resumed: again

referring to my letter through her eye-glass. They both had little

bright round twinkling eyes, by the way, which were like birds' eyes.

They were not unlike birds, altogether; having a sharp, brisk, sudden

manner, and a little short, spruce way of adjusting themselves, like

canaries.

Miss Lavinia, as I have said, resumed:

'You ask permission of my sister Clarissa and myself, Mr. Copperfield,

to visit here, as the accepted suitor of our niece.'

'If our brother Francis,' said Miss Clarissa, breaking out again, if I

may call anything so calm a breaking out, 'wished to surround himself

with an atmosphere of Doctors' Commons, and of Doctors' Commons only,

what right or desire had we to object? None, I am sure. We have ever

been far from wishing to obtrude ourselves on anyone. But why not say

so? Let our brother Francis and his wife have their society. Let

my sister Lavinia and myself have our society. We can find it for

ourselves, I hope.'

As this appeared to be addressed to Traddles and me, both Traddles and

I made some sort of reply. Traddles was inaudible. I think I observed,

myself, that it was highly creditable to all concerned. I don't in the

least know what I meant.

'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, having now relieved her mind, 'you

can go on, my dear.'

Miss Lavinia proceeded:

'Mr. Copperfield, my sister Clarissa and I have been very careful

indeed in considering this letter; and we have not considered it without

finally showing it to our niece, and discussing it with our niece. We

have no doubt that you think you like her very much.'

'Think, ma'am,' I rapturously began, 'oh!--'

But Miss Clarissa giving me a look (just like a sharp canary), as

requesting that I would not interrupt the oracle, I begged pardon.

'Affection,' said Miss Lavinia, glancing at her sister for

corroboration, which she gave in the form of a little nod to every

clause, 'mature affection, homage, devotion, does not easily express

itself. Its voice is low. It is modest and retiring, it lies in ambush,

waits and waits. Such is the mature fruit. Sometimes a life glides away,

and finds it still ripening in the shade.'

Of course I did not understand then that this was an allusion to her

supposed experience of the stricken Pidger; but I saw, from the gravity

with which Miss Clarissa nodded her head, that great weight was attached

to these words.

'The light--for I call them, in comparison with such sentiments, the

light--inclinations of very young people,' pursued Miss Lavinia, 'are

dust, compared to rocks. It is owing to the difficulty of knowing

whether they are likely to endure or have any real foundation, that

my sister Clarissa and myself have been very undecided how to act, Mr.

Copperfield, and Mr.--'

'Traddles,' said my friend, finding himself looked at.

'I beg pardon. Of the Inner Temple, I believe?' said Miss Clarissa,

again glancing at my letter.

Traddles said 'Exactly so,' and became pretty red in the face.

Now, although I had not received any express encouragement as yet, I

fancied that I saw in the two little sisters, and particularly in Miss

Lavinia, an intensified enjoyment of this new and fruitful subject of

domestic interest, a settling down to make the most of it, a disposition

to pet it, in which there was a good bright ray of hope. I thought

I perceived that Miss Lavinia would have uncommon satisfaction in

superintending two young lovers, like Dora and me; and that Miss

Clarissa would have hardly less satisfaction in seeing her superintend

us, and in chiming in with her own particular department of the subject

whenever that impulse was strong upon her. This gave me courage to

protest most vehemently that I loved Dora better than I could tell, or

anyone believe; that all my friends knew how I loved her; that my aunt,

Agnes, Traddles, everyone who knew me, knew how I loved her, and how

earnest my love had made me. For the truth of this, I appealed to

Traddles. And Traddles, firing up as if he were plunging into a

Parliamentary Debate, really did come out nobly: confirming me in good

round terms, and in a plain sensible practical manner, that evidently

made a favourable impression.

'I speak, if I may presume to say so, as one who has some little

experience of such things,' said Traddles, 'being myself engaged to a

young lady--one of ten, down in Devonshire--and seeing no probability,

at present, of our engagement coming to a termination.'

'You may be able to confirm what I have said, Mr. Traddles,' observed

Miss Lavinia, evidently taking a new interest in him, 'of the affection

that is modest and retiring; that waits and waits?'

'Entirely, ma'am,' said Traddles.

Miss Clarissa looked at Miss Lavinia, and shook her head gravely. Miss

Lavinia looked consciously at Miss Clarissa, and heaved a little sigh.

'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, 'take my smelling-bottle.'

Miss Lavinia revived herself with a few whiffs of aromatic

vinegar--Traddles and I looking on with great solicitude the while; and

then went on to say, rather faintly:

'My sister and myself have been in great doubt, Mr. Traddles, what

course we ought to take in reference to the likings, or imaginary

likings, of such very young people as your friend Mr. Copperfield and

our niece.'

'Our brother Francis's child,' remarked Miss Clarissa. 'If our brother

Francis's wife had found it convenient in her lifetime (though she had

an unquestionable right to act as she thought best) to invite the family

to her dinner-table, we might have known our brother Francis's child

better at the present moment. Sister Lavinia, proceed.'

Miss Lavinia turned my letter, so as to bring the superscription towards

herself, and referred through her eye-glass to some orderly-looking

notes she had made on that part of it.

'It seems to us,' said she, 'prudent, Mr. Traddles, to bring these

feelings to the test of our own observation. At present we know nothing

of them, and are not in a situation to judge how much reality there

may be in them. Therefore we are inclined so far to accede to Mr.

Copperfield's proposal, as to admit his visits here.'

'I shall never, dear ladies,' I exclaimed, relieved of an immense load

of apprehension, 'forget your kindness!'

'But,' pursued Miss Lavinia,--'but, we would prefer to regard those

visits, Mr. Traddles, as made, at present, to us. We must guard

ourselves from recognizing any positive engagement between Mr.

Copperfield and our niece, until we have had an opportunity--'

'Until YOU have had an opportunity, sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa.

'Be it so,' assented Miss Lavinia, with a sigh--'until I have had an

opportunity of observing them.'

'Copperfield,' said Traddles, turning to me, 'you feel, I am sure, that

nothing could be more reasonable or considerate.'

'Nothing!' cried I. 'I am deeply sensible of it.'

'In this position of affairs,' said Miss Lavinia, again referring to

her notes, 'and admitting his visits on this understanding only, we

must require from Mr. Copperfield a distinct assurance, on his word of

honour, that no communication of any kind shall take place between him

and our niece without our knowledge. That no project whatever shall be

entertained with regard to our niece, without being first submitted to

us--' 'To you, sister Lavinia,' Miss Clarissa interposed.

'Be it so, Clarissa!' assented Miss Lavinia resignedly--'to me--and

receiving our concurrence. We must make this a most express and serious

stipulation, not to be broken on any account. We wished Mr. Copperfield

to be accompanied by some confidential friend today,' with an

inclination of her head towards Traddles, who bowed, 'in order that

there might be no doubt or misconception on this subject. If Mr.

Copperfield, or if you, Mr. Traddles, feel the least scruple, in giving

this promise, I beg you to take time to consider it.'

I exclaimed, in a state of high ecstatic fervour, that not a moment's

consideration could be necessary. I bound myself by the required

promise, in a most impassioned manner; called upon Traddles to witness

it; and denounced myself as the most atrocious of characters if I ever

swerved from it in the least degree.

'Stay!' said Miss Lavinia, holding up her hand; 'we resolved, before we

had the pleasure of receiving you two gentlemen, to leave you alone

for a quarter of an hour, to consider this point. You will allow us to

retire.'

It was in vain for me to say that no consideration was necessary. They

persisted in withdrawing for the specified time. Accordingly, these

little birds hopped out with great dignity; leaving me to receive the

congratulations of Traddles, and to feel as if I were translated to

regions of exquisite happiness. Exactly at the expiration of the

quarter of an hour, they reappeared with no less dignity than they had

disappeared. They had gone rustling away as if their little dresses were

made of autumn-leaves: and they came rustling back, in like manner.

I then bound myself once more to the prescribed conditions.

'Sister Clarissa,' said Miss Lavinia, 'the rest is with you.'

Miss Clarissa, unfolding her arms for the first time, took the notes and

glanced at them.

'We shall be happy,' said Miss Clarissa, 'to see Mr. Copperfield to

dinner, every Sunday, if it should suit his convenience. Our hour is

three.'

I bowed.

'In the course of the week,' said Miss Clarissa, 'we shall be happy to

see Mr. Copperfield to tea. Our hour is half-past six.'

I bowed again.

'Twice in the week,' said Miss Clarissa, 'but, as a rule, not oftener.'

I bowed again.

'Miss Trotwood,' said Miss Clarissa, 'mentioned in Mr. Copperfield's

letter, will perhaps call upon us. When visiting is better for the

happiness of all parties, we are glad to receive visits, and return

them. When it is better for the happiness of all parties that no

visiting should take place, (as in the case of our brother Francis, and

his establishment) that is quite different.'

I intimated that my aunt would be proud and delighted to make their

acquaintance; though I must say I was not quite sure of their getting

on very satisfactorily together. The conditions being now closed, I

expressed my acknowledgements in the warmest manner; and, taking the

hand, first of Miss Clarissa, and then of Miss Lavinia, pressed it, in

each case, to my lips.

Miss Lavinia then arose, and begging Mr. Traddles to excuse us for a

minute, requested me to follow her. I obeyed, all in a tremble, and was

conducted into another room. There I found my blessed darling stopping

her ears behind the door, with her dear little face against the wall;

and Jip in the plate-warmer with his head tied up in a towel.

Oh! How beautiful she was in her black frock, and how she sobbed and

cried at first, and wouldn't come out from behind the door! How fond we

were of one another, when she did come out at last; and what a state of

bliss I was in, when we took Jip out of the plate-warmer, and restored

him to the light, sneezing very much, and were all three reunited!

'My dearest Dora! Now, indeed, my own for ever!'

'Oh, DON'T!' pleaded Dora. 'Please!'

'Are you not my own for ever, Dora?'

'Oh yes, of course I am!' cried Dora, 'but I am so frightened!'

'Frightened, my own?'

'Oh yes! I don't like him,' said Dora. 'Why don't he go?'

'Who, my life?'

'Your friend,' said Dora. 'It isn't any business of his. What a stupid

he must be!'

'My love!' (There never was anything so coaxing as her childish ways.)

'He is the best creature!'

'Oh, but we don't want any best creatures!' pouted Dora.

'My dear,' I argued, 'you will soon know him well, and like him of all

things. And here is my aunt coming soon; and you'll like her of all

things too, when you know her.'

'No, please don't bring her!' said Dora, giving me a horrified

little kiss, and folding her hands. 'Don't. I know she's a naughty,

mischief-making old thing! Don't let her come here, Doady!' which was a

corruption of David.

Remonstrance was of no use, then; so I laughed, and admired, and was

very much in love and very happy; and she showed me Jip's new trick of

standing on his hind legs in a corner--which he did for about the space

of a flash of lightning, and then fell down--and I don't know how long I

should have stayed there, oblivious of Traddles, if Miss Lavinia had not

come in to take me away. Miss Lavinia was very fond of Dora (she told

me Dora was exactly like what she had been herself at her age--she must

have altered a good deal), and she treated Dora just as if she had been

a toy. I wanted to persuade Dora to come and see Traddles, but on my

proposing it she ran off to her own room and locked herself in; so I

went to Traddles without her, and walked away with him on air.

'Nothing could be more satisfactory,' said Traddles; 'and they are very

agreeable old ladies, I am sure. I shouldn't be at all surprised if you

were to be married years before me, Copperfield.'

'Does your Sophy play on any instrument, Traddles?' I inquired, in the

pride of my heart.

'She knows enough of the piano to teach it to her little sisters,' said

Traddles.

'Does she sing at all?' I asked.

'Why, she sings ballads, sometimes, to freshen up the others a little

when they're out of spirits,' said Traddles. 'Nothing scientific.'

'She doesn't sing to the guitar?' said I.

'Oh dear no!' said Traddles.

'Paint at all?'

'Not at all,' said Traddles.

I promised Traddles that he should hear Dora sing, and see some of her

flower-painting. He said he should like it very much, and we went home

arm in arm in great good humour and delight. I encouraged him to talk

about Sophy, on the way; which he did with a loving reliance on her

that I very much admired. I compared her in my mind with Dora, with

considerable inward satisfaction; but I candidly admitted to myself that

she seemed to be an excellent kind of girl for Traddles, too.

Of course my aunt was immediately made acquainted with the successful

issue of the conference, and with all that had been said and done in the

course of it. She was happy to see me so happy, and promised to call on

Dora's aunts without loss of time. But she took such a long walk up and

down our rooms that night, while I was writing to Agnes, that I began to

think she meant to walk till morning.

My letter to Agnes was a fervent and grateful one, narrating all the

good effects that had resulted from my following her advice. She wrote,

by return of post, to me. Her letter was hopeful, earnest, and cheerful.

She was always cheerful from that time.

I had my hands more full than ever, now. My daily journeys to Highgate

considered, Putney was a long way off; and I naturally wanted to go

there as often as I could. The proposed tea-drinkings being quite

impracticable, I compounded with Miss Lavinia for permission to visit

every Saturday afternoon, without detriment to my privileged Sundays.

So, the close of every week was a delicious time for me; and I got

through the rest of the week by looking forward to it.

I was wonderfully relieved to find that my aunt and Dora's aunts

rubbed on, all things considered, much more smoothly than I could have

expected. My aunt made her promised visit within a few days of the

conference; and within a few more days, Dora's aunts called upon her,

in due state and form. Similar but more friendly exchanges took place

afterwards, usually at intervals of three or four weeks. I know that my

aunt distressed Dora's aunts very much, by utterly setting at naught the

dignity of fly-conveyance, and walking out to Putney at extraordinary

times, as shortly after breakfast or just before tea; likewise by

wearing her bonnet in any manner that happened to be comfortable to her

head, without at all deferring to the prejudices of civilization on that

subject. But Dora's aunts soon agreed to regard my aunt as an eccentric

and somewhat masculine lady, with a strong understanding; and although

my aunt occasionally ruffled the feathers of Dora's aunts, by expressing

heretical opinions on various points of ceremony, she loved me too

well not to sacrifice some of her little peculiarities to the general

harmony.

The only member of our small society who positively refused to adapt

himself to circumstances, was Jip. He never saw my aunt without

immediately displaying every tooth in his head, retiring under a chair,

and growling incessantly: with now and then a doleful howl, as if she

really were too much for his feelings. All kinds of treatment were tried

with him, coaxing, scolding, slapping, bringing him to Buckingham

Street (where he instantly dashed at the two cats, to the terror of all

beholders); but he never could prevail upon himself to bear my

aunt's society. He would sometimes think he had got the better of his

objection, and be amiable for a few minutes; and then would put up his

snub nose, and howl to that extent, that there was nothing for it but

to blind him and put him in the plate-warmer. At length, Dora regularly

muffled him in a towel and shut him up there, whenever my aunt was

reported at the door.

One thing troubled me much, after we had fallen into this quiet train.

It was, that Dora seemed by one consent to be regarded like a pretty toy

or plaything. My aunt, with whom she gradually became familiar, always

called her Little Blossom; and the pleasure of Miss Lavinia's life was

to wait upon her, curl her hair, make ornaments for her, and treat her

like a pet child. What Miss Lavinia did, her sister did as a matter of

course. It was very odd to me; but they all seemed to treat Dora, in her

degree, much as Dora treated Jip in his.

I made up my mind to speak to Dora about this; and one day when we were

out walking (for we were licensed by Miss Lavinia, after a while, to

go out walking by ourselves), I said to her that I wished she could get

them to behave towards her differently.

'Because you know, my darling,' I remonstrated, 'you are not a child.'

'There!' said Dora. 'Now you're going to be cross!'

'Cross, my love?'

'I am sure they're very kind to me,' said Dora, 'and I am very happy--'

'Well! But my dearest life!' said I, 'you might be very happy, and yet

be treated rationally.'

Dora gave me a reproachful look--the prettiest look!--and then began to

sob, saying, if I didn't like her, why had I ever wanted so much to be

engaged to her? And why didn't I go away, now, if I couldn't bear her?

What could I do, but kiss away her tears, and tell her how I doted on

her, after that!

'I am sure I am very affectionate,' said Dora; 'you oughtn't to be cruel

to me, Doady!'

'Cruel, my precious love! As if I would--or could--be cruel to you, for

the world!'

'Then don't find fault with me,' said Dora, making a rosebud of her

mouth; 'and I'll be good.'

I was charmed by her presently asking me, of her own accord, to give

her that cookery-book I had once spoken of, and to show her how to keep

accounts as I had once promised I would. I brought the volume with me on

my next visit (I got it prettily bound, first, to make it look less dry

and more inviting); and as we strolled about the Common, I showed her an

old housekeeping-book of my aunt's, and gave her a set of tablets, and

a pretty little pencil-case and box of leads, to practise housekeeping

with.

But the cookery-book made Dora's head ache, and the figures made her

cry. They wouldn't add up, she said. So she rubbed them out, and drew

little nosegays and likenesses of me and Jip, all over the tablets.

Then I playfully tried verbal instruction in domestic matters, as we

walked about on a Saturday afternoon. Sometimes, for example, when we

passed a butcher's shop, I would say:

'Now suppose, my pet, that we were married, and you were going to buy a

shoulder of mutton for dinner, would you know how to buy it?'

My pretty little Dora's face would fall, and she would make her mouth

into a bud again, as if she would very much prefer to shut mine with a

kiss.

'Would you know how to buy it, my darling?' I would repeat, perhaps, if

I were very inflexible.

Dora would think a little, and then reply, perhaps, with great triumph:

'Why, the butcher would know how to sell it, and what need I know? Oh,

you silly boy!'

So, when I once asked Dora, with an eye to the cookery-book, what she

would do, if we were married, and I were to say I should like a nice

Irish stew, she replied that she would tell the servant to make it; and

then clapped her little hands together across my arm, and laughed in

such a charming manner that she was more delightful than ever.

Consequently, the principal use to which the cookery-book was devoted,

was being put down in the corner for Jip to stand upon. But Dora was so

pleased, when she had trained him to stand upon it without offering to

come off, and at the same time to hold the pencil-case in his mouth,

that I was very glad I had bought it.

And we fell back on the guitar-case, and the flower-painting, and the

songs about never leaving off dancing, Ta ra la! and were as happy as

the week was long. I occasionally wished I could venture to hint to Miss

Lavinia, that she treated the darling of my heart a little too much like

a plaything; and I sometimes awoke, as it were, wondering to find that

I had fallen into the general fault, and treated her like a plaything

too--but not often.

CHAPTER 42. MISCHIEF

I feel as if it were not for me to record, even though this manuscript

is intended for no eyes but mine, how hard I worked at that tremendous

short-hand, and all improvement appertaining to it, in my sense of

responsibility to Dora and her aunts. I will only add, to what I have

already written of my perseverance at this time of my life, and of a

patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured within me,

and which I know to be the strong part of my character, if it have any

strength at all, that there, on looking back, I find the source of my

success. I have been very fortunate in worldly matters; many men have

worked much harder, and not succeeded half so well; but I never could

have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order,

and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one

object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon

its heels, which I then formed. Heaven knows I write this, in no spirit

of self-laudation. The man who reviews his own life, as I do mine,

in going on here, from page to page, had need to have been a good man

indeed, if he would be spared the sharp consciousness of many talents

neglected, many opportunities wasted, many erratic and perverted

feelings constantly at war within his breast, and defeating him. I

do not hold one natural gift, I dare say, that I have not abused. My

meaning simply is, that whatever I have tried to do in life, I have

tried with all my heart to do well; that whatever I have devoted myself

to, I have devoted myself to completely; that in great aims and in

small, I have always been thoroughly in earnest. I have never believed

it possible that any natural or improved ability can claim immunity from

the companionship of the steady, plain, hard-working qualities, and

hope to gain its end. There is no such thing as such fulfilment on this

earth. Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the

two sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that

ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear; and there is no

substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. Never

to put one hand to anything, on which I could throw my whole self; and

never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was; I find, now,

to have been my golden rules.

How much of the practice I have just reduced to precept, I owe to Agnes,

I will not repeat here. My narrative proceeds to Agnes, with a thankful

love.

She came on a visit of a fortnight to the Doctor's. Mr. Wickfield was

the Doctor's old friend, and the Doctor wished to talk with him, and

do him good. It had been matter of conversation with Agnes when she was

last in town, and this visit was the result. She and her father came

together. I was not much surprised to hear from her that she had engaged

to find a lodging in the neighbourhood for Mrs. Heep, whose rheumatic

complaint required change of air, and who would be charmed to have it in

such company. Neither was I surprised when, on the very next day, Uriah,

like a dutiful son, brought his worthy mother to take possession.

'You see, Master Copperfield,' said he, as he forced himself upon my

company for a turn in the Doctor's garden, 'where a person loves, a

person is a little jealous--leastways, anxious to keep an eye on the

beloved one.'

'Of whom are you jealous, now?' said I.

'Thanks to you, Master Copperfield,' he returned, 'of no one in

particular just at present--no male person, at least.'

'Do you mean that you are jealous of a female person?'

He gave me a sidelong glance out of his sinister red eyes, and laughed.

'Really, Master Copperfield,' he said, '--I should say Mister, but I

know you'll excuse the abit I've got into--you're so insinuating, that

you draw me like a corkscrew! Well, I don't mind telling you,' putting

his fish-like hand on mine, 'I'm not a lady's man in general, sir, and I

never was, with Mrs. Strong.'

His eyes looked green now, as they watched mine with a rascally cunning.

'What do you mean?' said I.

'Why, though I am a lawyer, Master Copperfield,' he replied, with a dry

grin, 'I mean, just at present, what I say.'

'And what do you mean by your look?' I retorted, quietly.

'By my look? Dear me, Copperfield, that's sharp practice! What do I mean

by my look?'

'Yes,' said I. 'By your look.'

He seemed very much amused, and laughed as heartily as it was in his

nature to laugh. After some scraping of his chin with his hand, he went

on to say, with his eyes cast downward--still scraping, very slowly:

'When I was but an umble clerk, she always looked down upon me. She was

for ever having my Agnes backwards and forwards at her ouse, and she was

for ever being a friend to you, Master Copperfield; but I was too far

beneath her, myself, to be noticed.'

'Well?' said I; 'suppose you were!'

'--And beneath him too,' pursued Uriah, very distinctly, and in a

meditative tone of voice, as he continued to scrape his chin.

'Don't you know the Doctor better,' said I, 'than to suppose him

conscious of your existence, when you were not before him?'

He directed his eyes at me in that sidelong glance again, and he made

his face very lantern-jawed, for the greater convenience of scraping, as

he answered:

'Oh dear, I am not referring to the Doctor! Oh no, poor man! I mean Mr.

Maldon!'

My heart quite died within me. All my old doubts and apprehensions on

that subject, all the Doctor's happiness and peace, all the mingled

possibilities of innocence and compromise, that I could not unravel, I

saw, in a moment, at the mercy of this fellow's twisting.

'He never could come into the office, without ordering and shoving me

about,' said Uriah. 'One of your fine gentlemen he was! I was very meek

and umble--and I am. But I didn't like that sort of thing--and I don't!'

He left off scraping his chin, and sucked in his cheeks until they

seemed to meet inside; keeping his sidelong glance upon me all the

while.

'She is one of your lovely women, she is,' he pursued, when he had

slowly restored his face to its natural form; 'and ready to be no friend

to such as me, I know. She's just the person as would put my Agnes up

to higher sort of game. Now, I ain't one of your lady's men, Master

Copperfield; but I've had eyes in my ed, a pretty long time back. We

umble ones have got eyes, mostly speaking--and we look out of 'em.'

I endeavoured to appear unconscious and not disquieted, but, I saw in

his face, with poor success.

'Now, I'm not a-going to let myself be run down, Copperfield,' he

continued, raising that part of his countenance, where his red eyebrows

would have been if he had had any, with malignant triumph, 'and I shall

do what I can to put a stop to this friendship. I don't approve of it.

I don't mind acknowledging to you that I've got rather a grudging

disposition, and want to keep off all intruders. I ain't a-going, if I

know it, to run the risk of being plotted against.'

'You are always plotting, and delude yourself into the belief that

everybody else is doing the like, I think,' said I.

'Perhaps so, Master Copperfield,' he replied. 'But I've got a motive, as

my fellow-partner used to say; and I go at it tooth and nail. I mustn't

be put upon, as a numble person, too much. I can't allow people in my

way. Really they must come out of the cart, Master Copperfield!'

'I don't understand you,' said I.

'Don't you, though?' he returned, with one of his jerks. 'I'm astonished

at that, Master Copperfield, you being usually so quick! I'll try to be

plainer, another time.---Is that Mr. Maldon a-norseback, ringing at the

gate, sir?'

'It looks like him,' I replied, as carelessly as I could.

Uriah stopped short, put his hands between his great knobs of knees, and

doubled himself up with laughter. With perfectly silent laughter. Not

a sound escaped from him. I was so repelled by his odious behaviour,

particularly by this concluding instance, that I turned away without any

ceremony; and left him doubled up in the middle of the garden, like a

scarecrow in want of support.

It was not on that evening; but, as I well remember, on the next evening

but one, which was a Sunday; that I took Agnes to see Dora. I had

arranged the visit, beforehand, with Miss Lavinia; and Agnes was

expected to tea.

I was in a flutter of pride and anxiety; pride in my dear little

betrothed, and anxiety that Agnes should like her. All the way to

Putney, Agnes being inside the stage-coach, and I outside, I pictured

Dora to myself in every one of the pretty looks I knew so well; now

making up my mind that I should like her to look exactly as she looked

at such a time, and then doubting whether I should not prefer her

looking as she looked at such another time; and almost worrying myself

into a fever about it.

I was troubled by no doubt of her being very pretty, in any case; but

it fell out that I had never seen her look so well. She was not in the

drawing-room when I presented Agnes to her little aunts, but was shyly

keeping out of the way. I knew where to look for her, now; and sure

enough I found her stopping her ears again, behind the same dull old

door.

At first she wouldn't come at all; and then she pleaded for five minutes

by my watch. When at length she put her arm through mine, to be taken

to the drawing-room, her charming little face was flushed, and had never

been so pretty. But, when we went into the room, and it turned pale, she

was ten thousand times prettier yet.

Dora was afraid of Agnes. She had told me that she knew Agnes was

'too clever'. But when she saw her looking at once so cheerful and so

earnest, and so thoughtful, and so good, she gave a faint little cry of

pleased surprise, and just put her affectionate arms round Agnes's neck,

and laid her innocent cheek against her face.

I never was so happy. I never was so pleased as when I saw those two sit

down together, side by side. As when I saw my little darling looking up

so naturally to those cordial eyes. As when I saw the tender, beautiful

regard which Agnes cast upon her.

Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa partook, in their way, of my joy. It was

the pleasantest tea-table in the world. Miss Clarissa presided. I cut

and handed the sweet seed-cake--the little sisters had a bird-like

fondness for picking up seeds and pecking at sugar; Miss Lavinia looked

on with benignant patronage, as if our happy love were all her work; and

we were perfectly contented with ourselves and one another.

The gentle cheerfulness of Agnes went to all their hearts. Her quiet

interest in everything that interested Dora; her manner of making

acquaintance with Jip (who responded instantly); her pleasant way, when

Dora was ashamed to come over to her usual seat by me; her modest grace

and ease, eliciting a crowd of blushing little marks of confidence from

Dora; seemed to make our circle quite complete.

'I am so glad,' said Dora, after tea, 'that you like me. I didn't think

you would; and I want, more than ever, to be liked, now Julia Mills is

gone.'

I have omitted to mention it, by the by. Miss Mills had sailed, and Dora

and I had gone aboard a great East Indiaman at Gravesend to see her;

and we had had preserved ginger, and guava, and other delicacies of that

sort for lunch; and we had left Miss Mills weeping on a camp-stool on

the quarter-deck, with a large new diary under her arm, in which the

original reflections awakened by the contemplation of Ocean were to be

recorded under lock and key.

Agnes said she was afraid I must have given her an unpromising

character; but Dora corrected that directly.

'Oh no!' she said, shaking her curls at me; 'it was all praise. He

thinks so much of your opinion, that I was quite afraid of it.'

'My good opinion cannot strengthen his attachment to some people whom he

knows,' said Agnes, with a smile; 'it is not worth their having.'

'But please let me have it,' said Dora, in her coaxing way, 'if you

can!'

We made merry about Dora's wanting to be liked, and Dora said I was a

goose, and she didn't like me at any rate, and the short evening flew

away on gossamer-wings. The time was at hand when the coach was to call

for us. I was standing alone before the fire, when Dora came stealing

softly in, to give me that usual precious little kiss before I went.

'Don't you think, if I had had her for a friend a long time ago, Doady,'

said Dora, her bright eyes shining very brightly, and her little right

hand idly busying itself with one of the buttons of my coat, 'I might

have been more clever perhaps?'

'My love!' said I, 'what nonsense!'

'Do you think it is nonsense?' returned Dora, without looking at me.

'Are you sure it is?'

'Of course I am!' 'I have forgotten,' said Dora, still turning the

button round and round, 'what relation Agnes is to you, you dear bad

boy.'

'No blood-relation,' I replied; 'but we were brought up together, like

brother and sister.'

'I wonder why you ever fell in love with me?' said Dora, beginning on

another button of my coat.

'Perhaps because I couldn't see you, and not love you, Dora!'

'Suppose you had never seen me at all,' said Dora, going to another

button.

'Suppose we had never been born!' said I, gaily.

I wondered what she was thinking about, as I glanced in admiring silence

at the little soft hand travelling up the row of buttons on my coat, and

at the clustering hair that lay against my breast, and at the lashes of

her downcast eyes, slightly rising as they followed her idle fingers. At

length her eyes were lifted up to mine, and she stood on tiptoe to

give me, more thoughtfully than usual, that precious little kiss--once,

twice, three times--and went out of the room.

They all came back together within five minutes afterwards, and Dora's

unusual thoughtfulness was quite gone then. She was laughingly resolved

to put Jip through the whole of his performances, before the coach came.

They took some time (not so much on account of their variety, as Jip's

reluctance), and were still unfinished when it was heard at the door.

There was a hurried but affectionate parting between Agnes and herself;

and Dora was to write to Agnes (who was not to mind her letters being

foolish, she said), and Agnes was to write to Dora; and they had a

second parting at the coach door, and a third when Dora, in spite of

the remonstrances of Miss Lavinia, would come running out once more to

remind Agnes at the coach window about writing, and to shake her curls

at me on the box.

The stage-coach was to put us down near Covent Garden, where we were

to take another stage-coach for Highgate. I was impatient for the short

walk in the interval, that Agnes might praise Dora to me. Ah! what

praise it was! How lovingly and fervently did it commend the pretty

creature I had won, with all her artless graces best displayed, to my

most gentle care! How thoughtfully remind me, yet with no pretence of

doing so, of the trust in which I held the orphan child!

Never, never, had I loved Dora so deeply and truly, as I loved her that

night. When we had again alighted, and were walking in the starlight

along the quiet road that led to the Doctor's house, I told Agnes it was

her doing.

'When you were sitting by her,' said I, 'you seemed to be no less her

guardian angel than mine; and you seem so now, Agnes.'

'A poor angel,' she returned, 'but faithful.'

The clear tone of her voice, going straight to my heart, made it natural

to me to say:

'The cheerfulness that belongs to you, Agnes (and to no one else that

ever I have seen), is so restored, I have observed today, that I have

begun to hope you are happier at home?'

'I am happier in myself,' she said; 'I am quite cheerful and

light-hearted.'

I glanced at the serene face looking upward, and thought it was the

stars that made it seem so noble.

'There has been no change at home,' said Agnes, after a few moments.

'No fresh reference,' said I, 'to--I wouldn't distress you, Agnes, but I

cannot help asking--to what we spoke of, when we parted last?'

'No, none,' she answered.

'I have thought so much about it.'

'You must think less about it. Remember that I confide in simple love

and truth at last. Have no apprehensions for me, Trotwood,' she added,

after a moment; 'the step you dread my taking, I shall never take.'

Although I think I had never really feared it, in any season of cool

reflection, it was an unspeakable relief to me to have this assurance

from her own truthful lips. I told her so, earnestly.

'And when this visit is over,' said I,--'for we may not be alone another

time,--how long is it likely to be, my dear Agnes, before you come to

London again?'

'Probably a long time,' she replied; 'I think it will be best--for

papa's sake--to remain at home. We are not likely to meet often, for

some time to come; but I shall be a good correspondent of Dora's, and we

shall frequently hear of one another that way.'

We were now within the little courtyard of the Doctor's cottage. It was

growing late. There was a light in the window of Mrs. Strong's chamber,

and Agnes, pointing to it, bade me good night.

'Do not be troubled,' she said, giving me her hand, 'by our misfortunes

and anxieties. I can be happier in nothing than in your happiness. If

you can ever give me help, rely upon it I will ask you for it. God

bless you always!' In her beaming smile, and in these last tones of her

cheerful voice, I seemed again to see and hear my little Dora in her

company. I stood awhile, looking through the porch at the stars, with

a heart full of love and gratitude, and then walked slowly forth. I had

engaged a bed at a decent alehouse close by, and was going out at the

gate, when, happening to turn my head, I saw a light in the Doctor's

study. A half-reproachful fancy came into my mind, that he had been

working at the Dictionary without my help. With the view of seeing if

this were so, and, in any case, of bidding him good night, if he were

yet sitting among his books, I turned back, and going softly across the

hall, and gently opening the door, looked in.

The first person whom I saw, to my surprise, by the sober light of the

shaded lamp, was Uriah. He was standing close beside it, with one of

his skeleton hands over his mouth, and the other resting on the Doctor's

table. The Doctor sat in his study chair, covering his face with his

hands. Mr. Wickfield, sorely troubled and distressed, was leaning

forward, irresolutely touching the Doctor's arm.

For an instant, I supposed that the Doctor was ill. I hastily advanced a

step under that impression, when I met Uriah's eye, and saw what was the

matter. I would have withdrawn, but the Doctor made a gesture to detain

me, and I remained.

'At any rate,' observed Uriah, with a writhe of his ungainly person, 'we

may keep the door shut. We needn't make it known to ALL the town.'

Saying which, he went on his toes to the door, which I had left open,

and carefully closed it. He then came back, and took up his former

position. There was an obtrusive show of compassionate zeal in his voice

and manner, more intolerable--at least to me--than any demeanour he

could have assumed.

'I have felt it incumbent upon me, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'to

point out to Doctor Strong what you and me have already talked about.

You didn't exactly understand me, though?'

I gave him a look, but no other answer; and, going to my good old

master, said a few words that I meant to be words of comfort and

encouragement. He put his hand upon my shoulder, as it had been his

custom to do when I was quite a little fellow, but did not lift his grey

head.

'As you didn't understand me, Master Copperfield,' resumed Uriah in

the same officious manner, 'I may take the liberty of umbly mentioning,

being among friends, that I have called Doctor Strong's attention to the

goings-on of Mrs. Strong. It's much against the grain with me, I assure

you, Copperfield, to be concerned in anything so unpleasant; but really,

as it is, we're all mixing ourselves up with what oughtn't to be. That

was what my meaning was, sir, when you didn't understand me.' I wonder

now, when I recall his leer, that I did not collar him, and try to shake

the breath out of his body.

'I dare say I didn't make myself very clear,' he went on, 'nor you

neither. Naturally, we was both of us inclined to give such a subject

a wide berth. Hows'ever, at last I have made up my mind to speak plain;

and I have mentioned to Doctor Strong that--did you speak, sir?'

This was to the Doctor, who had moaned. The sound might have touched any

heart, I thought, but it had no effect upon Uriah's.

'--mentioned to Doctor Strong,' he proceeded, 'that anyone may see that

Mr. Maldon, and the lovely and agreeable lady as is Doctor Strong's

wife, are too sweet on one another. Really the time is come (we being at

present all mixing ourselves up with what oughtn't to be), when Doctor

Strong must be told that this was full as plain to everybody as the sun,

before Mr. Maldon went to India; that Mr. Maldon made excuses to come

back, for nothing else; and that he's always here, for nothing else.

When you come in, sir, I was just putting it to my fellow-partner,'

towards whom he turned, 'to say to Doctor Strong upon his word and

honour, whether he'd ever been of this opinion long ago, or not. Come,

Mr. Wickfield, sir! Would you be so good as tell us? Yes or no, sir?

Come, partner!'

'For God's sake, my dear Doctor,' said Mr. Wickfield again laying his

irresolute hand upon the Doctor's arm, 'don't attach too much weight to

any suspicions I may have entertained.'

'There!' cried Uriah, shaking his head. 'What a melancholy confirmation:

ain't it? Him! Such an old friend! Bless your soul, when I was nothing

but a clerk in his office, Copperfield, I've seen him twenty times, if

I've seen him once, quite in a taking about it--quite put out, you know

(and very proper in him as a father; I'm sure I can't blame him), to

think that Miss Agnes was mixing herself up with what oughtn't to be.'

'My dear Strong,' said Mr. Wickfield in a tremulous voice, 'my good

friend, I needn't tell you that it has been my vice to look for some one

master motive in everybody, and to try all actions by one narrow test. I

may have fallen into such doubts as I have had, through this mistake.'

'You have had doubts, Wickfield,' said the Doctor, without lifting up

his head. 'You have had doubts.'

'Speak up, fellow-partner,' urged Uriah.

'I had, at one time, certainly,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'I--God forgive

me--I thought YOU had.'

'No, no, no!' returned the Doctor, in a tone of most pathetic grief.

'I thought, at one time,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'that you wished to send

Maldon abroad to effect a desirable separation.'

'No, no, no!' returned the Doctor. 'To give Annie pleasure, by making

some provision for the companion of her childhood. Nothing else.'

'So I found,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'I couldn't doubt it, when you told

me so. But I thought--I implore you to remember the narrow construction

which has been my besetting sin--that, in a case where there was so much

disparity in point of years--'

'That's the way to put it, you see, Master Copperfield!' observed Uriah,

with fawning and offensive pity.

'--a lady of such youth, and such attractions, however real her

respect for you, might have been influenced in marrying, by worldly

considerations only. I make no allowance for innumerable feelings

and circumstances that may have all tended to good. For Heaven's sake

remember that!'

'How kind he puts it!' said Uriah, shaking his head.

'Always observing her from one point of view,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'but

by all that is dear to you, my old friend, I entreat you to consider

what it was; I am forced to confess now, having no escape-'

'No! There's no way out of it, Mr. Wickfield, sir,' observed Uriah,

'when it's got to this.'

'--that I did,' said Mr. Wickfield, glancing helplessly and distractedly

at his partner, 'that I did doubt her, and think her wanting in her

duty to you; and that I did sometimes, if I must say all, feel averse

to Agnes being in such a familiar relation towards her, as to see what I

saw, or in my diseased theory fancied that I saw. I never mentioned

this to anyone. I never meant it to be known to anyone. And though it

is terrible to you to hear,' said Mr. Wickfield, quite subdued, 'if you

knew how terrible it is for me to tell, you would feel compassion for

me!'

The Doctor, in the perfect goodness of his nature, put out his hand. Mr.

Wickfield held it for a little while in his, with his head bowed down.

'I am sure,' said Uriah, writhing himself into the silence like a

Conger-eel, 'that this is a subject full of unpleasantness to everybody.

But since we have got so far, I ought to take the liberty of mentioning

that Copperfield has noticed it too.'

I turned upon him, and asked him how he dared refer to me!

'Oh! it's very kind of you, Copperfield,' returned Uriah, undulating all

over, 'and we all know what an amiable character yours is; but you know

that the moment I spoke to you the other night, you knew what I meant.

You know you knew what I meant, Copperfield. Don't deny it! You deny it

with the best intentions; but don't do it, Copperfield.'

I saw the mild eye of the good old Doctor turned upon me for a moment,

and I felt that the confession of my old misgivings and remembrances

was too plainly written in my face to be overlooked. It was of no use

raging. I could not undo that. Say what I would, I could not unsay it.

We were silent again, and remained so, until the Doctor rose and walked

twice or thrice across the room. Presently he returned to where his

chair stood; and, leaning on the back of it, and occasionally putting

his handkerchief to his eyes, with a simple honesty that did him more

honour, to my thinking, than any disguise he could have effected, said:

'I have been much to blame. I believe I have been very much to blame.

I have exposed one whom I hold in my heart, to trials and aspersions--I

call them aspersions, even to have been conceived in anybody's inmost

mind--of which she never, but for me, could have been the object.'

Uriah Heep gave a kind of snivel. I think to express sympathy.

'Of which my Annie,' said the Doctor, 'never, but for me, could have

been the object. Gentlemen, I am old now, as you know; I do not feel,

tonight, that I have much to live for. But my life--my Life--upon the

truth and honour of the dear lady who has been the subject of this

conversation!'

I do not think that the best embodiment of chivalry, the realization of

the handsomest and most romantic figure ever imagined by painter, could

have said this, with a more impressive and affecting dignity than the

plain old Doctor did.

'But I am not prepared,' he went on, 'to deny--perhaps I may have been,

without knowing it, in some degree prepared to admit--that I may have

unwittingly ensnared that lady into an unhappy marriage. I am a man

quite unaccustomed to observe; and I cannot but believe that the

observation of several people, of different ages and positions, all too

plainly tending in one direction (and that so natural), is better than

mine.'

I had often admired, as I have elsewhere described, his benignant manner

towards his youthful wife; but the respectful tenderness he manifested

in every reference to her on this occasion, and the almost reverential

manner in which he put away from him the lightest doubt of her

integrity, exalted him, in my eyes, beyond description.

'I married that lady,' said the Doctor, 'when she was extremely young. I

took her to myself when her character was scarcely formed. So far as it

was developed, it had been my happiness to form it. I knew her father

well. I knew her well. I had taught her what I could, for the love of

all her beautiful and virtuous qualities. If I did her wrong; as I fear

I did, in taking advantage (but I never meant it) of her gratitude and

her affection; I ask pardon of that lady, in my heart!'

He walked across the room, and came back to the same place; holding

the chair with a grasp that trembled, like his subdued voice, in its

earnestness.

'I regarded myself as a refuge, for her, from the dangers and

vicissitudes of life. I persuaded myself that, unequal though we were in

years, she would live tranquilly and contentedly with me. I did not shut

out of my consideration the time when I should leave her free, and still

young and still beautiful, but with her judgement more matured--no,

gentlemen--upon my truth!'

His homely figure seemed to be lightened up by his fidelity and

generosity. Every word he uttered had a force that no other grace could

have imparted to it.

'My life with this lady has been very happy. Until tonight, I have

had uninterrupted occasion to bless the day on which I did her great

injustice.'

His voice, more and more faltering in the utterance of these words,

stopped for a few moments; then he went on:

'Once awakened from my dream--I have been a poor dreamer, in one way or

other, all my life--I see how natural it is that she should have some

regretful feeling towards her old companion and her equal. That she does

regard him with some innocent regret, with some blameless thoughts of

what might have been, but for me, is, I fear, too true. Much that I have

seen, but not noted, has come back upon me with new meaning, during

this last trying hour. But, beyond this, gentlemen, the dear lady's name

never must be coupled with a word, a breath, of doubt.'

For a little while, his eye kindled and his voice was firm; for a little

while he was again silent. Presently, he proceeded as before:

'It only remains for me, to bear the knowledge of the unhappiness I have

occasioned, as submissively as I can. It is she who should reproach; not

I. To save her from misconstruction, cruel misconstruction, that even my

friends have not been able to avoid, becomes my duty. The more retired

we live, the better I shall discharge it. And when the time comes--may

it come soon, if it be His merciful pleasure!--when my death shall

release her from constraint, I shall close my eyes upon her honoured

face, with unbounded confidence and love; and leave her, with no sorrow

then, to happier and brighter days.'

I could not see him for the tears which his earnestness and goodness,

so adorned by, and so adorning, the perfect simplicity of his manner,

brought into my eyes. He had moved to the door, when he added:

'Gentlemen, I have shown you my heart. I am sure you will respect it.

What we have said tonight is never to be said more. Wickfield, give me

an old friend's arm upstairs!'

Mr. Wickfield hastened to him. Without interchanging a word they went

slowly out of the room together, Uriah looking after them.

'Well, Master Copperfield!' said Uriah, meekly turning to me. 'The thing

hasn't took quite the turn that might have been expected, for the old

Scholar--what an excellent man!--is as blind as a brickbat; but this

family's out of the cart, I think!'

I needed but the sound of his voice to be so madly enraged as I never

was before, and never have been since.

'You villain,' said I, 'what do you mean by entrapping me into your

schemes? How dare you appeal to me just now, you false rascal, as if we

had been in discussion together?'

As we stood, front to front, I saw so plainly, in the stealthy

exultation of his face, what I already so plainly knew; I mean that he

forced his confidence upon me, expressly to make me miserable, and had

set a deliberate trap for me in this very matter; that I couldn't bear

it. The whole of his lank cheek was invitingly before me, and I struck

it with my open hand with that force that my fingers tingled as if I had

burnt them.

He caught the hand in his, and we stood in that connexion, looking at

each other. We stood so, a long time; long enough for me to see the

white marks of my fingers die out of the deep red of his cheek, and

leave it a deeper red.

'Copperfield,' he said at length, in a breathless voice, 'have you taken

leave of your senses?'

'I have taken leave of you,' said I, wresting my hand away. 'You dog,

I'll know no more of you.'

'Won't you?' said he, constrained by the pain of his cheek to put his

hand there. 'Perhaps you won't be able to help it. Isn't this ungrateful

of you, now?'

'I have shown you often enough,' said I, 'that I despise you. I have

shown you now, more plainly, that I do. Why should I dread your doing

your worst to all about you? What else do you ever do?'

He perfectly understood this allusion to the considerations that had

hitherto restrained me in my communications with him. I rather think

that neither the blow, nor the allusion, would have escaped me, but for

the assurance I had had from Agnes that night. It is no matter.

There was another long pause. His eyes, as he looked at me, seemed to

take every shade of colour that could make eyes ugly.

'Copperfield,' he said, removing his hand from his cheek, 'you have

always gone against me. I know you always used to be against me at Mr.

Wickfield's.'

'You may think what you like,' said I, still in a towering rage. 'If it

is not true, so much the worthier you.'

'And yet I always liked you, Copperfield!' he rejoined.

I deigned to make him no reply; and, taking up my hat, was going out to

bed, when he came between me and the door.

'Copperfield,' he said, 'there must be two parties to a quarrel. I won't

be one.'

'You may go to the devil!' said I.

'Don't say that!' he replied. 'I know you'll be sorry afterwards. How

can you make yourself so inferior to me, as to show such a bad spirit?

But I forgive you.'

'You forgive me!' I repeated disdainfully.

'I do, and you can't help yourself,' replied Uriah. 'To think of your

going and attacking me, that have always been a friend to you! But there

can't be a quarrel without two parties, and I won't be one. I will be

a friend to you, in spite of you. So now you know what you've got to

expect.'

The necessity of carrying on this dialogue (his part in which was

very slow; mine very quick) in a low tone, that the house might not be

disturbed at an unseasonable hour, did not improve my temper; though my

passion was cooling down. Merely telling him that I should expect from

him what I always had expected, and had never yet been disappointed in,

I opened the door upon him, as if he had been a great walnut put there

to be cracked, and went out of the house. But he slept out of the house

too, at his mother's lodging; and before I had gone many hundred yards,

came up with me.

'You know, Copperfield,' he said, in my ear (I did not turn my head),

'you're in quite a wrong position'; which I felt to be true, and that

made me chafe the more; 'you can't make this a brave thing, and you

can't help being forgiven. I don't intend to mention it to mother, nor

to any living soul. I'm determined to forgive you. But I do wonder

that you should lift your hand against a person that you knew to be so

umble!'

I felt only less mean than he. He knew me better than I knew myself. If

he had retorted or openly exasperated me, it would have been a relief

and a justification; but he had put me on a slow fire, on which I lay

tormented half the night.

In the morning, when I came out, the early church-bell was ringing,

and he was walking up and down with his mother. He addressed me as if

nothing had happened, and I could do no less than reply. I had struck

him hard enough to give him the toothache, I suppose. At all events

his face was tied up in a black silk handkerchief, which, with his hat

perched on the top of it, was far from improving his appearance. I heard

that he went to a dentist's in London on the Monday morning, and had a

tooth out. I hope it was a double one.

The Doctor gave out that he was not quite well; and remained alone, for

a considerable part of every day, during the remainder of the visit.

Agnes and her father had been gone a week, before we resumed our usual

work. On the day preceding its resumption, the Doctor gave me with his

own hands a folded note not sealed. It was addressed to myself; and laid

an injunction on me, in a few affectionate words, never to refer to the

subject of that evening. I had confided it to my aunt, but to no

one else. It was not a subject I could discuss with Agnes, and Agnes

certainly had not the least suspicion of what had passed.

Neither, I felt convinced, had Mrs. Strong then. Several weeks elapsed

before I saw the least change in her. It came on slowly, like a cloud

when there is no wind. At first, she seemed to wonder at the gentle

compassion with which the Doctor spoke to her, and at his wish that she

should have her mother with her, to relieve the dull monotony of her

life. Often, when we were at work, and she was sitting by, I would see

her pausing and looking at him with that memorable face. Afterwards, I

sometimes observed her rise, with her eyes full of tears, and go out

of the room. Gradually, an unhappy shadow fell upon her beauty, and

deepened every day. Mrs. Markleham was a regular inmate of the cottage

then; but she talked and talked, and saw nothing.

As this change stole on Annie, once like sunshine in the Doctor's house,

the Doctor became older in appearance, and more grave; but the sweetness

of his temper, the placid kindness of his manner, and his benevolent

solicitude for her, if they were capable of any increase, were

increased. I saw him once, early on the morning of her birthday, when

she came to sit in the window while we were at work (which she had

always done, but now began to do with a timid and uncertain air that I

thought very touching), take her forehead between his hands, kiss it,

and go hurriedly away, too much moved to remain. I saw her stand where

he had left her, like a statue; and then bend down her head, and clasp

her hands, and weep, I cannot say how sorrowfully.

Sometimes, after that, I fancied that she tried to speak even to me,

in intervals when we were left alone. But she never uttered a word. The

Doctor always had some new project for her participating in amusements

away from home, with her mother; and Mrs. Markleham, who was very fond

of amusements, and very easily dissatisfied with anything else, entered

into them with great good-will, and was loud in her commendations. But

Annie, in a spiritless unhappy way, only went whither she was led, and

seemed to have no care for anything.

I did not know what to think. Neither did my aunt; who must have walked,

at various times, a hundred miles in her uncertainty. What was strangest

of all was, that the only real relief which seemed to make its way into

the secret region of this domestic unhappiness, made its way there in

the person of Mr. Dick.

What his thoughts were on the subject, or what his observation was, I am

as unable to explain, as I dare say he would have been to assist me in

the task. But, as I have recorded in the narrative of my school days,

his veneration for the Doctor was unbounded; and there is a subtlety of

perception in real attachment, even when it is borne towards man by one

of the lower animals, which leaves the highest intellect behind. To this

mind of the heart, if I may call it so, in Mr. Dick, some bright ray of

the truth shot straight.

He had proudly resumed his privilege, in many of his spare hours,

of walking up and down the garden with the Doctor; as he had been

accustomed to pace up and down The Doctor's Walk at Canterbury. But

matters were no sooner in this state, than he devoted all his spare time

(and got up earlier to make it more) to these perambulations. If he had

never been so happy as when the Doctor read that marvellous performance,

the Dictionary, to him; he was now quite miserable unless the Doctor

pulled it out of his pocket, and began. When the Doctor and I were

engaged, he now fell into the custom of walking up and down with Mrs.

Strong, and helping her to trim her favourite flowers, or weed the

beds. I dare say he rarely spoke a dozen words in an hour: but his quiet

interest, and his wistful face, found immediate response in both their

breasts; each knew that the other liked him, and that he loved both; and

he became what no one else could be--a link between them.

When I think of him, with his impenetrably wise face, walking up and

down with the Doctor, delighted to be battered by the hard words in the

Dictionary; when I think of him carrying huge watering-pots after Annie;

kneeling down, in very paws of gloves, at patient microscopic work among

the little leaves; expressing as no philosopher could have expressed,

in everything he did, a delicate desire to be her friend; showering

sympathy, trustfulness, and affection, out of every hole in the

watering-pot; when I think of him never wandering in that better mind

of his to which unhappiness addressed itself, never bringing the

unfortunate King Charles into the garden, never wavering in his grateful

service, never diverted from his knowledge that there was something

wrong, or from his wish to set it right--I really feel almost ashamed

of having known that he was not quite in his wits, taking account of the

utmost I have done with mine.

'Nobody but myself, Trot, knows what that man is!' my aunt would proudly

remark, when we conversed about it. 'Dick will distinguish himself yet!'

I must refer to one other topic before I close this chapter. While the

visit at the Doctor's was still in progress, I observed that the postman

brought two or three letters every morning for Uriah Heep, who remained

at Highgate until the rest went back, it being a leisure time; and that

these were always directed in a business-like manner by Mr. Micawber,

who now assumed a round legal hand. I was glad to infer, from these

slight premises, that Mr. Micawber was doing well; and consequently was

much surprised to receive, about this time, the following letter from

his amiable wife.

'CANTERBURY, Monday Evening.

'You will doubtless be surprised, my dear Mr. Copperfield, to receive

this communication. Still more so, by its contents. Still more so, by

the stipulation of implicit confidence which I beg to impose. But my

feelings as a wife and mother require relief; and as I do not wish to

consult my family (already obnoxious to the feelings of Mr. Micawber),

I know no one of whom I can better ask advice than my friend and former

lodger.

'You may be aware, my dear Mr. Copperfield, that between myself and Mr.

Micawber (whom I will never desert), there has always been preserved a

spirit of mutual confidence. Mr. Micawber may have occasionally given

a bill without consulting me, or he may have misled me as to the period

when that obligation would become due. This has actually happened.

But, in general, Mr. Micawber has had no secrets from the bosom of

affection--I allude to his wife--and has invariably, on our retirement

to rest, recalled the events of the day.

'You will picture to yourself, my dear Mr. Copperfield, what the

poignancy of my feelings must be, when I inform you that Mr. Micawber is

entirely changed. He is reserved. He is secret. His life is a mystery to

the partner of his joys and sorrows--I again allude to his wife--and if

I should assure you that beyond knowing that it is passed from morning

to night at the office, I now know less of it than I do of the man in

the south, connected with whose mouth the thoughtless children repeat

an idle tale respecting cold plum porridge, I should adopt a popular

fallacy to express an actual fact.

'But this is not all. Mr. Micawber is morose. He is severe. He is

estranged from our eldest son and daughter, he has no pride in his

twins, he looks with an eye of coldness even on the unoffending stranger

who last became a member of our circle. The pecuniary means of meeting

our expenses, kept down to the utmost farthing, are obtained from him

with great difficulty, and even under fearful threats that he will

Settle himself (the exact expression); and he inexorably refuses to give

any explanation whatever of this distracting policy.

'This is hard to bear. This is heart-breaking. If you will advise me,

knowing my feeble powers such as they are, how you think it will be best

to exert them in a dilemma so unwonted, you will add another friendly

obligation to the many you have already rendered me. With loves from the

children, and a smile from the happily-unconscious stranger, I remain,

dear Mr. Copperfield,

Your afflicted,

'EMMA MICAWBER.'

I did not feel justified in giving a wife of Mrs. Micawber's experience

any other recommendation, than that she should try to reclaim Mr.

Micawber by patience and kindness (as I knew she would in any case); but

the letter set me thinking about him very much.

CHAPTER 43. ANOTHER RETROSPECT

Once again, let me pause upon a memorable period of my life. Let me

stand aside, to see the phantoms of those days go by me, accompanying

the shadow of myself, in dim procession.

Weeks, months, seasons, pass along. They seem little more than a summer

day and a winter evening. Now, the Common where I walk with Dora is all

in bloom, a field of bright gold; and now the unseen heather lies in

mounds and bunches underneath a covering of snow. In a breath, the river

that flows through our Sunday walks is sparkling in the summer sun, is

ruffled by the winter wind, or thickened with drifting heaps of ice.

Faster than ever river ran towards the sea, it flashes, darkens, and

rolls away.

Not a thread changes, in the house of the two little bird-like ladies.

The clock ticks over the fireplace, the weather-glass hangs in the hall.

Neither clock nor weather-glass is ever right; but we believe in both,

devoutly.

I have come legally to man's estate. I have attained the dignity of

twenty-one. But this is a sort of dignity that may be thrust upon one.

Let me think what I have achieved.

I have tamed that savage stenographic mystery. I make a respectable

income by it. I am in high repute for my accomplishment in all

pertaining to the art, and am joined with eleven others in reporting

the debates in Parliament for a Morning Newspaper. Night after night, I

record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never

fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify. I wallow in

words. Britannia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a

trussed fowl: skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound

hand and foot with red tape. I am sufficiently behind the scenes to know

the worth of political life. I am quite an Infidel about it, and shall

never be converted.

My dear old Traddles has tried his hand at the same pursuit, but it

is not in Traddles's way. He is perfectly good-humoured respecting his

failure, and reminds me that he always did consider himself slow. He has

occasional employment on the same newspaper, in getting up the facts of

dry subjects, to be written about and embellished by more fertile minds.

He is called to the bar; and with admirable industry and self-denial

has scraped another hundred pounds together, to fee a Conveyancer whose

chambers he attends. A great deal of very hot port wine was consumed at

his call; and, considering the figure, I should think the Inner Temple

must have made a profit by it.

I have come out in another way. I have taken with fear and trembling

to authorship. I wrote a little something, in secret, and sent it to a

magazine, and it was published in the magazine. Since then, I have taken

heart to write a good many trifling pieces. Now, I am regularly paid for

them. Altogether, I am well off, when I tell my income on the fingers

of my left hand, I pass the third finger and take in the fourth to the

middle joint.

We have removed, from Buckingham Street, to a pleasant little cottage

very near the one I looked at, when my enthusiasm first came on. My

aunt, however (who has sold the house at Dover, to good advantage), is

not going to remain here, but intends removing herself to a still more

tiny cottage close at hand. What does this portend? My marriage? Yes!

Yes! I am going to be married to Dora! Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa

have given their consent; and if ever canary birds were in a flutter,

they are. Miss Lavinia, self-charged with the superintendence of my

darling's wardrobe, is constantly cutting out brown-paper cuirasses, and

differing in opinion from a highly respectable young man, with a long

bundle, and a yard measure under his arm. A dressmaker, always stabbed

in the breast with a needle and thread, boards and lodges in the house;

and seems to me, eating, drinking, or sleeping, never to take her

thimble off. They make a lay-figure of my dear. They are always sending

for her to come and try something on. We can't be happy together for

five minutes in the evening, but some intrusive female knocks at the

door, and says, 'Oh, if you please, Miss Dora, would you step upstairs!'

Miss Clarissa and my aunt roam all over London, to find out articles of

furniture for Dora and me to look at. It would be better for them to buy

the goods at once, without this ceremony of inspection; for, when we go

to see a kitchen fender and meat-screen, Dora sees a Chinese house for

Jip, with little bells on the top, and prefers that. And it takes a

long time to accustom Jip to his new residence, after we have bought it;

whenever he goes in or out, he makes all the little bells ring, and is

horribly frightened.

Peggotty comes up to make herself useful, and falls to work immediately.

Her department appears to be, to clean everything over and over again.

She rubs everything that can be rubbed, until it shines, like her own

honest forehead, with perpetual friction. And now it is, that I begin to

see her solitary brother passing through the dark streets at night, and

looking, as he goes, among the wandering faces. I never speak to him at

such an hour. I know too well, as his grave figure passes onward, what

he seeks, and what he dreads.

Why does Traddles look so important when he calls upon me this afternoon

in the Commons--where I still occasionally attend, for form's sake, when

I have time? The realization of my boyish day-dreams is at hand. I am

going to take out the licence.

It is a little document to do so much; and Traddles contemplates it,

as it lies upon my desk, half in admiration, half in awe. There are the

names, in the sweet old visionary connexion, David Copperfield and Dora

Spenlow; and there, in the corner, is that Parental Institution,

the Stamp Office, which is so benignantly interested in the various

transactions of human life, looking down upon our Union; and there is

the Archbishop of Canterbury invoking a blessing on us in print, and

doing it as cheap as could possibly be expected.

Nevertheless, I am in a dream, a flustered, happy, hurried dream. I

can't believe that it is going to be; and yet I can't believe but that

everyone I pass in the street, must have some kind of perception, that I

am to be married the day after tomorrow. The Surrogate knows me, when

I go down to be sworn; and disposes of me easily, as if there were a

Masonic understanding between us. Traddles is not at all wanted, but is

in attendance as my general backer.

'I hope the next time you come here, my dear fellow,' I say to Traddles,

'it will be on the same errand for yourself. And I hope it will be

soon.'

'Thank you for your good wishes, my dear Copperfield,' he replies. 'I

hope so too. It's a satisfaction to know that she'll wait for me any

length of time, and that she really is the dearest girl--'

'When are you to meet her at the coach?' I ask.

'At seven,' says Traddles, looking at his plain old silver watch--the

very watch he once took a wheel out of, at school, to make a water-mill.

'That is about Miss Wickfield's time, is it not?'

'A little earlier. Her time is half past eight.' 'I assure you, my dear

boy,' says Traddles, 'I am almost as pleased as if I were going to

be married myself, to think that this event is coming to such a happy

termination. And really the great friendship and consideration of

personally associating Sophy with the joyful occasion, and inviting

her to be a bridesmaid in conjunction with Miss Wickfield, demands my

warmest thanks. I am extremely sensible of it.'

I hear him, and shake hands with him; and we talk, and walk, and dine,

and so on; but I don't believe it. Nothing is real.

Sophy arrives at the house of Dora's aunts, in due course. She has the

most agreeable of faces,--not absolutely beautiful, but extraordinarily

pleasant,--and is one of the most genial, unaffected, frank, engaging

creatures I have ever seen. Traddles presents her to us with great

pride; and rubs his hands for ten minutes by the clock, with every

individual hair upon his head standing on tiptoe, when I congratulate

him in a corner on his choice.

I have brought Agnes from the Canterbury coach, and her cheerful and

beautiful face is among us for the second time. Agnes has a great liking

for Traddles, and it is capital to see them meet, and to observe the

glory of Traddles as he commends the dearest girl in the world to her

acquaintance.

Still I don't believe it. We have a delightful evening, and are

supremely happy; but I don't believe it yet. I can't collect myself. I

can't check off my happiness as it takes place. I feel in a misty and

unsettled kind of state; as if I had got up very early in the morning a

week or two ago, and had never been to bed since. I can't make out when

yesterday was. I seem to have been carrying the licence about, in my

pocket, many months.

Next day, too, when we all go in a flock to see the house--our

house--Dora's and mine--I am quite unable to regard myself as its

master. I seem to be there, by permission of somebody else. I half

expect the real master to come home presently, and say he is glad to see

me. Such a beautiful little house as it is, with everything so bright

and new; with the flowers on the carpets looking as if freshly gathered,

and the green leaves on the paper as if they had just come out; with the

spotless muslin curtains, and the blushing rose-coloured furniture, and

Dora's garden hat with the blue ribbon--do I remember, now, how I loved

her in such another hat when I first knew her!--already hanging on its

little peg; the guitar-case quite at home on its heels in a corner;

and everybody tumbling over Jip's pagoda, which is much too big for the

establishment. Another happy evening, quite as unreal as all the rest

of it, and I steal into the usual room before going away. Dora is not

there. I suppose they have not done trying on yet. Miss Lavinia peeps

in, and tells me mysteriously that she will not be long. She is rather

long, notwithstanding; but by and by I hear a rustling at the door, and

someone taps.

I say, 'Come in!' but someone taps again.

I go to the door, wondering who it is; there, I meet a pair of bright

eyes, and a blushing face; they are Dora's eyes and face, and Miss

Lavinia has dressed her in tomorrow's dress, bonnet and all, for me to

see. I take my little wife to my heart; and Miss Lavinia gives a little

scream because I tumble the bonnet, and Dora laughs and cries at once,

because I am so pleased; and I believe it less than ever.

'Do you think it pretty, Doady?' says Dora.

Pretty! I should rather think I did.

'And are you sure you like me very much?' says Dora.

The topic is fraught with such danger to the bonnet, that Miss Lavinia

gives another little scream, and begs me to understand that Dora is only

to be looked at, and on no account to be touched. So Dora stands in a

delightful state of confusion for a minute or two, to be admired; and

then takes off her bonnet--looking so natural without it!--and runs away

with it in her hand; and comes dancing down again in her own familiar

dress, and asks Jip if I have got a beautiful little wife, and whether

he'll forgive her for being married, and kneels down to make him stand

upon the cookery-book, for the last time in her single life.

I go home, more incredulous than ever, to a lodging that I have hard by;

and get up very early in the morning, to ride to the Highgate road and

fetch my aunt.

I have never seen my aunt in such state. She is dressed in

lavender-coloured silk, and has a white bonnet on, and is amazing. Janet

has dressed her, and is there to look at me. Peggotty is ready to go to

church, intending to behold the ceremony from the gallery. Mr. Dick,

who is to give my darling to me at the altar, has had his hair curled.

Traddles, whom I have taken up by appointment at the turnpike, presents

a dazzling combination of cream colour and light blue; and both he and

Mr. Dick have a general effect about them of being all gloves.

No doubt I see this, because I know it is so; but I am astray, and seem

to see nothing. Nor do I believe anything whatever. Still, as we drive

along in an open carriage, this fairy marriage is real enough to fill

me with a sort of wondering pity for the unfortunate people who have

no part in it, but are sweeping out the shops, and going to their daily

occupations.

My aunt sits with my hand in hers all the way. When we stop a little way

short of the church, to put down Peggotty, whom we have brought on the

box, she gives it a squeeze, and me a kiss.

'God bless you, Trot! My own boy never could be dearer. I think of poor

dear Baby this morning.' 'So do I. And of all I owe to you, dear aunt.'

'Tut, child!' says my aunt; and gives her hand in overflowing cordiality

to Traddles, who then gives his to Mr. Dick, who then gives his to me,

who then gives mine to Traddles, and then we come to the church door.

The church is calm enough, I am sure; but it might be a steam-power loom

in full action, for any sedative effect it has on me. I am too far gone

for that.

The rest is all a more or less incoherent dream.

A dream of their coming in with Dora; of the pew-opener arranging us,

like a drill-sergeant, before the altar rails; of my wondering, even

then, why pew-openers must always be the most disagreeable females

procurable, and whether there is any religious dread of a disastrous

infection of good-humour which renders it indispensable to set those

vessels of vinegar upon the road to Heaven.

Of the clergyman and clerk appearing; of a few boatmen and some

other people strolling in; of an ancient mariner behind me, strongly

flavouring the church with rum; of the service beginning in a deep

voice, and our all being very attentive.

Of Miss Lavinia, who acts as a semi-auxiliary bridesmaid, being the

first to cry, and of her doing homage (as I take it) to the memory of

Pidger, in sobs; of Miss Clarissa applying a smelling-bottle; of Agnes

taking care of Dora; of my aunt endeavouring to represent herself as

a model of sternness, with tears rolling down her face; of little Dora

trembling very much, and making her responses in faint whispers.

Of our kneeling down together, side by side; of Dora's trembling less

and less, but always clasping Agnes by the hand; of the service being

got through, quietly and gravely; of our all looking at each other in an

April state of smiles and tears, when it is over; of my young wife being

hysterical in the vestry, and crying for her poor papa, her dear papa.

Of her soon cheering up again, and our signing the register all round.

Of my going into the gallery for Peggotty to bring her to sign it; of

Peggotty's hugging me in a corner, and telling me she saw my own dear

mother married; of its being over, and our going away.

Of my walking so proudly and lovingly down the aisle with my sweet wife

upon my arm, through a mist of half-seen people, pulpits, monuments,

pews, fonts, organs, and church windows, in which there flutter faint

airs of association with my childish church at home, so long ago.

Of their whispering, as we pass, what a youthful couple we are, and what

a pretty little wife she is. Of our all being so merry and talkative in

the carriage going back. Of Sophy telling us that when she saw Traddles

(whom I had entrusted with the licence) asked for it, she almost

fainted, having been convinced that he would contrive to lose it, or to

have his pocket picked. Of Agnes laughing gaily; and of Dora being so

fond of Agnes that she will not be separated from her, but still keeps

her hand.

Of there being a breakfast, with abundance of things, pretty and

substantial, to eat and drink, whereof I partake, as I should do in any

other dream, without the least perception of their flavour; eating

and drinking, as I may say, nothing but love and marriage, and no more

believing in the viands than in anything else.

Of my making a speech in the same dreamy fashion, without having an idea

of what I want to say, beyond such as may be comprehended in the full

conviction that I haven't said it. Of our being very sociably and simply

happy (always in a dream though); and of Jip's having wedding cake, and

its not agreeing with him afterwards.

Of the pair of hired post-horses being ready, and of Dora's going away

to change her dress. Of my aunt and Miss Clarissa remaining with us; and

our walking in the garden; and my aunt, who has made quite a speech at

breakfast touching Dora's aunts, being mightily amused with herself, but

a little proud of it too.

Of Dora's being ready, and of Miss Lavinia's hovering about her, loth to

lose the pretty toy that has given her so much pleasant occupation.

Of Dora's making a long series of surprised discoveries that she

has forgotten all sorts of little things; and of everybody's running

everywhere to fetch them.

Of their all closing about Dora, when at last she begins to say

good-bye, looking, with their bright colours and ribbons, like a bed

of flowers. Of my darling being almost smothered among the flowers, and

coming out, laughing and crying both together, to my jealous arms.

Of my wanting to carry Jip (who is to go along with us), and Dora's

saying no, that she must carry him, or else he'll think she don't like

him any more, now she is married, and will break his heart. Of our

going, arm in arm, and Dora stopping and looking back, and saying, 'If

I have ever been cross or ungrateful to anybody, don't remember it!' and

bursting into tears.

Of her waving her little hand, and our going away once more. Of her

once more stopping, and looking back, and hurrying to Agnes, and giving

Agnes, above all the others, her last kisses and farewells.

We drive away together, and I awake from the dream. I believe it at

last. It is my dear, dear, little wife beside me, whom I love so well!

'Are you happy now, you foolish boy?' says Dora, 'and sure you don't

repent?'

I have stood aside to see the phantoms of those days go by me. They are

gone, and I resume the journey of my story.

CHAPTER 44. OUR HOUSEKEEPING

It was a strange condition of things, the honeymoon being over, and the

bridesmaids gone home, when I found myself sitting down in my own

small house with Dora; quite thrown out of employment, as I may say, in

respect of the delicious old occupation of making love.

It seemed such an extraordinary thing to have Dora always there. It was

so unaccountable not to be obliged to go out to see her, not to have any

occasion to be tormenting myself about her, not to have to write to her,

not to be scheming and devising opportunities of being alone with her.

Sometimes of an evening, when I looked up from my writing, and saw her

seated opposite, I would lean back in my chair, and think how queer it

was that there we were, alone together as a matter of course--nobody's

business any more--all the romance of our engagement put away upon a

shelf, to rust--no one to please but one another--one another to please,

for life.

When there was a debate, and I was kept out very late, it seemed so

strange to me, as I was walking home, to think that Dora was at home! It

was such a wonderful thing, at first, to have her coming softly down to

talk to me as I ate my supper. It was such a stupendous thing to know

for certain that she put her hair in papers. It was altogether such an

astonishing event to see her do it!

I doubt whether two young birds could have known less about keeping

house, than I and my pretty Dora did. We had a servant, of course. She

kept house for us. I have still a latent belief that she must have been

Mrs. Crupp's daughter in disguise, we had such an awful time of it with

Mary Anne.

Her name was Paragon. Her nature was represented to us, when we engaged

her, as being feebly expressed in her name. She had a written character,

as large as a proclamation; and, according to this document, could do

everything of a domestic nature that ever I heard of, and a great many

things that I never did hear of. She was a woman in the prime of life;

of a severe countenance; and subject (particularly in the arms) to

a sort of perpetual measles or fiery rash. She had a cousin in the

Life-Guards, with such long legs that he looked like the afternoon

shadow of somebody else. His shell-jacket was as much too little for him

as he was too big for the premises. He made the cottage smaller than it

need have been, by being so very much out of proportion to it. Besides

which, the walls were not thick, and, whenever he passed the evening at

our house, we always knew of it by hearing one continual growl in the

kitchen.

Our treasure was warranted sober and honest. I am therefore willing to

believe that she was in a fit when we found her under the boiler; and

that the deficient tea-spoons were attributable to the dustman.

But she preyed upon our minds dreadfully. We felt our inexperience, and

were unable to help ourselves. We should have been at her mercy, if she

had had any; but she was a remorseless woman, and had none. She was the

cause of our first little quarrel.

'My dearest life,' I said one day to Dora, 'do you think Mary Anne has

any idea of time?'

'Why, Doady?' inquired Dora, looking up, innocently, from her drawing.

'My love, because it's five, and we were to have dined at four.'

Dora glanced wistfully at the clock, and hinted that she thought it was

too fast.

'On the contrary, my love,' said I, referring to my watch, 'it's a few

minutes too slow.'

My little wife came and sat upon my knee, to coax me to be quiet, and

drew a line with her pencil down the middle of my nose; but I couldn't

dine off that, though it was very agreeable.

'Don't you think, my dear,' said I, 'it would be better for you to

remonstrate with Mary Anne?'

'Oh no, please! I couldn't, Doady!' said Dora.

'Why not, my love?' I gently asked.

'Oh, because I am such a little goose,' said Dora, 'and she knows I am!'

I thought this sentiment so incompatible with the establishment of any

system of check on Mary Anne, that I frowned a little.

'Oh, what ugly wrinkles in my bad boy's forehead!' said Dora, and still

being on my knee, she traced them with her pencil; putting it to her

rosy lips to make it mark blacker, and working at my forehead with a

quaint little mockery of being industrious, that quite delighted me in

spite of myself.

'There's a good child,' said Dora, 'it makes its face so much prettier

to laugh.' 'But, my love,' said I.

'No, no! please!' cried Dora, with a kiss, 'don't be a naughty Blue

Beard! Don't be serious!'

'My precious wife,' said I, 'we must be serious sometimes. Come! Sit

down on this chair, close beside me! Give me the pencil! There! Now let

us talk sensibly. You know, dear'; what a little hand it was to hold,

and what a tiny wedding-ring it was to see! 'You know, my love, it is

not exactly comfortable to have to go out without one's dinner. Now, is

it?'

'N-n-no!' replied Dora, faintly.

'My love, how you tremble!'

'Because I KNOW you're going to scold me,' exclaimed Dora, in a piteous

voice.

'My sweet, I am only going to reason.'

'Oh, but reasoning is worse than scolding!' exclaimed Dora, in despair.

'I didn't marry to be reasoned with. If you meant to reason with such a

poor little thing as I am, you ought to have told me so, you cruel boy!'

I tried to pacify Dora, but she turned away her face, and shook her

curls from side to side, and said, 'You cruel, cruel boy!' so many

times, that I really did not exactly know what to do: so I took a few

turns up and down the room in my uncertainty, and came back again.

'Dora, my darling!'

'No, I am not your darling. Because you must be sorry that you married

me, or else you wouldn't reason with me!' returned Dora.

I felt so injured by the inconsequential nature of this charge, that it

gave me courage to be grave.

'Now, my own Dora,' said I, 'you are very childish, and are talking

nonsense. You must remember, I am sure, that I was obliged to go out

yesterday when dinner was half over; and that, the day before, I was

made quite unwell by being obliged to eat underdone veal in a hurry;

today, I don't dine at all--and I am afraid to say how long we waited

for breakfast--and then the water didn't boil. I don't mean to reproach

you, my dear, but this is not comfortable.'

'Oh, you cruel, cruel boy, to say I am a disagreeable wife!' cried Dora.

'Now, my dear Dora, you must know that I never said that!'

'You said, I wasn't comfortable!' cried Dora. 'I said the housekeeping

was not comfortable!'

'It's exactly the same thing!' cried Dora. And she evidently thought so,

for she wept most grievously.

I took another turn across the room, full of love for my pretty wife,

and distracted by self-accusatory inclinations to knock my head against

the door. I sat down again, and said:

'I am not blaming you, Dora. We have both a great deal to learn. I am

only trying to show you, my dear, that you must--you really must' (I

was resolved not to give this up)--'accustom yourself to look after Mary

Anne. Likewise to act a little for yourself, and me.'

'I wonder, I do, at your making such ungrateful speeches,' sobbed Dora.

'When you know that the other day, when you said you would like a little

bit of fish, I went out myself, miles and miles, and ordered it, to

surprise you.'

'And it was very kind of you, my own darling,' said I. 'I felt it so

much that I wouldn't on any account have even mentioned that you

bought a Salmon--which was too much for two. Or that it cost one pound

six--which was more than we can afford.'

'You enjoyed it very much,' sobbed Dora. 'And you said I was a Mouse.'

'And I'll say so again, my love,' I returned, 'a thousand times!'

But I had wounded Dora's soft little heart, and she was not to be

comforted. She was so pathetic in her sobbing and bewailing, that I felt

as if I had said I don't know what to hurt her. I was obliged to hurry

away; I was kept out late; and I felt all night such pangs of remorse as

made me miserable. I had the conscience of an assassin, and was haunted

by a vague sense of enormous wickedness.

It was two or three hours past midnight when I got home. I found my

aunt, in our house, sitting up for me.

'Is anything the matter, aunt?' said I, alarmed.

'Nothing, Trot,' she replied. 'Sit down, sit down. Little Blossom has

been rather out of spirits, and I have been keeping her company. That's

all.'

I leaned my head upon my hand; and felt more sorry and downcast, as I

sat looking at the fire, than I could have supposed possible so soon

after the fulfilment of my brightest hopes. As I sat thinking, I

happened to meet my aunt's eyes, which were resting on my face. There

was an anxious expression in them, but it cleared directly.

'I assure you, aunt,' said I, 'I have been quite unhappy myself all

night, to think of Dora's being so. But I had no other intention than to

speak to her tenderly and lovingly about our home-affairs.'

MY aunt nodded encouragement.

'You must have patience, Trot,' said she.

'Of course. Heaven knows I don't mean to be unreasonable, aunt!'

'No, no,' said my aunt. 'But Little Blossom is a very tender little

blossom, and the wind must be gentle with her.'

I thanked my good aunt, in my heart, for her tenderness towards my wife;

and I was sure that she knew I did.

'Don't you think, aunt,' said I, after some further contemplation of the

fire, 'that you could advise and counsel Dora a little, for our mutual

advantage, now and then?'

'Trot,' returned my aunt, with some emotion, 'no! Don't ask me such a

thing.'

Her tone was so very earnest that I raised my eyes in surprise.

'I look back on my life, child,' said my aunt, 'and I think of some who

are in their graves, with whom I might have been on kinder terms. If I

judged harshly of other people's mistakes in marriage, it may have been

because I had bitter reason to judge harshly of my own. Let that pass. I

have been a grumpy, frumpy, wayward sort of a woman, a good many years.

I am still, and I always shall be. But you and I have done one another

some good, Trot,--at all events, you have done me good, my dear; and

division must not come between us, at this time of day.'

'Division between us!' cried I.

'Child, child!' said my aunt, smoothing her dress, 'how soon it might

come between us, or how unhappy I might make our Little Blossom, if I

meddled in anything, a prophet couldn't say. I want our pet to like me,

and be as gay as a butterfly. Remember your own home, in that second

marriage; and never do both me and her the injury you have hinted at!'

I comprehended, at once, that my aunt was right; and I comprehended the

full extent of her generous feeling towards my dear wife.

'These are early days, Trot,' she pursued, 'and Rome was not built in a

day, nor in a year. You have chosen freely for yourself'; a cloud passed

over her face for a moment, I thought; 'and you have chosen a very

pretty and a very affectionate creature. It will be your duty, and it

will be your pleasure too--of course I know that; I am not delivering

a lecture--to estimate her (as you chose her) by the qualities she has,

and not by the qualities she may not have. The latter you must develop

in her, if you can. And if you cannot, child,' here my aunt rubbed her

nose, 'you must just accustom yourself to do without 'em. But remember,

my dear, your future is between you two. No one can assist you; you are

to work it out for yourselves. This is marriage, Trot; and Heaven bless

you both, in it, for a pair of babes in the wood as you are!'

My aunt said this in a sprightly way, and gave me a kiss to ratify the

blessing.

'Now,' said she, 'light my little lantern, and see me into my bandbox by

the garden path'; for there was a communication between our cottages in

that direction. 'Give Betsey Trotwood's love to Blossom, when you come

back; and whatever you do, Trot, never dream of setting Betsey up as a

scarecrow, for if I ever saw her in the glass, she's quite grim enough

and gaunt enough in her private capacity!'

With this my aunt tied her head up in a handkerchief, with which she was

accustomed to make a bundle of it on such occasions; and I escorted her

home. As she stood in her garden, holding up her little lantern to light

me back, I thought her observation of me had an anxious air again; but

I was too much occupied in pondering on what she had said, and too much

impressed--for the first time, in reality--by the conviction that Dora

and I had indeed to work out our future for ourselves, and that no one

could assist us, to take much notice of it.

Dora came stealing down in her little slippers, to meet me, now that I

was alone; and cried upon my shoulder, and said I had been hard-hearted

and she had been naughty; and I said much the same thing in effect, I

believe; and we made it up, and agreed that our first little difference

was to be our last, and that we were never to have another if we lived a

hundred years.

The next domestic trial we went through, was the Ordeal of Servants.

Mary Anne's cousin deserted into our coal-hole, and was brought out, to

our great amazement, by a piquet of his companions in arms, who took

him away handcuffed in a procession that covered our front-garden with

ignominy. This nerved me to get rid of Mary Anne, who went so mildly,

on receipt of wages, that I was surprised, until I found out about the

tea-spoons, and also about the little sums she had borrowed in my

name of the tradespeople without authority. After an interval of Mrs.

Kidgerbury--the oldest inhabitant of Kentish Town, I believe, who went

out charing, but was too feeble to execute her conceptions of that

art--we found another treasure, who was one of the most amiable of

women, but who generally made a point of falling either up or down the

kitchen stairs with the tray, and almost plunged into the parlour,

as into a bath, with the tea-things. The ravages committed by this

unfortunate, rendering her dismissal necessary, she was succeeded (with

intervals of Mrs. Kidgerbury) by a long line of Incapables; terminating

in a young person of genteel appearance, who went to Greenwich Fair in

Dora's bonnet. After whom I remember nothing but an average equality of

failure.

Everybody we had anything to do with seemed to cheat us. Our appearance

in a shop was a signal for the damaged goods to be brought out

immediately. If we bought a lobster, it was full of water. All our meat

turned out to be tough, and there was hardly any crust to our loaves.

In search of the principle on which joints ought to be roasted, to be

roasted enough, and not too much, I myself referred to the Cookery Book,

and found it there established as the allowance of a quarter of an hour

to every pound, and say a quarter over. But the principle always failed

us by some curious fatality, and we never could hit any medium between

redness and cinders.

I had reason to believe that in accomplishing these failures we incurred

a far greater expense than if we had achieved a series of triumphs. It

appeared to me, on looking over the tradesmen's books, as if we might

have kept the basement storey paved with butter, such was the extensive

scale of our consumption of that article. I don't know whether the

Excise returns of the period may have exhibited any increase in the

demand for pepper; but if our performances did not affect the market,

I should say several families must have left off using it. And the most

wonderful fact of all was, that we never had anything in the house.

As to the washerwoman pawning the clothes, and coming in a state of

penitent intoxication to apologize, I suppose that might have happened

several times to anybody. Also the chimney on fire, the parish engine,

and perjury on the part of the Beadle. But I apprehend that we were

personally fortunate in engaging a servant with a taste for cordials,

who swelled our running account for porter at the public-house by such

inexplicable items as 'quartern rum shrub (Mrs. C.)'; 'Half-quartern

gin and cloves (Mrs. C.)'; 'Glass rum and peppermint (Mrs. C.)'--the

parentheses always referring to Dora, who was supposed, it appeared on

explanation, to have imbibed the whole of these refreshments.

One of our first feats in the housekeeping way was a little dinner to

Traddles. I met him in town, and asked him to walk out with me that

afternoon. He readily consenting, I wrote to Dora, saying I would bring

him home. It was pleasant weather, and on the road we made my domestic

happiness the theme of conversation. Traddles was very full of it; and

said, that, picturing himself with such a home, and Sophy waiting and

preparing for him, he could think of nothing wanting to complete his

bliss.

I could not have wished for a prettier little wife at the opposite end

of the table, but I certainly could have wished, when we sat down, for a

little more room. I did not know how it was, but though there were only

two of us, we were at once always cramped for room, and yet had always

room enough to lose everything in. I suspect it may have been because

nothing had a place of its own, except Jip's pagoda, which invariably

blocked up the main thoroughfare. On the present occasion, Traddles

was so hemmed in by the pagoda and the guitar-case, and Dora's

flower-painting, and my writing-table, that I had serious doubts of the

possibility of his using his knife and fork; but he protested, with his

own good-humour, 'Oceans of room, Copperfield! I assure you, Oceans!'

There was another thing I could have wished, namely, that Jip had never

been encouraged to walk about the tablecloth during dinner. I began to

think there was something disorderly in his being there at all, even

if he had not been in the habit of putting his foot in the salt or the

melted butter. On this occasion he seemed to think he was introduced

expressly to keep Traddles at bay; and he barked at my old friend, and

made short runs at his plate, with such undaunted pertinacity, that he

may be said to have engrossed the conversation.

However, as I knew how tender-hearted my dear Dora was, and how

sensitive she would be to any slight upon her favourite, I hinted no

objection. For similar reasons I made no allusion to the skirmishing

plates upon the floor; or to the disreputable appearance of the castors,

which were all at sixes and sevens, and looked drunk; or to the further

blockade of Traddles by wandering vegetable dishes and jugs. I could

not help wondering in my own mind, as I contemplated the boiled leg of

mutton before me, previous to carving it, how it came to pass that

our joints of meat were of such extraordinary shapes--and whether our

butcher contracted for all the deformed sheep that came into the world;

but I kept my reflections to myself.

'My love,' said I to Dora, 'what have you got in that dish?'

I could not imagine why Dora had been making tempting little faces at

me, as if she wanted to kiss me.

'Oysters, dear,' said Dora, timidly.

'Was that YOUR thought?' said I, delighted.

'Ye-yes, Doady,' said Dora.

'There never was a happier one!' I exclaimed, laying down the

carving-knife and fork. 'There is nothing Traddles likes so much!'

'Ye-yes, Doady,' said Dora, 'and so I bought a beautiful little barrel

of them, and the man said they were very good. But I--I am afraid

there's something the matter with them. They don't seem right.' Here

Dora shook her head, and diamonds twinkled in her eyes.

'They are only opened in both shells,' said I. 'Take the top one off, my

love.'

'But it won't come off!' said Dora, trying very hard, and looking very

much distressed.

'Do you know, Copperfield,' said Traddles, cheerfully examining the

dish, 'I think it is in consequence--they are capital oysters, but I

think it is in consequence--of their never having been opened.'

They never had been opened; and we had no oyster-knives--and couldn't

have used them if we had; so we looked at the oysters and ate the

mutton. At least we ate as much of it as was done, and made up with

capers. If I had permitted him, I am satisfied that Traddles would have

made a perfect savage of himself, and eaten a plateful of raw meat, to

express enjoyment of the repast; but I would hear of no such immolation

on the altar of friendship, and we had a course of bacon instead; there

happening, by good fortune, to be cold bacon in the larder.

My poor little wife was in such affliction when she thought I should be

annoyed, and in such a state of joy when she found I was not, that the

discomfiture I had subdued, very soon vanished, and we passed a happy

evening; Dora sitting with her arm on my chair while Traddles and I

discussed a glass of wine, and taking every opportunity of whispering

in my ear that it was so good of me not to be a cruel, cross old boy. By

and by she made tea for us; which it was so pretty to see her do, as if

she was busying herself with a set of doll's tea-things, that I was not

particular about the quality of the beverage. Then Traddles and I played

a game or two at cribbage; and Dora singing to the guitar the while,

it seemed to me as if our courtship and marriage were a tender dream

of mine, and the night when I first listened to her voice were not yet

over.

When Traddles went away, and I came back into the parlour from seeing

him out, my wife planted her chair close to mine, and sat down by my

side. 'I am very sorry,' she said. 'Will you try to teach me, Doady?'

'I must teach myself first, Dora,' said I. 'I am as bad as you, love.'

'Ah! But you can learn,' she returned; 'and you are a clever, clever

man!'

'Nonsense, mouse!' said I.

'I wish,' resumed my wife, after a long silence, 'that I could have gone

down into the country for a whole year, and lived with Agnes!'

Her hands were clasped upon my shoulder, and her chin rested on them,

and her blue eyes looked quietly into mine.

'Why so?' I asked.

'I think she might have improved me, and I think I might have learned

from her,' said Dora.

'All in good time, my love. Agnes has had her father to take care of for

these many years, you should remember. Even when she was quite a child,

she was the Agnes whom we know,' said I.

'Will you call me a name I want you to call me?' inquired Dora, without

moving.

'What is it?' I asked with a smile.

'It's a stupid name,' she said, shaking her curls for a moment.

'Child-wife.'

I laughingly asked my child-wife what her fancy was in desiring to be so

called. She answered without moving, otherwise than as the arm I twined

about her may have brought her blue eyes nearer to me:

'I don't mean, you silly fellow, that you should use the name instead

of Dora. I only mean that you should think of me that way. When you are

going to be angry with me, say to yourself, "it's only my child-wife!"

When I am very disappointing, say, "I knew, a long time ago, that she

would make but a child-wife!" When you miss what I should like to be,

and I think can never be, say, "still my foolish child-wife loves me!"

For indeed I do.'

I had not been serious with her; having no idea until now, that she was

serious herself. But her affectionate nature was so happy in what I now

said to her with my whole heart, that her face became a laughing one

before her glittering eyes were dry. She was soon my child-wife indeed;

sitting down on the floor outside the Chinese House, ringing all

the little bells one after another, to punish Jip for his recent bad

behaviour; while Jip lay blinking in the doorway with his head out, even

too lazy to be teased.

This appeal of Dora's made a strong impression on me. I look back on the

time I write of; I invoke the innocent figure that I dearly loved, to

come out from the mists and shadows of the past, and turn its gentle

head towards me once again; and I can still declare that this one little

speech was constantly in my memory. I may not have used it to the best

account; I was young and inexperienced; but I never turned a deaf ear to

its artless pleading.

Dora told me, shortly afterwards, that she was going to be a wonderful

housekeeper. Accordingly, she polished the tablets, pointed the pencil,

bought an immense account-book, carefully stitched up with a needle and

thread all the leaves of the Cookery Book which Jip had torn, and made

quite a desperate little attempt 'to be good', as she called it. But the

figures had the old obstinate propensity--they WOULD NOT add up. When

she had entered two or three laborious items in the account-book, Jip

would walk over the page, wagging his tail, and smear them all out. Her

own little right-hand middle finger got steeped to the very bone in ink;

and I think that was the only decided result obtained.

Sometimes, of an evening, when I was at home and at work--for I wrote

a good deal now, and was beginning in a small way to be known as a

writer--I would lay down my pen, and watch my child-wife trying to be

good. First of all, she would bring out the immense account-book, and

lay it down upon the table, with a deep sigh. Then she would open it at

the place where Jip had made it illegible last night, and call Jip

up, to look at his misdeeds. This would occasion a diversion in Jip's

favour, and some inking of his nose, perhaps, as a penalty. Then she

would tell Jip to lie down on the table instantly, 'like a lion'--which

was one of his tricks, though I cannot say the likeness was

striking--and, if he were in an obedient humour, he would obey. Then she

would take up a pen, and begin to write, and find a hair in it. Then

she would take up another pen, and begin to write, and find that it

spluttered. Then she would take up another pen, and begin to write, and

say in a low voice, 'Oh, it's a talking pen, and will disturb Doady!'

And then she would give it up as a bad job, and put the account-book

away, after pretending to crush the lion with it.

Or, if she were in a very sedate and serious state of mind, she would

sit down with the tablets, and a little basket of bills and other

documents, which looked more like curl-papers than anything else, and

endeavour to get some result out of them. After severely comparing one

with another, and making entries on the tablets, and blotting them

out, and counting all the fingers of her left hand over and over again,

backwards and forwards, she would be so vexed and discouraged, and

would look so unhappy, that it gave me pain to see her bright face

clouded--and for me!--and I would go softly to her, and say:

'What's the matter, Dora?'

Dora would look up hopelessly, and reply, 'They won't come right. They

make my head ache so. And they won't do anything I want!'

Then I would say, 'Now let us try together. Let me show you, Dora.'

Then I would commence a practical demonstration, to which Dora would pay

profound attention, perhaps for five minutes; when she would begin to be

dreadfully tired, and would lighten the subject by curling my hair,

or trying the effect of my face with my shirt-collar turned down. If

I tacitly checked this playfulness, and persisted, she would look so

scared and disconsolate, as she became more and more bewildered, that

the remembrance of her natural gaiety when I first strayed into her

path, and of her being my child-wife, would come reproachfully upon me;

and I would lay the pencil down, and call for the guitar.

I had a great deal of work to do, and had many anxieties, but the same

considerations made me keep them to myself. I am far from sure, now,

that it was right to do this, but I did it for my child-wife's sake. I

search my breast, and I commit its secrets, if I know them, without any

reservation to this paper. The old unhappy loss or want of something

had, I am conscious, some place in my heart; but not to the embitterment

of my life. When I walked alone in the fine weather, and thought of the

summer days when all the air had been filled with my boyish enchantment,

I did miss something of the realization of my dreams; but I thought it

was a softened glory of the Past, which nothing could have thrown upon

the present time. I did feel, sometimes, for a little while, that I

could have wished my wife had been my counsellor; had had more character

and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with

power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; but

I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness, that

never had been meant to be, and never could have been.

I was a boyish husband as to years. I had known the softening influence

of no other sorrows or experiences than those recorded in these leaves.

If I did any wrong, as I may have done much, I did it in mistaken love,

and in my want of wisdom. I write the exact truth. It would avail me

nothing to extenuate it now.

Thus it was that I took upon myself the toils and cares of our life,

and had no partner in them. We lived much as before, in reference to our

scrambling household arrangements; but I had got used to those, and Dora

I was pleased to see was seldom vexed now. She was bright and cheerful

in the old childish way, loved me dearly, and was happy with her old

trifles.

When the debates were heavy--I mean as to length, not quality, for in

the last respect they were not often otherwise--and I went home late,

Dora would never rest when she heard my footsteps, but would always come

downstairs to meet me. When my evenings were unoccupied by the pursuit

for which I had qualified myself with so much pains, and I was engaged

in writing at home, she would sit quietly near me, however late the

hour, and be so mute, that I would often think she had dropped asleep.

But generally, when I raised my head, I saw her blue eyes looking at me

with the quiet attention of which I have already spoken.

'Oh, what a weary boy!' said Dora one night, when I met her eyes as I

was shutting up my desk.

'What a weary girl!' said I. 'That's more to the purpose. You must go to

bed another time, my love. It's far too late for you.'

'No, don't send me to bed!' pleaded Dora, coming to my side. 'Pray,

don't do that!'

'Dora!' To my amazement she was sobbing on my neck. 'Not well, my dear!

not happy!'

'Yes! quite well, and very happy!' said Dora. 'But say you'll let me

stop, and see you write.'

'Why, what a sight for such bright eyes at midnight!' I replied.

'Are they bright, though?' returned Dora, laughing. 'I'm so glad they're

bright.' 'Little Vanity!' said I.

But it was not vanity; it was only harmless delight in my admiration. I

knew that very well, before she told me so.

'If you think them pretty, say I may always stop, and see you write!'

said Dora. 'Do you think them pretty?'

'Very pretty.'

'Then let me always stop and see you write.'

'I am afraid that won't improve their brightness, Dora.'

'Yes, it will! Because, you clever boy, you'll not forget me then, while

you are full of silent fancies. Will you mind it, if I say something

very, very silly?---more than usual?' inquired Dora, peeping over my

shoulder into my face.

'What wonderful thing is that?' said I.

'Please let me hold the pens,' said Dora. 'I want to have something to

do with all those many hours when you are so industrious. May I hold the

pens?'

The remembrance of her pretty joy when I said yes, brings tears into my

eyes. The next time I sat down to write, and regularly afterwards,

she sat in her old place, with a spare bundle of pens at her side. Her

triumph in this connexion with my work, and her delight when I wanted a

new pen--which I very often feigned to do--suggested to me a new way of

pleasing my child-wife. I occasionally made a pretence of wanting a

page or two of manuscript copied. Then Dora was in her glory. The

preparations she made for this great work, the aprons she put on, the

bibs she borrowed from the kitchen to keep off the ink, the time she

took, the innumerable stoppages she made to have a laugh with Jip as if

he understood it all, her conviction that her work was incomplete unless

she signed her name at the end, and the way in which she would bring it

to me, like a school-copy, and then, when I praised it, clasp me round

the neck, are touching recollections to me, simple as they might appear

to other men.

She took possession of the keys soon after this, and went jingling about

the house with the whole bunch in a little basket, tied to her slender

waist. I seldom found that the places to which they belonged were

locked, or that they were of any use except as a plaything for Jip--but

Dora was pleased, and that pleased me. She was quite satisfied that a

good deal was effected by this make-belief of housekeeping; and was as

merry as if we had been keeping a baby-house, for a joke.

So we went on. Dora was hardly less affectionate to my aunt than to me,

and often told her of the time when she was afraid she was 'a cross old

thing'. I never saw my aunt unbend more systematically to anyone. She

courted Jip, though Jip never responded; listened, day after day, to the

guitar, though I am afraid she had no taste for music; never attacked

the Incapables, though the temptation must have been severe; went

wonderful distances on foot to purchase, as surprises, any trifles that

she found out Dora wanted; and never came in by the garden, and missed

her from the room, but she would call out, at the foot of the stairs, in

a voice that sounded cheerfully all over the house:

'Where's Little Blossom?'

CHAPTER 45. MR. DICK FULFILS MY AUNT'S PREDICTIONS

It was some time now, since I had left the Doctor. Living in his

neighbourhood, I saw him frequently; and we all went to his house on two

or three occasions to dinner or tea. The Old Soldier was in permanent

quarters under the Doctor's roof. She was exactly the same as ever, and

the same immortal butterflies hovered over her cap.

Like some other mothers, whom I have known in the course of my life,

Mrs. Markleham was far more fond of pleasure than her daughter was.

She required a great deal of amusement, and, like a deep old soldier,

pretended, in consulting her own inclinations, to be devoting herself

to her child. The Doctor's desire that Annie should be entertained,

was therefore particularly acceptable to this excellent parent; who

expressed unqualified approval of his discretion.

I have no doubt, indeed, that she probed the Doctor's wound without

knowing it. Meaning nothing but a certain matured frivolity and

selfishness, not always inseparable from full-blown years, I think she

confirmed him in his fear that he was a constraint upon his young

wife, and that there was no congeniality of feeling between them, by so

strongly commending his design of lightening the load of her life.

'My dear soul,' she said to him one day when I was present, 'you know

there is no doubt it would be a little pokey for Annie to be always shut

up here.'

The Doctor nodded his benevolent head. 'When she comes to her mother's

age,' said Mrs. Markleham, with a flourish of her fan, 'then it'll be

another thing. You might put ME into a Jail, with genteel society and

a rubber, and I should never care to come out. But I am not Annie, you

know; and Annie is not her mother.'

'Surely, surely,' said the Doctor.

'You are the best of creatures--no, I beg your pardon!' for the Doctor

made a gesture of deprecation, 'I must say before your face, as I always

say behind your back, you are the best of creatures; but of course you

don't--now do you?---enter into the same pursuits and fancies as Annie?'

'No,' said the Doctor, in a sorrowful tone.

'No, of course not,' retorted the Old Soldier. 'Take your Dictionary,

for example. What a useful work a Dictionary is! What a necessary work!

The meanings of words! Without Doctor Johnson, or somebody of that sort,

we might have been at this present moment calling an Italian-iron,

a bedstead. But we can't expect a Dictionary--especially when it's

making--to interest Annie, can we?'

The Doctor shook his head.

'And that's why I so much approve,' said Mrs. Markleham, tapping him

on the shoulder with her shut-up fan, 'of your thoughtfulness. It shows

that you don't expect, as many elderly people do expect, old heads on

young shoulders. You have studied Annie's character, and you understand

it. That's what I find so charming!'

Even the calm and patient face of Doctor Strong expressed some little

sense of pain, I thought, under the infliction of these compliments.

'Therefore, my dear Doctor,' said the Old Soldier, giving him several

affectionate taps, 'you may command me, at all times and seasons. Now,

do understand that I am entirely at your service. I am ready to go with

Annie to operas, concerts, exhibitions, all kinds of places; and you

shall never find that I am tired. Duty, my dear Doctor, before every

consideration in the universe!'

She was as good as her word. She was one of those people who can bear

a great deal of pleasure, and she never flinched in her perseverance

in the cause. She seldom got hold of the newspaper (which she settled

herself down in the softest chair in the house to read through an

eye-glass, every day, for two hours), but she found out something that

she was certain Annie would like to see. It was in vain for Annie to

protest that she was weary of such things. Her mother's remonstrance

always was, 'Now, my dear Annie, I am sure you know better; and I must

tell you, my love, that you are not making a proper return for the

kindness of Doctor Strong.'

This was usually said in the Doctor's presence, and appeared to me to

constitute Annie's principal inducement for withdrawing her objections

when she made any. But in general she resigned herself to her mother,

and went where the Old Soldier would.

It rarely happened now that Mr. Maldon accompanied them. Sometimes

my aunt and Dora were invited to do so, and accepted the invitation.

Sometimes Dora only was asked. The time had been, when I should have

been uneasy in her going; but reflection on what had passed that

former night in the Doctor's study, had made a change in my mistrust. I

believed that the Doctor was right, and I had no worse suspicions.

My aunt rubbed her nose sometimes when she happened to be alone with

me, and said she couldn't make it out; she wished they were happier; she

didn't think our military friend (so she always called the Old Soldier)

mended the matter at all. My aunt further expressed her opinion, 'that

if our military friend would cut off those butterflies, and give 'em to

the chimney-sweepers for May-day, it would look like the beginning of

something sensible on her part.'

But her abiding reliance was on Mr. Dick. That man had evidently an

idea in his head, she said; and if he could only once pen it up into a

corner, which was his great difficulty, he would distinguish himself in

some extraordinary manner.

Unconscious of this prediction, Mr. Dick continued to occupy precisely

the same ground in reference to the Doctor and to Mrs. Strong. He seemed

neither to advance nor to recede. He appeared to have settled into his

original foundation, like a building; and I must confess that my faith

in his ever Moving, was not much greater than if he had been a building.

But one night, when I had been married some months, Mr. Dick put his

head into the parlour, where I was writing alone (Dora having gone out

with my aunt to take tea with the two little birds), and said, with a

significant cough:

'You couldn't speak to me without inconveniencing yourself, Trotwood, I

am afraid?'

'Certainly, Mr. Dick,' said I; 'come in!'

'Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, laying his finger on the side of his nose,

after he had shaken hands with me. 'Before I sit down, I wish to make an

observation. You know your aunt?'

'A little,' I replied.

'She is the most wonderful woman in the world, sir!'

After the delivery of this communication, which he shot out of himself

as if he were loaded with it, Mr. Dick sat down with greater gravity

than usual, and looked at me.

'Now, boy,' said Mr. Dick, 'I am going to put a question to you.'

'As many as you please,' said I.

'What do you consider me, sir?' asked Mr. Dick, folding his arms.

'A dear old friend,' said I. 'Thank you, Trotwood,' returned Mr. Dick,

laughing, and reaching across in high glee to shake hands with me. 'But

I mean, boy,' resuming his gravity, 'what do you consider me in this

respect?' touching his forehead.

I was puzzled how to answer, but he helped me with a word.

'Weak?' said Mr. Dick.

'Well,' I replied, dubiously. 'Rather so.'

'Exactly!' cried Mr. Dick, who seemed quite enchanted by my reply. 'That

is, Trotwood, when they took some of the trouble out of you-know-who's

head, and put it you know where, there was a--' Mr. Dick made his two

hands revolve very fast about each other a great number of times, and

then brought them into collision, and rolled them over and over one

another, to express confusion. 'There was that sort of thing done to me

somehow. Eh?'

I nodded at him, and he nodded back again.

'In short, boy,' said Mr. Dick, dropping his voice to a whisper, 'I am

simple.'

I would have qualified that conclusion, but he stopped me.

'Yes, I am! She pretends I am not. She won't hear of it; but I am. I

know I am. If she hadn't stood my friend, sir, I should have been shut

up, to lead a dismal life these many years. But I'll provide for her!

I never spend the copying money. I put it in a box. I have made a will.

I'll leave it all to her. She shall be rich--noble!'

Mr. Dick took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his eyes. He then

folded it up with great care, pressed it smooth between his two hands,

put it in his pocket, and seemed to put my aunt away with it.

'Now you are a scholar, Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick. 'You are a fine

scholar. You know what a learned man, what a great man, the Doctor is.

You know what honour he has always done me. Not proud in his wisdom.

Humble, humble--condescending even to poor Dick, who is simple and knows

nothing. I have sent his name up, on a scrap of paper, to the kite,

along the string, when it has been in the sky, among the larks. The kite

has been glad to receive it, sir, and the sky has been brighter with

it.'

I delighted him by saying, most heartily, that the Doctor was deserving

of our best respect and highest esteem.

'And his beautiful wife is a star,' said Mr. Dick. 'A shining star. I

have seen her shine, sir. But,' bringing his chair nearer, and laying

one hand upon my knee--'clouds, sir--clouds.'

I answered the solicitude which his face expressed, by conveying the

same expression into my own, and shaking my head.

'What clouds?' said Mr. Dick.

He looked so wistfully into my face, and was so anxious to understand,

that I took great pains to answer him slowly and distinctly, as I might

have entered on an explanation to a child.

'There is some unfortunate division between them,' I replied. 'Some

unhappy cause of separation. A secret. It may be inseparable from the

discrepancy in their years. It may have grown up out of almost nothing.'

Mr. Dick, who had told off every sentence with a thoughtful nod, paused

when I had done, and sat considering, with his eyes upon my face, and

his hand upon my knee.

'Doctor not angry with her, Trotwood?' he said, after some time.

'No. Devoted to her.'

'Then, I have got it, boy!' said Mr. Dick.

The sudden exultation with which he slapped me on the knee, and leaned

back in his chair, with his eyebrows lifted up as high as he could

possibly lift them, made me think him farther out of his wits than

ever. He became as suddenly grave again, and leaning forward as before,

said--first respectfully taking out his pocket-handkerchief, as if it

really did represent my aunt:

'Most wonderful woman in the world, Trotwood. Why has she done nothing

to set things right?'

'Too delicate and difficult a subject for such interference,' I replied.

'Fine scholar,' said Mr. Dick, touching me with his finger. 'Why has HE

done nothing?'

'For the same reason,' I returned.

'Then, I have got it, boy!' said Mr. Dick. And he stood up before me,

more exultingly than before, nodding his head, and striking himself

repeatedly upon the breast, until one might have supposed that he had

nearly nodded and struck all the breath out of his body.

'A poor fellow with a craze, sir,' said Mr. Dick, 'a simpleton, a

weak-minded person--present company, you know!' striking himself again,

'may do what wonderful people may not do. I'll bring them together, boy.

I'll try. They'll not blame me. They'll not object to me. They'll not

mind what I do, if it's wrong. I'm only Mr. Dick. And who minds Dick?

Dick's nobody! Whoo!' He blew a slight, contemptuous breath, as if he

blew himself away.

It was fortunate he had proceeded so far with his mystery, for we heard

the coach stop at the little garden gate, which brought my aunt and Dora

home.

'Not a word, boy!' he pursued in a whisper; 'leave all the blame with

Dick--simple Dick--mad Dick. I have been thinking, sir, for some time,

that I was getting it, and now I have got it. After what you have said

to me, I am sure I have got it. All right!' Not another word did Mr.

Dick utter on the subject; but he made a very telegraph of himself for

the next half-hour (to the great disturbance of my aunt's mind), to

enjoin inviolable secrecy on me.

To my surprise, I heard no more about it for some two or three weeks,

though I was sufficiently interested in the result of his endeavours;

descrying a strange gleam of good sense--I say nothing of good feeling,

for that he always exhibited--in the conclusion to which he had come. At

last I began to believe, that, in the flighty and unsettled state of his

mind, he had either forgotten his intention or abandoned it.

One fair evening, when Dora was not inclined to go out, my aunt and I

strolled up to the Doctor's cottage. It was autumn, when there were no

debates to vex the evening air; and I remember how the leaves smelt like

our garden at Blunderstone as we trod them under foot, and how the old,

unhappy feeling, seemed to go by, on the sighing wind.

It was twilight when we reached the cottage. Mrs. Strong was just coming

out of the garden, where Mr. Dick yet lingered, busy with his knife,

helping the gardener to point some stakes. The Doctor was engaged with

someone in his study; but the visitor would be gone directly, Mrs.

Strong said, and begged us to remain and see him. We went into the

drawing-room with her, and sat down by the darkening window. There was

never any ceremony about the visits of such old friends and neighbours

as we were.

We had not sat here many minutes, when Mrs. Markleham, who usually

contrived to be in a fuss about something, came bustling in, with her

newspaper in her hand, and said, out of breath, 'My goodness gracious,

Annie, why didn't you tell me there was someone in the Study!'

'My dear mama,' she quietly returned, 'how could I know that you desired

the information?'

'Desired the information!' said Mrs. Markleham, sinking on the sofa. 'I

never had such a turn in all my life!'

'Have you been to the Study, then, mama?' asked Annie.

'BEEN to the Study, my dear!' she returned emphatically. 'Indeed I have!

I came upon the amiable creature--if you'll imagine my feelings, Miss

Trotwood and David--in the act of making his will.'

Her daughter looked round from the window quickly.

'In the act, my dear Annie,' repeated Mrs. Markleham, spreading the

newspaper on her lap like a table-cloth, and patting her hands upon it,

'of making his last Will and Testament. The foresight and affection of

the dear! I must tell you how it was. I really must, in justice to the

darling--for he is nothing less!--tell you how it was. Perhaps you know,

Miss Trotwood, that there is never a candle lighted in this house, until

one's eyes are literally falling out of one's head with being stretched

to read the paper. And that there is not a chair in this house, in which

a paper can be what I call, read, except one in the Study. This took me

to the Study, where I saw a light. I opened the door. In company with

the dear Doctor were two professional people, evidently connected with

the law, and they were all three standing at the table: the

darling Doctor pen in hand. "This simply expresses then," said the

Doctor--Annie, my love, attend to the very words--"this simply expresses

then, gentlemen, the confidence I have in Mrs. Strong, and gives her all

unconditionally?" One of the professional people replied, "And gives her

all unconditionally." Upon that, with the natural feelings of a mother,

I said, "Good God, I beg your pardon!" fell over the door-step, and came

away through the little back passage where the pantry is.'

Mrs. Strong opened the window, and went out into the verandah, where she

stood leaning against a pillar.

'But now isn't it, Miss Trotwood, isn't it, David, invigorating,' said

Mrs. Markleham, mechanically following her with her eyes, 'to find a man

at Doctor Strong's time of life, with the strength of mind to do this

kind of thing? It only shows how right I was. I said to Annie, when

Doctor Strong paid a very flattering visit to myself, and made her the

subject of a declaration and an offer, I said, "My dear, there is no

doubt whatever, in my opinion, with reference to a suitable provision

for you, that Doctor Strong will do more than he binds himself to do."'

Here the bell rang, and we heard the sound of the visitors' feet as they

went out.

'It's all over, no doubt,' said the Old Soldier, after listening; 'the

dear creature has signed, sealed, and delivered, and his mind's at rest.

Well it may be! What a mind! Annie, my love, I am going to the Study

with my paper, for I am a poor creature without news. Miss Trotwood,

David, pray come and see the Doctor.'

I was conscious of Mr. Dick's standing in the shadow of the room,

shutting up his knife, when we accompanied her to the Study; and of my

aunt's rubbing her nose violently, by the way, as a mild vent for her

intolerance of our military friend; but who got first into the Study, or

how Mrs. Markleham settled herself in a moment in her easy-chair, or how

my aunt and I came to be left together near the door (unless her eyes

were quicker than mine, and she held me back), I have forgotten, if I

ever knew. But this I know,--that we saw the Doctor before he saw us,

sitting at his table, among the folio volumes in which he delighted,

resting his head calmly on his hand. That, in the same moment, we saw

Mrs. Strong glide in, pale and trembling. That Mr. Dick supported her on

his arm. That he laid his other hand upon the Doctor's arm, causing him

to look up with an abstracted air. That, as the Doctor moved his head,

his wife dropped down on one knee at his feet, and, with her hands

imploringly lifted, fixed upon his face the memorable look I had never

forgotten. That at this sight Mrs. Markleham dropped the newspaper,

and stared more like a figure-head intended for a ship to be called The

Astonishment, than anything else I can think of.

The gentleness of the Doctor's manner and surprise, the dignity that

mingled with the supplicating attitude of his wife, the amiable concern

of Mr. Dick, and the earnestness with which my aunt said to herself,

'That man mad!' (triumphantly expressive of the misery from which she

had saved him)--I see and hear, rather than remember, as I write about

it.

'Doctor!' said Mr. Dick. 'What is it that's amiss? Look here!'

'Annie!' cried the Doctor. 'Not at my feet, my dear!'

'Yes!' she said. 'I beg and pray that no one will leave the room! Oh, my

husband and father, break this long silence. Let us both know what it is

that has come between us!'

Mrs. Markleham, by this time recovering the power of speech, and seeming

to swell with family pride and motherly indignation, here exclaimed,

'Annie, get up immediately, and don't disgrace everybody belonging to

you by humbling yourself like that, unless you wish to see me go out of

my mind on the spot!'

'Mama!' returned Annie. 'Waste no words on me, for my appeal is to my

husband, and even you are nothing here.'

'Nothing!' exclaimed Mrs. Markleham. 'Me, nothing! The child has taken

leave of her senses. Please to get me a glass of water!'

I was too attentive to the Doctor and his wife, to give any heed to this

request; and it made no impression on anybody else; so Mrs. Markleham

panted, stared, and fanned herself.

'Annie!' said the Doctor, tenderly taking her in his hands. 'My dear!

If any unavoidable change has come, in the sequence of time, upon our

married life, you are not to blame. The fault is mine, and only mine.

There is no change in my affection, admiration, and respect. I wish to

make you happy. I truly love and honour you. Rise, Annie, pray!'

But she did not rise. After looking at him for a little while, she sank

down closer to him, laid her arm across his knee, and dropping her head

upon it, said:

'If I have any friend here, who can speak one word for me, or for my

husband in this matter; if I have any friend here, who can give a voice

to any suspicion that my heart has sometimes whispered to me; if I have

any friend here, who honours my husband, or has ever cared for me, and

has anything within his knowledge, no matter what it is, that may help

to mediate between us, I implore that friend to speak!'

There was a profound silence. After a few moments of painful hesitation,

I broke the silence.

'Mrs. Strong,' I said, 'there is something within my knowledge, which

I have been earnestly entreated by Doctor Strong to conceal, and have

concealed until tonight. But, I believe the time has come when it would

be mistaken faith and delicacy to conceal it any longer, and when your

appeal absolves me from his injunction.'

She turned her face towards me for a moment, and I knew that I was

right. I could not have resisted its entreaty, if the assurance that it

gave me had been less convincing.

'Our future peace,' she said, 'may be in your hands. I trust it

confidently to your not suppressing anything. I know beforehand that

nothing you, or anyone, can tell me, will show my husband's noble heart

in any other light than one. Howsoever it may seem to you to touch me,

disregard that. I will speak for myself, before him, and before God

afterwards.'

Thus earnestly besought, I made no reference to the Doctor for his

permission, but, without any other compromise of the truth than a little

softening of the coarseness of Uriah Heep, related plainly what had

passed in that same room that night. The staring of Mrs. Markleham

during the whole narration, and the shrill, sharp interjections with

which she occasionally interrupted it, defy description.

When I had finished, Annie remained, for some few moments, silent, with

her head bent down, as I have described. Then, she took the Doctor's

hand (he was sitting in the same attitude as when we had entered the

room), and pressed it to her breast, and kissed it. Mr. Dick softly

raised her; and she stood, when she began to speak, leaning on him, and

looking down upon her husband--from whom she never turned her eyes.

'All that has ever been in my mind, since I was married,' she said in a

low, submissive, tender voice, 'I will lay bare before you. I could not

live and have one reservation, knowing what I know now.'

'Nay, Annie,' said the Doctor, mildly, 'I have never doubted you, my

child. There is no need; indeed there is no need, my dear.'

'There is great need,' she answered, in the same way, 'that I should

open my whole heart before the soul of generosity and truth, whom, year

by year, and day by day, I have loved and venerated more and more, as

Heaven knows!'

'Really,' interrupted Mrs. Markleham, 'if I have any discretion at

all--'

('Which you haven't, you Marplot,' observed my aunt, in an indignant

whisper.) --'I must be permitted to observe that it cannot be requisite

to enter into these details.'

'No one but my husband can judge of that, mama,' said Annie without

removing her eyes from his face, 'and he will hear me. If I say anything

to give you pain, mama, forgive me. I have borne pain first, often and

long, myself.'

'Upon my word!' gasped Mrs. Markleham.

'When I was very young,' said Annie, 'quite a little child, my first

associations with knowledge of any kind were inseparable from a patient

friend and teacher--the friend of my dead father--who was always dear

to me. I can remember nothing that I know, without remembering him. He

stored my mind with its first treasures, and stamped his character upon

them all. They never could have been, I think, as good as they have been

to me, if I had taken them from any other hands.'

'Makes her mother nothing!' exclaimed Mrs. Markleham.

'Not so mama,' said Annie; 'but I make him what he was. I must do that.

As I grew up, he occupied the same place still. I was proud of his

interest: deeply, fondly, gratefully attached to him. I looked up to

him, I can hardly describe how--as a father, as a guide, as one whose

praise was different from all other praise, as one in whom I could have

trusted and confided, if I had doubted all the world. You know, mama,

how young and inexperienced I was, when you presented him before me, of

a sudden, as a lover.'

'I have mentioned the fact, fifty times at least, to everybody here!'

said Mrs. Markleham.

('Then hold your tongue, for the Lord's sake, and don't mention it any

more!' muttered my aunt.)

'It was so great a change: so great a loss, I felt it, at first,' said

Annie, still preserving the same look and tone, 'that I was agitated

and distressed. I was but a girl; and when so great a change came in the

character in which I had so long looked up to him, I think I was sorry.

But nothing could have made him what he used to be again; and I was

proud that he should think me so worthy, and we were married.' '--At

Saint Alphage, Canterbury,' observed Mrs. Markleham.

('Confound the woman!' said my aunt, 'she WON'T be quiet!')

'I never thought,' proceeded Annie, with a heightened colour, 'of any

worldly gain that my husband would bring to me. My young heart had no

room in its homage for any such poor reference. Mama, forgive me when

I say that it was you who first presented to my mind the thought that

anyone could wrong me, and wrong him, by such a cruel suspicion.'

'Me!' cried Mrs. Markleham.

('Ah! You, to be sure!' observed my aunt, 'and you can't fan it away, my

military friend!')

'It was the first unhappiness of my new life,' said Annie. 'It was the

first occasion of every unhappy moment I have known. These moments have

been more, of late, than I can count; but not--my generous husband!--not

for the reason you suppose; for in my heart there is not a thought, a

recollection, or a hope, that any power could separate from you!'

She raised her eyes, and clasped her hands, and looked as beautiful and

true, I thought, as any Spirit. The Doctor looked on her, henceforth, as

steadfastly as she on him.

'Mama is blameless,' she went on, 'of having ever urged you for herself,

and she is blameless in intention every way, I am sure,--but when I saw

how many importunate claims were pressed upon you in my name; how you

were traded on in my name; how generous you were, and how Mr. Wickfield,

who had your welfare very much at heart, resented it; the first sense

of my exposure to the mean suspicion that my tenderness was bought--and

sold to you, of all men on earth--fell upon me like unmerited disgrace,

in which I forced you to participate. I cannot tell you what it

was--mama cannot imagine what it was--to have this dread and trouble

always on my mind, yet know in my own soul that on my marriage-day I

crowned the love and honour of my life!'

'A specimen of the thanks one gets,' cried Mrs. Markleham, in tears,

'for taking care of one's family! I wish I was a Turk!'

('I wish you were, with all my heart--and in your native country!' said

my aunt.)

'It was at that time that mama was most solicitous about my Cousin

Maldon. I had liked him': she spoke softly, but without any hesitation:

'very much. We had been little lovers once. If circumstances had not

happened otherwise, I might have come to persuade myself that I really

loved him, and might have married him, and been most wretched. There can

be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.'

I pondered on those words, even while I was studiously attending to

what followed, as if they had some particular interest, or some strange

application that I could not divine. 'There can be no disparity in

marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose'--'no disparity in

marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.'

'There is nothing,' said Annie, 'that we have in common. I have long

found that there is nothing. If I were thankful to my husband for no

more, instead of for so much, I should be thankful to him for having

saved me from the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart.'

She stood quite still, before the Doctor, and spoke with an earnestness

that thrilled me. Yet her voice was just as quiet as before.

'When he was waiting to be the object of your munificence, so freely

bestowed for my sake, and when I was unhappy in the mercenary shape

I was made to wear, I thought it would have become him better to have

worked his own way on. I thought that if I had been he, I would have

tried to do it, at the cost of almost any hardship. But I thought no

worse of him, until the night of his departure for India. That night I

knew he had a false and thankless heart. I saw a double meaning, then,

in Mr. Wickfield's scrutiny of me. I perceived, for the first time, the

dark suspicion that shadowed my life.'

'Suspicion, Annie!' said the Doctor. 'No, no, no!'

'In your mind there was none, I know, my husband!' she returned. 'And

when I came to you, that night, to lay down all my load of shame and

grief, and knew that I had to tell that, underneath your roof, one of my

own kindred, to whom you had been a benefactor, for the love of me, had

spoken to me words that should have found no utterance, even if I had

been the weak and mercenary wretch he thought me--my mind revolted from

the taint the very tale conveyed. It died upon my lips, and from that

hour till now has never passed them.'

Mrs. Markleham, with a short groan, leaned back in her easy-chair; and

retired behind her fan, as if she were never coming out any more.

'I have never, but in your presence, interchanged a word with him from

that time; then, only when it has been necessary for the avoidance of

this explanation. Years have passed since he knew, from me, what his

situation here was. The kindnesses you have secretly done for his

advancement, and then disclosed to me, for my surprise and pleasure,

have been, you will believe, but aggravations of the unhappiness and

burden of my secret.'

She sunk down gently at the Doctor's feet, though he did his utmost to

prevent her; and said, looking up, tearfully, into his face:

'Do not speak to me yet! Let me say a little more! Right or wrong, if

this were to be done again, I think I should do just the same. You never

can know what it was to be devoted to you, with those old associations;

to find that anyone could be so hard as to suppose that the truth of my

heart was bartered away, and to be surrounded by appearances confirming

that belief. I was very young, and had no adviser. Between mama and

me, in all relating to you, there was a wide division. If I shrunk into

myself, hiding the disrespect I had undergone, it was because I honoured

you so much, and so much wished that you should honour me!'

'Annie, my pure heart!' said the Doctor, 'my dear girl!'

'A little more! a very few words more! I used to think there were so

many whom you might have married, who would not have brought such charge

and trouble on you, and who would have made your home a worthier home. I

used to be afraid that I had better have remained your pupil, and almost

your child. I used to fear that I was so unsuited to your learning and

wisdom. If all this made me shrink within myself (as indeed it did),

when I had that to tell, it was still because I honoured you so much,

and hoped that you might one day honour me.'

'That day has shone this long time, Annie,' said the Doctor, and can

have but one long night, my dear.'

'Another word! I afterwards meant--steadfastly meant, and purposed to

myself--to bear the whole weight of knowing the unworthiness of one

to whom you had been so good. And now a last word, dearest and best of

friends! The cause of the late change in you, which I have seen with

so much pain and sorrow, and have sometimes referred to my old

apprehension--at other times to lingering suppositions nearer to the

truth--has been made clear tonight; and by an accident I have also come

to know, tonight, the full measure of your noble trust in me, even

under that mistake. I do not hope that any love and duty I may render in

return, will ever make me worthy of your priceless confidence; but with

all this knowledge fresh upon me, I can lift my eyes to this dear

face, revered as a father's, loved as a husband's, sacred to me in

my childhood as a friend's, and solemnly declare that in my lightest

thought I have never wronged you; never wavered in the love and the

fidelity I owe you!'

She had her arms around the Doctor's neck, and he leant his head down

over her, mingling his grey hair with her dark brown tresses.

'Oh, hold me to your heart, my husband! Never cast me out! Do not think

or speak of disparity between us, for there is none, except in all my

many imperfections. Every succeeding year I have known this better, as I

have esteemed you more and more. Oh, take me to your heart, my husband,

for my love was founded on a rock, and it endures!'

In the silence that ensued, my aunt walked gravely up to Mr. Dick,

without at all hurrying herself, and gave him a hug and a sounding kiss.

And it was very fortunate, with a view to his credit, that she did so;

for I am confident that I detected him at that moment in the act of

making preparations to stand on one leg, as an appropriate expression of

delight.

'You are a very remarkable man, Dick!' said my aunt, with an air of

unqualified approbation; 'and never pretend to be anything else, for I

know better!'

With that, my aunt pulled him by the sleeve, and nodded to me; and we

three stole quietly out of the room, and came away.

'That's a settler for our military friend, at any rate,' said my aunt,

on the way home. 'I should sleep the better for that, if there was

nothing else to be glad of!'

'She was quite overcome, I am afraid,' said Mr. Dick, with great

commiseration.

'What! Did you ever see a crocodile overcome?' inquired my aunt.

'I don't think I ever saw a crocodile,' returned Mr. Dick, mildly.

'There never would have been anything the matter, if it hadn't been for

that old Animal,' said my aunt, with strong emphasis. 'It's very much

to be wished that some mothers would leave their daughters alone after

marriage, and not be so violently affectionate. They seem to think the

only return that can be made them for bringing an unfortunate young

woman into the world--God bless my soul, as if she asked to be brought,

or wanted to come!--is full liberty to worry her out of it again. What

are you thinking of, Trot?'

I was thinking of all that had been said. My mind was still running on

some of the expressions used. 'There can be no disparity in marriage

like unsuitability of mind and purpose.' 'The first mistaken impulse of

an undisciplined heart.' 'My love was founded on a rock.' But we were at

home; and the trodden leaves were lying under-foot, and the autumn wind

was blowing.

CHAPTER 46. INTELLIGENCE

I must have been married, if I may trust to my imperfect memory for

dates, about a year or so, when one evening, as I was returning from a

solitary walk, thinking of the book I was then writing--for my success

had steadily increased with my steady application, and I was engaged at

that time upon my first work of fiction--I came past Mrs. Steerforth's

house. I had often passed it before, during my residence in that

neighbourhood, though never when I could choose another road. Howbeit,

it did sometimes happen that it was not easy to find another, without

making a long circuit; and so I had passed that way, upon the whole,

pretty often.

I had never done more than glance at the house, as I went by with a

quickened step. It had been uniformly gloomy and dull. None of the best

rooms abutted on the road; and the narrow, heavily-framed old-fashioned

windows, never cheerful under any circumstances, looked very dismal,

close shut, and with their blinds always drawn down. There was a covered

way across a little paved court, to an entrance that was never used; and

there was one round staircase window, at odds with all the rest, and the

only one unshaded by a blind, which had the same unoccupied blank look.

I do not remember that I ever saw a light in all the house. If I had

been a casual passer-by, I should have probably supposed that some

childless person lay dead in it. If I had happily possessed no knowledge

of the place, and had seen it often in that changeless state, I should

have pleased my fancy with many ingenious speculations, I dare say.

As it was, I thought as little of it as I might. But my mind could not

go by it and leave it, as my body did; and it usually awakened a long

train of meditations. Coming before me, on this particular evening that

I mention, mingled with the childish recollections and later fancies,

the ghosts of half-formed hopes, the broken shadows of disappointments

dimly seen and understood, the blending of experience and imagination,

incidental to the occupation with which my thoughts had been busy, it

was more than commonly suggestive. I fell into a brown study as I walked

on, and a voice at my side made me start.

It was a woman's voice, too. I was not long in recollecting Mrs.

Steerforth's little parlour-maid, who had formerly worn blue ribbons in

her cap. She had taken them out now, to adapt herself, I suppose, to

the altered character of the house; and wore but one or two disconsolate

bows of sober brown.

'If you please, sir, would you have the goodness to walk in, and speak

to Miss Dartle?'

'Has Miss Dartle sent you for me?' I inquired.

'Not tonight, sir, but it's just the same. Miss Dartle saw you pass a

night or two ago; and I was to sit at work on the staircase, and when I

saw you pass again, to ask you to step in and speak to her.'

I turned back, and inquired of my conductor, as we went along, how Mrs.

Steerforth was. She said her lady was but poorly, and kept her own room

a good deal.

When we arrived at the house, I was directed to Miss Dartle in the

garden, and left to make my presence known to her myself. She was

sitting on a seat at one end of a kind of terrace, overlooking the great

city. It was a sombre evening, with a lurid light in the sky; and as

I saw the prospect scowling in the distance, with here and there some

larger object starting up into the sullen glare, I fancied it was no

inapt companion to the memory of this fierce woman.

She saw me as I advanced, and rose for a moment to receive me. I thought

her, then, still more colourless and thin than when I had seen her last;

the flashing eyes still brighter, and the scar still plainer.

Our meeting was not cordial. We had parted angrily on the last occasion;

and there was an air of disdain about her, which she took no pains to

conceal.

'I am told you wish to speak to me, Miss Dartle,' said I, standing near

her, with my hand upon the back of the seat, and declining her gesture

of invitation to sit down.

'If you please,' said she. 'Pray has this girl been found?'

'No.'

'And yet she has run away!'

I saw her thin lips working while she looked at me, as if they were

eager to load her with reproaches.

'Run away?' I repeated.

'Yes! From him,' she said, with a laugh. 'If she is not found, perhaps

she never will be found. She may be dead!'

The vaunting cruelty with which she met my glance, I never saw expressed

in any other face that ever I have seen.

'To wish her dead,' said I, 'may be the kindest wish that one of her own

sex could bestow upon her. I am glad that time has softened you so much,

Miss Dartle.'

She condescended to make no reply, but, turning on me with another

scornful laugh, said:

'The friends of this excellent and much-injured young lady are friends

of yours. You are their champion, and assert their rights. Do you wish

to know what is known of her?'

'Yes,' said I.

She rose with an ill-favoured smile, and taking a few steps towards

a wall of holly that was near at hand, dividing the lawn from a

kitchen-garden, said, in a louder voice, 'Come here!'--as if she were

calling to some unclean beast.

'You will restrain any demonstrative championship or vengeance in this

place, of course, Mr. Copperfield?' said she, looking over her shoulder

at me with the same expression.

I inclined my head, without knowing what she meant; and she said, 'Come

here!' again; and returned, followed by the respectable Mr. Littimer,

who, with undiminished respectability, made me a bow, and took up his

position behind her. The air of wicked grace: of triumph, in which,

strange to say, there was yet something feminine and alluring: with

which she reclined upon the seat between us, and looked at me, was

worthy of a cruel Princess in a Legend.

'Now,' said she, imperiously, without glancing at him, and touching

the old wound as it throbbed: perhaps, in this instance, with pleasure

rather than pain. 'Tell Mr. Copperfield about the flight.'

'Mr. James and myself, ma'am--'

'Don't address yourself to me!' she interrupted with a frown.

'Mr. James and myself, sir--'

'Nor to me, if you please,' said I.

Mr. Littimer, without being at all discomposed, signified by a slight

obeisance, that anything that was most agreeable to us was most

agreeable to him; and began again.

'Mr. James and myself have been abroad with the young woman, ever

since she left Yarmouth under Mr. james's protection. We have been in a

variety of places, and seen a deal of foreign country. We have been in

France, Switzerland, Italy, in fact, almost all parts.'

He looked at the back of the seat, as if he were addressing himself to

that; and softly played upon it with his hands, as if he were striking

chords upon a dumb piano.

'Mr. James took quite uncommonly to the young woman; and was more

settled, for a length of time, than I have known him to be since I have

been in his service. The young woman was very improvable, and spoke the

languages; and wouldn't have been known for the same country-person. I

noticed that she was much admired wherever we went.'

Miss Dartle put her hand upon her side. I saw him steal a glance at her,

and slightly smile to himself.

'Very much admired, indeed, the young woman was. What with her dress;

what with the air and sun; what with being made so much of; what with

this, that, and the other; her merits really attracted general notice.'

He made a short pause. Her eyes wandered restlessly over the distant

prospect, and she bit her nether lip to stop that busy mouth.

Taking his hands from the seat, and placing one of them within the

other, as he settled himself on one leg, Mr. Littimer proceeded, with

his eyes cast down, and his respectable head a little advanced, and a

little on one side:

'The young woman went on in this manner for some time, being

occasionally low in her spirits, until I think she began to weary Mr.

James by giving way to her low spirits and tempers of that kind; and

things were not so comfortable. Mr. James he began to be restless again.

The more restless he got, the worse she got; and I must say, for myself,

that I had a very difficult time of it indeed between the two. Still

matters were patched up here, and made good there, over and over again;

and altogether lasted, I am sure, for a longer time than anybody could

have expected.'

Recalling her eyes from the distance, she looked at me again now, with

her former air. Mr. Littimer, clearing his throat behind his hand with a

respectable short cough, changed legs, and went on:

'At last, when there had been, upon the whole, a good many words and

reproaches, Mr. James he set off one morning, from the neighbourhood of

Naples, where we had a villa (the young woman being very partial to

the sea), and, under pretence of coming back in a day or so, left it in

charge with me to break it out, that, for the general happiness of all

concerned, he was'--here an interruption of the short cough--'gone. But

Mr. James, I must say, certainly did behave extremely honourable; for

he proposed that the young woman should marry a very respectable person,

who was fully prepared to overlook the past, and who was, at least, as

good as anybody the young woman could have aspired to in a regular way:

her connexions being very common.'

He changed legs again, and wetted his lips. I was convinced that the

scoundrel spoke of himself, and I saw my conviction reflected in Miss

Dartle's face.

'This I also had it in charge to communicate. I was willing to do

anything to relieve Mr. James from his difficulty, and to restore

harmony between himself and an affectionate parent, who has undergone

so much on his account. Therefore I undertook the commission. The

young woman's violence when she came to, after I broke the fact of his

departure, was beyond all expectations. She was quite mad, and had to

be held by force; or, if she couldn't have got to a knife, or got to the

sea, she'd have beaten her head against the marble floor.'

Miss Dartle, leaning back upon the seat, with a light of exultation in

her face, seemed almost to caress the sounds this fellow had uttered.

'But when I came to the second part of what had been entrusted to me,'

said Mr. Littimer, rubbing his hands uneasily, 'which anybody might

have supposed would have been, at all events, appreciated as a kind

intention, then the young woman came out in her true colours. A more

outrageous person I never did see. Her conduct was surprisingly bad. She

had no more gratitude, no more feeling, no more patience, no more reason

in her, than a stock or a stone. If I hadn't been upon my guard, I am

convinced she would have had my blood.'

'I think the better of her for it,' said I, indignantly.

Mr. Littimer bent his head, as much as to say, 'Indeed, sir? But you're

young!' and resumed his narrative.

'It was necessary, in short, for a time, to take away everything nigh

her, that she could do herself, or anybody else, an injury with, and

to shut her up close. Notwithstanding which, she got out in the night;

forced the lattice of a window, that I had nailed up myself; dropped on

a vine that was trailed below; and never has been seen or heard of, to

my knowledge, since.'

'She is dead, perhaps,' said Miss Dartle, with a smile, as if she could

have spurned the body of the ruined girl.

'She may have drowned herself, miss,' returned Mr. Littimer, catching at

an excuse for addressing himself to somebody. 'It's very possible. Or,

she may have had assistance from the boatmen, and the boatmen's wives

and children. Being given to low company, she was very much in the

habit of talking to them on the beach, Miss Dartle, and sitting by their

boats. I have known her do it, when Mr. James has been away, whole days.

Mr. James was far from pleased to find out, once, that she had told the

children she was a boatman's daughter, and that in her own country, long

ago, she had roamed about the beach, like them.'

Oh, Emily! Unhappy beauty! What a picture rose before me of her sitting

on the far-off shore, among the children like herself when she was

innocent, listening to little voices such as might have called her

Mother had she been a poor man's wife; and to the great voice of the

sea, with its eternal 'Never more!'

'When it was clear that nothing could be done, Miss Dartle--'

'Did I tell you not to speak to me?' she said, with stern contempt.

'You spoke to me, miss,' he replied. 'I beg your pardon. But it is my

service to obey.'

'Do your service,' she returned. 'Finish your story, and go!'

'When it was clear,' he said, with infinite respectability and an

obedient bow, 'that she was not to be found, I went to Mr. James, at the

place where it had been agreed that I should write to him, and informed

him of what had occurred. Words passed between us in consequence, and

I felt it due to my character to leave him. I could bear, and I have

borne, a great deal from Mr. James; but he insulted me too far. He hurt

me. Knowing the unfortunate difference between himself and his mother,

and what her anxiety of mind was likely to be, I took the liberty of

coming home to England, and relating--'

'For money which I paid him,' said Miss Dartle to me.

'Just so, ma'am--and relating what I knew. I am not aware,' said Mr.

Littimer, after a moment's reflection, 'that there is anything else.

I am at present out of employment, and should be happy to meet with a

respectable situation.'

Miss Dartle glanced at me, as though she would inquire if there were

anything that I desired to ask. As there was something which had

occurred to my mind, I said in reply:

'I could wish to know from this--creature,' I could not bring myself

to utter any more conciliatory word, 'whether they intercepted a letter

that was written to her from home, or whether he supposes that she

received it.'

He remained calm and silent, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and the

tip of every finger of his right hand delicately poised against the tip

of every finger of his left.

Miss Dartle turned her head disdainfully towards him.

'I beg your pardon, miss,' he said, awakening from his abstraction,

'but, however submissive to you, I have my position, though a servant.

Mr. Copperfield and you, miss, are different people. If Mr. Copperfield

wishes to know anything from me, I take the liberty of reminding Mr.

Copperfield that he can put a question to me. I have a character to

maintain.'

After a momentary struggle with myself, I turned my eyes upon him, and

said, 'You have heard my question. Consider it addressed to yourself, if

you choose. What answer do you make?'

'Sir,' he rejoined, with an occasional separation and reunion of those

delicate tips, 'my answer must be qualified; because, to betray Mr.

james's confidence to his mother, and to betray it to you, are two

different actions. It is not probable, I consider, that Mr. James would

encourage the receipt of letters likely to increase low spirits and

unpleasantness; but further than that, sir, I should wish to avoid

going.'

'Is that all?' inquired Miss Dartle of me.

I indicated that I had nothing more to say. 'Except,' I added, as I

saw him moving off, 'that I understand this fellow's part in the wicked

story, and that, as I shall make it known to the honest man who has been

her father from her childhood, I would recommend him to avoid going too

much into public.'

He had stopped the moment I began, and had listened with his usual

repose of manner.

'Thank you, sir. But you'll excuse me if I say, sir, that there are

neither slaves nor slave-drivers in this country, and that people are

not allowed to take the law into their own hands. If they do, it is

more to their own peril, I believe, than to other people's. Consequently

speaking, I am not at all afraid of going wherever I may wish, sir.'

With that, he made a polite bow; and, with another to Miss Dartle, went

away through the arch in the wall of holly by which he had come. Miss

Dartle and I regarded each other for a little while in silence; her

manner being exactly what it was, when she had produced the man.

'He says besides,' she observed, with a slow curling of her lip, 'that

his master, as he hears, is coasting Spain; and this done, is away

to gratify his seafaring tastes till he is weary. But this is of no

interest to you. Between these two proud persons, mother and son, there

is a wider breach than before, and little hope of its healing, for they

are one at heart, and time makes each more obstinate and imperious.

Neither is this of any interest to you; but it introduces what I wish to

say. This devil whom you make an angel of. I mean this low girl whom he

picked out of the tide-mud,' with her black eyes full upon me, and her

passionate finger up, 'may be alive,--for I believe some common things

are hard to die. If she is, you will desire to have a pearl of such

price found and taken care of. We desire that, too; that he may not

by any chance be made her prey again. So far, we are united in one

interest; and that is why I, who would do her any mischief that so

coarse a wretch is capable of feeling, have sent for you to hear what

you have heard.'

I saw, by the change in her face, that someone was advancing behind me.

It was Mrs. Steerforth, who gave me her hand more coldly than of yore,

and with an augmentation of her former stateliness of manner, but still,

I perceived--and I was touched by it--with an ineffaceable remembrance

of my old love for her son. She was greatly altered. Her fine figure was

far less upright, her handsome face was deeply marked, and her hair was

almost white. But when she sat down on the seat, she was a handsome lady

still; and well I knew the bright eye with its lofty look, that had been

a light in my very dreams at school.

'Is Mr. Copperfield informed of everything, Rosa?'

'Yes.'

'And has he heard Littimer himself?'

'Yes; I have told him why you wished it.' 'You are a good girl. I have

had some slight correspondence with your former friend, sir,' addressing

me, 'but it has not restored his sense of duty or natural obligation.

Therefore I have no other object in this, than what Rosa has mentioned.

If, by the course which may relieve the mind of the decent man you

brought here (for whom I am sorry--I can say no more), my son may be

saved from again falling into the snares of a designing enemy, well!'

She drew herself up, and sat looking straight before her, far away.

'Madam,' I said respectfully, 'I understand. I assure you I am in no

danger of putting any strained construction on your motives. But I must

say, even to you, having known this injured family from childhood,

that if you suppose the girl, so deeply wronged, has not been cruelly

deluded, and would not rather die a hundred deaths than take a cup of

water from your son's hand now, you cherish a terrible mistake.'

'Well, Rosa, well!' said Mrs. Steerforth, as the other was about to

interpose, 'it is no matter. Let it be. You are married, sir, I am

told?'

I answered that I had been some time married.

'And are doing well? I hear little in the quiet life I lead, but I

understand you are beginning to be famous.'

'I have been very fortunate,' I said, 'and find my name connected with

some praise.'

'You have no mother?'--in a softened voice.

'No.'

'It is a pity,' she returned. 'She would have been proud of you. Good

night!'

I took the hand she held out with a dignified, unbending air, and it

was as calm in mine as if her breast had been at peace. Her pride could

still its very pulses, it appeared, and draw the placid veil before

her face, through which she sat looking straight before her on the far

distance.

As I moved away from them along the terrace, I could not help observing

how steadily they both sat gazing on the prospect, and how it thickened

and closed around them. Here and there, some early lamps were seen to

twinkle in the distant city; and in the eastern quarter of the sky

the lurid light still hovered. But, from the greater part of the broad

valley interposed, a mist was rising like a sea, which, mingling with

the darkness, made it seem as if the gathering waters would encompass

them. I have reason to remember this, and think of it with awe; for

before I looked upon those two again, a stormy sea had risen to their

feet.

Reflecting on what had been thus told me, I felt it right that it should

be communicated to Mr. Peggotty. On the following evening I went into

London in quest of him. He was always wandering about from place to

place, with his one object of recovering his niece before him; but was

more in London than elsewhere. Often and often, now, had I seen him in

the dead of night passing along the streets, searching, among the few

who loitered out of doors at those untimely hours, for what he dreaded

to find.

He kept a lodging over the little chandler's shop in Hungerford Market,

which I have had occasion to mention more than once, and from which he

first went forth upon his errand of mercy. Hither I directed my walk. On

making inquiry for him, I learned from the people of the house that he

had not gone out yet, and I should find him in his room upstairs.

He was sitting reading by a window in which he kept a few plants. The

room was very neat and orderly. I saw in a moment that it was always

kept prepared for her reception, and that he never went out but he

thought it possible he might bring her home. He had not heard my tap

at the door, and only raised his eyes when I laid my hand upon his

shoulder.

'Mas'r Davy! Thankee, sir! thankee hearty, for this visit! Sit ye down.

You're kindly welcome, sir!'

'Mr. Peggotty,' said I, taking the chair he handed me, 'don't expect

much! I have heard some news.'

'Of Em'ly!'

He put his hand, in a nervous manner, on his mouth, and turned pale, as

he fixed his eyes on mine.

'It gives no clue to where she is; but she is not with him.'

He sat down, looking intently at me, and listened in profound silence

to all I had to tell. I well remember the sense of dignity, beauty even,

with which the patient gravity of his face impressed me, when, having

gradually removed his eyes from mine, he sat looking downward, leaning

his forehead on his hand. He offered no interruption, but remained

throughout perfectly still. He seemed to pursue her figure through

the narrative, and to let every other shape go by him, as if it were

nothing.

When I had done, he shaded his face, and continued silent. I looked out

of the window for a little while, and occupied myself with the plants.

'How do you fare to feel about it, Mas'r Davy?' he inquired at length.

'I think that she is living,' I replied.

'I doen't know. Maybe the first shock was too rough, and in the wildness

of her art--! That there blue water as she used to speak on. Could she

have thowt o' that so many year, because it was to be her grave!'

He said this, musing, in a low, frightened voice; and walked across the

little room.

'And yet,' he added, 'Mas'r Davy, I have felt so sure as she was

living--I have know'd, awake and sleeping, as it was so trew that I

should find her--I have been so led on by it, and held up by it--that I

doen't believe I can have been deceived. No! Em'ly's alive!'

He put his hand down firmly on the table, and set his sunburnt face into

a resolute expression.

'My niece, Em'ly, is alive, sir!' he said, steadfastly. 'I doen't know

wheer it comes from, or how 'tis, but I am told as she's alive!'

He looked almost like a man inspired, as he said it. I waited for a

few moments, until he could give me his undivided attention; and then

proceeded to explain the precaution, that, it had occurred to me last

night, it would be wise to take.

'Now, my dear friend--'I began.

'Thankee, thankee, kind sir,' he said, grasping my hand in both of his.

'If she should make her way to London, which is likely--for where could

she lose herself so readily as in this vast city; and what would she

wish to do, but lose and hide herself, if she does not go home?--'

'And she won't go home,' he interposed, shaking his head mournfully. 'If

she had left of her own accord, she might; not as It was, sir.'

'If she should come here,' said I, 'I believe there is one person,

here, more likely to discover her than any other in the world. Do

you remember--hear what I say, with fortitude--think of your great

object!--do you remember Martha?'

'Of our town?'

I needed no other answer than his face.

'Do you know that she is in London?'

'I have seen her in the streets,' he answered, with a shiver.

'But you don't know,' said I, 'that Emily was charitable to her, with

Ham's help, long before she fled from home. Nor, that, when we met one

night, and spoke together in the room yonder, over the way, she listened

at the door.'

'Mas'r Davy!' he replied in astonishment. 'That night when it snew so

hard?'

'That night. I have never seen her since. I went back, after parting

from you, to speak to her, but she was gone. I was unwilling to mention

her to you then, and I am now; but she is the person of whom I speak,

and with whom I think we should communicate. Do you understand?'

'Too well, sir,' he replied. We had sunk our voices, almost to a

whisper, and continued to speak in that tone.

'You say you have seen her. Do you think that you could find her? I

could only hope to do so by chance.'

'I think, Mas'r Davy, I know wheer to look.'

'It is dark. Being together, shall we go out now, and try to find her

tonight?'

He assented, and prepared to accompany me. Without appearing to observe

what he was doing, I saw how carefully he adjusted the little room,

put a candle ready and the means of lighting it, arranged the bed, and

finally took out of a drawer one of her dresses (I remember to have

seen her wear it), neatly folded with some other garments, and a bonnet,

which he placed upon a chair. He made no allusion to these clothes,

neither did I. There they had been waiting for her, many and many a

night, no doubt.

'The time was, Mas'r Davy,' he said, as we came downstairs, 'when I

thowt this girl, Martha, a'most like the dirt underneath my Em'ly's

feet. God forgive me, theer's a difference now!'

As we went along, partly to hold him in conversation, and partly to

satisfy myself, I asked him about Ham. He said, almost in the same words

as formerly, that Ham was just the same, 'wearing away his life with

kiender no care nohow for 't; but never murmuring, and liked by all'.

I asked him what he thought Ham's state of mind was, in reference to the

cause of their misfortunes? Whether he believed it was dangerous? What

he supposed, for example, Ham would do, if he and Steerforth ever should

encounter?

'I doen't know, sir,' he replied. 'I have thowt of it oftentimes, but I

can't awize myself of it, no matters.'

I recalled to his remembrance the morning after her departure, when we

were all three on the beach. 'Do you recollect,' said I, 'a certain wild

way in which he looked out to sea, and spoke about "the end of it"?'

'Sure I do!' said he.

'What do you suppose he meant?'

'Mas'r Davy,' he replied, 'I've put the question to myself a mort o'

times, and never found no answer. And theer's one curious thing--that,

though he is so pleasant, I wouldn't fare to feel comfortable to try and

get his mind upon 't. He never said a wured to me as warn't as dootiful

as dootiful could be, and it ain't likely as he'd begin to speak any

other ways now; but it's fur from being fleet water in his mind, where

them thowts lays. It's deep, sir, and I can't see down.'

'You are right,' said I, 'and that has sometimes made me anxious.'

'And me too, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined. 'Even more so, I do assure you,

than his ventersome ways, though both belongs to the alteration in him.

I doen't know as he'd do violence under any circumstances, but I hope as

them two may be kep asunders.'

We had come, through Temple Bar, into the city. Conversing no more now,

and walking at my side, he yielded himself up to the one aim of his

devoted life, and went on, with that hushed concentration of his

faculties which would have made his figure solitary in a multitude.

We were not far from Blackfriars Bridge, when he turned his head and

pointed to a solitary female figure flitting along the opposite side of

the street. I knew it, readily, to be the figure that we sought.

We crossed the road, and were pressing on towards her, when it occurred

to me that she might be more disposed to feel a woman's interest in the

lost girl, if we spoke to her in a quieter place, aloof from the crowd,

and where we should be less observed. I advised my companion, therefore,

that we should not address her yet, but follow her; consulting in this,

likewise, an indistinct desire I had, to know where she went.

He acquiescing, we followed at a distance: never losing sight of her,

but never caring to come very near, as she frequently looked about.

Once, she stopped to listen to a band of music; and then we stopped too.

She went on a long way. Still we went on. It was evident, from the

manner in which she held her course, that she was going to some fixed

destination; and this, and her keeping in the busy streets, and I

suppose the strange fascination in the secrecy and mystery of so

following anyone, made me adhere to my first purpose. At length she

turned into a dull, dark street, where the noise and crowd were lost;

and I said, 'We may speak to her now'; and, mending our pace, we went

after her.

CHAPTER 47. MARTHA

We were now down in Westminster. We had turned back to follow her,

having encountered her coming towards us; and Westminster Abbey was

the point at which she passed from the lights and noise of the leading

streets. She proceeded so quickly, when she got free of the two currents

of passengers setting towards and from the bridge, that, between this

and the advance she had of us when she struck off, we were in the narrow

water-side street by Millbank before we came up with her. At that moment

she crossed the road, as if to avoid the footsteps that she heard so

close behind; and, without looking back, passed on even more rapidly.

A glimpse of the river through a dull gateway, where some waggons were

housed for the night, seemed to arrest my feet. I touched my companion

without speaking, and we both forbore to cross after her, and both

followed on that opposite side of the way; keeping as quietly as we

could in the shadow of the houses, but keeping very near her.

There was, and is when I write, at the end of that low-lying street,

a dilapidated little wooden building, probably an obsolete old

ferry-house. Its position is just at that point where the street ceases,

and the road begins to lie between a row of houses and the river. As

soon as she came here, and saw the water, she stopped as if she had come

to her destination; and presently went slowly along by the brink of the

river, looking intently at it.

All the way here, I had supposed that she was going to some house;

indeed, I had vaguely entertained the hope that the house might be in

some way associated with the lost girl. But that one dark glimpse of the

river, through the gateway, had instinctively prepared me for her going

no farther.

The neighbourhood was a dreary one at that time; as oppressive, sad, and

solitary by night, as any about London. There were neither wharves nor

houses on the melancholy waste of road near the great blank Prison. A

sluggish ditch deposited its mud at the prison walls. Coarse grass and

rank weeds straggled over all the marshy land in the vicinity. In one

part, carcases of houses, inauspiciously begun and never finished,

rotted away. In another, the ground was cumbered with rusty iron

monsters of steam-boilers, wheels, cranks, pipes, furnaces, paddles,

anchors, diving-bells, windmill-sails, and I know not what strange

objects, accumulated by some speculator, and grovelling in the dust,

underneath which--having sunk into the soil of their own weight in wet

weather--they had the appearance of vainly trying to hide themselves.

The clash and glare of sundry fiery Works upon the river-side, arose

by night to disturb everything except the heavy and unbroken smoke that

poured out of their chimneys. Slimy gaps and causeways, winding among

old wooden piles, with a sickly substance clinging to the latter, like

green hair, and the rags of last year's handbills offering rewards for

drowned men fluttering above high-water mark, led down through the ooze

and slush to the ebb-tide. There was a story that one of the pits

dug for the dead in the time of the Great Plague was hereabout; and

a blighting influence seemed to have proceeded from it over the whole

place. Or else it looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that

nightmare condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream.

As if she were a part of the refuse it had cast out, and left to

corruption and decay, the girl we had followed strayed down to the

river's brink, and stood in the midst of this night-picture, lonely and

still, looking at the water.

There were some boats and barges astrand in the mud, and these enabled

us to come within a few yards of her without being seen. I then signed

to Mr. Peggotty to remain where he was, and emerged from their shade to

speak to her. I did not approach her solitary figure without trembling;

for this gloomy end to her determined walk, and the way in which she

stood, almost within the cavernous shadow of the iron bridge, looking

at the lights crookedly reflected in the strong tide, inspired a dread

within me.

I think she was talking to herself. I am sure, although absorbed in

gazing at the water, that her shawl was off her shoulders, and that she

was muffling her hands in it, in an unsettled and bewildered way, more

like the action of a sleep-walker than a waking person. I know, and

never can forget, that there was that in her wild manner which gave me

no assurance but that she would sink before my eyes, until I had her arm

within my grasp.

At the same moment I said 'Martha!'

She uttered a terrified scream, and struggled with me with such strength

that I doubt if I could have held her alone. But a stronger hand than

mine was laid upon her; and when she raised her frightened eyes and saw

whose it was, she made but one more effort and dropped down between us.

We carried her away from the water to where there were some dry stones,

and there laid her down, crying and moaning. In a little while she sat

among the stones, holding her wretched head with both her hands.

'Oh, the river!' she cried passionately. 'Oh, the river!'

'Hush, hush!' said I. 'Calm yourself.'

But she still repeated the same words, continually exclaiming, 'Oh, the

river!' over and over again.

'I know it's like me!' she exclaimed. 'I know that I belong to it.

I know that it's the natural company of such as I am! It comes from

country places, where there was once no harm in it--and it creeps

through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable--and it goes away,

like my life, to a great sea, that is always troubled--and I feel that

I must go with it!' I have never known what despair was, except in the

tone of those words.

'I can't keep away from it. I can't forget it. It haunts me day and

night. It's the only thing in all the world that I am fit for, or that's

fit for me. Oh, the dreadful river!'

The thought passed through my mind that in the face of my companion,

as he looked upon her without speech or motion, I might have read his

niece's history, if I had known nothing of it. I never saw, in any

painting or reality, horror and compassion so impressively blended. He

shook as if he would have fallen; and his hand--I touched it with my

own, for his appearance alarmed me--was deadly cold.

'She is in a state of frenzy,' I whispered to him. 'She will speak

differently in a little time.'

I don't know what he would have said in answer. He made some motion with

his mouth, and seemed to think he had spoken; but he had only pointed to

her with his outstretched hand.

A new burst of crying came upon her now, in which she once more hid

her face among the stones, and lay before us, a prostrate image of

humiliation and ruin. Knowing that this state must pass, before we could

speak to her with any hope, I ventured to restrain him when he would

have raised her, and we stood by in silence until she became more

tranquil.

'Martha,' said I then, leaning down, and helping her to rise--she seemed

to want to rise as if with the intention of going away, but she was

weak, and leaned against a boat. 'Do you know who this is, who is with

me?'

She said faintly, 'Yes.'

'Do you know that we have followed you a long way tonight?'

She shook her head. She looked neither at him nor at me, but stood in

a humble attitude, holding her bonnet and shawl in one hand, without

appearing conscious of them, and pressing the other, clenched, against

her forehead.

'Are you composed enough,' said I, 'to speak on the subject which so

interested you--I hope Heaven may remember it!--that snowy night?'

Her sobs broke out afresh, and she murmured some inarticulate thanks to

me for not having driven her away from the door.

'I want to say nothing for myself,' she said, after a few moments. 'I

am bad, I am lost. I have no hope at all. But tell him, sir,' she had

shrunk away from him, 'if you don't feel too hard to me to do it, that

I never was in any way the cause of his misfortune.' 'It has never been

attributed to you,' I returned, earnestly responding to her earnestness.

'It was you, if I don't deceive myself,' she said, in a broken voice,

'that came into the kitchen, the night she took such pity on me; was so

gentle to me; didn't shrink away from me like all the rest, and gave me

such kind help! Was it you, sir?'

'It was,' said I.

'I should have been in the river long ago,' she said, glancing at it

with a terrible expression, 'if any wrong to her had been upon my mind.

I never could have kept out of it a single winter's night, if I had not

been free of any share in that!'

'The cause of her flight is too well understood,' I said. 'You are

innocent of any part in it, we thoroughly believe,--we know.'

'Oh, I might have been much the better for her, if I had had a better

heart!' exclaimed the girl, with most forlorn regret; 'for she was

always good to me! She never spoke a word to me but what was pleasant

and right. Is it likely I would try to make her what I am myself,

knowing what I am myself, so well? When I lost everything that makes

life dear, the worst of all my thoughts was that I was parted for ever

from her!'

Mr. Peggotty, standing with one hand on the gunwale of the boat, and his

eyes cast down, put his disengaged hand before his face.

'And when I heard what had happened before that snowy night, from some

belonging to our town,' cried Martha, 'the bitterest thought in all my

mind was, that the people would remember she once kept company with me,

and would say I had corrupted her! When, Heaven knows, I would have died

to have brought back her good name!'

Long unused to any self-control, the piercing agony of her remorse and

grief was terrible.

'To have died, would not have been much--what can I say?---I would

have lived!' she cried. 'I would have lived to be old, in the wretched

streets--and to wander about, avoided, in the dark--and to see the day

break on the ghastly line of houses, and remember how the same sun used

to shine into my room, and wake me once--I would have done even that, to

save her!'

Sinking on the stones, she took some in each hand, and clenched them

up, as if she would have ground them. She writhed into some new posture

constantly: stiffening her arms, twisting them before her face, as

though to shut out from her eyes the little light there was, and

drooping her head, as if it were heavy with insupportable recollections.

'What shall I ever do!' she said, fighting thus with her despair. 'How

can I go on as I am, a solitary curse to myself, a living disgrace to

everyone I come near!' Suddenly she turned to my companion. 'Stamp upon

me, kill me! When she was your pride, you would have thought I had

done her harm if I had brushed against her in the street. You can't

believe--why should you?---a syllable that comes out of my lips. It

would be a burning shame upon you, even now, if she and I exchanged a

word. I don't complain. I don't say she and I are alike--I know there

is a long, long way between us. I only say, with all my guilt and

wretchedness upon my head, that I am grateful to her from my soul, and

love her. Oh, don't think that all the power I had of loving anything is

quite worn out! Throw me away, as all the world does. Kill me for being

what I am, and having ever known her; but don't think that of me!'

He looked upon her, while she made this supplication, in a wild

distracted manner; and, when she was silent, gently raised her.

'Martha,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'God forbid as I should judge you. Forbid

as I, of all men, should do that, my girl! You doen't know half the

change that's come, in course of time, upon me, when you think it

likely. Well!' he paused a moment, then went on. 'You doen't understand

how 'tis that this here gentleman and me has wished to speak to you. You

doen't understand what 'tis we has afore us. Listen now!'

His influence upon her was complete. She stood, shrinkingly, before him,

as if she were afraid to meet his eyes; but her passionate sorrow was

quite hushed and mute.

'If you heerd,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'owt of what passed between Mas'r

Davy and me, th' night when it snew so hard, you know as I have

been--wheer not--fur to seek my dear niece. My dear niece,' he repeated

steadily. 'Fur she's more dear to me now, Martha, than she was dear

afore.'

She put her hands before her face; but otherwise remained quiet.

'I have heerd her tell,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'as you was early left

fatherless and motherless, with no friend fur to take, in a rough

seafaring-way, their place. Maybe you can guess that if you'd had such

a friend, you'd have got into a way of being fond of him in course of

time, and that my niece was kiender daughter-like to me.'

As she was silently trembling, he put her shawl carefully about her,

taking it up from the ground for that purpose.

'Whereby,' said he, 'I know, both as she would go to the wureld's

furdest end with me, if she could once see me again; and that she would

fly to the wureld's furdest end to keep off seeing me. For though she

ain't no call to doubt my love, and doen't--and doen't,' he repeated,

with a quiet assurance of the truth of what he said, 'there's shame

steps in, and keeps betwixt us.'

I read, in every word of his plain impressive way of delivering himself,

new evidence of his having thought of this one topic, in every feature

it presented.

'According to our reckoning,' he proceeded, 'Mas'r Davy's here, and

mine, she is like, one day, to make her own poor solitary course to

London. We believe--Mas'r Davy, me, and all of us--that you are as

innocent of everything that has befell her, as the unborn child. You've

spoke of her being pleasant, kind, and gentle to you. Bless her, I knew

she was! I knew she always was, to all. You're thankful to her, and you

love her. Help us all you can to find her, and may Heaven reward you!'

She looked at him hastily, and for the first time, as if she were

doubtful of what he had said.

'Will you trust me?' she asked, in a low voice of astonishment.

'Full and free!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'To speak to her, if I should ever find her; shelter her, if I have any

shelter to divide with her; and then, without her knowledge, come to

you, and bring you to her?' she asked hurriedly.

We both replied together, 'Yes!'

She lifted up her eyes, and solemnly declared that she would devote

herself to this task, fervently and faithfully. That she would never

waver in it, never be diverted from it, never relinquish it, while there

was any chance of hope. If she were not true to it, might the object

she now had in life, which bound her to something devoid of evil, in its

passing away from her, leave her more forlorn and more despairing, if

that were possible, than she had been upon the river's brink that night;

and then might all help, human and Divine, renounce her evermore!

She did not raise her voice above her breath, or address us, but said

this to the night sky; then stood profoundly quiet, looking at the

gloomy water.

We judged it expedient, now, to tell her all we knew; which I recounted

at length. She listened with great attention, and with a face that often

changed, but had the same purpose in all its varying expressions. Her

eyes occasionally filled with tears, but those she repressed. It seemed

as if her spirit were quite altered, and she could not be too quiet.

She asked, when all was told, where we were to be communicated with, if

occasion should arise. Under a dull lamp in the road, I wrote our two

addresses on a leaf of my pocket-book, which I tore out and gave to

her, and which she put in her poor bosom. I asked her where she lived

herself. She said, after a pause, in no place long. It were better not

to know.

Mr. Peggotty suggesting to me, in a whisper, what had already occurred

to myself, I took out my purse; but I could not prevail upon her to

accept any money, nor could I exact any promise from her that she would

do so at another time. I represented to her that Mr. Peggotty could

not be called, for one in his condition, poor; and that the idea of her

engaging in this search, while depending on her own resources, shocked

us both. She continued steadfast. In this particular, his influence

upon her was equally powerless with mine. She gratefully thanked him but

remained inexorable.

'There may be work to be got,' she said. 'I'll try.'

'At least take some assistance,' I returned, 'until you have tried.'

'I could not do what I have promised, for money,' she replied. 'I could

not take it, if I was starving. To give me money would be to take away

your trust, to take away the object that you have given me, to take away

the only certain thing that saves me from the river.'

'In the name of the great judge,' said I, 'before whom you and all of us

must stand at His dread time, dismiss that terrible idea! We can all do

some good, if we will.'

She trembled, and her lip shook, and her face was paler, as she

answered:

'It has been put into your hearts, perhaps, to save a wretched creature

for repentance. I am afraid to think so; it seems too bold. If any good

should come of me, I might begin to hope; for nothing but harm has ever

come of my deeds yet. I am to be trusted, for the first time in a long

while, with my miserable life, on account of what you have given me to

try for. I know no more, and I can say no more.'

Again she repressed the tears that had begun to flow; and, putting out

her trembling hand, and touching Mr. Peggotty, as if there was some

healing virtue in him, went away along the desolate road. She had been

ill, probably for a long time. I observed, upon that closer opportunity

of observation, that she was worn and haggard, and that her sunken eyes

expressed privation and endurance.

We followed her at a short distance, our way lying in the same

direction, until we came back into the lighted and populous streets. I

had such implicit confidence in her declaration, that I then put it to

Mr. Peggotty, whether it would not seem, in the onset, like distrusting

her, to follow her any farther. He being of the same mind, and equally

reliant on her, we suffered her to take her own road, and took ours,

which was towards Highgate. He accompanied me a good part of the way;

and when we parted, with a prayer for the success of this fresh effort,

there was a new and thoughtful compassion in him that I was at no loss

to interpret.

It was midnight when I arrived at home. I had reached my own gate, and

was standing listening for the deep bell of St. Paul's, the sound

of which I thought had been borne towards me among the multitude of

striking clocks, when I was rather surprised to see that the door of my

aunt's cottage was open, and that a faint light in the entry was shining

out across the road.

Thinking that my aunt might have relapsed into one of her old alarms,

and might be watching the progress of some imaginary conflagration in

the distance, I went to speak to her. It was with very great surprise

that I saw a man standing in her little garden.

He had a glass and bottle in his hand, and was in the act of drinking. I

stopped short, among the thick foliage outside, for the moon was up now,

though obscured; and I recognized the man whom I had once supposed to be

a delusion of Mr. Dick's, and had once encountered with my aunt in the

streets of the city.

He was eating as well as drinking, and seemed to eat with a hungry

appetite. He seemed curious regarding the cottage, too, as if it were

the first time he had seen it. After stooping to put the bottle on the

ground, he looked up at the windows, and looked about; though with a

covert and impatient air, as if he was anxious to be gone.

The light in the passage was obscured for a moment, and my aunt came

out. She was agitated, and told some money into his hand. I heard it

chink.

'What's the use of this?' he demanded.

'I can spare no more,' returned my aunt.

'Then I can't go,' said he. 'Here! You may take it back!'

'You bad man,' returned my aunt, with great emotion; 'how can you use me

so? But why do I ask? It is because you know how weak I am! What have

I to do, to free myself for ever of your visits, but to abandon you to

your deserts?'

'And why don't you abandon me to my deserts?' said he.

'You ask me why!' returned my aunt. 'What a heart you must have!'

He stood moodily rattling the money, and shaking his head, until at

length he said:

'Is this all you mean to give me, then?'

'It is all I CAN give you,' said my aunt. 'You know I have had losses,

and am poorer than I used to be. I have told you so. Having got it, why

do you give me the pain of looking at you for another moment, and seeing

what you have become?'

'I have become shabby enough, if you mean that,' he said. 'I lead the

life of an owl.'

'You stripped me of the greater part of all I ever had,' said my aunt.

'You closed my heart against the whole world, years and years. You

treated me falsely, ungratefully, and cruelly. Go, and repent of it.

Don't add new injuries to the long, long list of injuries you have done

me!'

'Aye!' he returned. 'It's all very fine--Well! I must do the best I can,

for the present, I suppose.'

In spite of himself, he appeared abashed by my aunt's indignant tears,

and came slouching out of the garden. Taking two or three quick steps,

as if I had just come up, I met him at the gate, and went in as he came

out. We eyed one another narrowly in passing, and with no favour.

'Aunt,' said I, hurriedly. 'This man alarming you again! Let me speak to

him. Who is he?'

'Child,' returned my aunt, taking my arm, 'come in, and don't speak to

me for ten minutes.'

We sat down in her little parlour. My aunt retired behind the round

green fan of former days, which was screwed on the back of a chair, and

occasionally wiped her eyes, for about a quarter of an hour. Then she

came out, and took a seat beside me.

'Trot,' said my aunt, calmly, 'it's my husband.'

'Your husband, aunt? I thought he had been dead!'

'Dead to me,' returned my aunt, 'but living.'

I sat in silent amazement.

'Betsey Trotwood don't look a likely subject for the tender passion,'

said my aunt, composedly, 'but the time was, Trot, when she believed in

that man most entirely. When she loved him, Trot, right well. When there

was no proof of attachment and affection that she would not have given

him. He repaid her by breaking her fortune, and nearly breaking her

heart. So she put all that sort of sentiment, once and for ever, in a

grave, and filled it up, and flattened it down.'

'My dear, good aunt!'

'I left him,' my aunt proceeded, laying her hand as usual on the back of

mine, 'generously. I may say at this distance of time, Trot, that I left

him generously. He had been so cruel to me, that I might have effected

a separation on easy terms for myself; but I did not. He soon made ducks

and drakes of what I gave him, sank lower and lower, married another

woman, I believe, became an adventurer, a gambler, and a cheat. What he

is now, you see. But he was a fine-looking man when I married him,' said

my aunt, with an echo of her old pride and admiration in her tone; 'and

I believed him--I was a fool!--to be the soul of honour!'

She gave my hand a squeeze, and shook her head.

'He is nothing to me now, Trot--less than nothing. But, sooner than have

him punished for his offences (as he would be if he prowled about in

this country), I give him more money than I can afford, at intervals

when he reappears, to go away. I was a fool when I married him; and I am

so far an incurable fool on that subject, that, for the sake of what

I once believed him to be, I wouldn't have even this shadow of my idle

fancy hardly dealt with. For I was in earnest, Trot, if ever a woman

was.'

MY aunt dismissed the matter with a heavy sigh, and smoothed her dress.

'There, my dear!' she said. 'Now you know the beginning, middle, and

end, and all about it. We won't mention the subject to one another any

more; neither, of course, will you mention it to anybody else. This is

my grumpy, frumpy story, and we'll keep it to ourselves, Trot!'

CHAPTER 48. DOMESTIC

I laboured hard at my book, without allowing it to interfere with the

punctual discharge of my newspaper duties; and it came out and was very

successful. I was not stunned by the praise which sounded in my ears,

notwithstanding that I was keenly alive to it, and thought better of

my own performance, I have little doubt, than anybody else did. It has

always been in my observation of human nature, that a man who has any

good reason to believe in himself never flourishes himself before the

faces of other people in order that they may believe in him. For this

reason, I retained my modesty in very self-respect; and the more praise

I got, the more I tried to deserve.

It is not my purpose, in this record, though in all other essentials

it is my written memory, to pursue the history of my own fictions. They

express themselves, and I leave them to themselves. When I refer to

them, incidentally, it is only as a part of my progress.

Having some foundation for believing, by this time, that nature and

accident had made me an author, I pursued my vocation with confidence.

Without such assurance I should certainly have left it alone, and

bestowed my energy on some other endeavour. I should have tried to find

out what nature and accident really had made me, and to be that, and

nothing else. I had been writing, in the newspaper and elsewhere, so

prosperously, that when my new success was achieved, I considered myself

reasonably entitled to escape from the dreary debates. One joyful night,

therefore, I noted down the music of the parliamentary bagpipes for the

last time, and I have never heard it since; though I still recognize the

old drone in the newspapers, without any substantial variation (except,

perhaps, that there is more of it), all the livelong session.

I now write of the time when I had been married, I suppose, about a year

and a half. After several varieties of experiment, we had given up the

housekeeping as a bad job. The house kept itself, and we kept a page.

The principal function of this retainer was to quarrel with the cook;

in which respect he was a perfect Whittington, without his cat, or the

remotest chance of being made Lord Mayor.

He appears to me to have lived in a hail of saucepan-lids. His whole

existence was a scuffle. He would shriek for help on the most improper

occasions,--as when we had a little dinner-party, or a few friends in

the evening,--and would come tumbling out of the kitchen, with iron

missiles flying after him. We wanted to get rid of him, but he was very

much attached to us, and wouldn't go. He was a tearful boy, and broke

into such deplorable lamentations, when a cessation of our connexion

was hinted at, that we were obliged to keep him. He had no mother--no

anything in the way of a relative, that I could discover, except a

sister, who fled to America the moment we had taken him off her hands;

and he became quartered on us like a horrible young changeling. He had

a lively perception of his own unfortunate state, and was always rubbing

his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket, or stooping to blow his nose on

the extreme corner of a little pocket-handkerchief, which he never would

take completely out of his pocket, but always economized and secreted.

This unlucky page, engaged in an evil hour at six pounds ten per annum,

was a source of continual trouble to me. I watched him as he grew--and

he grew like scarlet beans--with painful apprehensions of the time when

he would begin to shave; even of the days when he would be bald or grey.

I saw no prospect of ever getting rid of him; and, projecting myself

into the future, used to think what an inconvenience he would be when he

was an old man.

I never expected anything less, than this unfortunate's manner of

getting me out of my difficulty. He stole Dora's watch, which, like

everything else belonging to us, had no particular place of its own;

and, converting it into money, spent the produce (he was always a

weak-minded boy) in incessantly riding up and down between London and

Uxbridge outside the coach. He was taken to Bow Street, as well as

I remember, on the completion of his fifteenth journey; when

four-and-sixpence, and a second-hand fife which he couldn't play, were

found upon his person.

The surprise and its consequences would have been much less disagreeable

to me if he had not been penitent. But he was very penitent indeed, and

in a peculiar way--not in the lump, but by instalments. For example:

the day after that on which I was obliged to appear against him, he made

certain revelations touching a hamper in the cellar, which we believed

to be full of wine, but which had nothing in it except bottles and

corks. We supposed he had now eased his mind, and told the worst he knew

of the cook; but, a day or two afterwards, his conscience sustained a

new twinge, and he disclosed how she had a little girl, who, early every

morning, took away our bread; and also how he himself had been suborned

to maintain the milkman in coals. In two or three days more, I was

informed by the authorities of his having led to the discovery of

sirloins of beef among the kitchen-stuff, and sheets in the rag-bag. A

little while afterwards, he broke out in an entirely new direction, and

confessed to a knowledge of burglarious intentions as to our premises,

on the part of the pot-boy, who was immediately taken up. I got to be so

ashamed of being such a victim, that I would have given him any money

to hold his tongue, or would have offered a round bribe for his being

permitted to run away. It was an aggravating circumstance in the case

that he had no idea of this, but conceived that he was making me amends

in every new discovery: not to say, heaping obligations on my head.

At last I ran away myself, whenever I saw an emissary of the police

approaching with some new intelligence; and lived a stealthy life until

he was tried and ordered to be transported. Even then he couldn't be

quiet, but was always writing us letters; and wanted so much to see Dora

before he went away, that Dora went to visit him, and fainted when she

found herself inside the iron bars. In short, I had no peace of my life

until he was expatriated, and made (as I afterwards heard) a shepherd

of, 'up the country' somewhere; I have no geographical idea where.

All this led me into some serious reflections, and presented our

mistakes in a new aspect; as I could not help communicating to Dora one

evening, in spite of my tenderness for her.

'My love,' said I, 'it is very painful to me to think that our want of

system and management, involves not only ourselves (which we have got

used to), but other people.'

'You have been silent for a long time, and now you are going to be

cross!' said Dora.

'No, my dear, indeed! Let me explain to you what I mean.'

'I think I don't want to know,' said Dora.

'But I want you to know, my love. Put Jip down.'

Dora put his nose to mine, and said 'Boh!' to drive my seriousness away;

but, not succeeding, ordered him into his Pagoda, and sat looking at

me, with her hands folded, and a most resigned little expression of

countenance.

'The fact is, my dear,' I began, 'there is contagion in us. We infect

everyone about us.'

I might have gone on in this figurative manner, if Dora's face had not

admonished me that she was wondering with all her might whether I was

going to propose any new kind of vaccination, or other medical remedy,

for this unwholesome state of ours. Therefore I checked myself, and made

my meaning plainer.

'It is not merely, my pet,' said I, 'that we lose money and comfort, and

even temper sometimes, by not learning to be more careful; but that we

incur the serious responsibility of spoiling everyone who comes into

our service, or has any dealings with us. I begin to be afraid that the

fault is not entirely on one side, but that these people all turn out

ill because we don't turn out very well ourselves.'

'Oh, what an accusation,' exclaimed Dora, opening her eyes wide; 'to say

that you ever saw me take gold watches! Oh!'

'My dearest,' I remonstrated, 'don't talk preposterous nonsense! Who has

made the least allusion to gold watches?'

'You did,' returned Dora. 'You know you did. You said I hadn't turned

out well, and compared me to him.'

'To whom?' I asked.

'To the page,' sobbed Dora. 'Oh, you cruel fellow, to compare your

affectionate wife to a transported page! Why didn't you tell me

your opinion of me before we were married? Why didn't you say,

you hard-hearted thing, that you were convinced I was worse than a

transported page? Oh, what a dreadful opinion to have of me! Oh, my

goodness!'

'Now, Dora, my love,' I returned, gently trying to remove the

handkerchief she pressed to her eyes, 'this is not only very ridiculous

of you, but very wrong. In the first place, it's not true.'

'You always said he was a story-teller,' sobbed Dora. 'And now you say

the same of me! Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!'

'My darling girl,' I retorted, 'I really must entreat you to be

reasonable, and listen to what I did say, and do say. My dear Dora,

unless we learn to do our duty to those whom we employ, they will never

learn to do their duty to us. I am afraid we present opportunities to

people to do wrong, that never ought to be presented. Even if we were

as lax as we are, in all our arrangements, by choice--which we are

not--even if we liked it, and found it agreeable to be so--which we

don't--I am persuaded we should have no right to go on in this way. We

are positively corrupting people. We are bound to think of that. I can't

help thinking of it, Dora. It is a reflection I am unable to dismiss,

and it sometimes makes me very uneasy. There, dear, that's all. Come

now. Don't be foolish!'

Dora would not allow me, for a long time, to remove the handkerchief.

She sat sobbing and murmuring behind it, that, if I was uneasy, why had

I ever been married? Why hadn't I said, even the day before we went to

church, that I knew I should be uneasy, and I would rather not? If I

couldn't bear her, why didn't I send her away to her aunts at Putney, or

to Julia Mills in India? Julia would be glad to see her, and would not

call her a transported page; Julia never had called her anything of the

sort. In short, Dora was so afflicted, and so afflicted me by being

in that condition, that I felt it was of no use repeating this kind of

effort, though never so mildly, and I must take some other course.

What other course was left to take? To 'form her mind'? This was a

common phrase of words which had a fair and promising sound, and I

resolved to form Dora's mind.

I began immediately. When Dora was very childish, and I would

have infinitely preferred to humour her, I tried to be grave--and

disconcerted her, and myself too. I talked to her on the subjects which

occupied my thoughts; and I read Shakespeare to her--and fatigued her

to the last degree. I accustomed myself to giving her, as it were quite

casually, little scraps of useful information, or sound opinion--and she

started from them when I let them off, as if they had been crackers.

No matter how incidentally or naturally I endeavoured to form my little

wife's mind, I could not help seeing that she always had an instinctive

perception of what I was about, and became a prey to the keenest

apprehensions. In particular, it was clear to me, that she thought

Shakespeare a terrible fellow. The formation went on very slowly.

I pressed Traddles into the service without his knowledge; and whenever

he came to see us, exploded my mines upon him for the edification of

Dora at second hand. The amount of practical wisdom I bestowed upon

Traddles in this manner was immense, and of the best quality; but it

had no other effect upon Dora than to depress her spirits, and make her

always nervous with the dread that it would be her turn next. I found

myself in the condition of a schoolmaster, a trap, a pitfall; of always

playing spider to Dora's fly, and always pouncing out of my hole to her

infinite disturbance.

Still, looking forward through this intermediate stage, to the time

when there should be a perfect sympathy between Dora and me, and when I

should have 'formed her mind' to my entire satisfaction, I persevered,

even for months. Finding at last, however, that, although I had been

all this time a very porcupine or hedgehog, bristling all over with

determination, I had effected nothing, it began to occur to me that

perhaps Dora's mind was already formed.

On further consideration this appeared so likely, that I abandoned

my scheme, which had had a more promising appearance in words than in

action; resolving henceforth to be satisfied with my child-wife, and to

try to change her into nothing else by any process. I was heartily tired

of being sagacious and prudent by myself, and of seeing my darling under

restraint; so I bought a pretty pair of ear-rings for her, and a collar

for Jip, and went home one day to make myself agreeable.

Dora was delighted with the little presents, and kissed me joyfully; but

there was a shadow between us, however slight, and I had made up my mind

that it should not be there. If there must be such a shadow anywhere, I

would keep it for the future in my own breast.

I sat down by my wife on the sofa, and put the ear-rings in her ears;

and then I told her that I feared we had not been quite as good company

lately, as we used to be, and that the fault was mine. Which I sincerely

felt, and which indeed it was.

'The truth is, Dora, my life,' I said; 'I have been trying to be wise.'

'And to make me wise too,' said Dora, timidly. 'Haven't you, Doady?'

I nodded assent to the pretty inquiry of the raised eyebrows, and kissed

the parted lips.

'It's of not a bit of use,' said Dora, shaking her head, until the

ear-rings rang again. 'You know what a little thing I am, and what I

wanted you to call me from the first. If you can't do so, I am afraid

you'll never like me. Are you sure you don't think, sometimes, it would

have been better to have--'

'Done what, my dear?' For she made no effort to proceed.

'Nothing!' said Dora.

'Nothing?' I repeated.

She put her arms round my neck, and laughed, and called herself by her

favourite name of a goose, and hid her face on my shoulder in such a

profusion of curls that it was quite a task to clear them away and see

it.

'Don't I think it would have been better to have done nothing, than to

have tried to form my little wife's mind?' said I, laughing at myself.

'Is that the question? Yes, indeed, I do.'

'Is that what you have been trying?' cried Dora. 'Oh what a shocking

boy!'

'But I shall never try any more,' said I. 'For I love her dearly as she

is.'

'Without a story--really?' inquired Dora, creeping closer to me.

'Why should I seek to change,' said I, 'what has been so precious to me

for so long! You never can show better than as your own natural self, my

sweet Dora; and we'll try no conceited experiments, but go back to our

old way, and be happy.'

'And be happy!' returned Dora. 'Yes! All day! And you won't mind things

going a tiny morsel wrong, sometimes?'

'No, no,' said I. 'We must do the best we can.'

'And you won't tell me, any more, that we make other people bad,' coaxed

Dora; 'will you? Because you know it's so dreadfully cross!'

'No, no,' said I.

'It's better for me to be stupid than uncomfortable, isn't it?' said

Dora.

'Better to be naturally Dora than anything else in the world.'

'In the world! Ah, Doady, it's a large place!'

She shook her head, turned her delighted bright eyes up to mine, kissed

me, broke into a merry laugh, and sprang away to put on Jip's new

collar.

So ended my last attempt to make any change in Dora. I had been unhappy

in trying it; I could not endure my own solitary wisdom; I could not

reconcile it with her former appeal to me as my child-wife. I resolved

to do what I could, in a quiet way, to improve our proceedings myself,

but I foresaw that my utmost would be very little, or I must degenerate

into the spider again, and be for ever lying in wait.

And the shadow I have mentioned, that was not to be between us any more,

but was to rest wholly on my own heart? How did that fall?

The old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, if it were

changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever, and addressed me like

a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night. I loved my wife

dearly, and I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated,

once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something

wanting.

In fulfilment of the compact I have made with myself, to reflect my mind

on this paper, I again examine it, closely, and bring its secrets to the

light. What I missed, I still regarded--I always regarded--as something

that had been a dream of my youthful fancy; that was incapable of

realization; that I was now discovering to be so, with some natural

pain, as all men did. But that it would have been better for me if my

wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which I

had no partner; and that this might have been; I knew.

Between these two irreconcilable conclusions: the one, that what I felt

was general and unavoidable; the other, that it was particular to me,

and might have been different: I balanced curiously, with no distinct

sense of their opposition to each other. When I thought of the airy

dreams of youth that are incapable of realization, I thought of the

better state preceding manhood that I had outgrown; and then the

contented days with Agnes, in the dear old house, arose before me, like

spectres of the dead, that might have some renewal in another world, but

never more could be reanimated here.

Sometimes, the speculation came into my thoughts, What might have

happened, or what would have happened, if Dora and I had never known

each other? But she was so incorporated with my existence, that it

was the idlest of all fancies, and would soon rise out of my reach and

sight, like gossamer floating in the air.

I always loved her. What I am describing, slumbered, and half awoke, and

slept again, in the innermost recesses of my mind. There was no evidence

of it in me; I know of no influence it had in anything I said or did. I

bore the weight of all our little cares, and all my projects; Dora held

the pens; and we both felt that our shares were adjusted as the case

required. She was truly fond of me, and proud of me; and when Agnes

wrote a few earnest words in her letters to Dora, of the pride and

interest with which my old friends heard of my growing reputation, and

read my book as if they heard me speaking its contents, Dora read them

out to me with tears of joy in her bright eyes, and said I was a dear

old clever, famous boy.

'The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart.' Those words of

Mrs. Strong's were constantly recurring to me, at this time; were almost

always present to my mind. I awoke with them, often, in the night; I

remember to have even read them, in dreams, inscribed upon the walls

of houses. For I knew, now, that my own heart was undisciplined when it

first loved Dora; and that if it had been disciplined, it never

could have felt, when we were married, what it had felt in its secret

experience.

'There can be no disparity in marriage, like unsuitability of mind and

purpose.' Those words I remembered too. I had endeavoured to adapt

Dora to myself, and found it impracticable. It remained for me to adapt

myself to Dora; to share with her what I could, and be happy; to bear

on my own shoulders what I must, and be happy still. This was the

discipline to which I tried to bring my heart, when I began to think.

It made my second year much happier than my first; and, what was better

still, made Dora's life all sunshine.

But, as that year wore on, Dora was not strong. I had hoped that lighter

hands than mine would help to mould her character, and that a baby-smile

upon her breast might change my child-wife to a woman. It was not to be.

The spirit fluttered for a moment on the threshold of its little prison,

and, unconscious of captivity, took wing.

'When I can run about again, as I used to do, aunt,' said Dora, 'I shall

make Jip race. He is getting quite slow and lazy.'

'I suspect, my dear,' said my aunt quietly working by her side, 'he has

a worse disorder than that. Age, Dora.'

'Do you think he is old?' said Dora, astonished. 'Oh, how strange it

seems that Jip should be old!'

'It's a complaint we are all liable to, Little One, as we get on in

life,' said my aunt, cheerfully; 'I don't feel more free from it than I

used to be, I assure you.'

'But Jip,' said Dora, looking at him with compassion, 'even little Jip!

Oh, poor fellow!'

'I dare say he'll last a long time yet, Blossom,' said my aunt, patting

Dora on the cheek, as she leaned out of her couch to look at Jip, who

responded by standing on his hind legs, and baulking himself in various

asthmatic attempts to scramble up by the head and shoulders. 'He must

have a piece of flannel in his house this winter, and I shouldn't wonder

if he came out quite fresh again, with the flowers in the spring. Bless

the little dog!' exclaimed my aunt, 'if he had as many lives as a cat,

and was on the point of losing 'em all, he'd bark at me with his last

breath, I believe!'

Dora had helped him up on the sofa; where he really was defying my aunt

to such a furious extent, that he couldn't keep straight, but barked

himself sideways. The more my aunt looked at him, the more he reproached

her; for she had lately taken to spectacles, and for some inscrutable

reason he considered the glasses personal.

Dora made him lie down by her, with a good deal of persuasion; and when

he was quiet, drew one of his long ears through and through her hand,

repeating thoughtfully, 'Even little Jip! Oh, poor fellow!'

'His lungs are good enough,' said my aunt, gaily, 'and his dislikes are

not at all feeble. He has a good many years before him, no doubt. But if

you want a dog to race with, Little Blossom, he has lived too well for

that, and I'll give you one.'

'Thank you, aunt,' said Dora, faintly. 'But don't, please!'

'No?' said my aunt, taking off her spectacles.

'I couldn't have any other dog but Jip,' said Dora. 'It would be so

unkind to Jip! Besides, I couldn't be such friends with any other dog

but Jip; because he wouldn't have known me before I was married,

and wouldn't have barked at Doady when he first came to our house. I

couldn't care for any other dog but Jip, I am afraid, aunt.'

'To be sure!' said my aunt, patting her cheek again. 'You are right.'

'You are not offended,' said Dora. 'Are you?'

'Why, what a sensitive pet it is!' cried my aunt, bending over her

affectionately. 'To think that I could be offended!'

'No, no, I didn't really think so,' returned Dora; 'but I am a little

tired, and it made me silly for a moment--I am always a silly little

thing, you know, but it made me more silly--to talk about Jip. He

has known me in all that has happened to me, haven't you, Jip? And I

couldn't bear to slight him, because he was a little altered--could I,

Jip?'

Jip nestled closer to his mistress, and lazily licked her hand.

'You are not so old, Jip, are you, that you'll leave your mistress yet?'

said Dora. 'We may keep one another company a little longer!'

My pretty Dora! When she came down to dinner on the ensuing Sunday, and

was so glad to see old Traddles (who always dined with us on Sunday), we

thought she would be 'running about as she used to do', in a few days.

But they said, wait a few days more; and then, wait a few days more; and

still she neither ran nor walked. She looked very pretty, and was very

merry; but the little feet that used to be so nimble when they danced

round Jip, were dull and motionless.

I began to carry her downstairs every morning, and upstairs every night.

She would clasp me round the neck and laugh, the while, as if I did it

for a wager. Jip would bark and caper round us, and go on before, and

look back on the landing, breathing short, to see that we were coming.

My aunt, the best and most cheerful of nurses, would trudge after us, a

moving mass of shawls and pillows. Mr. Dick would not have relinquished

his post of candle-bearer to anyone alive. Traddles would be often at

the bottom of the staircase, looking on, and taking charge of sportive

messages from Dora to the dearest girl in the world. We made quite a gay

procession of it, and my child-wife was the gayest there.

But, sometimes, when I took her up, and felt that she was lighter in

my arms, a dead blank feeling came upon me, as if I were approaching

to some frozen region yet unseen, that numbed my life. I avoided the

recognition of this feeling by any name, or by any communing with

myself; until one night, when it was very strong upon me, and my aunt

had left her with a parting cry of 'Good night, Little Blossom,' I sat

down at my desk alone, and cried to think, Oh what a fatal name it was,

and how the blossom withered in its bloom upon the tree!

CHAPTER 49. I AM INVOLVED IN MYSTERY

I received one morning by the post, the following letter, dated

Canterbury, and addressed to me at Doctor's Commons; which I read with

some surprise:

'MY DEAR SIR,

'Circumstances beyond my individual control have, for a considerable

lapse of time, effected a severance of that intimacy which, in the

limited opportunities conceded to me in the midst of my professional

duties, of contemplating the scenes and events of the past, tinged by

the prismatic hues of memory, has ever afforded me, as it ever must

continue to afford, gratifying emotions of no common description. This

fact, my dear sir, combined with the distinguished elevation to which

your talents have raised you, deters me from presuming to aspire to

the liberty of addressing the companion of my youth, by the familiar

appellation of Copperfield! It is sufficient to know that the name to

which I do myself the honour to refer, will ever be treasured among

the muniments of our house (I allude to the archives connected with our

former lodgers, preserved by Mrs. Micawber), with sentiments of personal

esteem amounting to affection.

'It is not for one, situated, through his original errors and a

fortuitous combination of unpropitious events, as is the foundered Bark

(if he may be allowed to assume so maritime a denomination), who

now takes up the pen to address you--it is not, I repeat, for one

so circumstanced, to adopt the language of compliment, or of

congratulation. That he leaves to abler and to purer hands.

'If your more important avocations should admit of your ever tracing

these imperfect characters thus far--which may be, or may not be, as

circumstances arise--you will naturally inquire by what object am I

influenced, then, in inditing the present missive? Allow me to say that

I fully defer to the reasonable character of that inquiry, and proceed

to develop it; premising that it is not an object of a pecuniary nature.

'Without more directly referring to any latent ability that may

possibly exist on my part, of wielding the thunderbolt, or directing

the devouring and avenging flame in any quarter, I may be permitted

to observe, in passing, that my brightest visions are for ever

dispelled--that my peace is shattered and my power of enjoyment

destroyed--that my heart is no longer in the right place--and that I no

more walk erect before my fellow man. The canker is in the flower.

The cup is bitter to the brim. The worm is at his work, and will soon

dispose of his victim. The sooner the better. But I will not digress.

'Placed in a mental position of peculiar painfulness, beyond the

assuaging reach even of Mrs. Micawber's influence, though exercised in

the tripartite character of woman, wife, and mother, it is my intention

to fly from myself for a short period, and devote a respite of

eight-and-forty hours to revisiting some metropolitan scenes of past

enjoyment. Among other havens of domestic tranquillity and peace of

mind, my feet will naturally tend towards the King's Bench Prison. In

stating that I shall be (D. V.) on the outside of the south wall of

that place of incarceration on civil process, the day after tomorrow,

at seven in the evening, precisely, my object in this epistolary

communication is accomplished.

'I do not feel warranted in soliciting my former friend Mr. Copperfield,

or my former friend Mr. Thomas Traddles of the Inner Temple, if that

gentleman is still existent and forthcoming, to condescend to meet me,

and renew (so far as may be) our past relations of the olden time. I

confine myself to throwing out the observation, that, at the hour and

place I have indicated, may be found such ruined vestiges as yet

'Remain,

'Of

'A

'Fallen Tower,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.

'P.S. It may be advisable to superadd to the above, the statement that

Mrs. Micawber is not in confidential possession of my intentions.'

I read the letter over several times. Making due allowance for Mr.

Micawber's lofty style of composition, and for the extraordinary relish

with which he sat down and wrote long letters on all possible and

impossible occasions, I still believed that something important lay

hidden at the bottom of this roundabout communication. I put it down,

to think about it; and took it up again, to read it once more; and

was still pursuing it, when Traddles found me in the height of my

perplexity.

'My dear fellow,' said I, 'I never was better pleased to see you. You

come to give me the benefit of your sober judgement at a most opportune

time. I have received a very singular letter, Traddles, from Mr.

Micawber.'

'No?' cried Traddles. 'You don't say so? And I have received one from

Mrs. Micawber!'

With that, Traddles, who was flushed with walking, and whose hair, under

the combined effects of exercise and excitement, stood on end as if he

saw a cheerful ghost, produced his letter and made an exchange with me.

I watched him into the heart of Mr. Micawber's letter, and returned the

elevation of eyebrows with which he said "'Wielding the thunderbolt,

or directing the devouring and avenging flame!" Bless me,

Copperfield!'--and then entered on the perusal of Mrs. Micawber's

epistle.

It ran thus:

'My best regards to Mr. Thomas Traddles, and if he should still remember

one who formerly had the happiness of being well acquainted with him,

may I beg a few moments of his leisure time? I assure Mr. T. T. that I

would not intrude upon his kindness, were I in any other position than

on the confines of distraction.

'Though harrowing to myself to mention, the alienation of Mr. Micawber

(formerly so domesticated) from his wife and family, is the cause of my

addressing my unhappy appeal to Mr. Traddles, and soliciting his best

indulgence. Mr. T. can form no adequate idea of the change in Mr.

Micawber's conduct, of his wildness, of his violence. It has gradually

augmented, until it assumes the appearance of aberration of intellect.

Scarcely a day passes, I assure Mr. Traddles, on which some paroxysm

does not take place. Mr. T. will not require me to depict my feelings,

when I inform him that I have become accustomed to hear Mr. Micawber

assert that he has sold himself to the D. Mystery and secrecy have

long been his principal characteristic, have long replaced unlimited

confidence. The slightest provocation, even being asked if there is

anything he would prefer for dinner, causes him to express a wish for a

separation. Last night, on being childishly solicited for twopence, to

buy 'lemon-stunners'--a local sweetmeat--he presented an oyster-knife at

the twins!

'I entreat Mr. Traddles to bear with me in entering into these details.

Without them, Mr. T. would indeed find it difficult to form the faintest

conception of my heart-rending situation.

'May I now venture to confide to Mr. T. the purport of my letter? Will

he now allow me to throw myself on his friendly consideration? Oh yes,

for I know his heart!

'The quick eye of affection is not easily blinded, when of the female

sex. Mr. Micawber is going to London. Though he studiously concealed his

hand, this morning before breakfast, in writing the direction-card which

he attached to the little brown valise of happier days, the eagle-glance

of matrimonial anxiety detected, d, o, n, distinctly traced. The

West-End destination of the coach, is the Golden Cross. Dare I fervently

implore Mr. T. to see my misguided husband, and to reason with him?

Dare I ask Mr. T. to endeavour to step in between Mr. Micawber and his

agonized family? Oh no, for that would be too much!

'If Mr. Copperfield should yet remember one unknown to fame, will Mr.

T. take charge of my unalterable regards and similar entreaties? In

any case, he will have the benevolence to consider this communication

strictly private, and on no account whatever to be alluded to, however

distantly, in the presence of Mr. Micawber. If Mr. T. should ever

reply to it (which I cannot but feel to be most improbable), a letter

addressed to M. E., Post Office, Canterbury, will be fraught with

less painful consequences than any addressed immediately to one, who

subscribes herself, in extreme distress,

'Mr. Thomas Traddles's respectful friend and suppliant,

'EMMA MICAWBER.'

'What do you think of that letter?' said Traddles, casting his eyes upon

me, when I had read it twice.

'What do you think of the other?' said I. For he was still reading it

with knitted brows.

'I think that the two together, Copperfield,' replied Traddles,

'mean more than Mr. and Mrs. Micawber usually mean in their

correspondence--but I don't know what. They are both written in good

faith, I have no doubt, and without any collusion. Poor thing!' he was

now alluding to Mrs. Micawber's letter, and we were standing side by

side comparing the two; 'it will be a charity to write to her, at all

events, and tell her that we will not fail to see Mr. Micawber.'

I acceded to this the more readily, because I now reproached myself with

having treated her former letter rather lightly. It had set me thinking

a good deal at the time, as I have mentioned in its place; but my

absorption in my own affairs, my experience of the family, and my

hearing nothing more, had gradually ended in my dismissing the subject.

I had often thought of the Micawbers, but chiefly to wonder what

'pecuniary liabilities' they were establishing in Canterbury, and to

recall how shy Mr. Micawber was of me when he became clerk to Uriah

Heep.

However, I now wrote a comforting letter to Mrs. Micawber, in our

joint names, and we both signed it. As we walked into town to post it,

Traddles and I held a long conference, and launched into a number of

speculations, which I need not repeat. We took my aunt into our counsels

in the afternoon; but our only decided conclusion was, that we would be

very punctual in keeping Mr. Micawber's appointment.

Although we appeared at the stipulated place a quarter of an hour before

the time, we found Mr. Micawber already there. He was standing with his

arms folded, over against the wall, looking at the spikes on the top,

with a sentimental expression, as if they were the interlacing boughs of

trees that had shaded him in his youth.

When we accosted him, his manner was something more confused, and

something less genteel, than of yore. He had relinquished his legal suit

of black for the purposes of this excursion, and wore the old surtout

and tights, but not quite with the old air. He gradually picked up more

and more of it as we conversed with him; but, his very eye-glass seemed

to hang less easily, and his shirt-collar, though still of the old

formidable dimensions, rather drooped.

'Gentlemen!' said Mr. Micawber, after the first salutations, 'you are

friends in need, and friends indeed. Allow me to offer my inquiries with

reference to the physical welfare of Mrs. Copperfield in esse, and

Mrs. Traddles in posse,--presuming, that is to say, that my friend Mr.

Traddles is not yet united to the object of his affections, for weal and

for woe.'

We acknowledged his politeness, and made suitable replies. He then

directed our attention to the wall, and was beginning, 'I assure you,

gentlemen,' when I ventured to object to that ceremonious form of

address, and to beg that he would speak to us in the old way.

'My dear Copperfield,' he returned, pressing my hand, 'your cordiality

overpowers me. This reception of a shattered fragment of the Temple once

called Man--if I may be permitted so to express myself--bespeaks a heart

that is an honour to our common nature. I was about to observe that

I again behold the serene spot where some of the happiest hours of my

existence fleeted by.'

'Made so, I am sure, by Mrs. Micawber,' said I. 'I hope she is well?'

'Thank you,' returned Mr. Micawber, whose face clouded at this

reference, 'she is but so-so. And this,' said Mr. Micawber, nodding

his head sorrowfully, 'is the Bench! Where, for the first time in many

revolving years, the overwhelming pressure of pecuniary liabilities was

not proclaimed, from day to day, by importune voices declining to vacate

the passage; where there was no knocker on the door for any creditor

to appeal to; where personal service of process was not required, and

detainees were merely lodged at the gate! Gentlemen,' said Mr. Micawber,

'when the shadow of that iron-work on the summit of the brick structure

has been reflected on the gravel of the Parade, I have seen my children

thread the mazes of the intricate pattern, avoiding the dark marks. I

have been familiar with every stone in the place. If I betray weakness,

you will know how to excuse me.'

'We have all got on in life since then, Mr. Micawber,' said I.

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, bitterly, 'when I was an

inmate of that retreat I could look my fellow-man in the face, and punch

his head if he offended me. My fellow-man and myself are no longer on

those glorious terms!'

Turning from the building in a downcast manner, Mr. Micawber accepted

my proffered arm on one side, and the proffered arm of Traddles on the

other, and walked away between us.

'There are some landmarks,' observed Mr. Micawber, looking fondly back

over his shoulder, 'on the road to the tomb, which, but for the impiety

of the aspiration, a man would wish never to have passed. Such is the

Bench in my chequered career.'

'Oh, you are in low spirits, Mr. Micawber,' said Traddles.

'I am, sir,' interposed Mr. Micawber.

'I hope,' said Traddles, 'it is not because you have conceived a dislike

to the law--for I am a lawyer myself, you know.'

Mr. Micawber answered not a word.

'How is our friend Heep, Mr. Micawber?' said I, after a silence.

'My dear Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, bursting into a state of

much excitement, and turning pale, 'if you ask after my employer as

your friend, I am sorry for it; if you ask after him as MY friend,

I sardonically smile at it. In whatever capacity you ask after my

employer, I beg, without offence to you, to limit my reply to this--that

whatever his state of health may be, his appearance is foxy: not to

say diabolical. You will allow me, as a private individual, to

decline pursuing a subject which has lashed me to the utmost verge of

desperation in my professional capacity.'

I expressed my regret for having innocently touched upon a theme

that roused him so much. 'May I ask,' said I, 'without any hazard of

repeating the mistake, how my old friends Mr. and Miss Wickfield are?'

'Miss Wickfield,' said Mr. Micawber, now turning red, 'is, as she always

is, a pattern, and a bright example. My dear Copperfield, she is the

only starry spot in a miserable existence. My respect for that young

lady, my admiration of her character, my devotion to her for her love

and truth, and goodness!--Take me,' said Mr. Micawber, 'down a turning,

for, upon my soul, in my present state of mind I am not equal to this!'

We wheeled him off into a narrow street, where he took out his

pocket-handkerchief, and stood with his back to a wall. If I looked as

gravely at him as Traddles did, he must have found our company by no

means inspiriting.

'It is my fate,' said Mr. Micawber, unfeignedly sobbing, but doing even

that, with a shadow of the old expression of doing something genteel;

'it is my fate, gentlemen, that the finer feelings of our nature have

become reproaches to me. My homage to Miss Wickfield, is a flight of

arrows in my bosom. You had better leave me, if you please, to walk the

earth as a vagabond. The worm will settle my business in double-quick

time.'

Without attending to this invocation, we stood by, until he put up his

pocket-handkerchief, pulled up his shirt-collar, and, to delude any

person in the neighbourhood who might have been observing him, hummed a

tune with his hat very much on one side. I then mentioned--not knowing

what might be lost if we lost sight of him yet--that it would give me

great pleasure to introduce him to my aunt, if he would ride out to

Highgate, where a bed was at his service.

'You shall make us a glass of your own punch, Mr. Micawber,' said

I, 'and forget whatever you have on your mind, in pleasanter

reminiscences.'

'Or, if confiding anything to friends will be more likely to relieve

you, you shall impart it to us, Mr. Micawber,' said Traddles, prudently.

'Gentlemen,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'do with me as you will! I am a

straw upon the surface of the deep, and am tossed in all directions by

the elephants--I beg your pardon; I should have said the elements.'

We walked on, arm-in-arm, again; found the coach in the act of starting;

and arrived at Highgate without encountering any difficulties by the

way. I was very uneasy and very uncertain in my mind what to say or do

for the best--so was Traddles, evidently. Mr. Micawber was for the most

part plunged into deep gloom. He occasionally made an attempt to smarten

himself, and hum the fag-end of a tune; but his relapses into profound

melancholy were only made the more impressive by the mockery of a hat

exceedingly on one side, and a shirt-collar pulled up to his eyes.

We went to my aunt's house rather than to mine, because of Dora's not

being well. My aunt presented herself on being sent for, and welcomed

Mr. Micawber with gracious cordiality. Mr. Micawber kissed her hand,

retired to the window, and pulling out his pocket-handkerchief, had a

mental wrestle with himself.

Mr. Dick was at home. He was by nature so exceedingly compassionate of

anyone who seemed to be ill at ease, and was so quick to find any such

person out, that he shook hands with Mr. Micawber, at least half-a-dozen

times in five minutes. To Mr. Micawber, in his trouble, this warmth, on

the part of a stranger, was so extremely touching, that he could

only say, on the occasion of each successive shake, 'My dear sir, you

overpower me!' Which gratified Mr. Dick so much, that he went at it

again with greater vigour than before.

'The friendliness of this gentleman,' said Mr. Micawber to my aunt, 'if

you will allow me, ma'am, to cull a figure of speech from the vocabulary

of our coarser national sports--floors me. To a man who is struggling

with a complicated burden of perplexity and disquiet, such a reception

is trying, I assure you.'

'My friend Mr. Dick,' replied my aunt proudly, 'is not a common man.'

'That I am convinced of,' said Mr. Micawber. 'My dear sir!' for Mr.

Dick was shaking hands with him again; 'I am deeply sensible of your

cordiality!'

'How do you find yourself?' said Mr. Dick, with an anxious look.

'Indifferent, my dear sir,' returned Mr. Micawber, sighing.

'You must keep up your spirits,' said Mr. Dick, 'and make yourself as

comfortable as possible.'

Mr. Micawber was quite overcome by these friendly words, and by finding

Mr. Dick's hand again within his own. 'It has been my lot,' he observed,

'to meet, in the diversified panorama of human existence, with an

occasional oasis, but never with one so green, so gushing, as the

present!'

At another time I should have been amused by this; but I felt that

we were all constrained and uneasy, and I watched Mr. Micawber so

anxiously, in his vacillations between an evident disposition to reveal

something, and a counter-disposition to reveal nothing, that I was in a

perfect fever. Traddles, sitting on the edge of his chair, with his eyes

wide open, and his hair more emphatically erect than ever, stared by

turns at the ground and at Mr. Micawber, without so much as attempting

to put in a word. My aunt, though I saw that her shrewdest observation

was concentrated on her new guest, had more useful possession of her

wits than either of us; for she held him in conversation, and made it

necessary for him to talk, whether he liked it or not.

'You are a very old friend of my nephew's, Mr. Micawber,' said my aunt.

'I wish I had had the pleasure of seeing you before.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'I wish I had had the honour of knowing

you at an earlier period. I was not always the wreck you at present

behold.'

'I hope Mrs. Micawber and your family are well, sir,' said my aunt.

Mr. Micawber inclined his head. 'They are as well, ma'am,' he

desperately observed after a pause, 'as Aliens and Outcasts can ever

hope to be.'

'Lord bless you, sir!' exclaimed my aunt, in her abrupt way. 'What are

you talking about?'

'The subsistence of my family, ma'am,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'trembles

in the balance. My employer--'

Here Mr. Micawber provokingly left off; and began to peel the lemons

that had been under my directions set before him, together with all the

other appliances he used in making punch.

'Your employer, you know,' said Mr. Dick, jogging his arm as a gentle

reminder.

'My good sir,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'you recall me, I am obliged to

you.' They shook hands again. 'My employer, ma'am--Mr. Heep--once did

me the favour to observe to me, that if I were not in the receipt of the

stipendiary emoluments appertaining to my engagement with him, I should

probably be a mountebank about the country, swallowing a sword-blade,

and eating the devouring element. For anything that I can perceive to

the contrary, it is still probable that my children may be reduced to

seek a livelihood by personal contortion, while Mrs. Micawber abets

their unnatural feats by playing the barrel-organ.'

Mr. Micawber, with a random but expressive flourish of his knife,

signified that these performances might be expected to take place after

he was no more; then resumed his peeling with a desperate air.

My aunt leaned her elbow on the little round table that she usually kept

beside her, and eyed him attentively. Notwithstanding the aversion with

which I regarded the idea of entrapping him into any disclosure he was

not prepared to make voluntarily, I should have taken him up at this

point, but for the strange proceedings in which I saw him engaged;

whereof his putting the lemon-peel into the kettle, the sugar into the

snuffer-tray, the spirit into the empty jug, and confidently attempting

to pour boiling water out of a candlestick, were among the most

remarkable. I saw that a crisis was at hand, and it came. He clattered

all his means and implements together, rose from his chair, pulled out

his pocket-handkerchief, and burst into tears.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, behind his handkerchief,

'this is an occupation, of all others, requiring an untroubled mind, and

self-respect. I cannot perform it. It is out of the question.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'what is the matter? Pray speak out. You are

among friends.'

'Among friends, sir!' repeated Mr. Micawber; and all he had reserved

came breaking out of him. 'Good heavens, it is principally because I AM

among friends that my state of mind is what it is. What is the matter,

gentlemen? What is NOT the matter? Villainy is the matter; baseness is

the matter; deception, fraud, conspiracy, are the matter; and the name

of the whole atrocious mass is--HEEP!'

MY aunt clapped her hands, and we all started up as if we were

possessed.

'The struggle is over!' said Mr. Micawber violently gesticulating with

his pocket-handkerchief, and fairly striking out from time to time with

both arms, as if he were swimming under superhuman difficulties. 'I will

lead this life no longer. I am a wretched being, cut off from everything

that makes life tolerable. I have been under a Taboo in that infernal

scoundrel's service. Give me back my wife, give me back my family,

substitute Micawber for the petty wretch who walks about in the boots

at present on my feet, and call upon me to swallow a sword tomorrow, and

I'll do it. With an appetite!'

I never saw a man so hot in my life. I tried to calm him, that we might

come to something rational; but he got hotter and hotter, and wouldn't

hear a word.

'I'll put my hand in no man's hand,' said Mr. Micawber, gasping,

puffing, and sobbing, to that degree that he was like a man

fighting with cold water, 'until I have--blown to

fragments--the--a--detestable--serpent--HEEP! I'll partake of no

one's hospitality, until I have--a--moved Mount Vesuvius--to

eruption--on--a--the abandoned rascal--HEEP! Refreshment--a--underneath

this roof--particularly punch--would--a--choke me--unless--I

had--previously--choked the eyes--out of the head--a--of--interminable

cheat, and liar--HEEP! I--a--I'll know nobody--and--a--say

nothing--and--a--live nowhere--until I have

crushed--to--a--undiscoverable atoms--the--transcendent and immortal

hypocrite and perjurer--HEEP!'

I really had some fear of Mr. Micawber's dying on the spot. The manner

in which he struggled through these inarticulate sentences, and,

whenever he found himself getting near the name of Heep, fought his way

on to it, dashed at it in a fainting state, and brought it out with a

vehemence little less than marvellous, was frightful; but now, when

he sank into a chair, steaming, and looked at us, with every possible

colour in his face that had no business there, and an endless procession

of lumps following one another in hot haste up his throat, whence they

seemed to shoot into his forehead, he had the appearance of being in

the last extremity. I would have gone to his assistance, but he waved me

off, and wouldn't hear a word.

'No, Copperfield!--No communication--a--until--Miss

Wickfield--a--redress from wrongs inflicted by consummate

scoundrel--HEEP!' (I am quite convinced he could not have uttered three

words, but for the amazing energy with which this word inspired him when

he felt it coming.) 'Inviolable secret--a--from the whole world--a--no

exceptions--this day week--a--at breakfast-time--a--everybody

present--including aunt--a--and extremely friendly gentleman--to be at

the hotel at Canterbury--a--where--Mrs. Micawber and myself--Auld Lang

Syne in chorus--and--a--will expose intolerable ruffian--HEEP! No more

to say--a--or listen to persuasion--go immediately--not capable--a--bear

society--upon the track of devoted and doomed traitor--HEEP!'

With this last repetition of the magic word that had kept him going at

all, and in which he surpassed all his previous efforts, Mr. Micawber

rushed out of the house; leaving us in a state of excitement, hope, and

wonder, that reduced us to a condition little better than his own. But

even then his passion for writing letters was too strong to be resisted;

for while we were yet in the height of our excitement, hope, and wonder,

the following pastoral note was brought to me from a neighbouring

tavern, at which he had called to write it:--

'Most secret and confidential.

'MY DEAR SIR,

'I beg to be allowed to convey, through you, my apologies to your

excellent aunt for my late excitement. An explosion of a smouldering

volcano long suppressed, was the result of an internal contest more

easily conceived than described.

'I trust I rendered tolerably intelligible my appointment for the

morning of this day week, at the house of public entertainment at

Canterbury, where Mrs. Micawber and myself had once the honour of

uniting our voices to yours, in the well-known strain of the Immortal

exciseman nurtured beyond the Tweed.

'The duty done, and act of reparation performed, which can alone enable

me to contemplate my fellow mortal, I shall be known no more. I shall

simply require to be deposited in that place of universal resort, where

Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,

The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep,

'--With the plain Inscription,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

CHAPTER 50. Mr. PEGGOTTY'S DREAM COMES TRUE

By this time, some months had passed since our interview on the bank

of the river with Martha. I had never seen her since, but she had

communicated with Mr. Peggotty on several occasions. Nothing had come of

her zealous intervention; nor could I infer, from what he told me, that

any clue had been obtained, for a moment, to Emily's fate. I confess

that I began to despair of her recovery, and gradually to sink deeper

and deeper into the belief that she was dead.

His conviction remained unchanged. So far as I know--and I believe

his honest heart was transparent to me--he never wavered again, in his

solemn certainty of finding her. His patience never tired. And, although

I trembled for the agony it might one day be to him to have his strong

assurance shivered at a blow, there was something so religious in it, so

affectingly expressive of its anchor being in the purest depths of

his fine nature, that the respect and honour in which I held him were

exalted every day.

His was not a lazy trustfulness that hoped, and did no more. He had

been a man of sturdy action all his life, and he knew that in all things

wherein he wanted help he must do his own part faithfully, and help

himself. I have known him set out in the night, on a misgiving that the

light might not be, by some accident, in the window of the old boat,

and walk to Yarmouth. I have known him, on reading something in the

newspaper that might apply to her, take up his stick, and go forth on a

journey of three--or four-score miles. He made his way by sea to Naples,

and back, after hearing the narrative to which Miss Dartle had assisted

me. All his journeys were ruggedly performed; for he was always

steadfast in a purpose of saving money for Emily's sake, when she should

be found. In all this long pursuit, I never heard him repine; I never

heard him say he was fatigued, or out of heart.

Dora had often seen him since our marriage, and was quite fond of him.

I fancy his figure before me now, standing near her sofa, with his rough

cap in his hand, and the blue eyes of my child-wife raised, with a timid

wonder, to his face. Sometimes of an evening, about twilight, when

he came to talk with me, I would induce him to smoke his pipe in the

garden, as we slowly paced to and fro together; and then, the picture

of his deserted home, and the comfortable air it used to have in my

childish eyes of an evening when the fire was burning, and the wind

moaning round it, came most vividly into my mind.

One evening, at this hour, he told me that he had found Martha waiting

near his lodging on the preceding night when he came out, and that she

had asked him not to leave London on any account, until he should have

seen her again.

'Did she tell you why?' I inquired.

'I asked her, Mas'r Davy,' he replied, 'but it is but few words as she

ever says, and she on'y got my promise and so went away.'

'Did she say when you might expect to see her again?' I demanded.

'No, Mas'r Davy,' he returned, drawing his hand thoughtfully down his

face. 'I asked that too; but it was more (she said) than she could

tell.'

As I had long forborne to encourage him with hopes that hung on threads,

I made no other comment on this information than that I supposed he

would see her soon. Such speculations as it engendered within me I kept

to myself, and those were faint enough.

I was walking alone in the garden, one evening, about a fortnight

afterwards. I remember that evening well. It was the second in Mr.

Micawber's week of suspense. There had been rain all day, and there was

a damp feeling in the air. The leaves were thick upon the trees, and

heavy with wet; but the rain had ceased, though the sky was still dark;

and the hopeful birds were singing cheerfully. As I walked to and fro

in the garden, and the twilight began to close around me, their little

voices were hushed; and that peculiar silence which belongs to such an

evening in the country when the lightest trees are quite still, save for

the occasional droppings from their boughs, prevailed.

There was a little green perspective of trellis-work and ivy at the side

of our cottage, through which I could see, from the garden where I was

walking, into the road before the house. I happened to turn my eyes

towards this place, as I was thinking of many things; and I saw a figure

beyond, dressed in a plain cloak. It was bending eagerly towards me, and

beckoning.

'Martha!' said I, going to it.

'Can you come with me?' she inquired, in an agitated whisper. 'I have

been to him, and he is not at home. I wrote down where he was to come,

and left it on his table with my own hand. They said he would not be out

long. I have tidings for him. Can you come directly?'

My answer was, to pass out at the gate immediately. She made a hasty

gesture with her hand, as if to entreat my patience and my silence,

and turned towards London, whence, as her dress betokened, she had come

expeditiously on foot.

I asked her if that were not our destination? On her motioning Yes,

with the same hasty gesture as before, I stopped an empty coach that was

coming by, and we got into it. When I asked her where the coachman was

to drive, she answered, 'Anywhere near Golden Square! And quick!'--then

shrunk into a corner, with one trembling hand before her face, and the

other making the former gesture, as if she could not bear a voice.

Now much disturbed, and dazzled with conflicting gleams of hope and

dread, I looked at her for some explanation. But seeing how strongly

she desired to remain quiet, and feeling that it was my own natural

inclination too, at such a time, I did not attempt to break the silence.

We proceeded without a word being spoken. Sometimes she glanced out of

the window, as though she thought we were going slowly, though indeed we

were going fast; but otherwise remained exactly as at first.

We alighted at one of the entrances to the Square she had mentioned,

where I directed the coach to wait, not knowing but that we might have

some occasion for it. She laid her hand on my arm, and hurried me on

to one of the sombre streets, of which there are several in that part,

where the houses were once fair dwellings in the occupation of single

families, but have, and had, long degenerated into poor lodgings let off

in rooms. Entering at the open door of one of these, and releasing my

arm, she beckoned me to follow her up the common staircase, which was

like a tributary channel to the street.

The house swarmed with inmates. As we went up, doors of rooms were

opened and people's heads put out; and we passed other people on the

stairs, who were coming down. In glancing up from the outside, before

we entered, I had seen women and children lolling at the windows over

flower-pots; and we seemed to have attracted their curiosity, for these

were principally the observers who looked out of their doors. It was a

broad panelled staircase, with massive balustrades of some dark wood;

cornices above the doors, ornamented with carved fruit and flowers; and

broad seats in the windows. But all these tokens of past grandeur

were miserably decayed and dirty; rot, damp, and age, had weakened

the flooring, which in many places was unsound and even unsafe. Some

attempts had been made, I noticed, to infuse new blood into this

dwindling frame, by repairing the costly old wood-work here and there

with common deal; but it was like the marriage of a reduced old noble to

a plebeian pauper, and each party to the ill-assorted union shrunk away

from the other. Several of the back windows on the staircase had

been darkened or wholly blocked up. In those that remained, there was

scarcely any glass; and, through the crumbling frames by which the bad

air seemed always to come in, and never to go out, I saw, through other

glassless windows, into other houses in a similar condition, and looked

giddily down into a wretched yard, which was the common dust-heap of the

mansion.

We proceeded to the top-storey of the house. Two or three times, by the

way, I thought I observed in the indistinct light the skirts of a female

figure going up before us. As we turned to ascend the last flight of

stairs between us and the roof, we caught a full view of this figure

pausing for a moment, at a door. Then it turned the handle, and went in.

'What's this!' said Martha, in a whisper. 'She has gone into my room. I

don't know her!'

I knew her. I had recognized her with amazement, for Miss Dartle.

I said something to the effect that it was a lady whom I had seen

before, in a few words, to my conductress; and had scarcely done so,

when we heard her voice in the room, though not, from where we stood,

what she was saying. Martha, with an astonished look, repeated her

former action, and softly led me up the stairs; and then, by a little

back-door which seemed to have no lock, and which she pushed open with a

touch, into a small empty garret with a low sloping roof, little better

than a cupboard. Between this, and the room she had called hers,

there was a small door of communication, standing partly open. Here we

stopped, breathless with our ascent, and she placed her hand lightly on

my lips. I could only see, of the room beyond, that it was pretty large;

that there was a bed in it; and that there were some common pictures of

ships upon the walls. I could not see Miss Dartle, or the person whom

we had heard her address. Certainly, my companion could not, for my

position was the best. A dead silence prevailed for some moments. Martha

kept one hand on my lips, and raised the other in a listening attitude.

'It matters little to me her not being at home,' said Rosa Dartle

haughtily, 'I know nothing of her. It is you I come to see.'

'Me?' replied a soft voice.

At the sound of it, a thrill went through my frame. For it was Emily's!

'Yes,' returned Miss Dartle, 'I have come to look at you. What? You are

not ashamed of the face that has done so much?'

The resolute and unrelenting hatred of her tone, its cold stern

sharpness, and its mastered rage, presented her before me, as if I had

seen her standing in the light. I saw the flashing black eyes, and the

passion-wasted figure; and I saw the scar, with its white track cutting

through her lips, quivering and throbbing as she spoke.

'I have come to see,' she said, 'James Steerforth's fancy; the girl who

ran away with him, and is the town-talk of the commonest people of her

native place; the bold, flaunting, practised companion of persons like

James Steerforth. I want to know what such a thing is like.'

There was a rustle, as if the unhappy girl, on whom she heaped these

taunts, ran towards the door, and the speaker swiftly interposed herself

before it. It was succeeded by a moment's pause.

When Miss Dartle spoke again, it was through her set teeth, and with a

stamp upon the ground.

'Stay there!' she said, 'or I'll proclaim you to the house, and the

whole street! If you try to evade me, I'll stop you, if it's by the

hair, and raise the very stones against you!'

A frightened murmur was the only reply that reached my ears. A silence

succeeded. I did not know what to do. Much as I desired to put an end to

the interview, I felt that I had no right to present myself; that it was

for Mr. Peggotty alone to see her and recover her. Would he never come?

I thought impatiently.

'So!' said Rosa Dartle, with a contemptuous laugh, 'I see her at last!

Why, he was a poor creature to be taken by that delicate mock-modesty,

and that hanging head!'

'Oh, for Heaven's sake, spare me!' exclaimed Emily. 'Whoever you are,

you know my pitiable story, and for Heaven's sake spare me, if you would

be spared yourself!'

'If I would be spared!' returned the other fiercely; 'what is there in

common between US, do you think!'

'Nothing but our sex,' said Emily, with a burst of tears.

'And that,' said Rosa Dartle, 'is so strong a claim, preferred by one

so infamous, that if I had any feeling in my breast but scorn and

abhorrence of you, it would freeze it up. Our sex! You are an honour to

our sex!'

'I have deserved this,' said Emily, 'but it's dreadful! Dear, dear lady,

think what I have suffered, and how I am fallen! Oh, Martha, come back!

Oh, home, home!'

Miss Dartle placed herself in a chair, within view of the door, and

looked downward, as if Emily were crouching on the floor before her.

Being now between me and the light, I could see her curled lip, and her

cruel eyes intently fixed on one place, with a greedy triumph.

'Listen to what I say!' she said; 'and reserve your false arts for your

dupes. Do you hope to move me by your tears? No more than you could

charm me by your smiles, you purchased slave.'

'Oh, have some mercy on me!' cried Emily. 'Show me some compassion, or I

shall die mad!'

'It would be no great penance,' said Rosa Dartle, 'for your crimes. Do

you know what you have done? Do you ever think of the home you have laid

waste?'

'Oh, is there ever night or day, when I don't think of it!' cried Emily;

and now I could just see her, on her knees, with her head thrown back,

her pale face looking upward, her hands wildly clasped and held out,

and her hair streaming about her. 'Has there ever been a single minute,

waking or sleeping, when it hasn't been before me, just as it used to

be in the lost days when I turned my back upon it for ever and for ever!

Oh, home, home! Oh dear, dear uncle, if you ever could have known the

agony your love would cause me when I fell away from good, you never

would have shown it to me so constant, much as you felt it; but would

have been angry to me, at least once in my life, that I might have had

some comfort! I have none, none, no comfort upon earth, for all of them

were always fond of me!' She dropped on her face, before the imperious

figure in the chair, with an imploring effort to clasp the skirt of her

dress.

Rosa Dartle sat looking down upon her, as inflexible as a figure of

brass. Her lips were tightly compressed, as if she knew that she

must keep a strong constraint upon herself--I write what I sincerely

believe--or she would be tempted to strike the beautiful form with

her foot. I saw her, distinctly, and the whole power of her face and

character seemed forced into that expression.---Would he never come?

'The miserable vanity of these earth-worms!' she said, when she had so

far controlled the angry heavings of her breast, that she could trust

herself to speak. 'YOUR home! Do you imagine that I bestow a thought

on it, or suppose you could do any harm to that low place, which money

would not pay for, and handsomely? YOUR home! You were a part of the

trade of your home, and were bought and sold like any other vendible

thing your people dealt in.'

'Oh, not that!' cried Emily. 'Say anything of me; but don't visit

my disgrace and shame, more than I have done, on folks who are as

honourable as you! Have some respect for them, as you are a lady, if you

have no mercy for me.'

'I speak,' she said, not deigning to take any heed of this appeal, and

drawing away her dress from the contamination of Emily's touch, 'I speak

of HIS home--where I live. Here,' she said, stretching out her hand with

her contemptuous laugh, and looking down upon the prostrate girl, 'is a

worthy cause of division between lady-mother and gentleman-son; of grief

in a house where she wouldn't have been admitted as a kitchen-girl; of

anger, and repining, and reproach. This piece of pollution, picked up

from the water-side, to be made much of for an hour, and then tossed

back to her original place!'

'No! no!' cried Emily, clasping her hands together. 'When he first came

into my way--that the day had never dawned upon me, and he had met me

being carried to my grave!--I had been brought up as virtuous as you or

any lady, and was going to be the wife of as good a man as you or any

lady in the world can ever marry. If you live in his home and know him,

you know, perhaps, what his power with a weak, vain girl might be. I

don't defend myself, but I know well, and he knows well, or he will know

when he comes to die, and his mind is troubled with it, that he used all

his power to deceive me, and that I believed him, trusted him, and loved

him!'

Rosa Dartle sprang up from her seat; recoiled; and in recoiling struck

at her, with a face of such malignity, so darkened and disfigured by

passion, that I had almost thrown myself between them. The blow, which

had no aim, fell upon the air. As she now stood panting, looking at

her with the utmost detestation that she was capable of expressing, and

trembling from head to foot with rage and scorn, I thought I had never

seen such a sight, and never could see such another.

'YOU love him? You?' she cried, with her clenched hand, quivering as if

it only wanted a weapon to stab the object of her wrath.

Emily had shrunk out of my view. There was no reply.

'And tell that to ME,' she added, 'with your shameful lips? Why don't

they whip these creatures? If I could order it to be done, I would have

this girl whipped to death.'

And so she would, I have no doubt. I would not have trusted her with the

rack itself, while that furious look lasted. She slowly, very slowly,

broke into a laugh, and pointed at Emily with her hand, as if she were a

sight of shame for gods and men.

'SHE love!' she said. 'THAT carrion! And he ever cared for her, she'd

tell me. Ha, ha! The liars that these traders are!'

Her mockery was worse than her undisguised rage. Of the two, I would

have much preferred to be the object of the latter. But, when she

suffered it to break loose, it was only for a moment. She had chained

it up again, and however it might tear her within, she subdued it to

herself.

'I came here, you pure fountain of love,' she said, 'to see--as I began

by telling you--what such a thing as you was like. I was curious. I am

satisfied. Also to tell you, that you had best seek that home of yours,

with all speed, and hide your head among those excellent people who are

expecting you, and whom your money will console. When it's all gone, you

can believe, and trust, and love again, you know! I thought you a broken

toy that had lasted its time; a worthless spangle that was tarnished,

and thrown away. But, finding you true gold, a very lady, and

an ill-used innocent, with a fresh heart full of love and

trustfulness--which you look like, and is quite consistent with your

story!--I have something more to say. Attend to it; for what I say I'll

do. Do you hear me, you fairy spirit? What I say, I mean to do!'

Her rage got the better of her again, for a moment; but it passed over

her face like a spasm, and left her smiling.

'Hide yourself,' she pursued, 'if not at home, somewhere. Let it be

somewhere beyond reach; in some obscure life--or, better still, in some

obscure death. I wonder, if your loving heart will not break, you have

found no way of helping it to be still! I have heard of such means

sometimes. I believe they may be easily found.'

A low crying, on the part of Emily, interrupted her here. She stopped,

and listened to it as if it were music.

'I am of a strange nature, perhaps,' Rosa Dartle went on; 'but I can't

breathe freely in the air you breathe. I find it sickly. Therefore, I

will have it cleared; I will have it purified of you. If you live here

tomorrow, I'll have your story and your character proclaimed on the

common stair. There are decent women in the house, I am told; and it

is a pity such a light as you should be among them, and concealed. If,

leaving here, you seek any refuge in this town in any character but your

true one (which you are welcome to bear, without molestation from me),

the same service shall be done you, if I hear of your retreat. Being

assisted by a gentleman who not long ago aspired to the favour of your

hand, I am sanguine as to that.'

Would he never, never come? How long was I to bear this? How long could

I bear it? 'Oh me, oh me!' exclaimed the wretched Emily, in a tone that

might have touched the hardest heart, I should have thought; but there

was no relenting in Rosa Dartle's smile. 'What, what, shall I do!'

'Do?' returned the other. 'Live happy in your own reflections!

Consecrate your existence to the recollection of James Steerforth's

tenderness--he would have made you his serving-man's wife, would he

not?---or to feeling grateful to the upright and deserving creature who

would have taken you as his gift. Or, if those proud remembrances, and

the consciousness of your own virtues, and the honourable position to

which they have raised you in the eyes of everything that wears the

human shape, will not sustain you, marry that good man, and be happy in

his condescension. If this will not do either, die! There are doorways

and dust-heaps for such deaths, and such despair--find one, and take

your flight to Heaven!'

I heard a distant foot upon the stairs. I knew it, I was certain. It was

his, thank God!

She moved slowly from before the door when she said this, and passed out

of my sight.

'But mark!' she added, slowly and sternly, opening the other door to

go away, 'I am resolved, for reasons that I have and hatreds that

I entertain, to cast you out, unless you withdraw from my reach

altogether, or drop your pretty mask. This is what I had to say; and

what I say, I mean to do!'

The foot upon the stairs came nearer--nearer--passed her as she went

down--rushed into the room!

'Uncle!'

A fearful cry followed the word. I paused a moment, and looking in, saw

him supporting her insensible figure in his arms. He gazed for a few

seconds in the face; then stooped to kiss it--oh, how tenderly!--and

drew a handkerchief before it.

'Mas'r Davy,' he said, in a low tremulous voice, when it was covered, 'I

thank my Heav'nly Father as my dream's come true! I thank Him hearty for

having guided of me, in His own ways, to my darling!'

With those words he took her up in his arms; and, with the veiled

face lying on his bosom, and addressed towards his own, carried her,

motionless and unconscious, down the stairs.

CHAPTER 51. THE BEGINNING OF A LONGER JOURNEY

It was yet early in the morning of the following day, when, as I was

walking in my garden with my aunt (who took little other exercise

now, being so much in attendance on my dear Dora), I was told that Mr.

Peggotty desired to speak with me. He came into the garden to meet me

half-way, on my going towards the gate; and bared his head, as it was

always his custom to do when he saw my aunt, for whom he had a high

respect. I had been telling her all that had happened overnight. Without

saying a word, she walked up with a cordial face, shook hands with him,

and patted him on the arm. It was so expressively done, that she had no

need to say a word. Mr. Peggotty understood her quite as well as if she

had said a thousand.

'I'll go in now, Trot,' said my aunt, 'and look after Little Blossom,

who will be getting up presently.'

'Not along of my being heer, ma'am, I hope?' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Unless

my wits is gone a bahd's neezing'--by which Mr. Peggotty meant to say,

bird's-nesting--'this morning, 'tis along of me as you're a-going to

quit us?'

'You have something to say, my good friend,' returned my aunt, 'and will

do better without me.'

'By your leave, ma'am,' returned Mr. Peggotty, 'I should take it kind,

pervising you doen't mind my clicketten, if you'd bide heer.'

'Would you?' said my aunt, with short good-nature. 'Then I am sure I

will!'

So, she drew her arm through Mr. Peggotty's, and walked with him to a

leafy little summer-house there was at the bottom of the garden, where

she sat down on a bench, and I beside her. There was a seat for Mr.

Peggotty too, but he preferred to stand, leaning his hand on the small

rustic table. As he stood, looking at his cap for a little while before

beginning to speak, I could not help observing what power and force

of character his sinewy hand expressed, and what a good and trusty

companion it was to his honest brow and iron-grey hair.

'I took my dear child away last night,' Mr. Peggotty began, as he

raised his eyes to ours, 'to my lodging, wheer I have a long time been

expecting of her and preparing fur her. It was hours afore she knowed me

right; and when she did, she kneeled down at my feet, and kiender said

to me, as if it was her prayers, how it all come to be. You may believe

me, when I heerd her voice, as I had heerd at home so playful--and see

her humbled, as it might be in the dust our Saviour wrote in with his

blessed hand--I felt a wownd go to my 'art, in the midst of all its

thankfulness.'

He drew his sleeve across his face, without any pretence of concealing

why; and then cleared his voice.

'It warn't for long as I felt that; for she was found. I had on'y to

think as she was found, and it was gone. I doen't know why I do so much

as mention of it now, I'm sure. I didn't have it in my mind a minute

ago, to say a word about myself; but it come up so nat'ral, that I

yielded to it afore I was aweer.'

'You are a self-denying soul,' said my aunt, 'and will have your

reward.'

Mr. Peggotty, with the shadows of the leaves playing athwart his

face, made a surprised inclination of the head towards my aunt, as an

acknowledgement of her good opinion; then took up the thread he had

relinquished.

'When my Em'ly took flight,' he said, in stern wrath for the moment,

'from the house wheer she was made a prisoner by that theer spotted

snake as Mas'r Davy see,--and his story's trew, and may GOD confound

him!--she took flight in the night. It was a dark night, with a many

stars a-shining. She was wild. She ran along the sea beach, believing

the old boat was theer; and calling out to us to turn away our faces,

for she was a-coming by. She heerd herself a-crying out, like as if

it was another person; and cut herself on them sharp-pinted stones and

rocks, and felt it no more than if she had been rock herself. Ever so

fur she run, and there was fire afore her eyes, and roarings in her

ears. Of a sudden--or so she thowt, you unnerstand--the day broke, wet

and windy, and she was lying b'low a heap of stone upon the shore, and

a woman was a-speaking to her, saying, in the language of that country,

what was it as had gone so much amiss?'

He saw everything he related. It passed before him, as he spoke, so

vividly, that, in the intensity of his earnestness, he presented what

he described to me, with greater distinctness than I can express. I can

hardly believe, writing now long afterwards, but that I was actually

present in these scenes; they are impressed upon me with such an

astonishing air of fidelity.

'As Em'ly's eyes--which was heavy--see this woman better,' Mr. Peggotty

went on, 'she know'd as she was one of them as she had often talked to

on the beach. Fur, though she had run (as I have said) ever so fur in

the night, she had oftentimes wandered long ways, partly afoot, partly

in boats and carriages, and know'd all that country, 'long the coast,

miles and miles. She hadn't no children of her own, this woman, being

a young wife; but she was a-looking to have one afore long. And may

my prayers go up to Heaven that 'twill be a happiness to her, and a

comfort, and a honour, all her life! May it love her and be dootiful to

her, in her old age; helpful of her at the last; a Angel to her heer,

and heerafter!'

'Amen!' said my aunt.

'She had been summat timorous and down,' said Mr. Peggotty, and had sat,

at first, a little way off, at her spinning, or such work as it was,

when Em'ly talked to the children. But Em'ly had took notice of her,

and had gone and spoke to her; and as the young woman was partial to

the children herself, they had soon made friends. Sermuchser, that when

Em'ly went that way, she always giv Em'ly flowers. This was her as

now asked what it was that had gone so much amiss. Em'ly told her,

and she--took her home. She did indeed. She took her home,' said Mr.

Peggotty, covering his face.

He was more affected by this act of kindness, than I had ever seen him

affected by anything since the night she went away. My aunt and I did

not attempt to disturb him.

'It was a little cottage, you may suppose,' he said, presently, 'but she

found space for Em'ly in it,--her husband was away at sea,--and she kep

it secret, and prevailed upon such neighbours as she had (they was not

many near) to keep it secret too. Em'ly was took bad with fever,

and, what is very strange to me is,--maybe 'tis not so strange to

scholars,--the language of that country went out of her head, and she

could only speak her own, that no one unnerstood. She recollects, as if

she had dreamed it, that she lay there always a-talking her own tongue,

always believing as the old boat was round the next pint in the bay, and

begging and imploring of 'em to send theer and tell how she was dying,

and bring back a message of forgiveness, if it was on'y a wured. A'most

the whole time, she thowt,--now, that him as I made mention on just now

was lurking for her unnerneath the winder; now that him as had brought

her to this was in the room,--and cried to the good young woman not to

give her up, and know'd, at the same time, that she couldn't unnerstand,

and dreaded that she must be took away. Likewise the fire was afore

her eyes, and the roarings in her ears; and theer was no today, nor

yesterday, nor yet tomorrow; but everything in her life as ever had

been, or as ever could be, and everything as never had been, and as

never could be, was a crowding on her all at once, and nothing clear nor

welcome, and yet she sang and laughed about it! How long this lasted, I

doen't know; but then theer come a sleep; and in that sleep, from being

a many times stronger than her own self, she fell into the weakness of

the littlest child.'

Here he stopped, as if for relief from the terrors of his own

description. After being silent for a few moments, he pursued his story.

'It was a pleasant arternoon when she awoke; and so quiet, that there

warn't a sound but the rippling of that blue sea without a tide, upon

the shore. It was her belief, at first, that she was at home upon a

Sunday morning; but the vine leaves as she see at the winder, and the

hills beyond, warn't home, and contradicted of her. Then, come in her

friend to watch alongside of her bed; and then she know'd as the old

boat warn't round that next pint in the bay no more, but was fur off;

and know'd where she was, and why; and broke out a-crying on that good

young woman's bosom, wheer I hope her baby is a-lying now, a-cheering of

her with its pretty eyes!'

He could not speak of this good friend of Emily's without a flow of

tears. It was in vain to try. He broke down again, endeavouring to bless

her!

'That done my Em'ly good,' he resumed, after such emotion as I could

not behold without sharing in; and as to my aunt, she wept with all her

heart; 'that done Em'ly good, and she begun to mend. But, the language

of that country was quite gone from her, and she was forced to make

signs. So she went on, getting better from day to day, slow, but sure,

and trying to learn the names of common things--names as she seemed

never to have heerd in all her life--till one evening come, when she

was a-setting at her window, looking at a little girl at play upon the

beach. And of a sudden this child held out her hand, and said, what

would be in English, "Fisherman's daughter, here's a shell!"--for you

are to unnerstand that they used at first to call her "Pretty lady", as

the general way in that country is, and that she had taught 'em to

call her "Fisherman's daughter" instead. The child says of a sudden,

"Fisherman's daughter, here's a shell!" Then Em'ly unnerstands her; and

she answers, bursting out a-crying; and it all comes back!

'When Em'ly got strong again,' said Mr. Peggotty, after another short

interval of silence, 'she cast about to leave that good young creetur,

and get to her own country. The husband was come home, then; and the two

together put her aboard a small trader bound to Leghorn, and from that

to France. She had a little money, but it was less than little as they

would take for all they done. I'm a'most glad on it, though they was

so poor! What they done, is laid up wheer neither moth or rust doth

corrupt, and wheer thieves do not break through nor steal. Mas'r Davy,

it'll outlast all the treasure in the wureld.

'Em'ly got to France, and took service to wait on travelling ladies at a

inn in the port. Theer, theer come, one day, that snake. --Let him never

come nigh me. I doen't know what hurt I might do him!--Soon as she see

him, without him seeing her, all her fear and wildness returned upon

her, and she fled afore the very breath he draw'd. She come to England,

and was set ashore at Dover.

'I doen't know,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'for sure, when her 'art begun to

fail her; but all the way to England she had thowt to come to her dear

home. Soon as she got to England she turned her face tow'rds it. But,

fear of not being forgiv, fear of being pinted at, fear of some of

us being dead along of her, fear of many things, turned her from it,

kiender by force, upon the road: "Uncle, uncle," she says to me, "the

fear of not being worthy to do what my torn and bleeding breast so

longed to do, was the most fright'ning fear of all! I turned back, when

my 'art was full of prayers that I might crawl to the old door-step, in

the night, kiss it, lay my wicked face upon it, and theer be found dead

in the morning."

'She come,' said Mr. Peggotty, dropping his voice to an

awe-stricken whisper, 'to London. She--as had never seen it in her

life--alone--without a penny--young--so pretty--come to London. A'most

the moment as she lighted heer, all so desolate, she found (as she

believed) a friend; a decent woman as spoke to her about the needle-work

as she had been brought up to do, about finding plenty of it fur her,

about a lodging fur the night, and making secret inquiration concerning

of me and all at home, tomorrow. When my child,' he said aloud, and with

an energy of gratitude that shook him from head to foot, 'stood upon the

brink of more than I can say or think on--Martha, trew to her promise,

saved her.'

I could not repress a cry of joy.

'Mas'r Davy!' said he, gripping my hand in that strong hand of his,

'it was you as first made mention of her to me. I thankee, sir! She was

arnest. She had know'd of her bitter knowledge wheer to watch and what

to do. She had done it. And the Lord was above all! She come, white and

hurried, upon Em'ly in her sleep. She says to her, "Rise up from worse

than death, and come with me!" Them belonging to the house would have

stopped her, but they might as soon have stopped the sea. "Stand away

from me," she says, "I am a ghost that calls her from beside her open

grave!" She told Em'ly she had seen me, and know'd I loved her, and

forgive her. She wrapped her, hasty, in her clothes. She took her, faint

and trembling, on her arm. She heeded no more what they said, than if

she had had no ears. She walked among 'em with my child, minding only

her; and brought her safe out, in the dead of the night, from that black

pit of ruin!

'She attended on Em'ly,' said Mr. Peggotty, who had released my hand,

and put his own hand on his heaving chest; 'she attended to my Em'ly,

lying wearied out, and wandering betwixt whiles, till late next day.

Then she went in search of me; then in search of you, Mas'r Davy. She

didn't tell Em'ly what she come out fur, lest her 'art should fail, and

she should think of hiding of herself. How the cruel lady know'd of

her being theer, I can't say. Whether him as I have spoke so much of,

chanced to see 'em going theer, or whether (which is most like, to my

thinking) he had heerd it from the woman, I doen't greatly ask myself.

My niece is found.

'All night long,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'we have been together, Em'ly

and me. 'Tis little (considering the time) as she has said, in wureds,

through them broken-hearted tears; 'tis less as I have seen of her dear

face, as grow'd into a woman's at my hearth. But, all night long, her

arms has been about my neck; and her head has laid heer; and we knows

full well, as we can put our trust in one another, ever more.'

He ceased to speak, and his hand upon the table rested there in perfect

repose, with a resolution in it that might have conquered lions.

'It was a gleam of light upon me, Trot,' said my aunt, drying her eyes,

'when I formed the resolution of being godmother to your sister Betsey

Trotwood, who disappointed me; but, next to that, hardly anything would

have given me greater pleasure, than to be godmother to that good young

creature's baby!'

Mr. Peggotty nodded his understanding of my aunt's feelings, but could

not trust himself with any verbal reference to the subject of her

commendation. We all remained silent, and occupied with our own

reflections (my aunt drying her eyes, and now sobbing convulsively, and

now laughing and calling herself a fool); until I spoke.

'You have quite made up your mind,' said I to Mr. Peggotty, 'as to the

future, good friend? I need scarcely ask you.'

'Quite, Mas'r Davy,' he returned; 'and told Em'ly. Theer's mighty

countries, fur from heer. Our future life lays over the sea.'

'They will emigrate together, aunt,' said I.

'Yes!' said Mr. Peggotty, with a hopeful smile. 'No one can't reproach

my darling in Australia. We will begin a new life over theer!'

I asked him if he yet proposed to himself any time for going away.

'I was down at the Docks early this morning, sir,' he returned, 'to get

information concerning of them ships. In about six weeks or two

months from now, there'll be one sailing--I see her this morning--went

aboard--and we shall take our passage in her.'

'Quite alone?' I asked.

'Aye, Mas'r Davy!' he returned. 'My sister, you see, she's that fond

of you and yourn, and that accustomed to think on'y of her own country,

that it wouldn't be hardly fair to let her go. Besides which, theer's

one she has in charge, Mas'r Davy, as doen't ought to be forgot.'

'Poor Ham!' said I.

'My good sister takes care of his house, you see, ma'am, and he takes

kindly to her,' Mr. Peggotty explained for my aunt's better information.

'He'll set and talk to her, with a calm spirit, wen it's like he

couldn't bring himself to open his lips to another. Poor fellow!' said

Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, 'theer's not so much left him, that he

could spare the little as he has!'

'And Mrs. Gummidge?' said I.

'Well, I've had a mort of consideration, I do tell you,' returned Mr.

Peggotty, with a perplexed look which gradually cleared as he went

on, 'concerning of Missis Gummidge. You see, wen Missis Gummidge falls

a-thinking of the old 'un, she an't what you may call good company.

Betwixt you and me, Mas'r Davy--and you, ma'am--wen Mrs. Gummidge takes

to wimicking,'--our old country word for crying,--'she's liable to be

considered to be, by them as didn't know the old 'un, peevish-like. Now

I DID know the old 'un,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and I know'd his merits,

so I unnerstan' her; but 'tan't entirely so, you see, with

others--nat'rally can't be!'

My aunt and I both acquiesced.

'Wheerby,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'my sister might--I doen't say she would,

but might--find Missis Gummidge give her a leetle trouble now-and-again.

Theerfur 'tan't my intentions to moor Missis Gummidge 'long with them,

but to find a Beein' fur her wheer she can fisherate for herself.'

(A Beein' signifies, in that dialect, a home, and to fisherate is to

provide.) 'Fur which purpose,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I means to make her

a 'lowance afore I go, as'll leave her pretty comfort'ble. She's the

faithfullest of creeturs. 'Tan't to be expected, of course, at her

time of life, and being lone and lorn, as the good old Mawther is to

be knocked about aboardship, and in the woods and wilds of a new and

fur-away country. So that's what I'm a-going to do with her.'

He forgot nobody. He thought of everybody's claims and strivings, but

his own.

'Em'ly,' he continued, 'will keep along with me--poor child, she's sore

in need of peace and rest!--until such time as we goes upon our voyage.

She'll work at them clothes, as must be made; and I hope her troubles

will begin to seem longer ago than they was, wen she finds herself once

more by her rough but loving uncle.'

MY aunt nodded confirmation of this hope, and imparted great

satisfaction to Mr. Peggotty.

'Theer's one thing furder, Mas'r Davy,' said he, putting his hand in his

breast-pocket, and gravely taking out the little paper bundle I had

seen before, which he unrolled on the table. 'Theer's these here

banknotes--fifty pound, and ten. To them I wish to add the money as she

come away with. I've asked her about that (but not saying why), and have

added of it up. I an't a scholar. Would you be so kind as see how 'tis?'

He handed me, apologetically for his scholarship, a piece of paper, and

observed me while I looked it over. It was quite right.

'Thankee, sir,' he said, taking it back. 'This money, if you doen't

see objections, Mas'r Davy, I shall put up jest afore I go, in a cover

directed to him; and put that up in another, directed to his mother.

I shall tell her, in no more wureds than I speak to you, what it's the

price on; and that I'm gone, and past receiving of it back.'

I told him that I thought it would be right to do so--that I was

thoroughly convinced it would be, since he felt it to be right.

'I said that theer was on'y one thing furder,' he proceeded with a grave

smile, when he had made up his little bundle again, and put it in his

pocket; 'but theer was two. I warn't sure in my mind, wen I come out

this morning, as I could go and break to Ham, of my own self, what had

so thankfully happened. So I writ a letter while I was out, and put

it in the post-office, telling of 'em how all was as 'tis; and that I

should come down tomorrow to unload my mind of what little needs a-doing

of down theer, and, most-like, take my farewell leave of Yarmouth.'

'And do you wish me to go with you?' said I, seeing that he left

something unsaid.

'If you could do me that kind favour, Mas'r Davy,' he replied. 'I know

the sight on you would cheer 'em up a bit.'

My little Dora being in good spirits, and very desirous that I should

go--as I found on talking it over with her--I readily pledged myself to

accompany him in accordance with his wish. Next morning, consequently,

we were on the Yarmouth coach, and again travelling over the old ground.

As we passed along the familiar street at night--Mr. Peggotty, in

despite of all my remonstrances, carrying my bag--I glanced into Omer

and Joram's shop, and saw my old friend Mr. Omer there, smoking his

pipe. I felt reluctant to be present, when Mr. Peggotty first met his

sister and Ham; and made Mr. Omer my excuse for lingering behind.

'How is Mr. Omer, after this long time?' said I, going in.

He fanned away the smoke of his pipe, that he might get a better view of

me, and soon recognized me with great delight.

'I should get up, sir, to acknowledge such an honour as this visit,'

said he, 'only my limbs are rather out of sorts, and I am wheeled about.

With the exception of my limbs and my breath, howsoever, I am as hearty

as a man can be, I'm thankful to say.'

I congratulated him on his contented looks and his good spirits, and

saw, now, that his easy-chair went on wheels.

'It's an ingenious thing, ain't it?' he inquired, following the

direction of my glance, and polishing the elbow with his arm. 'It runs

as light as a feather, and tracks as true as a mail-coach. Bless you,

my little Minnie--my grand-daughter you know, Minnie's child--puts her

little strength against the back, gives it a shove, and away we go, as

clever and merry as ever you see anything! And I tell you what--it's a

most uncommon chair to smoke a pipe in.'

I never saw such a good old fellow to make the best of a thing, and

find out the enjoyment of it, as Mr. Omer. He was as radiant, as if

his chair, his asthma, and the failure of his limbs, were the various

branches of a great invention for enhancing the luxury of a pipe.

'I see more of the world, I can assure you,' said Mr. Omer, 'in this

chair, than ever I see out of it. You'd be surprised at the number of

people that looks in of a day to have a chat. You really would! There's

twice as much in the newspaper, since I've taken to this chair, as there

used to be. As to general reading, dear me, what a lot of it I do get

through! That's what I feel so strong, you know! If it had been my eyes,

what should I have done? If it had been my ears, what should I have

done? Being my limbs, what does it signify? Why, my limbs only made my

breath shorter when I used 'em. And now, if I want to go out into

the street or down to the sands, I've only got to call Dick, Joram's

youngest 'prentice, and away I go in my own carriage, like the Lord

Mayor of London.'

He half suffocated himself with laughing here.

'Lord bless you!' said Mr. Omer, resuming his pipe, 'a man must take

the fat with the lean; that's what he must make up his mind to, in this

life. Joram does a fine business. Ex-cellent business!'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said I.

'I knew you would be,' said Mr. Omer. 'And Joram and Minnie are like

Valentines. What more can a man expect? What's his limbs to that!'

His supreme contempt for his own limbs, as he sat smoking, was one of

the pleasantest oddities I have ever encountered.

'And since I've took to general reading, you've took to general writing,

eh, sir?' said Mr. Omer, surveying me admiringly. 'What a lovely work

that was of yours! What expressions in it! I read it every word--every

word. And as to feeling sleepy! Not at all!'

I laughingly expressed my satisfaction, but I must confess that I

thought this association of ideas significant.

'I give you my word and honour, sir,' said Mr. Omer, 'that when I lay

that book upon the table, and look at it outside; compact in three

separate and indiwidual wollumes--one, two, three; I am as proud as

Punch to think that I once had the honour of being connected with

your family. And dear me, it's a long time ago, now, ain't it? Over

at Blunderstone. With a pretty little party laid along with the other

party. And you quite a small party then, yourself. Dear, dear!'

I changed the subject by referring to Emily. After assuring him that I

did not forget how interested he had always been in her, and how

kindly he had always treated her, I gave him a general account of her

restoration to her uncle by the aid of Martha; which I knew would please

the old man. He listened with the utmost attention, and said, feelingly,

when I had done:

'I am rejoiced at it, sir! It's the best news I have heard for many

a day. Dear, dear, dear! And what's going to be undertook for that

unfortunate young woman, Martha, now?'

'You touch a point that my thoughts have been dwelling on since

yesterday,' said I, 'but on which I can give you no information yet, Mr.

Omer. Mr. Peggotty has not alluded to it, and I have a delicacy in

doing so. I am sure he has not forgotten it. He forgets nothing that is

disinterested and good.'

'Because you know,' said Mr. Omer, taking himself up, where he had left

off, 'whatever is done, I should wish to be a member of. Put me down for

anything you may consider right, and let me know. I never could think

the girl all bad, and I am glad to find she's not. So will my daughter

Minnie be. Young women are contradictory creatures in some things--her

mother was just the same as her--but their hearts are soft and kind.

It's all show with Minnie, about Martha. Why she should consider it

necessary to make any show, I don't undertake to tell you. But it's all

show, bless you. She'd do her any kindness in private. So, put me down

for whatever you may consider right, will you be so good? and drop me

a line where to forward it. Dear me!' said Mr. Omer, 'when a man is

drawing on to a time of life, where the two ends of life meet; when he

finds himself, however hearty he is, being wheeled about for the second

time, in a speeches of go-cart; he should be over-rejoiced to do a

kindness if he can. He wants plenty. And I don't speak of myself,

particular,' said Mr. Omer, 'because, sir, the way I look at it is, that

we are all drawing on to the bottom of the hill, whatever age we are,

on account of time never standing still for a single moment. So let us

always do a kindness, and be over-rejoiced. To be sure!'

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and put it on a ledge in the back

of his chair, expressly made for its reception.

'There's Em'ly's cousin, him that she was to have been married to,' said

Mr. Omer, rubbing his hands feebly, 'as fine a fellow as there is in

Yarmouth! He'll come and talk or read to me, in the evening, for an hour

together sometimes. That's a kindness, I should call it! All his life's

a kindness.'

'I am going to see him now,' said I.

'Are you?' said Mr. Omer. 'Tell him I was hearty, and sent my respects.

Minnie and Joram's at a ball. They would be as proud to see you as I

am, if they was at home. Minnie won't hardly go out at all, you see, "on

account of father", as she says. So I swore tonight, that if she didn't

go, I'd go to bed at six. In consequence of which,' Mr. Omer shook

himself and his chair with laughter at the success of his device, 'she

and Joram's at a ball.'

I shook hands with him, and wished him good night.

'Half a minute, sir,' said Mr. Omer. 'If you was to go without seeing

my little elephant, you'd lose the best of sights. You never see such

a sight! Minnie!' A musical little voice answered, from somewhere

upstairs, 'I am coming, grandfather!' and a pretty little girl with

long, flaxen, curling hair, soon came running into the shop.

'This is my little elephant, sir,' said Mr. Omer, fondling the child.

'Siamese breed, sir. Now, little elephant!'

The little elephant set the door of the parlour open, enabling me to see

that, in these latter days, it was converted into a bedroom for Mr.

Omer who could not be easily conveyed upstairs; and then hid her pretty

forehead, and tumbled her long hair, against the back of Mr. Omer's

chair.

'The elephant butts, you know, sir,' said Mr. Omer, winking, 'when he

goes at a object. Once, elephant. Twice. Three times!'

At this signal, the little elephant, with a dexterity that was next to

marvellous in so small an animal, whisked the chair round with Mr. Omer

in it, and rattled it off, pell-mell, into the parlour, without touching

the door-post: Mr. Omer indescribably enjoying the performance, and

looking back at me on the road as if it were the triumphant issue of his

life's exertions.

After a stroll about the town I went to Ham's house. Peggotty had now

removed here for good; and had let her own house to the successor of

Mr. Barkis in the carrying business, who had paid her very well for the

good-will, cart, and horse. I believe the very same slow horse that Mr.

Barkis drove was still at work.

I found them in the neat kitchen, accompanied by Mrs. Gummidge, who had

been fetched from the old boat by Mr. Peggotty himself. I doubt if

she could have been induced to desert her post, by anyone else. He

had evidently told them all. Both Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge had their

aprons to their eyes, and Ham had just stepped out 'to take a turn on

the beach'. He presently came home, very glad to see me; and I hope they

were all the better for my being there. We spoke, with some approach to

cheerfulness, of Mr. Peggotty's growing rich in a new country, and of

the wonders he would describe in his letters. We said nothing of Emily

by name, but distantly referred to her more than once. Ham was the

serenest of the party.

But, Peggotty told me, when she lighted me to a little chamber where the

Crocodile book was lying ready for me on the table, that he always was

the same. She believed (she told me, crying) that he was broken-hearted;

though he was as full of courage as of sweetness, and worked harder and

better than any boat-builder in any yard in all that part. There were

times, she said, of an evening, when he talked of their old life in

the boat-house; and then he mentioned Emily as a child. But, he never

mentioned her as a woman.

I thought I had read in his face that he would like to speak to me

alone. I therefore resolved to put myself in his way next evening, as he

came home from his work. Having settled this with myself, I fell asleep.

That night, for the first time in all those many nights, the candle was

taken out of the window, Mr. Peggotty swung in his old hammock in the

old boat, and the wind murmured with the old sound round his head.

All next day, he was occupied in disposing of his fishing-boat and

tackle; in packing up, and sending to London by waggon, such of his

little domestic possessions as he thought would be useful to him; and in

parting with the rest, or bestowing them on Mrs. Gummidge. She was with

him all day. As I had a sorrowful wish to see the old place once more,

before it was locked up, I engaged to meet them there in the evening.

But I so arranged it, as that I should meet Ham first.

It was easy to come in his way, as I knew where he worked. I met him

at a retired part of the sands, which I knew he would cross, and turned

back with him, that he might have leisure to speak to me if he really

wished. I had not mistaken the expression of his face. We had walked but

a little way together, when he said, without looking at me:

'Mas'r Davy, have you seen her?'

'Only for a moment, when she was in a swoon,' I softly answered.

We walked a little farther, and he said:

'Mas'r Davy, shall you see her, d'ye think?'

'It would be too painful to her, perhaps,' said I.

'I have thowt of that,' he replied. 'So 'twould, sir, so 'twould.'

'But, Ham,' said I, gently, 'if there is anything that I could write

to her, for you, in case I could not tell it; if there is anything

you would wish to make known to her through me; I should consider it a

sacred trust.'

'I am sure on't. I thankee, sir, most kind! I think theer is something I

could wish said or wrote.'

'What is it?'

We walked a little farther in silence, and then he spoke.

''Tan't that I forgive her. 'Tan't that so much. 'Tis more as I beg of

her to forgive me, for having pressed my affections upon her. Odd times,

I think that if I hadn't had her promise fur to marry me, sir, she was

that trustful of me, in a friendly way, that she'd have told me what was

struggling in her mind, and would have counselled with me, and I might

have saved her.'

I pressed his hand. 'Is that all?' 'Theer's yet a something else,' he

returned, 'if I can say it, Mas'r Davy.'

We walked on, farther than we had walked yet, before he spoke again. He

was not crying when he made the pauses I shall express by lines. He was

merely collecting himself to speak very plainly.

'I loved her--and I love the mem'ry of her--too deep--to be able to

lead her to believe of my own self as I'm a happy man. I could only be

happy--by forgetting of her--and I'm afeerd I couldn't hardly bear as

she should be told I done that. But if you, being so full of learning,

Mas'r Davy, could think of anything to say as might bring her to believe

I wasn't greatly hurt: still loving of her, and mourning for her:

anything as might bring her to believe as I was not tired of my life,

and yet was hoping fur to see her without blame, wheer the wicked cease

from troubling and the weary are at rest--anything as would ease her

sorrowful mind, and yet not make her think as I could ever marry, or as

'twas possible that anyone could ever be to me what she was--I should

ask of you to say that--with my prayers for her--that was so dear.'

I pressed his manly hand again, and told him I would charge myself to do

this as well as I could.

'I thankee, sir,' he answered. ''Twas kind of you to meet me. 'Twas kind

of you to bear him company down. Mas'r Davy, I unnerstan' very well,

though my aunt will come to Lon'on afore they sail, and they'll unite

once more, that I am not like to see him agen. I fare to feel sure on't.

We doen't say so, but so 'twill be, and better so. The last you see on

him--the very last--will you give him the lovingest duty and thanks of

the orphan, as he was ever more than a father to?'

This I also promised, faithfully.

'I thankee agen, sir,' he said, heartily shaking hands. 'I know wheer

you're a-going. Good-bye!'

With a slight wave of his hand, as though to explain to me that he could

not enter the old place, he turned away. As I looked after his figure,

crossing the waste in the moonlight, I saw him turn his face towards a

strip of silvery light upon the sea, and pass on, looking at it, until

he was a shadow in the distance.

The door of the boat-house stood open when I approached; and, on

entering, I found it emptied of all its furniture, saving one of the old

lockers, on which Mrs. Gummidge, with a basket on her knee, was seated,

looking at Mr. Peggotty. He leaned his elbow on the rough chimney-piece,

and gazed upon a few expiring embers in the grate; but he raised his

head, hopefully, on my coming in, and spoke in a cheery manner.

'Come, according to promise, to bid farewell to 't, eh, Mas'r Davy?'

he said, taking up the candle. 'Bare enough, now, an't it?' 'Indeed you

have made good use of the time,' said I.

'Why, we have not been idle, sir. Missis Gummidge has worked like a--I

doen't know what Missis Gummidge an't worked like,' said Mr. Peggotty,

looking at her, at a loss for a sufficiently approving simile.

Mrs. Gummidge, leaning on her basket, made no observation.

'Theer's the very locker that you used to sit on, 'long with Em'ly!'

said Mr. Peggotty, in a whisper. 'I'm a-going to carry it away with me,

last of all. And heer's your old little bedroom, see, Mas'r Davy! A'most

as bleak tonight, as 'art could wish!'

In truth, the wind, though it was low, had a solemn sound, and crept

around the deserted house with a whispered wailing that was very

mournful. Everything was gone, down to the little mirror with the

oyster-shell frame. I thought of myself, lying here, when that first

great change was being wrought at home. I thought of the blue-eyed child

who had enchanted me. I thought of Steerforth: and a foolish, fearful

fancy came upon me of his being near at hand, and liable to be met at

any turn.

''Tis like to be long,' said Mr. Peggotty, in a low voice, 'afore

the boat finds new tenants. They look upon 't, down beer, as being

unfortunate now!'

'Does it belong to anybody in the neighbourhood?' I asked.

'To a mast-maker up town,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I'm a-going to give the

key to him tonight.'

We looked into the other little room, and came back to Mrs. Gummidge,

sitting on the locker, whom Mr. Peggotty, putting the light on the

chimney-piece, requested to rise, that he might carry it outside the

door before extinguishing the candle.

'Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge, suddenly deserting her basket, and clinging

to his arm 'my dear Dan'l, the parting words I speak in this house is, I

mustn't be left behind. Doen't ye think of leaving me behind, Dan'l! Oh,

doen't ye ever do it!'

Mr. Peggotty, taken aback, looked from Mrs. Gummidge to me, and from me

to Mrs. Gummidge, as if he had been awakened from a sleep.

'Doen't ye, dearest Dan'l, doen't ye!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, fervently.

'Take me 'long with you, Dan'l, take me 'long with you and Em'ly! I'll

be your servant, constant and trew. If there's slaves in them parts

where you're a-going, I'll be bound to you for one, and happy, but

doen't ye leave me behind, Dan'l, that's a deary dear!'

'My good soul,' said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, 'you doen't know

what a long voyage, and what a hard life 'tis!' 'Yes, I do, Dan'l! I can

guess!' cried Mrs. Gummidge. 'But my parting words under this roof is,

I shall go into the house and die, if I am not took. I can dig, Dan'l.

I can work. I can live hard. I can be loving and patient now--more than

you think, Dan'l, if you'll on'y try me. I wouldn't touch the 'lowance,

not if I was dying of want, Dan'l Peggotty; but I'll go with you and

Em'ly, if you'll on'y let me, to the world's end! I know how 'tis; I

know you think that I am lone and lorn; but, deary love, 'tan't so no

more! I ain't sat here, so long, a-watching, and a-thinking of your

trials, without some good being done me. Mas'r Davy, speak to him for

me! I knows his ways, and Em'ly's, and I knows their sorrows, and can be

a comfort to 'em, some odd times, and labour for 'em allus! Dan'l, deary

Dan'l, let me go 'long with you!'

And Mrs. Gummidge took his hand, and kissed it with a homely pathos and

affection, in a homely rapture of devotion and gratitude, that he well

deserved.

We brought the locker out, extinguished the candle, fastened the door

on the outside, and left the old boat close shut up, a dark speck in

the cloudy night. Next day, when we were returning to London outside the

coach, Mrs. Gummidge and her basket were on the seat behind, and Mrs.

Gummidge was happy.

CHAPTER 52. I ASSIST AT AN EXPLOSION

When the time Mr. Micawber had appointed so mysteriously, was within

four-and-twenty hours of being come, my aunt and I consulted how we

should proceed; for my aunt was very unwilling to leave Dora. Ah! how

easily I carried Dora up and down stairs, now!

We were disposed, notwithstanding Mr. Micawber's stipulation for my

aunt's attendance, to arrange that she should stay at home, and be

represented by Mr. Dick and me. In short, we had resolved to take this

course, when Dora again unsettled us by declaring that she never

would forgive herself, and never would forgive her bad boy, if my aunt

remained behind, on any pretence.

'I won't speak to you,' said Dora, shaking her curls at my aunt. 'I'll

be disagreeable! I'll make Jip bark at you all day. I shall be sure that

you really are a cross old thing, if you don't go!'

'Tut, Blossom!' laughed my aunt. 'You know you can't do without me!'

'Yes, I can,' said Dora. 'You are no use to me at all. You never run up

and down stairs for me, all day long. You never sit and tell me stories

about Doady, when his shoes were worn out, and he was covered with

dust--oh, what a poor little mite of a fellow! You never do anything at

all to please me, do you, dear?' Dora made haste to kiss my aunt, and

say, 'Yes, you do! I'm only joking!'-lest my aunt should think she

really meant it.

'But, aunt,' said Dora, coaxingly, 'now listen. You must go. I shall

tease you, 'till you let me have my own way about it. I shall lead my

naughty boy such a life, if he don't make you go. I shall make myself

so disagreeable--and so will Jip! You'll wish you had gone, like a good

thing, for ever and ever so long, if you don't go. Besides,' said Dora,

putting back her hair, and looking wonderingly at my aunt and me, 'why

shouldn't you both go? I am not very ill indeed. Am I?'

'Why, what a question!' cried my aunt.

'What a fancy!' said I.

'Yes! I know I am a silly little thing!' said Dora, slowly looking from

one of us to the other, and then putting up her pretty lips to kiss us

as she lay upon her couch. 'Well, then, you must both go, or I shall not

believe you; and then I shall cry!'

I saw, in my aunt's face, that she began to give way now, and Dora

brightened again, as she saw it too.

'You'll come back with so much to tell me, that it'll take at least

a week to make me understand!' said Dora. 'Because I know I shan't

understand, for a length of time, if there's any business in it. And

there's sure to be some business in it! If there's anything to add up,

besides, I don't know when I shall make it out; and my bad boy will look

so miserable all the time. There! Now you'll go, won't you? You'll only

be gone one night, and Jip will take care of me while you are gone.

Doady will carry me upstairs before you go, and I won't come down again

till you come back; and you shall take Agnes a dreadfully scolding

letter from me, because she has never been to see us!'

We agreed, without any more consultation, that we would both go, and

that Dora was a little Impostor, who feigned to be rather unwell,

because she liked to be petted. She was greatly pleased, and very merry;

and we four, that is to say, my aunt, Mr. Dick, Traddles, and I, went

down to Canterbury by the Dover mail that night.

At the hotel where Mr. Micawber had requested us to await him, which

we got into, with some trouble, in the middle of the night, I found a

letter, importing that he would appear in the morning punctually at half

past nine. After which, we went shivering, at that uncomfortable hour,

to our respective beds, through various close passages; which smelt as

if they had been steeped, for ages, in a solution of soup and stables.

Early in the morning, I sauntered through the dear old tranquil streets,

and again mingled with the shadows of the venerable gateways and

churches. The rooks were sailing about the cathedral towers; and the

towers themselves, overlooking many a long unaltered mile of the rich

country and its pleasant streams, were cutting the bright morning air,

as if there were no such thing as change on earth. Yet the bells, when

they sounded, told me sorrowfully of change in everything; told me of

their own age, and my pretty Dora's youth; and of the many, never old,

who had lived and loved and died, while the reverberations of the bells

had hummed through the rusty armour of the Black Prince hanging up

within, and, motes upon the deep of Time, had lost themselves in air, as

circles do in water.

I looked at the old house from the corner of the street, but did not go

nearer to it, lest, being observed, I might unwittingly do any harm to

the design I had come to aid. The early sun was striking edgewise on its

gables and lattice-windows, touching them with gold; and some beams of

its old peace seemed to touch my heart.

I strolled into the country for an hour or so, and then returned by

the main street, which in the interval had shaken off its last night's

sleep. Among those who were stirring in the shops, I saw my ancient

enemy the butcher, now advanced to top-boots and a baby, and in business

for himself. He was nursing the baby, and appeared to be a benignant

member of society.

We all became very anxious and impatient, when we sat down to breakfast.

As it approached nearer and nearer to half past nine o'clock, our

restless expectation of Mr. Micawber increased. At last we made no more

pretence of attending to the meal, which, except with Mr. Dick, had been

a mere form from the first; but my aunt walked up and down the room,

Traddles sat upon the sofa affecting to read the paper with his eyes on

the ceiling; and I looked out of the window to give early notice of Mr.

Micawber's coming. Nor had I long to watch, for, at the first chime of

the half hour, he appeared in the street.

'Here he is,' said I, 'and not in his legal attire!'

My aunt tied the strings of her bonnet (she had come down to breakfast

in it), and put on her shawl, as if she were ready for anything that

was resolute and uncompromising. Traddles buttoned his coat with a

determined air. Mr. Dick, disturbed by these formidable appearances, but

feeling it necessary to imitate them, pulled his hat, with both hands,

as firmly over his ears as he possibly could; and instantly took it off

again, to welcome Mr. Micawber.

'Gentlemen, and madam,' said Mr. Micawber, 'good morning! My dear sir,'

to Mr. Dick, who shook hands with him violently, 'you are extremely

good.'

'Have you breakfasted?' said Mr. Dick. 'Have a chop!'

'Not for the world, my good sir!' cried Mr. Micawber, stopping him on

his way to the bell; 'appetite and myself, Mr. Dixon, have long been

strangers.'

Mr. Dixon was so well pleased with his new name, and appeared to think

it so obliging in Mr. Micawber to confer it upon him, that he shook

hands with him again, and laughed rather childishly.

'Dick,' said my aunt, 'attention!'

Mr. Dick recovered himself, with a blush.

'Now, sir,' said my aunt to Mr. Micawber, as she put on her gloves, 'we

are ready for Mount Vesuvius, or anything else, as soon as YOU please.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'I trust you will shortly witness an

eruption. Mr. Traddles, I have your permission, I believe, to mention

here that we have been in communication together?'

'It is undoubtedly the fact, Copperfield,' said Traddles, to whom I

looked in surprise. 'Mr. Micawber has consulted me in reference to

what he has in contemplation; and I have advised him to the best of my

judgement.'

'Unless I deceive myself, Mr. Traddles,' pursued Mr. Micawber, 'what I

contemplate is a disclosure of an important nature.'

'Highly so,' said Traddles.

'Perhaps, under such circumstances, madam and gentlemen,' said Mr.

Micawber, 'you will do me the favour to submit yourselves, for the

moment, to the direction of one who, however unworthy to be regarded in

any other light but as a Waif and Stray upon the shore of human nature,

is still your fellow-man, though crushed out of his original form

by individual errors, and the accumulative force of a combination of

circumstances?'

'We have perfect confidence in you, Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'and will do

what you please.'

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'your confidence is not, at

the existing juncture, ill-bestowed. I would beg to be allowed a start

of five minutes by the clock; and then to receive the present company,

inquiring for Miss Wickfield, at the office of Wickfield and Heep, whose

Stipendiary I am.'

My aunt and I looked at Traddles, who nodded his approval.

'I have no more,' observed Mr. Micawber, 'to say at present.'

With which, to my infinite surprise, he included us all in a

comprehensive bow, and disappeared; his manner being extremely distant,

and his face extremely pale.

Traddles only smiled, and shook his head (with his hair standing upright

on the top of it), when I looked to him for an explanation; so I took

out my watch, and, as a last resource, counted off the five minutes. My

aunt, with her own watch in her hand, did the like. When the time was

expired, Traddles gave her his arm; and we all went out together to the

old house, without saying one word on the way.

We found Mr. Micawber at his desk, in the turret office on the

ground floor, either writing, or pretending to write, hard. The large

office-ruler was stuck into his waistcoat, and was not so well concealed

but that a foot or more of that instrument protruded from his bosom,

like a new kind of shirt-frill.

As it appeared to me that I was expected to speak, I said aloud:

'How do you do, Mr. Micawber?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, gravely, 'I hope I see you well?'

'Is Miss Wickfield at home?' said I.

'Mr. Wickfield is unwell in bed, sir, of a rheumatic fever,' he

returned; 'but Miss Wickfield, I have no doubt, will be happy to see old

friends. Will you walk in, sir?'

He preceded us to the dining-room--the first room I had entered in that

house--and flinging open the door of Mr. Wickfield's former office,

said, in a sonorous voice:

'Miss Trotwood, Mr. David Copperfield, Mr. Thomas Traddles, and Mr.

Dixon!'

I had not seen Uriah Heep since the time of the blow. Our visit

astonished him, evidently; not the less, I dare say, because it

astonished ourselves. He did not gather his eyebrows together, for he

had none worth mentioning; but he frowned to that degree that he almost

closed his small eyes, while the hurried raising of his grisly hand to

his chin betrayed some trepidation or surprise. This was only when we

were in the act of entering his room, and when I caught a glance at him

over my aunt's shoulder. A moment afterwards, he was as fawning and as

humble as ever.

'Well, I am sure,' he said. 'This is indeed an unexpected pleasure! To

have, as I may say, all friends round St. Paul's at once, is a treat

unlooked for! Mr. Copperfield, I hope I see you well, and--if I may

umbly express myself so--friendly towards them as is ever your friends,

whether or not. Mrs. Copperfield, sir, I hope she's getting on. We have

been made quite uneasy by the poor accounts we have had of her state,

lately, I do assure you.'

I felt ashamed to let him take my hand, but I did not know yet what else

to do.

'Things are changed in this office, Miss Trotwood, since I was an umble

clerk, and held your pony; ain't they?' said Uriah, with his sickliest

smile. 'But I am not changed, Miss Trotwood.'

'Well, sir,' returned my aunt, 'to tell you the truth, I think you are

pretty constant to the promise of your youth; if that's any satisfaction

to you.'

'Thank you, Miss Trotwood,' said Uriah, writhing in his ungainly manner,

'for your good opinion! Micawber, tell 'em to let Miss Agnes know--and

mother. Mother will be quite in a state, when she sees the present

company!' said Uriah, setting chairs.

'You are not busy, Mr. Heep?' said Traddles, whose eye the cunning red

eye accidentally caught, as it at once scrutinized and evaded us.

'No, Mr. Traddles,' replied Uriah, resuming his official seat, and

squeezing his bony hands, laid palm to palm between his bony knees. 'Not

so much so as I could wish. But lawyers, sharks, and leeches, are not

easily satisfied, you know! Not but what myself and Micawber have our

hands pretty full, in general, on account of Mr. Wickfield's being

hardly fit for any occupation, sir. But it's a pleasure as well as a

duty, I am sure, to work for him. You've not been intimate with Mr.

Wickfield, I think, Mr. Traddles? I believe I've only had the honour of

seeing you once myself?'

'No, I have not been intimate with Mr. Wickfield,' returned Traddles;

'or I might perhaps have waited on you long ago, Mr. Heep.'

There was something in the tone of this reply, which made Uriah look at

the speaker again, with a very sinister and suspicious expression. But,

seeing only Traddles, with his good-natured face, simple manner, and

hair on end, he dismissed it as he replied, with a jerk of his whole

body, but especially his throat:

'I am sorry for that, Mr. Traddles. You would have admired him as much

as we all do. His little failings would only have endeared him to you

the more. But if you would like to hear my fellow-partner eloquently

spoken of, I should refer you to Copperfield. The family is a subject

he's very strong upon, if you never heard him.'

I was prevented from disclaiming the compliment (if I should have

done so, in any case), by the entrance of Agnes, now ushered in by Mr.

Micawber. She was not quite so self-possessed as usual, I thought; and

had evidently undergone anxiety and fatigue. But her earnest cordiality,

and her quiet beauty, shone with the gentler lustre for it.

I saw Uriah watch her while she greeted us; and he reminded me of an

ugly and rebellious genie watching a good spirit. In the meanwhile,

some slight sign passed between Mr. Micawber and Traddles; and Traddles,

unobserved except by me, went out.

'Don't wait, Micawber,' said Uriah.

Mr. Micawber, with his hand upon the ruler in his breast, stood erect

before the door, most unmistakably contemplating one of his fellow-men,

and that man his employer.

'What are you waiting for?' said Uriah. 'Micawber! did you hear me tell

you not to wait?'

'Yes!' replied the immovable Mr. Micawber.

'Then why DO you wait?' said Uriah.

'Because I--in short, choose,' replied Mr. Micawber, with a burst.

Uriah's cheeks lost colour, and an unwholesome paleness, still faintly

tinged by his pervading red, overspread them. He looked at Mr. Micawber

attentively, with his whole face breathing short and quick in every

feature.

'You are a dissipated fellow, as all the world knows,' he said, with an

effort at a smile, 'and I am afraid you'll oblige me to get rid of you.

Go along! I'll talk to you presently.'

'If there is a scoundrel on this earth,' said Mr. Micawber, suddenly

breaking out again with the utmost vehemence, 'with whom I have already

talked too much, that scoundrel's name is--HEEP!'

Uriah fell back, as if he had been struck or stung. Looking slowly round

upon us with the darkest and wickedest expression that his face could

wear, he said, in a lower voice:

'Oho! This is a conspiracy! You have met here by appointment! You are

playing Booty with my clerk, are you, Copperfield? Now, take care.

You'll make nothing of this. We understand each other, you and me.

There's no love between us. You were always a puppy with a proud

stomach, from your first coming here; and you envy me my rise, do you?

None of your plots against me; I'll counterplot you! Micawber, you be

off. I'll talk to you presently.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'there is a sudden change in this fellow, in

more respects than the extraordinary one of his speaking the truth in

one particular, which assures me that he is brought to bay. Deal with

him as he deserves!'

'You are a precious set of people, ain't you?' said Uriah, in the same

low voice, and breaking out into a clammy heat, which he wiped from his

forehead, with his long lean hand, 'to buy over my clerk, who is the

very scum of society,--as you yourself were, Copperfield, you know it,

before anyone had charity on you,--to defame me with his lies? Miss

Trotwood, you had better stop this; or I'll stop your husband shorter

than will be pleasant to you. I won't know your story professionally,

for nothing, old lady! Miss Wickfield, if you have any love for your

father, you had better not join that gang. I'll ruin him, if you do.

Now, come! I have got some of you under the harrow. Think twice, before

it goes over you. Think twice, you, Micawber, if you don't want to

be crushed. I recommend you to take yourself off, and be talked to

presently, you fool! while there's time to retreat. Where's mother?' he

said, suddenly appearing to notice, with alarm, the absence of Traddles,

and pulling down the bell-rope. 'Fine doings in a person's own house!'

'Mrs. Heep is here, sir,' said Traddles, returning with that worthy

mother of a worthy son. 'I have taken the liberty of making myself known

to her.'

'Who are you to make yourself known?' retorted Uriah. 'And what do you

want here?'

'I am the agent and friend of Mr. Wickfield, sir,' said Traddles, in a

composed and business-like way. 'And I have a power of attorney from him

in my pocket, to act for him in all matters.'

'The old ass has drunk himself into a state of dotage,' said Uriah,

turning uglier than before, 'and it has been got from him by fraud!'

'Something has been got from him by fraud, I know,' returned Traddles

quietly; 'and so do you, Mr. Heep. We will refer that question, if you

please, to Mr. Micawber.'

'Ury--!' Mrs. Heep began, with an anxious gesture.

'YOU hold your tongue, mother,' he returned; 'least said, soonest

mended.'

'But, my Ury--'

'Will you hold your tongue, mother, and leave it to me?'

Though I had long known that his servility was false, and all his

pretences knavish and hollow, I had had no adequate conception of the

extent of his hypocrisy, until I now saw him with his mask off. The

suddenness with which he dropped it, when he perceived that it was

useless to him; the malice, insolence, and hatred, he revealed; the leer

with which he exulted, even at this moment, in the evil he had done--all

this time being desperate too, and at his wits' end for the means

of getting the better of us--though perfectly consistent with the

experience I had of him, at first took even me by surprise, who had

known him so long, and disliked him so heartily.

I say nothing of the look he conferred on me, as he stood eyeing us,

one after another; for I had always understood that he hated me, and I

remembered the marks of my hand upon his cheek. But when his eyes passed

on to Agnes, and I saw the rage with which he felt his power over her

slipping away, and the exhibition, in their disappointment, of the

odious passions that had led him to aspire to one whose virtues he could

never appreciate or care for, I was shocked by the mere thought of her

having lived, an hour, within sight of such a man.

After some rubbing of the lower part of his face, and some looking at us

with those bad eyes, over his grisly fingers, he made one more address

to me, half whining, and half abusive.

'You think it justifiable, do you, Copperfield, you who pride yourself

so much on your honour and all the rest of it, to sneak about my place,

eaves-dropping with my clerk? If it had been ME, I shouldn't have

wondered; for I don't make myself out a gentleman (though I never was

in the streets either, as you were, according to Micawber), but being

you!--And you're not afraid of doing this, either? You don't think at

all of what I shall do, in return; or of getting yourself into

trouble for conspiracy and so forth? Very well. We shall see! Mr.

What's-your-name, you were going to refer some question to Micawber.

There's your referee. Why don't you make him speak? He has learnt his

lesson, I see.'

Seeing that what he said had no effect on me or any of us, he sat on the

edge of his table with his hands in his pockets, and one of his splay

feet twisted round the other leg, waiting doggedly for what might

follow.

Mr. Micawber, whose impetuosity I had restrained thus far with the

greatest difficulty, and who had repeatedly interposed with the first

syllable Of SCOUN-drel! without getting to the second, now burst

forward, drew the ruler from his breast (apparently as a defensive

weapon), and produced from his pocket a foolscap document, folded in the

form of a large letter. Opening this packet, with his old flourish, and

glancing at the contents, as if he cherished an artistic admiration of

their style of composition, he began to read as follows:

'"Dear Miss Trotwood and gentlemen--"'

'Bless and save the man!' exclaimed my aunt in a low voice. 'He'd write

letters by the ream, if it was a capital offence!'

Mr. Micawber, without hearing her, went on.

'"In appearing before you to denounce probably the most consummate

Villain that has ever existed,"' Mr. Micawber, without looking off the

letter, pointed the ruler, like a ghostly truncheon, at Uriah Heep,

'"I ask no consideration for myself. The victim, from my cradle, of

pecuniary liabilities to which I have been unable to respond, I have

ever been the sport and toy of debasing circumstances. Ignominy,

Want, Despair, and Madness, have, collectively or separately, been the

attendants of my career."'

The relish with which Mr. Micawber described himself as a prey to these

dismal calamities, was only to be equalled by the emphasis with which he

read his letter; and the kind of homage he rendered to it with a roll of

his head, when he thought he had hit a sentence very hard indeed.

'"In an accumulation of Ignominy, Want, Despair, and Madness, I entered

the office--or, as our lively neighbour the Gaul would term it, the

Bureau--of the Firm, nominally conducted under the appellation of

Wickfield and--HEEP, but in reality, wielded by--HEEP alone. HEEP, and

only HEEP, is the mainspring of that machine. HEEP, and only HEEP, is

the Forger and the Cheat."'

Uriah, more blue than white at these words, made a dart at the letter,

as if to tear it in pieces. Mr. Micawber, with a perfect miracle of

dexterity or luck, caught his advancing knuckles with the ruler, and

disabled his right hand. It dropped at the wrist, as if it were broken.

The blow sounded as if it had fallen on wood.

'The Devil take you!' said Uriah, writhing in a new way with pain. 'I'll

be even with you.'

'Approach me again, you--you--you HEEP of infamy,' gasped Mr. Micawber,

'and if your head is human, I'll break it. Come on, come on!'

I think I never saw anything more ridiculous--I was sensible of it, even

at the time--than Mr. Micawber making broad-sword guards with the ruler,

and crying, 'Come on!' while Traddles and I pushed him back into a

corner, from which, as often as we got him into it, he persisted in

emerging again.

His enemy, muttering to himself, after wringing his wounded hand for

sometime, slowly drew off his neck-kerchief and bound it up; then

held it in his other hand, and sat upon his table with his sullen face

looking down.

Mr. Micawber, when he was sufficiently cool, proceeded with his letter.

'"The stipendiary emoluments in consideration of which I entered into

the service of--HEEP,"' always pausing before that word and uttering

it with astonishing vigour, '"were not defined, beyond the pittance of

twenty-two shillings and six per week. The rest was left contingent on

the value of my professional exertions; in other and more expressive

words, on the baseness of my nature, the cupidity of my motives, the

poverty of my family, the general moral (or rather immoral) resemblance

between myself and--HEEP. Need I say, that it soon became necessary for

me to solicit from--HEEP--pecuniary advances towards the support of

Mrs. Micawber, and our blighted but rising family? Need I say that this

necessity had been foreseen by--HEEP? That those advances were secured

by I.O.U.'s and other similar acknowledgements, known to the legal

institutions of this country? And that I thus became immeshed in the web

he had spun for my reception?"'

Mr. Micawber's enjoyment of his epistolary powers, in describing this

unfortunate state of things, really seemed to outweigh any pain or

anxiety that the reality could have caused him. He read on:

'"Then it was that--HEEP--began to favour me with just so much of his

confidence, as was necessary to the discharge of his infernal business.

Then it was that I began, if I may so Shakespearianly express myself, to

dwindle, peak, and pine. I found that my services were constantly

called into requisition for the falsification of business, and the

mystification of an individual whom I will designate as Mr. W. That Mr.

W. was imposed upon, kept in ignorance, and deluded, in every possible

way; yet, that all this while, the ruffian--HEEP--was professing

unbounded gratitude to, and unbounded friendship for, that much-abused

gentleman. This was bad enough; but, as the philosophic Dane observes,

with that universal applicability which distinguishes the illustrious

ornament of the Elizabethan Era, worse remains behind!"'

Mr. Micawber was so very much struck by this happy rounding off with a

quotation, that he indulged himself, and us, with a second reading of

the sentence, under pretence of having lost his place.

'"It is not my intention,"' he continued reading on, '"to enter on a

detailed list, within the compass of the present epistle (though it

is ready elsewhere), of the various malpractices of a minor nature,

affecting the individual whom I have denominated Mr. W., to which I

have been a tacitly consenting party. My object, when the contest within

myself between stipend and no stipend, baker and no baker, existence

and non-existence, ceased, was to take advantage of my opportunities

to discover and expose the major malpractices committed, to that

gentleman's grievous wrong and injury, by--HEEP. Stimulated by the

silent monitor within, and by a no less touching and appealing monitor

without--to whom I will briefly refer as Miss W.--I entered on a not

unlaborious task of clandestine investigation, protracted--now, to the

best of my knowledge, information, and belief, over a period exceeding

twelve calendar months."'

He read this passage as if it were from an Act of Parliament; and

appeared majestically refreshed by the sound of the words.

'"My charges against--HEEP,"' he read on, glancing at him, and drawing

the ruler into a convenient position under his left arm, in case of

need, '"are as follows."'

We all held our breath, I think. I am sure Uriah held his.

'"First,"' said Mr. Micawber, '"When Mr. W.'s faculties and memory

for business became, through causes into which it is not necessary or

expedient for me to enter, weakened and confused,--HEEP--designedly

perplexed and complicated the whole of the official transactions. When

Mr. W. was least fit to enter on business,--HEEP was always at hand

to force him to enter on it. He obtained Mr. W.'s signature under such

circumstances to documents of importance, representing them to be other

documents of no importance. He induced Mr. W. to empower him to draw

out, thus, one particular sum of trust-money, amounting to twelve six

fourteen, two and nine, and employed it to meet pretended business

charges and deficiencies which were either already provided for, or

had never really existed. He gave this proceeding, throughout, the

appearance of having originated in Mr. W.'s own dishonest intention, and

of having been accomplished by Mr. W.'s own dishonest act; and has used

it, ever since, to torture and constrain him."'

'You shall prove this, you Copperfield!' said Uriah, with a threatening

shake of the head. 'All in good time!'

'Ask--HEEP--Mr. Traddles, who lived in his house after him,' said Mr.

Micawber, breaking off from the letter; 'will you?'

'The fool himself--and lives there now,' said Uriah, disdainfully.

'Ask--HEEP--if he ever kept a pocket-book in that house,' said Mr.

Micawber; 'will you?'

I saw Uriah's lank hand stop, involuntarily, in the scraping of his

chin.

'Or ask him,' said Mr. Micawber,'if he ever burnt one there. If he says

yes, and asks you where the ashes are, refer him to Wilkins Micawber,

and he will hear of something not at all to his advantage!'

The triumphant flourish with which Mr. Micawber delivered himself of

these words, had a powerful effect in alarming the mother; who cried

out, in much agitation:

'Ury, Ury! Be umble, and make terms, my dear!'

'Mother!' he retorted, 'will you keep quiet? You're in a fright, and

don't know what you say or mean. Umble!' he repeated, looking at me,

with a snarl; 'I've umbled some of 'em for a pretty long time back,

umble as I was!'

Mr. Micawber, genteelly adjusting his chin in his cravat, presently

proceeded with his composition.

'"Second. HEEP has, on several occasions, to the best of my knowledge,

information, and belief--"'

'But that won't do,' muttered Uriah, relieved. 'Mother, you keep quiet.'

'We will endeavour to provide something that WILL do, and do for you

finally, sir, very shortly,' replied Mr. Micawber.

'"Second. HEEP has, on several occasions, to the best of my knowledge,

information, and belief, systematically forged, to various entries,

books, and documents, the signature of Mr. W.; and has distinctly done

so in one instance, capable of proof by me. To wit, in manner following,

that is to say:"'

Again, Mr. Micawber had a relish in this formal piling up of words,

which, however ludicrously displayed in his case, was, I must say, not

at all peculiar to him. I have observed it, in the course of my life,

in numbers of men. It seems to me to be a general rule. In the taking of

legal oaths, for instance, deponents seem to enjoy themselves mightily

when they come to several good words in succession, for the expression

of one idea; as, that they utterly detest, abominate, and abjure, or so

forth; and the old anathemas were made relishing on the same principle.

We talk about the tyranny of words, but we like to tyrannize over them

too; we are fond of having a large superfluous establishment of words to

wait upon us on great occasions; we think it looks important, and sounds

well. As we are not particular about the meaning of our liveries on

state occasions, if they be but fine and numerous enough, so, the

meaning or necessity of our words is a secondary consideration, if there

be but a great parade of them. And as individuals get into trouble by

making too great a show of liveries, or as slaves when they are too

numerous rise against their masters, so I think I could mention a

nation that has got into many great difficulties, and will get into many

greater, from maintaining too large a retinue of words.

Mr. Micawber read on, almost smacking his lips:

'"To wit, in manner following, that is to say. Mr. W. being infirm, and

it being within the bounds of probability that his decease might lead

to some discoveries, and to the downfall of--HEEP'S--power over the W.

family,--as I, Wilkins Micawber, the undersigned, assume--unless the

filial affection of his daughter could be secretly influenced from

allowing any investigation of the partnership affairs to be ever made,

the said--HEEP--deemed it expedient to have a bond ready by him, as from

Mr. W., for the before-mentioned sum of twelve six fourteen, two and

nine, with interest, stated therein to have been advanced by--HEEP--to

Mr. W. to save Mr. W. from dishonour; though really the sum was never

advanced by him, and has long been replaced. The signatures to this

instrument purporting to be executed by Mr. W. and attested by Wilkins

Micawber, are forgeries by--HEEP. I have, in my possession, in his hand

and pocket-book, several similar imitations of Mr. W.'s signature, here

and there defaced by fire, but legible to anyone. I never attested any

such document. And I have the document itself, in my possession."' Uriah

Heep, with a start, took out of his pocket a bunch of keys, and opened

a certain drawer; then, suddenly bethought himself of what he was about,

and turned again towards us, without looking in it.

'"And I have the document,"' Mr. Micawber read again, looking about as

if it were the text of a sermon, '"in my possession,--that is to say,

I had, early this morning, when this was written, but have since

relinquished it to Mr. Traddles."'

'It is quite true,' assented Traddles.

'Ury, Ury!' cried the mother, 'be umble and make terms. I know my

son will be umble, gentlemen, if you'll give him time to think. Mr.

Copperfield, I'm sure you know that he was always very umble, sir!'

It was singular to see how the mother still held to the old trick, when

the son had abandoned it as useless.

'Mother,' he said, with an impatient bite at the handkerchief in which

his hand was wrapped, 'you had better take and fire a loaded gun at me.'

'But I love you, Ury,' cried Mrs. Heep. And I have no doubt she did; or

that he loved her, however strange it may appear; though, to be sure,

they were a congenial couple. 'And I can't bear to hear you provoking

the gentlemen, and endangering of yourself more. I told the gentleman

at first, when he told me upstairs it was come to light, that I would

answer for your being umble, and making amends. Oh, see how umble I am,

gentlemen, and don't mind him!'

'Why, there's Copperfield, mother,' he angrily retorted, pointing his

lean finger at me, against whom all his animosity was levelled, as the

prime mover in the discovery; and I did not undeceive him; 'there's

Copperfield, would have given you a hundred pound to say less than

you've blurted out!'

'I can't help it, Ury,' cried his mother. 'I can't see you running into

danger, through carrying your head so high. Better be umble, as you

always was.'

He remained for a little, biting the handkerchief, and then said to me

with a scowl:

'What more have you got to bring forward? If anything, go on with it.

What do you look at me for?'

Mr. Micawber promptly resumed his letter, glad to revert to a

performance with which he was so highly satisfied.

'"Third. And last. I am now in a condition to show, by--HEEP'S--false

books, and--HEEP'S--real memoranda, beginning with the partially

destroyed pocket-book (which I was unable to comprehend, at the time of

its accidental discovery by Mrs. Micawber, on our taking possession of

our present abode, in the locker or bin devoted to the reception of the

ashes calcined on our domestic hearth), that the weaknesses, the faults,

the very virtues, the parental affections, and the sense of honour, of

the unhappy Mr. W. have been for years acted on by, and warped to the

base purposes of--HEEP. That Mr. W. has been for years deluded and

plundered, in every conceivable manner, to the pecuniary aggrandisement

of the avaricious, false, and grasping--HEEP. That the engrossing object

of--HEEP--was, next to gain, to subdue Mr. and Miss W. (of his ulterior

views in reference to the latter I say nothing) entirely to himself.

That his last act, completed but a few months since, was to induce Mr.

W. to execute a relinquishment of his share in the partnership, and even

a bill of sale on the very furniture of his house, in consideration of a

certain annuity, to be well and truly paid by--HEEP--on the four common

quarter-days in each and every year. That these meshes; beginning with

alarming and falsified accounts of the estate of which Mr. W. is the

receiver, at a period when Mr. W. had launched into imprudent and

ill-judged speculations, and may not have had the money, for which he

was morally and legally responsible, in hand; going on with pretended

borrowings of money at enormous interest, really coming from--HEEP--and

by--HEEP--fraudulently obtained or withheld from Mr. W. himself,

on pretence of such speculations or otherwise; perpetuated by a

miscellaneous catalogue of unscrupulous chicaneries--gradually

thickened, until the unhappy Mr. W. could see no world beyond. Bankrupt,

as he believed, alike in circumstances, in all other hope, and

in honour, his sole reliance was upon the monster in the garb of

man,"'--Mr. Micawber made a good deal of this, as a new turn of

expression,--'"who, by making himself necessary to him, had achieved his

destruction. All this I undertake to show. Probably much more!"'

I whispered a few words to Agnes, who was weeping, half joyfully, half

sorrowfully, at my side; and there was a movement among us, as if Mr.

Micawber had finished. He said, with exceeding gravity, 'Pardon me,'

and proceeded, with a mixture of the lowest spirits and the most intense

enjoyment, to the peroration of his letter.

'"I have now concluded. It merely remains for me to substantiate these

accusations; and then, with my ill-starred family, to disappear from the

landscape on which we appear to be an encumbrance. That is soon done. It

may be reasonably inferred that our baby will first expire of inanition,

as being the frailest member of our circle; and that our twins will

follow next in order. So be it! For myself, my Canterbury Pilgrimage has

done much; imprisonment on civil process, and want, will soon do more.

I trust that the labour and hazard of an investigation--of which the

smallest results have been slowly pieced together, in the pressure of

arduous avocations, under grinding penurious apprehensions, at rise of

morn, at dewy eve, in the shadows of night, under the watchful eye of

one whom it were superfluous to call Demon--combined with the struggle

of parental Poverty to turn it, when completed, to the right account,

may be as the sprinkling of a few drops of sweet water on my funeral

pyre. I ask no more. Let it be, in justice, merely said of me, as of a

gallant and eminent naval Hero, with whom I have no pretensions to

cope, that what I have done, I did, in despite of mercenary and selfish

objects,

For England, home, and Beauty.

'"Remaining always, &c. &c., WILKINS MICAWBER."'

Much affected, but still intensely enjoying himself, Mr. Micawber folded

up his letter, and handed it with a bow to my aunt, as something she

might like to keep.

There was, as I had noticed on my first visit long ago, an iron safe in

the room. The key was in it. A hasty suspicion seemed to strike Uriah;

and, with a glance at Mr. Micawber, he went to it, and threw the doors

clanking open. It was empty.

'Where are the books?' he cried, with a frightful face. 'Some thief has

stolen the books!'

Mr. Micawber tapped himself with the ruler. 'I did, when I got the key

from you as usual--but a little earlier--and opened it this morning.'

'Don't be uneasy,' said Traddles. 'They have come into my possession. I

will take care of them, under the authority I mentioned.'

'You receive stolen goods, do you?' cried Uriah.

'Under such circumstances,' answered Traddles, 'yes.'

What was my astonishment when I beheld my aunt, who had been profoundly

quiet and attentive, make a dart at Uriah Heep, and seize him by the

collar with both hands!

'You know what I want?' said my aunt.

'A strait-waistcoat,' said he.

'No. My property!' returned my aunt. 'Agnes, my dear, as long as

I believed it had been really made away with by your father, I

wouldn't--and, my dear, I didn't, even to Trot, as he knows--breathe a

syllable of its having been placed here for investment. But, now I know

this fellow's answerable for it, and I'll have it! Trot, come and take

it away from him!'

Whether my aunt supposed, for the moment, that he kept her property in

his neck-kerchief, I am sure I don't know; but she certainly pulled at

it as if she thought so. I hastened to put myself between them, and to

assure her that we would all take care that he should make the utmost

restitution of everything he had wrongly got. This, and a few moments'

reflection, pacified her; but she was not at all disconcerted by what

she had done (though I cannot say as much for her bonnet) and resumed

her seat composedly.

During the last few minutes, Mrs. Heep had been clamouring to her son

to be 'umble'; and had been going down on her knees to all of us in

succession, and making the wildest promises. Her son sat her down in his

chair; and, standing sulkily by her, holding her arm with his hand, but

not rudely, said to me, with a ferocious look:

'What do you want done?'

'I will tell you what must be done,' said Traddles.

'Has that Copperfield no tongue?' muttered Uriah, 'I would do a good

deal for you if you could tell me, without lying, that somebody had cut

it out.'

'My Uriah means to be umble!' cried his mother. 'Don't mind what he

says, good gentlemen!'

'What must be done,' said Traddles, 'is this. First, the deed of

relinquishment, that we have heard of, must be given over to me

now--here.'

'Suppose I haven't got it,' he interrupted.

'But you have,' said Traddles; 'therefore, you know, we won't suppose

so.' And I cannot help avowing that this was the first occasion on

which I really did justice to the clear head, and the plain, patient,

practical good sense, of my old schoolfellow. 'Then,' said Traddles,

'you must prepare to disgorge all that your rapacity has become

possessed of, and to make restoration to the last farthing. All the

partnership books and papers must remain in our possession; all your

books and papers; all money accounts and securities, of both kinds. In

short, everything here.'

'Must it? I don't know that,' said Uriah. 'I must have time to think

about that.'

'Certainly,' replied Traddles; 'but, in the meanwhile, and until

everything is done to our satisfaction, we shall maintain possession

of these things; and beg you--in short, compel you--to keep to your own

room, and hold no communication with anyone.'

'I won't do it!' said Uriah, with an oath.

'Maidstone jail is a safer place of detention,' observed Traddles; 'and

though the law may be longer in righting us, and may not be able to

right us so completely as you can, there is no doubt of its punishing

YOU. Dear me, you know that quite as well as I! Copperfield, will you go

round to the Guildhall, and bring a couple of officers?'

Here, Mrs. Heep broke out again, crying on her knees to Agnes to

interfere in their behalf, exclaiming that he was very humble, and it

was all true, and if he didn't do what we wanted, she would, and much

more to the same purpose; being half frantic with fears for her darling.

To inquire what he might have done, if he had had any boldness, would

be like inquiring what a mongrel cur might do, if it had the spirit of

a tiger. He was a coward, from head to foot; and showed his dastardly

nature through his sullenness and mortification, as much as at any time

of his mean life.

'Stop!' he growled to me; and wiped his hot face with his hand. 'Mother,

hold your noise. Well! Let 'em have that deed. Go and fetch it!'

'Do you help her, Mr. Dick,' said Traddles, 'if you please.'

Proud of his commission, and understanding it, Mr. Dick accompanied her

as a shepherd's dog might accompany a sheep. But, Mrs. Heep gave him

little trouble; for she not only returned with the deed, but with the

box in which it was, where we found a banker's book and some other

papers that were afterwards serviceable.

'Good!' said Traddles, when this was brought. 'Now, Mr. Heep, you can

retire to think: particularly observing, if you please, that I declare

to you, on the part of all present, that there is only one thing to be

done; that it is what I have explained; and that it must be done without

delay.'

Uriah, without lifting his eyes from the ground, shuffled across the

room with his hand to his chin, and pausing at the door, said:

'Copperfield, I have always hated you. You've always been an upstart,

and you've always been against me.'

'As I think I told you once before,' said I, 'it is you who have been,

in your greed and cunning, against all the world. It may be profitable

to you to reflect, in future, that there never were greed and cunning in

the world yet, that did not do too much, and overreach themselves. It is

as certain as death.'

'Or as certain as they used to teach at school (the same school where I

picked up so much umbleness), from nine o'clock to eleven, that labour

was a curse; and from eleven o'clock to one, that it was a blessing and

a cheerfulness, and a dignity, and I don't know what all, eh?' said

he with a sneer. 'You preach, about as consistent as they did.

Won't umbleness go down? I shouldn't have got round my gentleman

fellow-partner without it, I think. --Micawber, you old bully, I'll pay

YOU!'

Mr. Micawber, supremely defiant of him and his extended finger, and

making a great deal of his chest until he had slunk out at the door,

then addressed himself to me, and proffered me the satisfaction of

'witnessing the re-establishment of mutual confidence between himself

and Mrs. Micawber'. After which, he invited the company generally to the

contemplation of that affecting spectacle.

'The veil that has long been interposed between Mrs. Micawber and

myself, is now withdrawn,' said Mr. Micawber; 'and my children and the

Author of their Being can once more come in contact on equal terms.'

As we were all very grateful to him, and all desirous to show that we

were, as well as the hurry and disorder of our spirits would permit, I

dare say we should all have gone, but that it was necessary for Agnes to

return to her father, as yet unable to bear more than the dawn of

hope; and for someone else to hold Uriah in safe keeping. So, Traddles

remained for the latter purpose, to be presently relieved by Mr. Dick;

and Mr. Dick, my aunt, and I, went home with Mr. Micawber. As I parted

hurriedly from the dear girl to whom I owed so much, and thought from

what she had been saved, perhaps, that morning--her better resolution

notwithstanding--I felt devoutly thankful for the miseries of my younger

days which had brought me to the knowledge of Mr. Micawber.

His house was not far off; and as the street door opened into the

sitting-room, and he bolted in with a precipitation quite his own,

we found ourselves at once in the bosom of the family. Mr. Micawber

exclaiming, 'Emma! my life!' rushed into Mrs. Micawber's arms. Mrs.

Micawber shrieked, and folded Mr. Micawber in her embrace. Miss

Micawber, nursing the unconscious stranger of Mrs. Micawber's last

letter to me, was sensibly affected. The stranger leaped. The twins

testified their joy by several inconvenient but innocent demonstrations.

Master Micawber, whose disposition appeared to have been soured by

early disappointment, and whose aspect had become morose, yielded to his

better feelings, and blubbered.

'Emma!' said Mr. Micawber. 'The cloud is past from my mind. Mutual

confidence, so long preserved between us once, is restored, to know

no further interruption. Now, welcome poverty!' cried Mr. Micawber,

shedding tears. 'Welcome misery, welcome houselessness, welcome hunger,

rags, tempest, and beggary! Mutual confidence will sustain us to the

end!'

With these expressions, Mr. Micawber placed Mrs. Micawber in a chair,

and embraced the family all round; welcoming a variety of bleak

prospects, which appeared, to the best of my judgement, to be anything

but welcome to them; and calling upon them to come out into Canterbury

and sing a chorus, as nothing else was left for their support.

But Mrs. Micawber having, in the strength of her emotions, fainted away,

the first thing to be done, even before the chorus could be considered

complete, was to recover her. This my aunt and Mr. Micawber did; and

then my aunt was introduced, and Mrs. Micawber recognized me.

'Excuse me, dear Mr. Copperfield,' said the poor lady, giving me her

hand, 'but I am not strong; and the removal of the late misunderstanding

between Mr. Micawber and myself was at first too much for me.'

'Is this all your family, ma'am?' said my aunt.

'There are no more at present,' returned Mrs. Micawber.

'Good gracious, I didn't mean that, ma'am,' said my aunt. 'I mean, are

all these yours?'

'Madam,' replied Mr. Micawber, 'it is a true bill.'

'And that eldest young gentleman, now,' said my aunt, musing, 'what has

he been brought up to?'

'It was my hope when I came here,' said Mr. Micawber, 'to have got

Wilkins into the Church: or perhaps I shall express my meaning more

strictly, if I say the Choir. But there was no vacancy for a tenor in

the venerable Pile for which this city is so justly eminent; and he

has--in short, he has contracted a habit of singing in public-houses,

rather than in sacred edifices.'

'But he means well,' said Mrs. Micawber, tenderly.

'I dare say, my love,' rejoined Mr. Micawber, 'that he means

particularly well; but I have not yet found that he carries out his

meaning, in any given direction whatsoever.'

Master Micawber's moroseness of aspect returned upon him again, and he

demanded, with some temper, what he was to do? Whether he had been born

a carpenter, or a coach-painter, any more than he had been born a bird?

Whether he could go into the next street, and open a chemist's shop?

Whether he could rush to the next assizes, and proclaim himself a

lawyer? Whether he could come out by force at the opera, and succeed

by violence? Whether he could do anything, without being brought up to

something?

My aunt mused a little while, and then said:

'Mr. Micawber, I wonder you have never turned your thoughts to

emigration.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'it was the dream of my youth, and the

fallacious aspiration of my riper years.' I am thoroughly persuaded, by

the by, that he had never thought of it in his life.

'Aye?' said my aunt, with a glance at me. 'Why, what a thing it would

be for yourselves and your family, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, if you were to

emigrate now.'

'Capital, madam, capital,' urged Mr. Micawber, gloomily.

'That is the principal, I may say the only difficulty, my dear Mr.

Copperfield,' assented his wife.

'Capital?' cried my aunt. 'But you are doing us a great service--have

done us a great service, I may say, for surely much will come out of

the fire--and what could we do for you, that would be half so good as to

find the capital?'

'I could not receive it as a gift,' said Mr. Micawber, full of fire and

animation, 'but if a sufficient sum could be advanced, say at five per

cent interest, per annum, upon my personal liability--say my notes of

hand, at twelve, eighteen, and twenty-four months, respectively, to

allow time for something to turn up--'

'Could be? Can be and shall be, on your own terms,' returned my aunt,

'if you say the word. Think of this now, both of you. Here are some

people David knows, going out to Australia shortly. If you decide to go,

why shouldn't you go in the same ship? You may help each other. Think of

this now, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. Take your time, and weigh it well.'

'There is but one question, my dear ma'am, I could wish to ask,' said

Mrs. Micawber. 'The climate, I believe, is healthy?'

'Finest in the world!' said my aunt.

'Just so,' returned Mrs. Micawber. 'Then my question arises. Now, are

the circumstances of the country such, that a man of Mr. Micawber's

abilities would have a fair chance of rising in the social scale? I will

not say, at present, might he aspire to be Governor, or anything of that

sort; but would there be a reasonable opening for his talents to

develop themselves--that would be amply sufficient--and find their own

expansion?'

'No better opening anywhere,' said my aunt, 'for a man who conducts

himself well, and is industrious.'

'For a man who conducts himself well,' repeated Mrs. Micawber, with her

clearest business manner, 'and is industrious. Precisely. It is

evident to me that Australia is the legitimate sphere of action for Mr.

Micawber!'

'I entertain the conviction, my dear madam,' said Mr. Micawber, 'that

it is, under existing circumstances, the land, the only land, for myself

and family; and that something of an extraordinary nature will turn up

on that shore. It is no distance--comparatively speaking; and though

consideration is due to the kindness of your proposal, I assure you that

is a mere matter of form.'

Shall I ever forget how, in a moment, he was the most sanguine of men,

looking on to fortune; or how Mrs. Micawber presently discoursed

about the habits of the kangaroo! Shall I ever recall that street of

Canterbury on a market-day, without recalling him, as he walked

back with us; expressing, in the hardy roving manner he assumed, the

unsettled habits of a temporary sojourner in the land; and looking at

the bullocks, as they came by, with the eye of an Australian farmer!

CHAPTER 53. ANOTHER RETROSPECT

I must pause yet once again. O, my child-wife, there is a figure in the

moving crowd before my memory, quiet and still, saying in its innocent

love and childish beauty, Stop to think of me--turn to look upon the

Little Blossom, as it flutters to the ground!

I do. All else grows dim, and fades away. I am again with Dora, in our

cottage. I do not know how long she has been ill. I am so used to it in

feeling, that I cannot count the time. It is not really long, in weeks

or months; but, in my usage and experience, it is a weary, weary while.

They have left off telling me to 'wait a few days more'. I have begun

to fear, remotely, that the day may never shine, when I shall see my

child-wife running in the sunlight with her old friend Jip.

He is, as it were suddenly, grown very old. It may be that he misses in

his mistress, something that enlivened him and made him younger; but he

mopes, and his sight is weak, and his limbs are feeble, and my aunt is

sorry that he objects to her no more, but creeps near her as he lies on

Dora's bed--she sitting at the bedside--and mildly licks her hand.

Dora lies smiling on us, and is beautiful, and utters no hasty or

complaining word. She says that we are very good to her; that her dear

old careful boy is tiring himself out, she knows; that my aunt has no

sleep, yet is always wakeful, active, and kind. Sometimes, the

little bird-like ladies come to see her; and then we talk about our

wedding-day, and all that happy time.

What a strange rest and pause in my life there seems to be--and in all

life, within doors and without--when I sit in the quiet, shaded, orderly

room, with the blue eyes of my child-wife turned towards me, and her

little fingers twining round my hand! Many and many an hour I sit thus;

but, of all those times, three times come the freshest on my mind.

It is morning; and Dora, made so trim by my aunt's hands, shows me how

her pretty hair will curl upon the pillow yet, an how long and bright it

is, and how she likes to have it loosely gathered in that net she wears.

'Not that I am vain of it, now, you mocking boy,' she says, when I

smile; 'but because you used to say you thought it so beautiful; and

because, when I first began to think about you, I used to peep in the

glass, and wonder whether you would like very much to have a lock of it.

Oh what a foolish fellow you were, Doady, when I gave you one!'

'That was on the day when you were painting the flowers I had given you,

Dora, and when I told you how much in love I was.'

'Ah! but I didn't like to tell you,' says Dora, 'then, how I had cried

over them, because I believed you really liked me! When I can run about

again as I used to do, Doady, let us go and see those places where we

were such a silly couple, shall we? And take some of the old walks? And

not forget poor papa?'

'Yes, we will, and have some happy days. So you must make haste to get

well, my dear.'

'Oh, I shall soon do that! I am so much better, you don't know!'

It is evening; and I sit in the same chair, by the same bed, with the

same face turned towards me. We have been silent, and there is a smile

upon her face. I have ceased to carry my light burden up and down stairs

now. She lies here all the day.

'Doady!'

'My dear Dora!'

'You won't think what I am going to say, unreasonable, after what you

told me, such a little while ago, of Mr. Wickfield's not being well? I

want to see Agnes. Very much I want to see her.'

'I will write to her, my dear.'

'Will you?'

'Directly.'

'What a good, kind boy! Doady, take me on your arm. Indeed, my dear,

it's not a whim. It's not a foolish fancy. I want, very much indeed, to

see her!'

'I am certain of it. I have only to tell her so, and she is sure to

come.'

'You are very lonely when you go downstairs, now?' Dora whispers, with

her arm about my neck.

'How can I be otherwise, my own love, when I see your empty chair?'

'My empty chair!' She clings to me for a little while, in silence. 'And

you really miss me, Doady?' looking up, and brightly smiling. 'Even

poor, giddy, stupid me?'

'My heart, who is there upon earth that I could miss so much?'

'Oh, husband! I am so glad, yet so sorry!' creeping closer to me, and

folding me in both her arms. She laughs and sobs, and then is quiet, and

quite happy.

'Quite!' she says. 'Only give Agnes my dear love, and tell her that I

want very, very, much to see her; and I have nothing left to wish for.'

'Except to get well again, Dora.'

'Ah, Doady! Sometimes I think--you know I always was a silly little

thing!--that that will never be!'

'Don't say so, Dora! Dearest love, don't think so!'

'I won't, if I can help it, Doady. But I am very happy; though my dear

boy is so lonely by himself, before his child-wife's empty chair!'

It is night; and I am with her still. Agnes has arrived; has been among

us for a whole day and an evening. She, my aunt, and I, have sat with

Dora since the morning, all together. We have not talked much, but Dora

has been perfectly contented and cheerful. We are now alone.

Do I know, now, that my child-wife will soon leave me? They have told me

so; they have told me nothing new to my thoughts--but I am far from

sure that I have taken that truth to heart. I cannot master it. I have

withdrawn by myself, many times today, to weep. I have remembered Who

wept for a parting between the living and the dead. I have bethought me

of all that gracious and compassionate history. I have tried to resign

myself, and to console myself; and that, I hope, I may have done

imperfectly; but what I cannot firmly settle in my mind is, that the end

will absolutely come. I hold her hand in mine, I hold her heart in mine,

I see her love for me, alive in all its strength. I cannot shut out a

pale lingering shadow of belief that she will be spared.

'I am going to speak to you, Doady. I am going to say something I have

often thought of saying, lately. You won't mind?' with a gentle look.

'Mind, my darling?'

'Because I don't know what you will think, or what you may have thought

sometimes. Perhaps you have often thought the same. Doady, dear, I am

afraid I was too young.'

I lay my face upon the pillow by her, and she looks into my eyes, and

speaks very softly. Gradually, as she goes on, I feel, with a stricken

heart, that she is speaking of herself as past.

'I am afraid, dear, I was too young. I don't mean in years only, but

in experience, and thoughts, and everything. I was such a silly little

creature! I am afraid it would have been better, if we had only loved

each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it. I have begun to think I

was not fit to be a wife.'

I try to stay my tears, and to reply, 'Oh, Dora, love, as fit as I to be

a husband!'

'I don't know,' with the old shake of her curls. 'Perhaps! But if I had

been more fit to be married I might have made you more so, too. Besides,

you are very clever, and I never was.'

'We have been very happy, my sweet Dora.'

'I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have

wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion

for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting

in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is.'

'Oh, Dora, dearest, dearest, do not speak to me so. Every word seems a

reproach!'

'No, not a syllable!' she answers, kissing me. 'Oh, my dear, you never

deserved it, and I loved you far too well to say a reproachful word to

you, in earnest--it was all the merit I had, except being pretty--or you

thought me so. Is it lonely, down-stairs, Doady?'

'Very! Very!'

'Don't cry! Is my chair there?'

'In its old place.'

'Oh, how my poor boy cries! Hush, hush! Now, make me one promise. I want

to speak to Agnes. When you go downstairs, tell Agnes so, and send her

up to me; and while I speak to her, let no one come--not even aunt.

I want to speak to Agnes by herself. I want to speak to Agnes, quite

alone.'

I promise that she shall, immediately; but I cannot leave her, for my

grief.

'I said that it was better as it is!' she whispers, as she holds me in

her arms. 'Oh, Doady, after more years, you never could have loved your

child-wife better than you do; and, after more years, she would so have

tried and disappointed you, that you might not have been able to love

her half so well! I know I was too young and foolish. It is much better

as it is!'

Agnes is downstairs, when I go into the parlour; and I give her the

message. She disappears, leaving me alone with Jip.

His Chinese house is by the fire; and he lies within it, on his bed of

flannel, querulously trying to sleep. The bright moon is high and clear.

As I look out on the night, my tears fall fast, and my undisciplined

heart is chastened heavily--heavily.

I sit down by the fire, thinking with a blind remorse of all those

secret feelings I have nourished since my marriage. I think of every

little trifle between me and Dora, and feel the truth, that trifles

make the sum of life. Ever rising from the sea of my remembrance, is the

image of the dear child as I knew her first, graced by my young love,

and by her own, with every fascination wherein such love is rich. Would

it, indeed, have been better if we had loved each other as a boy and a

girl, and forgotten it? Undisciplined heart, reply!

How the time wears, I know not; until I am recalled by my child-wife's

old companion. More restless than he was, he crawls out of his house,

and looks at me, and wanders to the door, and whines to go upstairs.

'Not tonight, Jip! Not tonight!'

He comes very slowly back to me, licks my hand, and lifts his dim eyes

to my face.

'Oh, Jip! It may be, never again!'

He lies down at my feet, stretches himself out as if to sleep, and with

a plaintive cry, is dead.

'Oh, Agnes! Look, look, here!' --That face, so full of pity, and of

grief, that rain of tears, that awful mute appeal to me, that solemn

hand upraised towards Heaven!

'Agnes?'

It is over. Darkness comes before my eyes; and, for a time, all things

are blotted out of my remembrance.

CHAPTER 54. Mr. MICAWBER'S TRANSACTIONS

This is not the time at which I am to enter on the state of my mind

beneath its load of sorrow. I came to think that the Future was walled

up before me, that the energy and action of my life were at an end, that

I never could find any refuge but in the grave. I came to think so, I

say, but not in the first shock of my grief. It slowly grew to that.

If the events I go on to relate, had not thickened around me, in the

beginning to confuse, and in the end to augment, my affliction, it is

possible (though I think not probable), that I might have fallen at once

into this condition. As it was, an interval occurred before I fully knew

my own distress; an interval, in which I even supposed that its sharpest

pangs were past; and when my mind could soothe itself by resting on

all that was most innocent and beautiful, in the tender story that was

closed for ever.

When it was first proposed that I should go abroad, or how it came to be

agreed among us that I was to seek the restoration of my peace in change

and travel, I do not, even now, distinctly know. The spirit of Agnes so

pervaded all we thought, and said, and did, in that time of sorrow, that

I assume I may refer the project to her influence. But her influence was

so quiet that I know no more.

And now, indeed, I began to think that in my old association of her with

the stained-glass window in the church, a prophetic foreshadowing of

what she would be to me, in the calamity that was to happen in the

fullness of time, had found a way into my mind. In all that sorrow, from

the moment, never to be forgotten, when she stood before me with her

upraised hand, she was like a sacred presence in my lonely house. When

the Angel of Death alighted there, my child-wife fell asleep--they told

me so when I could bear to hear it--on her bosom, with a smile. From my

swoon, I first awoke to a consciousness of her compassionate tears, her

words of hope and peace, her gentle face bending down as from a purer

region nearer Heaven, over my undisciplined heart, and softening its

pain.

Let me go on.

I was to go abroad. That seemed to have been determined among us from

the first. The ground now covering all that could perish of my

departed wife, I waited only for what Mr. Micawber called the 'final

pulverization of Heep'; and for the departure of the emigrants.

At the request of Traddles, most affectionate and devoted of friends in

my trouble, we returned to Canterbury: I mean my aunt, Agnes, and I. We

proceeded by appointment straight to Mr. Micawber's house; where, and at

Mr. Wickfield's, my friend had been labouring ever since our explosive

meeting. When poor Mrs. Micawber saw me come in, in my black clothes,

she was sensibly affected. There was a great deal of good in Mrs.

Micawber's heart, which had not been dunned out of it in all those many

years.

'Well, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber,' was my aunt's first salutation after we

were seated. 'Pray, have you thought about that emigration proposal of

mine?'

'My dear madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'perhaps I cannot better express

the conclusion at which Mrs. Micawber, your humble servant, and I may

add our children, have jointly and severally arrived, than by borrowing

the language of an illustrious poet, to reply that our Boat is on the

shore, and our Bark is on the sea.'

'That's right,' said my aunt. 'I augur all sort of good from your

sensible decision.'

'Madam, you do us a great deal of honour,' he rejoined. He then referred

to a memorandum. 'With respect to the pecuniary assistance enabling

us to launch our frail canoe on the ocean of enterprise, I have

reconsidered that important business-point; and would beg to propose

my notes of hand--drawn, it is needless to stipulate, on stamps of the

amounts respectively required by the various Acts of Parliament applying

to such securities--at eighteen, twenty-four, and thirty months.

The proposition I originally submitted, was twelve, eighteen, and

twenty-four; but I am apprehensive that such an arrangement might not

allow sufficient time for the requisite amount of--Something--to turn

up. We might not,' said Mr. Micawber, looking round the room as if it

represented several hundred acres of highly cultivated land, 'on the

first responsibility becoming due, have been successful in our harvest,

or we might not have got our harvest in. Labour, I believe, is sometimes

difficult to obtain in that portion of our colonial possessions where it

will be our lot to combat with the teeming soil.'

'Arrange it in any way you please, sir,' said my aunt.

'Madam,' he replied, 'Mrs. Micawber and myself are deeply sensible of

the very considerate kindness of our friends and patrons. What I wish

is, to be perfectly business-like, and perfectly punctual. Turning over,

as we are about to turn over, an entirely new leaf; and falling back,

as we are now in the act of falling back, for a Spring of no common

magnitude; it is important to my sense of self-respect, besides being

an example to my son, that these arrangements should be concluded as

between man and man.'

I don't know that Mr. Micawber attached any meaning to this last phrase;

I don't know that anybody ever does, or did; but he appeared to relish

it uncommonly, and repeated, with an impressive cough, 'as between man

and man'.

'I propose,' said Mr. Micawber, 'Bills--a convenience to the mercantile

world, for which, I believe, we are originally indebted to the Jews, who

appear to me to have had a devilish deal too much to do with them

ever since--because they are negotiable. But if a Bond, or any other

description of security, would be preferred, I should be happy to

execute any such instrument. As between man and man.'

MY aunt observed, that in a case where both parties were willing to

agree to anything, she took it for granted there would be no difficulty

in settling this point. Mr. Micawber was of her opinion.

'In reference to our domestic preparations, madam,' said Mr. Micawber,

with some pride, 'for meeting the destiny to which we are now understood

to be self-devoted, I beg to report them. My eldest daughter attends

at five every morning in a neighbouring establishment, to acquire

the process--if process it may be called--of milking cows. My younger

children are instructed to observe, as closely as circumstances will

permit, the habits of the pigs and poultry maintained in the poorer

parts of this city: a pursuit from which they have, on two occasions,

been brought home, within an inch of being run over. I have myself

directed some attention, during the past week, to the art of baking; and

my son Wilkins has issued forth with a walking-stick and driven cattle,

when permitted, by the rugged hirelings who had them in charge, to

render any voluntary service in that direction--which I regret to say,

for the credit of our nature, was not often; he being generally warned,

with imprecations, to desist.'

'All very right indeed,' said my aunt, encouragingly. 'Mrs. Micawber has

been busy, too, I have no doubt.'

'My dear madam,' returned Mrs. Micawber, with her business-like air.

'I am free to confess that I have not been actively engaged in pursuits

immediately connected with cultivation or with stock, though well aware

that both will claim my attention on a foreign shore. Such opportunities

as I have been enabled to alienate from my domestic duties, I have

devoted to corresponding at some length with my family. For I own it

seems to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, who always

fell back on me, I suppose from old habit, to whomsoever else she might

address her discourse at starting, 'that the time is come when the past

should be buried in oblivion; when my family should take Mr. Micawber by

the hand, and Mr. Micawber should take my family by the hand; when the

lion should lie down with the lamb, and my family be on terms with Mr.

Micawber.'

I said I thought so too.

'This, at least, is the light, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' pursued Mrs.

Micawber, 'in which I view the subject. When I lived at home with my

papa and mama, my papa was accustomed to ask, when any point was under

discussion in our limited circle, "In what light does my Emma view the

subject?" That my papa was too partial, I know; still, on such a point

as the frigid coldness which has ever subsisted between Mr. Micawber and

my family, I necessarily have formed an opinion, delusive though it may

be.'

'No doubt. Of course you have, ma'am,' said my aunt.

'Precisely so,' assented Mrs. Micawber. 'Now, I may be wrong in my

conclusions; it is very likely that I am, but my individual impression

is, that the gulf between my family and Mr. Micawber may be traced to an

apprehension, on the part of my family, that Mr. Micawber would require

pecuniary accommodation. I cannot help thinking,' said Mrs. Micawber,

with an air of deep sagacity, 'that there are members of my family who

have been apprehensive that Mr. Micawber would solicit them for their

names.---I do not mean to be conferred in Baptism upon our children,

but to be inscribed on Bills of Exchange, and negotiated in the Money

Market.'

The look of penetration with which Mrs. Micawber announced this

discovery, as if no one had ever thought of it before, seemed rather to

astonish my aunt; who abruptly replied, 'Well, ma'am, upon the whole, I

shouldn't wonder if you were right!'

'Mr. Micawber being now on the eve of casting off the pecuniary

shackles that have so long enthralled him,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'and of

commencing a new career in a country where there is sufficient range

for his abilities,--which, in my opinion, is exceedingly important; Mr.

Micawber's abilities peculiarly requiring space,--it seems to me that

my family should signalize the occasion by coming forward. What I could

wish to see, would be a meeting between Mr. Micawber and my family at

a festive entertainment, to be given at my family's expense; where Mr.

Micawber's health and prosperity being proposed, by some leading member

of my family, Mr. Micawber might have an opportunity of developing his

views.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, with some heat, 'it may be better for me

to state distinctly, at once, that if I were to develop my views to that

assembled group, they would possibly be found of an offensive nature:

my impression being that your family are, in the aggregate, impertinent

Snobs; and, in detail, unmitigated Ruffians.'

'Micawber,' said Mrs. Micawber, shaking her head, 'no! You have never

understood them, and they have never understood you.'

Mr. Micawber coughed.

'They have never understood you, Micawber,' said his wife. 'They may

be incapable of it. If so, that is their misfortune. I can pity their

misfortune.'

'I am extremely sorry, my dear Emma,' said Mr. Micawber, relenting, 'to

have been betrayed into any expressions that might, even remotely, have

the appearance of being strong expressions. All I would say is, that

I can go abroad without your family coming forward to favour me,--in

short, with a parting Shove of their cold shoulders; and that, upon the

whole, I would rather leave England with such impetus as I possess, than

derive any acceleration of it from that quarter. At the same time, my

dear, if they should condescend to reply to your communications--which

our joint experience renders most improbable--far be it from me to be a

barrier to your wishes.'

The matter being thus amicably settled, Mr. Micawber gave Mrs. Micawber

his arm, and glancing at the heap of books and papers lying before

Traddles on the table, said they would leave us to ourselves; which they

ceremoniously did.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, leaning back in his chair when

they were gone, and looking at me with an affection that made his eyes

red, and his hair all kinds of shapes, 'I don't make any excuse for

troubling you with business, because I know you are deeply interested

in it, and it may divert your thoughts. My dear boy, I hope you are not

worn out?'

'I am quite myself,' said I, after a pause. 'We have more cause to think

of my aunt than of anyone. You know how much she has done.'

'Surely, surely,' answered Traddles. 'Who can forget it!'

'But even that is not all,' said I. 'During the last fortnight, some new

trouble has vexed her; and she has been in and out of London every day.

Several times she has gone out early, and been absent until evening.

Last night, Traddles, with this journey before her, it was almost

midnight before she came home. You know what her consideration for

others is. She will not tell me what has happened to distress her.'

My aunt, very pale, and with deep lines in her face, sat immovable until

I had finished; when some stray tears found their way to her cheeks, and

she put her hand on mine.

'It's nothing, Trot; it's nothing. There will be no more of it. You

shall know by and by. Now Agnes, my dear, let us attend to these

affairs.'

'I must do Mr. Micawber the justice to say,' Traddles began, 'that

although he would appear not to have worked to any good account for

himself, he is a most untiring man when he works for other people. I

never saw such a fellow. If he always goes on in the same way, he must

be, virtually, about two hundred years old, at present. The heat into

which he has been continually putting himself; and the distracted and

impetuous manner in which he has been diving, day and night, among

papers and books; to say nothing of the immense number of letters he has

written me between this house and Mr. Wickfield's, and often across the

table when he has been sitting opposite, and might much more easily have

spoken; is quite extraordinary.'

'Letters!' cried my aunt. 'I believe he dreams in letters!'

'There's Mr. Dick, too,' said Traddles, 'has been doing wonders! As soon

as he was released from overlooking Uriah Heep, whom he kept in such

charge as I never saw exceeded, he began to devote himself to Mr.

Wickfield. And really his anxiety to be of use in the investigations we

have been making, and his real usefulness in extracting, and copying,

and fetching, and carrying, have been quite stimulating to us.'

'Dick is a very remarkable man,' exclaimed my aunt; 'and I always said

he was. Trot, you know it.'

'I am happy to say, Miss Wickfield,' pursued Traddles, at once with

great delicacy and with great earnestness, 'that in your absence Mr.

Wickfield has considerably improved. Relieved of the incubus that had

fastened upon him for so long a time, and of the dreadful apprehensions

under which he had lived, he is hardly the same person. At times,

even his impaired power of concentrating his memory and attention on

particular points of business, has recovered itself very much; and he

has been able to assist us in making some things clear, that we should

have found very difficult indeed, if not hopeless, without him. But

what I have to do is to come to results; which are short enough; not

to gossip on all the hopeful circumstances I have observed, or I shall

never have done.' His natural manner and agreeable simplicity made it

transparent that he said this to put us in good heart, and to enable

Agnes to hear her father mentioned with greater confidence; but it was

not the less pleasant for that.

'Now, let me see,' said Traddles, looking among the papers on the

table. 'Having counted our funds, and reduced to order a great mass of

unintentional confusion in the first place, and of wilful confusion and

falsification in the second, we take it to be clear that Mr. Wickfield

might now wind up his business, and his agency-trust, and exhibit no

deficiency or defalcation whatever.'

'Oh, thank Heaven!' cried Agnes, fervently.

'But,' said Traddles, 'the surplus that would be left as his means of

support--and I suppose the house to be sold, even in saying this--would

be so small, not exceeding in all probability some hundreds of pounds,

that perhaps, Miss Wickfield, it would be best to consider whether he

might not retain his agency of the estate to which he has so long been

receiver. His friends might advise him, you know; now he is free. You

yourself, Miss Wickfield--Copperfield--I--'

'I have considered it, Trotwood,' said Agnes, looking to me, 'and I feel

that it ought not to be, and must not be; even on the recommendation of

a friend to whom I am so grateful, and owe so much.'

'I will not say that I recommend it,' observed Traddles. 'I think it

right to suggest it. No more.'

'I am happy to hear you say so,' answered Agnes, steadily, 'for it gives

me hope, almost assurance, that we think alike. Dear Mr. Traddles and

dear Trotwood, papa once free with honour, what could I wish for! I have

always aspired, if I could have released him from the toils in which he

was held, to render back some little portion of the love and care I owe

him, and to devote my life to him. It has been, for years, the utmost

height of my hopes. To take our future on myself, will be the next

great happiness--the next to his release from all trust and

responsibility--that I can know.'

'Have you thought how, Agnes?'

'Often! I am not afraid, dear Trotwood. I am certain of success. So many

people know me here, and think kindly of me, that I am certain. Don't

mistrust me. Our wants are not many. If I rent the dear old house, and

keep a school, I shall be useful and happy.'

The calm fervour of her cheerful voice brought back so vividly, first

the dear old house itself, and then my solitary home, that my heart was

too full for speech. Traddles pretended for a little while to be busily

looking among the papers.

'Next, Miss Trotwood,' said Traddles, 'that property of yours.'

'Well, sir,' sighed my aunt. 'All I have got to say about it is, that if

it's gone, I can bear it; and if it's not gone, I shall be glad to get

it back.'

'It was originally, I think, eight thousand pounds, Consols?' said

Traddles.

'Right!' replied my aunt.

'I can't account for more than five,' said Traddles, with an air of

perplexity.

'--thousand, do you mean?' inquired my aunt, with uncommon composure,

'or pounds?'

'Five thousand pounds,' said Traddles.

'It was all there was,' returned my aunt. 'I sold three, myself. One, I

paid for your articles, Trot, my dear; and the other two I have by me.

When I lost the rest, I thought it wise to say nothing about that sum,

but to keep it secretly for a rainy day. I wanted to see how you would

come out of the trial, Trot; and you came out nobly--persevering,

self-reliant, self-denying! So did Dick. Don't speak to me, for I find

my nerves a little shaken!'

Nobody would have thought so, to see her sitting upright, with her arms

folded; but she had wonderful self-command.

'Then I am delighted to say,' cried Traddles, beaming with joy, 'that we

have recovered the whole money!'

'Don't congratulate me, anybody!' exclaimed my aunt. 'How so, sir?'

'You believed it had been misappropriated by Mr. Wickfield?' said

Traddles.

'Of course I did,' said my aunt, 'and was therefore easily silenced.

Agnes, not a word!'

'And indeed,' said Traddles, 'it was sold, by virtue of the power of

management he held from you; but I needn't say by whom sold, or on whose

actual signature. It was afterwards pretended to Mr. Wickfield, by that

rascal,--and proved, too, by figures,--that he had possessed himself of

the money (on general instructions, he said) to keep other deficiencies

and difficulties from the light. Mr. Wickfield, being so weak and

helpless in his hands as to pay you, afterwards, several sums of

interest on a pretended principal which he knew did not exist, made

himself, unhappily, a party to the fraud.'

'And at last took the blame upon himself,' added my aunt; 'and wrote me

a mad letter, charging himself with robbery, and wrong unheard of. Upon

which I paid him a visit early one morning, called for a candle, burnt

the letter, and told him if he ever could right me and himself, to

do it; and if he couldn't, to keep his own counsel for his daughter's

sake.---If anybody speaks to me, I'll leave the house!'

We all remained quiet; Agnes covering her face.

'Well, my dear friend,' said my aunt, after a pause, 'and you have

really extorted the money back from him?'

'Why, the fact is,' returned Traddles, 'Mr. Micawber had so completely

hemmed him in, and was always ready with so many new points if an

old one failed, that he could not escape from us. A most remarkable

circumstance is, that I really don't think he grasped this sum even so

much for the gratification of his avarice, which was inordinate, as in

the hatred he felt for Copperfield. He said so to me, plainly. He said

he would even have spent as much, to baulk or injure Copperfield.'

'Ha!' said my aunt, knitting her brows thoughtfully, and glancing at

Agnes. 'And what's become of him?'

'I don't know. He left here,' said Traddles, 'with his mother, who had

been clamouring, and beseeching, and disclosing, the whole time. They

went away by one of the London night coaches, and I know no more about

him; except that his malevolence to me at parting was audacious. He

seemed to consider himself hardly less indebted to me, than to Mr.

Micawber; which I consider (as I told him) quite a compliment.'

'Do you suppose he has any money, Traddles?' I asked.

'Oh dear, yes, I should think so,' he replied, shaking his head,

seriously. 'I should say he must have pocketed a good deal, in one

way or other. But, I think you would find, Copperfield, if you had an

opportunity of observing his course, that money would never keep that

man out of mischief. He is such an incarnate hypocrite, that whatever

object he pursues, he must pursue crookedly. It's his only compensation

for the outward restraints he puts upon himself. Always creeping along

the ground to some small end or other, he will always magnify every

object in the way; and consequently will hate and suspect everybody that

comes, in the most innocent manner, between him and it. So the crooked

courses will become crookeder, at any moment, for the least reason,

or for none. It's only necessary to consider his history here,' said

Traddles, 'to know that.'

'He's a monster of meanness!' said my aunt.

'Really I don't know about that,' observed Traddles thoughtfully. 'Many

people can be very mean, when they give their minds to it.'

'And now, touching Mr. Micawber,' said my aunt.

'Well, really,' said Traddles, cheerfully, 'I must, once more, give Mr.

Micawber high praise. But for his having been so patient and persevering

for so long a time, we never could have hoped to do anything worth

speaking of. And I think we ought to consider that Mr. Micawber did

right, for right's sake, when we reflect what terms he might have made

with Uriah Heep himself, for his silence.'

'I think so too,' said I.

'Now, what would you give him?' inquired my aunt.

'Oh! Before you come to that,' said Traddles, a little disconcerted,

'I am afraid I thought it discreet to omit (not being able to carry

everything before me) two points, in making this lawless adjustment--for

it's perfectly lawless from beginning to end--of a difficult affair.

Those I.O.U.'s, and so forth, which Mr. Micawber gave him for the

advances he had--'

'Well! They must be paid,' said my aunt.

'Yes, but I don't know when they may be proceeded on, or where they

are,' rejoined Traddles, opening his eyes; 'and I anticipate, that,

between this time and his departure, Mr. Micawber will be constantly

arrested, or taken in execution.'

'Then he must be constantly set free again, and taken out of execution,'

said my aunt. 'What's the amount altogether?'

'Why, Mr. Micawber has entered the transactions--he calls them

transactions--with great form, in a book,' rejoined Traddles, smiling;

'and he makes the amount a hundred and three pounds, five.'

'Now, what shall we give him, that sum included?' said my aunt. 'Agnes,

my dear, you and I can talk about division of it afterwards. What should

it be? Five hundred pounds?'

Upon this, Traddles and I both struck in at once. We both recommended

a small sum in money, and the payment, without stipulation to Mr.

Micawber, of the Uriah claims as they came in. We proposed that the

family should have their passage and their outfit, and a hundred pounds;

and that Mr. Micawber's arrangement for the repayment of the advances

should be gravely entered into, as it might be wholesome for him

to suppose himself under that responsibility. To this, I added the

suggestion, that I should give some explanation of his character and

history to Mr. Peggotty, who I knew could be relied on; and that to Mr.

Peggotty should be quietly entrusted the discretion of advancing another

hundred. I further proposed to interest Mr. Micawber in Mr. Peggotty,

by confiding so much of Mr. Peggotty's story to him as I might feel

justified in relating, or might think expedient; and to endeavour to

bring each of them to bear upon the other, for the common advantage. We

all entered warmly into these views; and I may mention at once, that the

principals themselves did so, shortly afterwards, with perfect good will

and harmony.

Seeing that Traddles now glanced anxiously at my aunt again, I reminded

him of the second and last point to which he had adverted.

'You and your aunt will excuse me, Copperfield, if I touch upon a

painful theme, as I greatly fear I shall,' said Traddles, hesitating;

'but I think it necessary to bring it to your recollection. On the day

of Mr. Micawber's memorable denunciation a threatening allusion was made

by Uriah Heep to your aunt's--husband.'

My aunt, retaining her stiff position, and apparent composure, assented

with a nod.

'Perhaps,' observed Traddles, 'it was mere purposeless impertinence?'

'No,' returned my aunt.

'There was--pardon me--really such a person, and at all in his power?'

hinted Traddles.

'Yes, my good friend,' said my aunt.

Traddles, with a perceptible lengthening of his face, explained that he

had not been able to approach this subject; that it had shared the fate

of Mr. Micawber's liabilities, in not being comprehended in the terms he

had made; that we were no longer of any authority with Uriah Heep; and

that if he could do us, or any of us, any injury or annoyance, no doubt

he would.

My aunt remained quiet; until again some stray tears found their way to

her cheeks. 'You are quite right,' she said. 'It was very thoughtful to

mention it.'

'Can I--or Copperfield--do anything?' asked Traddles, gently.

'Nothing,' said my aunt. 'I thank you many times. Trot, my dear, a vain

threat! Let us have Mr. and Mrs. Micawber back. And don't any of you

speak to me!' With that she smoothed her dress, and sat, with her

upright carriage, looking at the door.

'Well, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber!' said my aunt, when they entered. 'We have

been discussing your emigration, with many apologies to you for keeping

you out of the room so long; and I'll tell you what arrangements we

propose.'

These she explained to the unbounded satisfaction of the

family,--children and all being then present,--and so much to the

awakening of Mr. Micawber's punctual habits in the opening stage of

all bill transactions, that he could not be dissuaded from immediately

rushing out, in the highest spirits, to buy the stamps for his notes of

hand. But, his joy received a sudden check; for within five minutes,

he returned in the custody of a sheriff 's officer, informing us, in

a flood of tears, that all was lost. We, being quite prepared for this

event, which was of course a proceeding of Uriah Heep's, soon paid the

money; and in five minutes more Mr. Micawber was seated at the table,

filling up the stamps with an expression of perfect joy, which only

that congenial employment, or the making of punch, could impart in full

completeness to his shining face. To see him at work on the stamps, with

the relish of an artist, touching them like pictures, looking at them

sideways, taking weighty notes of dates and amounts in his pocket-book,

and contemplating them when finished, with a high sense of their

precious value, was a sight indeed.

'Now, the best thing you can do, sir, if you'll allow me to advise

you,' said my aunt, after silently observing him, 'is to abjure that

occupation for evermore.'

'Madam,' replied Mr. Micawber, 'it is my intention to register such a

vow on the virgin page of the future. Mrs. Micawber will attest it. I

trust,' said Mr. Micawber, solemnly, 'that my son Wilkins will ever bear

in mind, that he had infinitely better put his fist in the fire, than

use it to handle the serpents that have poisoned the life-blood of his

unhappy parent!' Deeply affected, and changed in a moment to the image

of despair, Mr. Micawber regarded the serpents with a look of gloomy

abhorrence (in which his late admiration of them was not quite subdued),

folded them up and put them in his pocket.

This closed the proceedings of the evening. We were weary with sorrow

and fatigue, and my aunt and I were to return to London on the morrow.

It was arranged that the Micawbers should follow us, after effecting a

sale of their goods to a broker; that Mr. Wickfield's affairs should be

brought to a settlement, with all convenient speed, under the direction

of Traddles; and that Agnes should also come to London, pending those

arrangements. We passed the night at the old house, which, freed from

the presence of the Heeps, seemed purged of a disease; and I lay in my

old room, like a shipwrecked wanderer come home.

We went back next day to my aunt's house--not to mine--and when she and

I sat alone, as of old, before going to bed, she said:

'Trot, do you really wish to know what I have had upon my mind lately?'

'Indeed I do, aunt. If there ever was a time when I felt unwilling that

you should have a sorrow or anxiety which I could not share, it is now.'

'You have had sorrow enough, child,' said my aunt, affectionately,

'without the addition of my little miseries. I could have no other

motive, Trot, in keeping anything from you.'

'I know that well,' said I. 'But tell me now.'

'Would you ride with me a little way tomorrow morning?' asked my aunt.

'Of course.'

'At nine,' said she. 'I'll tell you then, my dear.'

At nine, accordingly, we went out in a little chariot, and drove to

London. We drove a long way through the streets, until we came to one of

the large hospitals. Standing hard by the building was a plain hearse.

The driver recognized my aunt, and, in obedience to a motion of her hand

at the window, drove slowly off; we following.

'You understand it now, Trot,' said my aunt. 'He is gone!'

'Did he die in the hospital?'

'Yes.'

She sat immovable beside me; but, again I saw the stray tears on her

face.

'He was there once before,' said my aunt presently. 'He was ailing a

long time--a shattered, broken man, these many years. When he knew his

state in this last illness, he asked them to send for me. He was sorry

then. Very sorry.'

'You went, I know, aunt.'

'I went. I was with him a good deal afterwards.'

'He died the night before we went to Canterbury?' said I. My aunt

nodded. 'No one can harm him now,' she said. 'It was a vain threat.'

We drove away, out of town, to the churchyard at Hornsey. 'Better here

than in the streets,' said my aunt. 'He was born here.'

We alighted; and followed the plain coffin to a corner I remember well,

where the service was read consigning it to the dust.

'Six-and-thirty years ago, this day, my dear,' said my aunt, as we

walked back to the chariot, 'I was married. God forgive us all!' We took

our seats in silence; and so she sat beside me for a long time, holding

my hand. At length she suddenly burst into tears, and said:

'He was a fine-looking man when I married him, Trot--and he was sadly

changed!'

It did not last long. After the relief of tears, she soon became

composed, and even cheerful. Her nerves were a little shaken, she said,

or she would not have given way to it. God forgive us all!

So we rode back to her little cottage at Highgate, where we found the

following short note, which had arrived by that morning's post from Mr.

Micawber:

'Canterbury,

'Friday.

'My dear Madam, and Copperfield,

'The fair land of promise lately looming on the horizon is again

enveloped in impenetrable mists, and for ever withdrawn from the eyes of

a drifting wretch whose Doom is sealed!

'Another writ has been issued (in His Majesty's High Court of King's

Bench at Westminster), in another cause of HEEP V. MICAWBER, and

the defendant in that cause is the prey of the sheriff having legal

jurisdiction in this bailiwick.

'Now's the day, and now's the hour,

See the front of battle lower,

See approach proud EDWARD'S power--

Chains and slavery!

'Consigned to which, and to a speedy end (for mental torture is not

supportable beyond a certain point, and that point I feel I have

attained), my course is run. Bless you, bless you! Some future

traveller, visiting, from motives of curiosity, not unmingled, let us

hope, with sympathy, the place of confinement allotted to debtors in

this city, may, and I trust will, Ponder, as he traces on its wall,

inscribed with a rusty nail,

'The obscure initials,

'W. M.

'P.S. I re-open this to say that our common friend, Mr. Thomas Traddles

(who has not yet left us, and is looking extremely well), has paid the

debt and costs, in the noble name of Miss Trotwood; and that myself and

family are at the height of earthly bliss.'

CHAPTER 55. TEMPEST

I now approach an event in my life, so indelible, so awful, so bound by

an infinite variety of ties to all that has preceded it, in these pages,

that, from the beginning of my narrative, I have seen it growing larger

and larger as I advanced, like a great tower in a plain, and throwing

its fore-cast shadow even on the incidents of my childish days.

For years after it occurred, I dreamed of it often. I have started up so

vividly impressed by it, that its fury has yet seemed raging in my quiet

room, in the still night. I dream of it sometimes, though at lengthened

and uncertain intervals, to this hour. I have an association between it

and a stormy wind, or the lightest mention of a sea-shore, as strong as

any of which my mind is conscious. As plainly as I behold what happened,

I will try to write it down. I do not recall it, but see it done; for it

happens again before me.

The time drawing on rapidly for the sailing of the emigrant-ship, my

good old nurse (almost broken-hearted for me, when we first met) came up

to London. I was constantly with her, and her brother, and the Micawbers

(they being very much together); but Emily I never saw.

One evening when the time was close at hand, I was alone with Peggotty

and her brother. Our conversation turned on Ham. She described to us how

tenderly he had taken leave of her, and how manfully and quietly he

had borne himself. Most of all, of late, when she believed he was most

tried. It was a subject of which the affectionate creature never tired;

and our interest in hearing the many examples which she, who was so much

with him, had to relate, was equal to hers in relating them.

MY aunt and I were at that time vacating the two cottages at Highgate; I

intending to go abroad, and she to return to her house at Dover. We had

a temporary lodging in Covent Garden. As I walked home to it, after this

evening's conversation, reflecting on what had passed between Ham and

myself when I was last at Yarmouth, I wavered in the original purpose

I had formed, of leaving a letter for Emily when I should take leave of

her uncle on board the ship, and thought it would be better to write to

her now. She might desire, I thought, after receiving my communication,

to send some parting word by me to her unhappy lover. I ought to give

her the opportunity.

I therefore sat down in my room, before going to bed, and wrote to her.

I told her that I had seen him, and that he had requested me to tell her

what I have already written in its place in these sheets. I faithfully

repeated it. I had no need to enlarge upon it, if I had had the right.

Its deep fidelity and goodness were not to be adorned by me or any

man. I left it out, to be sent round in the morning; with a line to Mr.

Peggotty, requesting him to give it to her; and went to bed at daybreak.

I was weaker than I knew then; and, not falling asleep until the sun

was up, lay late, and unrefreshed, next day. I was roused by the silent

presence of my aunt at my bedside. I felt it in my sleep, as I suppose

we all do feel such things.

'Trot, my dear,' she said, when I opened my eyes, 'I couldn't make up my

mind to disturb you. Mr. Peggotty is here; shall he come up?'

I replied yes, and he soon appeared.

'Mas'r Davy,' he said, when we had shaken hands, 'I giv Em'ly your

letter, sir, and she writ this heer; and begged of me fur to ask you

to read it, and if you see no hurt in't, to be so kind as take charge

on't.'

'Have you read it?' said I.

He nodded sorrowfully. I opened it, and read as follows:

'I have got your message. Oh, what can I write, to thank you for your

good and blessed kindness to me!

'I have put the words close to my heart. I shall keep them till I die.

They are sharp thorns, but they are such comfort. I have prayed over

them, oh, I have prayed so much. When I find what you are, and what

uncle is, I think what God must be, and can cry to him.

'Good-bye for ever. Now, my dear, my friend, good-bye for ever in this

world. In another world, if I am forgiven, I may wake a child and come

to you. All thanks and blessings. Farewell, evermore.'

This, blotted with tears, was the letter.

'May I tell her as you doen't see no hurt in't, and as you'll be so kind

as take charge on't, Mas'r Davy?' said Mr. Peggotty, when I had read it.

'Unquestionably,' said I--'but I am thinking--'

'Yes, Mas'r Davy?'

'I am thinking,' said I, 'that I'll go down again to Yarmouth. There's

time, and to spare, for me to go and come back before the ship sails. My

mind is constantly running on him, in his solitude; to put this letter

of her writing in his hand at this time, and to enable you to tell her,

in the moment of parting, that he has got it, will be a kindness to

both of them. I solemnly accepted his commission, dear good fellow, and

cannot discharge it too completely. The journey is nothing to me. I am

restless, and shall be better in motion. I'll go down tonight.'

Though he anxiously endeavoured to dissuade me, I saw that he was of my

mind; and this, if I had required to be confirmed in my intention, would

have had the effect. He went round to the coach office, at my request,

and took the box-seat for me on the mail. In the evening I started,

by that conveyance, down the road I had traversed under so many

vicissitudes.

'Don't you think that,' I asked the coachman, in the first stage out of

London, 'a very remarkable sky? I don't remember to have seen one like

it.'

'Nor I--not equal to it,' he replied. 'That's wind, sir. There'll be

mischief done at sea, I expect, before long.'

It was a murky confusion--here and there blotted with a colour like the

colour of the smoke from damp fuel--of flying clouds, tossed up into

most remarkable heaps, suggesting greater heights in the clouds than

there were depths below them to the bottom of the deepest hollows in the

earth, through which the wild moon seemed to plunge headlong, as if, in

a dread disturbance of the laws of nature, she had lost her way and were

frightened. There had been a wind all day; and it was rising then, with

an extraordinary great sound. In another hour it had much increased, and

the sky was more overcast, and blew hard.

But, as the night advanced, the clouds closing in and densely

over-spreading the whole sky, then very dark, it came on to blow, harder

and harder. It still increased, until our horses could scarcely face

the wind. Many times, in the dark part of the night (it was then late in

September, when the nights were not short), the leaders turned about, or

came to a dead stop; and we were often in serious apprehension that the

coach would be blown over. Sweeping gusts of rain came up before this

storm, like showers of steel; and, at those times, when there was any

shelter of trees or lee walls to be got, we were fain to stop, in a

sheer impossibility of continuing the struggle.

When the day broke, it blew harder and harder. I had been in Yarmouth

when the seamen said it blew great guns, but I had never known the like

of this, or anything approaching to it. We came to Ipswich--very late,

having had to fight every inch of ground since we were ten miles out of

London; and found a cluster of people in the market-place, who had

risen from their beds in the night, fearful of falling chimneys. Some of

these, congregating about the inn-yard while we changed horses, told us

of great sheets of lead having been ripped off a high church-tower, and

flung into a by-street, which they then blocked up. Others had to tell

of country people, coming in from neighbouring villages, who had seen

great trees lying torn out of the earth, and whole ricks scattered about

the roads and fields. Still, there was no abatement in the storm, but it

blew harder.

As we struggled on, nearer and nearer to the sea, from which this mighty

wind was blowing dead on shore, its force became more and more terrific.

Long before we saw the sea, its spray was on our lips, and showered

salt rain upon us. The water was out, over miles and miles of the flat

country adjacent to Yarmouth; and every sheet and puddle lashed its

banks, and had its stress of little breakers setting heavily towards us.

When we came within sight of the sea, the waves on the horizon, caught

at intervals above the rolling abyss, were like glimpses of another

shore with towers and buildings. When at last we got into the town, the

people came out to their doors, all aslant, and with streaming hair,

making a wonder of the mail that had come through such a night.

I put up at the old inn, and went down to look at the sea; staggering

along the street, which was strewn with sand and seaweed, and with

flying blotches of sea-foam; afraid of falling slates and tiles; and

holding by people I met, at angry corners. Coming near the beach, I saw,

not only the boatmen, but half the people of the town, lurking behind

buildings; some, now and then braving the fury of the storm to look

away to sea, and blown sheer out of their course in trying to get zigzag

back.

Joining these groups, I found bewailing women whose husbands were away

in herring or oyster boats, which there was too much reason to think

might have foundered before they could run in anywhere for safety.

Grizzled old sailors were among the people, shaking their heads, as they

looked from water to sky, and muttering to one another; ship-owners,

excited and uneasy; children, huddling together, and peering into older

faces; even stout mariners, disturbed and anxious, levelling their

glasses at the sea from behind places of shelter, as if they were

surveying an enemy.

The tremendous sea itself, when I could find sufficient pause to look at

it, in the agitation of the blinding wind, the flying stones and sand,

and the awful noise, confounded me. As the high watery walls came

rolling in, and, at their highest, tumbled into surf, they looked as if

the least would engulf the town. As the receding wave swept back with a

hoarse roar, it seemed to scoop out deep caves in the beach, as if its

purpose were to undermine the earth. When some white-headed billows

thundered on, and dashed themselves to pieces before they reached the

land, every fragment of the late whole seemed possessed by the full

might of its wrath, rushing to be gathered to the composition of another

monster. Undulating hills were changed to valleys, undulating valleys

(with a solitary storm-bird sometimes skimming through them) were lifted

up to hills; masses of water shivered and shook the beach with a booming

sound; every shape tumultuously rolled on, as soon as made, to change

its shape and place, and beat another shape and place away; the ideal

shore on the horizon, with its towers and buildings, rose and fell; the

clouds fell fast and thick; I seemed to see a rending and upheaving of

all nature.

Not finding Ham among the people whom this memorable wind--for it is

still remembered down there, as the greatest ever known to blow upon

that coast--had brought together, I made my way to his house. It was

shut; and as no one answered to my knocking, I went, by back ways and

by-lanes, to the yard where he worked. I learned, there, that he had

gone to Lowestoft, to meet some sudden exigency of ship-repairing

in which his skill was required; but that he would be back tomorrow

morning, in good time.

I went back to the inn; and when I had washed and dressed, and tried to

sleep, but in vain, it was five o'clock in the afternoon. I had not sat

five minutes by the coffee-room fire, when the waiter, coming to stir

it, as an excuse for talking, told me that two colliers had gone down,

with all hands, a few miles away; and that some other ships had been

seen labouring hard in the Roads, and trying, in great distress, to keep

off shore. Mercy on them, and on all poor sailors, said he, if we had

another night like the last!

I was very much depressed in spirits; very solitary; and felt an

uneasiness in Ham's not being there, disproportionate to the occasion. I

was seriously affected, without knowing how much, by late events; and my

long exposure to the fierce wind had confused me. There was that jumble

in my thoughts and recollections, that I had lost the clear arrangement

of time and distance. Thus, if I had gone out into the town, I should

not have been surprised, I think, to encounter someone who I knew must

be then in London. So to speak, there was in these respects a curious

inattention in my mind. Yet it was busy, too, with all the remembrances

the place naturally awakened; and they were particularly distinct and

vivid.

In this state, the waiter's dismal intelligence about the ships

immediately connected itself, without any effort of my volition, with my

uneasiness about Ham. I was persuaded that I had an apprehension of his

returning from Lowestoft by sea, and being lost. This grew so strong

with me, that I resolved to go back to the yard before I took my dinner,

and ask the boat-builder if he thought his attempting to return by sea

at all likely? If he gave me the least reason to think so, I would go

over to Lowestoft and prevent it by bringing him with me.

I hastily ordered my dinner, and went back to the yard. I was none too

soon; for the boat-builder, with a lantern in his hand, was locking

the yard-gate. He quite laughed when I asked him the question, and said

there was no fear; no man in his senses, or out of them, would put off

in such a gale of wind, least of all Ham Peggotty, who had been born to

seafaring.

So sensible of this, beforehand, that I had really felt ashamed of doing

what I was nevertheless impelled to do, I went back to the inn. If

such a wind could rise, I think it was rising. The howl and roar, the

rattling of the doors and windows, the rumbling in the chimneys, the

apparent rocking of the very house that sheltered me, and the prodigious

tumult of the sea, were more fearful than in the morning. But there

was now a great darkness besides; and that invested the storm with new

terrors, real and fanciful.

I could not eat, I could not sit still, I could not continue steadfast

to anything. Something within me, faintly answering to the storm

without, tossed up the depths of my memory and made a tumult in them.

Yet, in all the hurry of my thoughts, wild running with the thundering

sea,--the storm, and my uneasiness regarding Ham were always in the

fore-ground.

My dinner went away almost untasted, and I tried to refresh myself with

a glass or two of wine. In vain. I fell into a dull slumber before

the fire, without losing my consciousness, either of the uproar out of

doors, or of the place in which I was. Both became overshadowed by a new

and indefinable horror; and when I awoke--or rather when I shook off

the lethargy that bound me in my chair--my whole frame thrilled with

objectless and unintelligible fear.

I walked to and fro, tried to read an old gazetteer, listened to the

awful noises: looked at faces, scenes, and figures in the fire.

At length, the steady ticking of the undisturbed clock on the wall

tormented me to that degree that I resolved to go to bed.

It was reassuring, on such a night, to be told that some of the

inn-servants had agreed together to sit up until morning. I went to bed,

exceedingly weary and heavy; but, on my lying down, all such sensations

vanished, as if by magic, and I was broad awake, with every sense

refined.

For hours I lay there, listening to the wind and water; imagining, now,

that I heard shrieks out at sea; now, that I distinctly heard the firing

of signal guns; and now, the fall of houses in the town. I got up,

several times, and looked out; but could see nothing, except the

reflection in the window-panes of the faint candle I had left burning,

and of my own haggard face looking in at me from the black void.

At length, my restlessness attained to such a pitch, that I hurried on

my clothes, and went downstairs. In the large kitchen, where I dimly

saw bacon and ropes of onions hanging from the beams, the watchers were

clustered together, in various attitudes, about a table, purposely moved

away from the great chimney, and brought near the door. A pretty girl,

who had her ears stopped with her apron, and her eyes upon the door,

screamed when I appeared, supposing me to be a spirit; but the others

had more presence of mind, and were glad of an addition to their

company. One man, referring to the topic they had been discussing, asked

me whether I thought the souls of the collier-crews who had gone down,

were out in the storm?

I remained there, I dare say, two hours. Once, I opened the yard-gate,

and looked into the empty street. The sand, the sea-weed, and the flakes

of foam, were driving by; and I was obliged to call for assistance

before I could shut the gate again, and make it fast against the wind.

There was a dark gloom in my solitary chamber, when I at length returned

to it; but I was tired now, and, getting into bed again, fell--off

a tower and down a precipice--into the depths of sleep. I have an

impression that for a long time, though I dreamed of being elsewhere and

in a variety of scenes, it was always blowing in my dream. At length,

I lost that feeble hold upon reality, and was engaged with two dear

friends, but who they were I don't know, at the siege of some town in a

roar of cannonading.

The thunder of the cannon was so loud and incessant, that I could not

hear something I much desired to hear, until I made a great exertion

and awoke. It was broad day--eight or nine o'clock; the storm raging, in

lieu of the batteries; and someone knocking and calling at my door.

'What is the matter?' I cried.

'A wreck! Close by!'

I sprung out of bed, and asked, what wreck?

'A schooner, from Spain or Portugal, laden with fruit and wine. Make

haste, sir, if you want to see her! It's thought, down on the beach,

she'll go to pieces every moment.'

The excited voice went clamouring along the staircase; and I wrapped

myself in my clothes as quickly as I could, and ran into the street.

Numbers of people were there before me, all running in one direction, to

the beach. I ran the same way, outstripping a good many, and soon came

facing the wild sea.

The wind might by this time have lulled a little, though not more

sensibly than if the cannonading I had dreamed of, had been diminished

by the silencing of half-a-dozen guns out of hundreds. But the sea,

having upon it the additional agitation of the whole night, was

infinitely more terrific than when I had seen it last. Every appearance

it had then presented, bore the expression of being swelled; and the

height to which the breakers rose, and, looking over one another,

bore one another down, and rolled in, in interminable hosts, was most

appalling. In the difficulty of hearing anything but wind and waves,

and in the crowd, and the unspeakable confusion, and my first breathless

efforts to stand against the weather, I was so confused that I looked

out to sea for the wreck, and saw nothing but the foaming heads of the

great waves. A half-dressed boatman, standing next me, pointed with his

bare arm (a tattoo'd arrow on it, pointing in the same direction) to the

left. Then, O great Heaven, I saw it, close in upon us!

One mast was broken short off, six or eight feet from the deck, and lay

over the side, entangled in a maze of sail and rigging; and all that

ruin, as the ship rolled and beat--which she did without a moment's

pause, and with a violence quite inconceivable--beat the side as if it

would stave it in. Some efforts were even then being made, to cut this

portion of the wreck away; for, as the ship, which was broadside on,

turned towards us in her rolling, I plainly descried her people at

work with axes, especially one active figure with long curling hair,

conspicuous among the rest. But a great cry, which was audible even

above the wind and water, rose from the shore at this moment; the sea,

sweeping over the rolling wreck, made a clean breach, and carried men,

spars, casks, planks, bulwarks, heaps of such toys, into the boiling

surge.

The second mast was yet standing, with the rags of a rent sail, and

a wild confusion of broken cordage flapping to and fro. The ship had

struck once, the same boatman hoarsely said in my ear, and then lifted

in and struck again. I understood him to add that she was parting

amidships, and I could readily suppose so, for the rolling and beating

were too tremendous for any human work to suffer long. As he spoke,

there was another great cry of pity from the beach; four men arose with

the wreck out of the deep, clinging to the rigging of the remaining

mast; uppermost, the active figure with the curling hair.

There was a bell on board; and as the ship rolled and dashed, like a

desperate creature driven mad, now showing us the whole sweep of her

deck, as she turned on her beam-ends towards the shore, now nothing but

her keel, as she sprung wildly over and turned towards the sea, the bell

rang; and its sound, the knell of those unhappy men, was borne towards

us on the wind. Again we lost her, and again she rose. Two men were

gone. The agony on the shore increased. Men groaned, and clasped their

hands; women shrieked, and turned away their faces. Some ran wildly

up and down along the beach, crying for help where no help could be. I

found myself one of these, frantically imploring a knot of sailors whom

I knew, not to let those two lost creatures perish before our eyes.

They were making out to me, in an agitated way--I don't know how,

for the little I could hear I was scarcely composed enough to

understand--that the lifeboat had been bravely manned an hour ago, and

could do nothing; and that as no man would be so desperate as to attempt

to wade off with a rope, and establish a communication with the shore,

there was nothing left to try; when I noticed that some new sensation

moved the people on the beach, and saw them part, and Ham come breaking

through them to the front.

I ran to him--as well as I know, to repeat my appeal for help. But,

distracted though I was, by a sight so new to me and terrible, the

determination in his face, and his look out to sea--exactly the same

look as I remembered in connexion with the morning after Emily's

flight--awoke me to a knowledge of his danger. I held him back with both

arms; and implored the men with whom I had been speaking, not to listen

to him, not to do murder, not to let him stir from off that sand!

Another cry arose on shore; and looking to the wreck, we saw the cruel

sail, with blow on blow, beat off the lower of the two men, and fly up

in triumph round the active figure left alone upon the mast.

Against such a sight, and against such determination as that of the

calmly desperate man who was already accustomed to lead half the people

present, I might as hopefully have entreated the wind. 'Mas'r Davy,'

he said, cheerily grasping me by both hands, 'if my time is come, 'tis

come. If 'tan't, I'll bide it. Lord above bless you, and bless all!

Mates, make me ready! I'm a-going off!'

I was swept away, but not unkindly, to some distance, where the people

around me made me stay; urging, as I confusedly perceived, that he was

bent on going, with help or without, and that I should endanger the

precautions for his safety by troubling those with whom they rested. I

don't know what I answered, or what they rejoined; but I saw hurry on

the beach, and men running with ropes from a capstan that was there, and

penetrating into a circle of figures that hid him from me. Then, I saw

him standing alone, in a seaman's frock and trousers: a rope in his

hand, or slung to his wrist: another round his body: and several of the

best men holding, at a little distance, to the latter, which he laid out

himself, slack upon the shore, at his feet.

The wreck, even to my unpractised eye, was breaking up. I saw that she

was parting in the middle, and that the life of the solitary man upon

the mast hung by a thread. Still, he clung to it. He had a singular red

cap on,--not like a sailor's cap, but of a finer colour; and as the few

yielding planks between him and destruction rolled and bulged, and his

anticipative death-knell rung, he was seen by all of us to wave it. I

saw him do it now, and thought I was going distracted, when his action

brought an old remembrance to my mind of a once dear friend.

Ham watched the sea, standing alone, with the silence of suspended

breath behind him, and the storm before, until there was a great

retiring wave, when, with a backward glance at those who held the rope

which was made fast round his body, he dashed in after it, and in a

moment was buffeting with the water; rising with the hills, falling

with the valleys, lost beneath the foam; then drawn again to land. They

hauled in hastily.

He was hurt. I saw blood on his face, from where I stood; but he took

no thought of that. He seemed hurriedly to give them some directions for

leaving him more free--or so I judged from the motion of his arm--and

was gone as before.

And now he made for the wreck, rising with the hills, falling with the

valleys, lost beneath the rugged foam, borne in towards the shore,

borne on towards the ship, striving hard and valiantly. The distance was

nothing, but the power of the sea and wind made the strife deadly. At

length he neared the wreck. He was so near, that with one more of his

vigorous strokes he would be clinging to it,--when a high, green, vast

hill-side of water, moving on shoreward, from beyond the ship, he seemed

to leap up into it with a mighty bound, and the ship was gone!

Some eddying fragments I saw in the sea, as if a mere cask had been

broken, in running to the spot where they were hauling in. Consternation

was in every face. They drew him to my very feet--insensible--dead.

He was carried to the nearest house; and, no one preventing me now, I

remained near him, busy, while every means of restoration were tried;

but he had been beaten to death by the great wave, and his generous

heart was stilled for ever.

As I sat beside the bed, when hope was abandoned and all was done, a

fisherman, who had known me when Emily and I were children, and ever

since, whispered my name at the door.

'Sir,' said he, with tears starting to his weather-beaten face, which,

with his trembling lips, was ashy pale, 'will you come over yonder?'

The old remembrance that had been recalled to me, was in his look. I

asked him, terror-stricken, leaning on the arm he held out to support

me:

'Has a body come ashore?'

He said, 'Yes.'

'Do I know it?' I asked then.

He answered nothing.

But he led me to the shore. And on that part of it where she and I had

looked for shells, two children--on that part of it where some lighter

fragments of the old boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by

the wind--among the ruins of the home he had wronged--I saw him lying

with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.

CHAPTER 56. THE NEW WOUND, AND THE OLD

No need, O Steerforth, to have said, when we last spoke together, in

that hour which I so little deemed to be our parting-hour--no need to

have said, 'Think of me at my best!' I had done that ever; and could I

change now, looking on this sight!

They brought a hand-bier, and laid him on it, and covered him with a

flag, and took him up and bore him on towards the houses. All the men

who carried him had known him, and gone sailing with him, and seen him

merry and bold. They carried him through the wild roar, a hush in the

midst of all the tumult; and took him to the cottage where Death was

already.

But when they set the bier down on the threshold, they looked at one

another, and at me, and whispered. I knew why. They felt as if it were

not right to lay him down in the same quiet room.

We went into the town, and took our burden to the inn. So soon as I

could at all collect my thoughts, I sent for Joram, and begged him to

provide me a conveyance in which it could be got to London in the night.

I knew that the care of it, and the hard duty of preparing his mother to

receive it, could only rest with me; and I was anxious to discharge that

duty as faithfully as I could.

I chose the night for the journey, that there might be less curiosity

when I left the town. But, although it was nearly midnight when I came

out of the yard in a chaise, followed by what I had in charge, there

were many people waiting. At intervals, along the town, and even a

little way out upon the road, I saw more: but at length only the bleak

night and the open country were around me, and the ashes of my youthful

friendship.

Upon a mellow autumn day, about noon, when the ground was perfumed by

fallen leaves, and many more, in beautiful tints of yellow, red, and

brown, yet hung upon the trees, through which the sun was shining, I

arrived at Highgate. I walked the last mile, thinking as I went along of

what I had to do; and left the carriage that had followed me all through

the night, awaiting orders to advance.

The house, when I came up to it, looked just the same. Not a blind was

raised; no sign of life was in the dull paved court, with its covered

way leading to the disused door. The wind had quite gone down, and

nothing moved.

I had not, at first, the courage to ring at the gate; and when I did

ring, my errand seemed to me to be expressed in the very sound of the

bell. The little parlour-maid came out, with the key in her hand; and

looking earnestly at me as she unlocked the gate, said:

'I beg your pardon, sir. Are you ill?'

'I have been much agitated, and am fatigued.'

'Is anything the matter, sir?---Mr. James?--' 'Hush!' said I. 'Yes,

something has happened, that I have to break to Mrs. Steerforth. She is

at home?'

The girl anxiously replied that her mistress was very seldom out now,

even in a carriage; that she kept her room; that she saw no company, but

would see me. Her mistress was up, she said, and Miss Dartle was with

her. What message should she take upstairs?

Giving her a strict charge to be careful of her manner, and only to

carry in my card and say I waited, I sat down in the drawing-room (which

we had now reached) until she should come back. Its former pleasant air

of occupation was gone, and the shutters were half closed. The harp had

not been used for many and many a day. His picture, as a boy, was

there. The cabinet in which his mother had kept his letters was there. I

wondered if she ever read them now; if she would ever read them more!

The house was so still that I heard the girl's light step upstairs. On

her return, she brought a message, to the effect that Mrs. Steerforth

was an invalid and could not come down; but that if I would excuse her

being in her chamber, she would be glad to see me. In a few moments I

stood before her.

She was in his room; not in her own. I felt, of course, that she had

taken to occupy it, in remembrance of him; and that the many tokens

of his old sports and accomplishments, by which she was surrounded,

remained there, just as he had left them, for the same reason. She

murmured, however, even in her reception of me, that she was out of her

own chamber because its aspect was unsuited to her infirmity; and with

her stately look repelled the least suspicion of the truth.

At her chair, as usual, was Rosa Dartle. From the first moment of

her dark eyes resting on me, I saw she knew I was the bearer of evil

tidings. The scar sprung into view that instant. She withdrew herself

a step behind the chair, to keep her own face out of Mrs. Steerforth's

observation; and scrutinized me with a piercing gaze that never

faltered, never shrunk.

'I am sorry to observe you are in mourning, sir,' said Mrs. Steerforth.

'I am unhappily a widower,' said I.

'You are very young to know so great a loss,' she returned. 'I am

grieved to hear it. I am grieved to hear it. I hope Time will be good to

you.'

'I hope Time,' said I, looking at her, 'will be good to all of us.

Dear Mrs. Steerforth, we must all trust to that, in our heaviest

misfortunes.'

The earnestness of my manner, and the tears in my eyes, alarmed her. The

whole course of her thoughts appeared to stop, and change.

I tried to command my voice in gently saying his name, but it trembled.

She repeated it to herself, two or three times, in a low tone. Then,

addressing me, she said, with enforced calmness:

'My son is ill.'

'Very ill.'

'You have seen him?'

'I have.'

'Are you reconciled?'

I could not say Yes, I could not say No. She slightly turned her head

towards the spot where Rosa Dartle had been standing at her elbow, and

in that moment I said, by the motion of my lips, to Rosa, 'Dead!'

That Mrs. Steerforth might not be induced to look behind her, and read,

plainly written, what she was not yet prepared to know, I met her look

quickly; but I had seen Rosa Dartle throw her hands up in the air with

vehemence of despair and horror, and then clasp them on her face.

The handsome lady--so like, oh so like!--regarded me with a fixed look,

and put her hand to her forehead. I besought her to be calm, and prepare

herself to bear what I had to tell; but I should rather have entreated

her to weep, for she sat like a stone figure.

'When I was last here,' I faltered, 'Miss Dartle told me he was sailing

here and there. The night before last was a dreadful one at sea. If he

were at sea that night, and near a dangerous coast, as it is said he

was; and if the vessel that was seen should really be the ship which--'

'Rosa!' said Mrs. Steerforth, 'come to me!'

She came, but with no sympathy or gentleness. Her eyes gleamed like fire

as she confronted his mother, and broke into a frightful laugh.

'Now,' she said, 'is your pride appeased, you madwoman? Now has he made

atonement to you--with his life! Do you hear?---His life!'

Mrs. Steerforth, fallen back stiffly in her chair, and making no sound

but a moan, cast her eyes upon her with a wide stare.

'Aye!' cried Rosa, smiting herself passionately on the breast, 'look at

me! Moan, and groan, and look at me! Look here!' striking the scar, 'at

your dead child's handiwork!'

The moan the mother uttered, from time to time, went to My heart. Always

the same. Always inarticulate and stifled. Always accompanied with

an incapable motion of the head, but with no change of face. Always

proceeding from a rigid mouth and closed teeth, as if the jaw were

locked and the face frozen up in pain.

'Do you remember when he did this?' she proceeded. 'Do you remember

when, in his inheritance of your nature, and in your pampering of his

pride and passion, he did this, and disfigured me for life? Look at me,

marked until I die with his high displeasure; and moan and groan for

what you made him!'

'Miss Dartle,' I entreated her. 'For Heaven's sake--'

'I WILL speak!' she said, turning on me with her lightning eyes. 'Be

silent, you! Look at me, I say, proud mother of a proud, false son! Moan

for your nurture of him, moan for your corruption of him, moan for your

loss of him, moan for mine!'

She clenched her hand, and trembled through her spare, worn figure, as

if her passion were killing her by inches.

'You, resent his self-will!' she exclaimed. 'You, injured by his haughty

temper! You, who opposed to both, when your hair was grey, the qualities

which made both when you gave him birth! YOU, who from his cradle reared

him to be what he was, and stunted what he should have been! Are you

rewarded, now, for your years of trouble?'

'Oh, Miss Dartle, shame! Oh cruel!'

'I tell you,' she returned, 'I WILL speak to her. No power on earth

should stop me, while I was standing here! Have I been silent all these

years, and shall I not speak now? I loved him better than you ever loved

him!' turning on her fiercely. 'I could have loved him, and asked no

return. If I had been his wife, I could have been the slave of his

caprices for a word of love a year. I should have been. Who knows it

better than I? You were exacting, proud, punctilious, selfish. My love

would have been devoted--would have trod your paltry whimpering under

foot!'

With flashing eyes, she stamped upon the ground as if she actually did

it.

'Look here!' she said, striking the scar again, with a relentless hand.

'When he grew into the better understanding of what he had done, he saw

it, and repented of it! I could sing to him, and talk to him, and show

the ardour that I felt in all he did, and attain with labour to such

knowledge as most interested him; and I attracted him. When he was

freshest and truest, he loved me. Yes, he did! Many a time, when you

were put off with a slight word, he has taken Me to his heart!'

She said it with a taunting pride in the midst of her frenzy--for it

was little less--yet with an eager remembrance of it, in which the

smouldering embers of a gentler feeling kindled for the moment.

'I descended--as I might have known I should, but that he fascinated me

with his boyish courtship--into a doll, a trifle for the occupation

of an idle hour, to be dropped, and taken up, and trifled with, as the

inconstant humour took him. When he grew weary, I grew weary. As his

fancy died out, I would no more have tried to strengthen any power I

had, than I would have married him on his being forced to take me for

his wife. We fell away from one another without a word. Perhaps you saw

it, and were not sorry. Since then, I have been a mere disfigured piece

of furniture between you both; having no eyes, no ears, no feelings,

no remembrances. Moan? Moan for what you made him; not for your love. I

tell you that the time was, when I loved him better than you ever did!'

She stood with her bright angry eyes confronting the wide stare, and the

set face; and softened no more, when the moaning was repeated, than if

the face had been a picture.

'Miss Dartle,' said I, 'if you can be so obdurate as not to feel for

this afflicted mother--'

'Who feels for me?' she sharply retorted. 'She has sown this. Let her

moan for the harvest that she reaps today!'

'And if his faults--' I began.

'Faults!' she cried, bursting into passionate tears. 'Who dares malign

him? He had a soul worth millions of the friends to whom he stooped!'

'No one can have loved him better, no one can hold him in dearer

remembrance than I,' I replied. 'I meant to say, if you have no

compassion for his mother; or if his faults--you have been bitter on

them--'

'It's false,' she cried, tearing her black hair; 'I loved him!'

'--if his faults cannot,' I went on, 'be banished from your remembrance,

in such an hour; look at that figure, even as one you have never seen

before, and render it some help!'

All this time, the figure was unchanged, and looked unchangeable.

Motionless, rigid, staring; moaning in the same dumb way from time to

time, with the same helpless motion of the head; but giving no other

sign of life. Miss Dartle suddenly kneeled down before it, and began to

loosen the dress.

'A curse upon you!' she said, looking round at me, with a mingled

expression of rage and grief. 'It was in an evil hour that you ever came

here! A curse upon you! Go!'

After passing out of the room, I hurried back to ring the bell, the

sooner to alarm the servants. She had then taken the impassive figure

in her arms, and, still upon her knees, was weeping over it, kissing it,

calling to it, rocking it to and fro upon her bosom like a child, and

trying every tender means to rouse the dormant senses. No longer afraid

of leaving her, I noiselessly turned back again; and alarmed the house

as I went out.

Later in the day, I returned, and we laid him in his mother's room. She

was just the same, they told me; Miss Dartle never left her; doctors

were in attendance, many things had been tried; but she lay like a

statue, except for the low sound now and then.

I went through the dreary house, and darkened the windows. The windows

of the chamber where he lay, I darkened last. I lifted up the leaden

hand, and held it to my heart; and all the world seemed death and

silence, broken only by his mother's moaning.

CHAPTER 57. THE EMIGRANTS

One thing more, I had to do, before yielding myself to the shock of

these emotions. It was, to conceal what had occurred, from those who

were going away; and to dismiss them on their voyage in happy ignorance.

In this, no time was to be lost.

I took Mr. Micawber aside that same night, and confided to him the

task of standing between Mr. Peggotty and intelligence of the late

catastrophe. He zealously undertook to do so, and to intercept any

newspaper through which it might, without such precautions, reach him.

'If it penetrates to him, sir,' said Mr. Micawber, striking himself on

the breast, 'it shall first pass through this body!'

Mr. Micawber, I must observe, in his adaptation of himself to a new

state of society, had acquired a bold buccaneering air, not absolutely

lawless, but defensive and prompt. One might have supposed him a child

of the wilderness, long accustomed to live out of the confines of

civilization, and about to return to his native wilds.

He had provided himself, among other things, with a complete suit of

oilskin, and a straw hat with a very low crown, pitched or caulked on

the outside. In this rough clothing, with a common mariner's telescope

under his arm, and a shrewd trick of casting up his eye at the sky

as looking out for dirty weather, he was far more nautical, after his

manner, than Mr. Peggotty. His whole family, if I may so express it,

were cleared for action. I found Mrs. Micawber in the closest and most

uncompromising of bonnets, made fast under the chin; and in a shawl

which tied her up (as I had been tied up, when my aunt first received

me) like a bundle, and was secured behind at the waist, in a strong

knot. Miss Micawber I found made snug for stormy weather, in the same

manner; with nothing superfluous about her. Master Micawber was hardly

visible in a Guernsey shirt, and the shaggiest suit of slops I ever

saw; and the children were done up, like preserved meats, in impervious

cases. Both Mr. Micawber and his eldest son wore their sleeves loosely

turned back at the wrists, as being ready to lend a hand in any

direction, and to 'tumble up', or sing out, 'Yeo--Heave--Yeo!' on the

shortest notice.

Thus Traddles and I found them at nightfall, assembled on the wooden

steps, at that time known as Hungerford Stairs, watching the departure

of a boat with some of their property on board. I had told Traddles of

the terrible event, and it had greatly shocked him; but there could be

no doubt of the kindness of keeping it a secret, and he had come to help

me in this last service. It was here that I took Mr. Micawber aside, and

received his promise.

The Micawber family were lodged in a little, dirty, tumble-down

public-house, which in those days was close to the stairs, and whose

protruding wooden rooms overhung the river. The family, as emigrants,

being objects of some interest in and about Hungerford, attracted so

many beholders, that we were glad to take refuge in their room. It was

one of the wooden chambers upstairs, with the tide flowing underneath.

My aunt and Agnes were there, busily making some little extra comforts,

in the way of dress, for the children. Peggotty was quietly assisting,

with the old insensible work-box, yard-measure, and bit of wax-candle

before her, that had now outlived so much.

It was not easy to answer her inquiries; still less to whisper Mr.

Peggotty, when Mr. Micawber brought him in, that I had given the letter,

and all was well. But I did both, and made them happy. If I showed any

trace of what I felt, my own sorrows were sufficient to account for it.

'And when does the ship sail, Mr. Micawber?' asked my aunt.

Mr. Micawber considered it necessary to prepare either my aunt or his

wife, by degrees, and said, sooner than he had expected yesterday.

'The boat brought you word, I suppose?' said my aunt.

'It did, ma'am,' he returned.

'Well?' said my aunt. 'And she sails--'

'Madam,' he replied, 'I am informed that we must positively be on board

before seven tomorrow morning.'

'Heyday!' said my aunt, 'that's soon. Is it a sea-going fact, Mr.

Peggotty?' ''Tis so, ma'am. She'll drop down the river with that theer

tide. If Mas'r Davy and my sister comes aboard at Gravesen', arternoon

o' next day, they'll see the last on us.'

'And that we shall do,' said I, 'be sure!'

'Until then, and until we are at sea,' observed Mr. Micawber, with a

glance of intelligence at me, 'Mr. Peggotty and myself will constantly

keep a double look-out together, on our goods and chattels. Emma, my

love,' said Mr. Micawber, clearing his throat in his magnificent way,

'my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles is so obliging as to solicit, in my ear,

that he should have the privilege of ordering the ingredients necessary

to the composition of a moderate portion of that Beverage which is

peculiarly associated, in our minds, with the Roast Beef of Old England.

I allude to--in short, Punch. Under ordinary circumstances, I should

scruple to entreat the indulgence of Miss Trotwood and Miss Wickfield,

but-'

'I can only say for myself,' said my aunt, 'that I will drink all

happiness and success to you, Mr. Micawber, with the utmost pleasure.'

'And I too!' said Agnes, with a smile.

Mr. Micawber immediately descended to the bar, where he appeared to be

quite at home; and in due time returned with a steaming jug. I could

not but observe that he had been peeling the lemons with his own

clasp-knife, which, as became the knife of a practical settler, was

about a foot long; and which he wiped, not wholly without ostentation,

on the sleeve of his coat. Mrs. Micawber and the two elder members

of the family I now found to be provided with similar formidable

instruments, while every child had its own wooden spoon attached to its

body by a strong line. In a similar anticipation of life afloat, and in

the Bush, Mr. Micawber, instead of helping Mrs. Micawber and his eldest

son and daughter to punch, in wine-glasses, which he might easily have

done, for there was a shelf-full in the room, served it out to them in a

series of villainous little tin pots; and I never saw him enjoy anything

so much as drinking out of his own particular pint pot, and putting it

in his pocket at the close of the evening.

'The luxuries of the old country,' said Mr. Micawber, with an intense

satisfaction in their renouncement, 'we abandon. The denizens of the

forest cannot, of course, expect to participate in the refinements of

the land of the Free.'

Here, a boy came in to say that Mr. Micawber was wanted downstairs.

'I have a presentiment,' said Mrs. Micawber, setting down her tin pot,

'that it is a member of my family!'

'If so, my dear,' observed Mr. Micawber, with his usual suddenness of

warmth on that subject, 'as the member of your family--whoever he, she,

or it, may be--has kept us waiting for a considerable period, perhaps

the Member may now wait MY convenience.'

'Micawber,' said his wife, in a low tone, 'at such a time as this--'

'"It is not meet,"' said Mr. Micawber, rising, '"that every nice offence

should bear its comment!" Emma, I stand reproved.'

'The loss, Micawber,' observed his wife, 'has been my family's, not

yours. If my family are at length sensible of the deprivation to which

their own conduct has, in the past, exposed them, and now desire to

extend the hand of fellowship, let it not be repulsed.'

'My dear,' he returned, 'so be it!'

'If not for their sakes; for mine, Micawber,' said his wife.

'Emma,' he returned, 'that view of the question is, at such a moment,

irresistible. I cannot, even now, distinctly pledge myself to fall

upon your family's neck; but the member of your family, who is now in

attendance, shall have no genial warmth frozen by me.'

Mr. Micawber withdrew, and was absent some little time; in the course of

which Mrs. Micawber was not wholly free from an apprehension that words

might have arisen between him and the Member. At length the same boy

reappeared, and presented me with a note written in pencil, and headed,

in a legal manner, 'Heep v. Micawber'. From this document, I learned

that Mr. Micawber being again arrested, 'Was in a final paroxysm of

despair; and that he begged me to send him his knife and pint pot, by

bearer, as they might prove serviceable during the brief remainder of

his existence, in jail. He also requested, as a last act of friendship,

that I would see his family to the Parish Workhouse, and forget that

such a Being ever lived.

Of course I answered this note by going down with the boy to pay the

money, where I found Mr. Micawber sitting in a corner, looking darkly at

the Sheriff 's Officer who had effected the capture. On his release,

he embraced me with the utmost fervour; and made an entry of the

transaction in his pocket-book--being very particular, I recollect,

about a halfpenny I inadvertently omitted from my statement of the

total.

This momentous pocket-book was a timely reminder to him of another

transaction. On our return to the room upstairs (where he accounted for

his absence by saying that it had been occasioned by circumstances over

which he had no control), he took out of it a large sheet of paper,

folded small, and quite covered with long sums, carefully worked. From

the glimpse I had of them, I should say that I never saw such sums

out of a school ciphering-book. These, it seemed, were calculations of

compound interest on what he called 'the principal amount of forty-one,

ten, eleven and a half', for various periods. After a careful

consideration of these, and an elaborate estimate of his resources,

he had come to the conclusion to select that sum which represented the

amount with compound interest to two years, fifteen calendar months, and

fourteen days, from that date. For this he had drawn a note-of-hand

with great neatness, which he handed over to Traddles on the spot,

a discharge of his debt in full (as between man and man), with many

acknowledgements.

'I have still a presentiment,' said Mrs. Micawber, pensively shaking her

head, 'that my family will appear on board, before we finally depart.'

Mr. Micawber evidently had his presentiment on the subject too, but he

put it in his tin pot and swallowed it.

'If you have any opportunity of sending letters home, on your passage,

Mrs. Micawber,' said my aunt, 'you must let us hear from you, you know.'

'My dear Miss Trotwood,' she replied, 'I shall only be too happy

to think that anyone expects to hear from us. I shall not fail to

correspond. Mr. Copperfield, I trust, as an old and familiar friend,

will not object to receive occasional intelligence, himself, from one

who knew him when the twins were yet unconscious?'

I said that I should hope to hear, whenever she had an opportunity of

writing.

'Please Heaven, there will be many such opportunities,' said Mr.

Micawber. 'The ocean, in these times, is a perfect fleet of ships; and

we can hardly fail to encounter many, in running over. It is merely

crossing,' said Mr. Micawber, trifling with his eye-glass, 'merely

crossing. The distance is quite imaginary.'

I think, now, how odd it was, but how wonderfully like Mr. Micawber,

that, when he went from London to Canterbury, he should have talked as

if he were going to the farthest limits of the earth; and, when he went

from England to Australia, as if he were going for a little trip across

the channel.

'On the voyage, I shall endeavour,' said Mr. Micawber, 'occasionally

to spin them a yarn; and the melody of my son Wilkins will, I trust,

be acceptable at the galley-fire. When Mrs. Micawber has her

sea-legs on--an expression in which I hope there is no conventional

impropriety--she will give them, I dare say, "Little Tafflin". Porpoises

and dolphins, I believe, will be frequently observed athwart our

Bows; and, either on the starboard or the larboard quarter, objects of

interest will be continually descried. In short,' said Mr. Micawber,

with the old genteel air, 'the probability is, all will be found so

exciting, alow and aloft, that when the lookout, stationed in the

main-top, cries Land-oh! we shall be very considerably astonished!'

With that he flourished off the contents of his little tin pot, as if he

had made the voyage, and had passed a first-class examination before the

highest naval authorities.

'What I chiefly hope, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber,

'is, that in some branches of our family we may live again in the old

country. Do not frown, Micawber! I do not now refer to my own family,

but to our children's children. However vigorous the sapling,' said Mrs.

Micawber, shaking her head, 'I cannot forget the parent-tree; and when

our race attains to eminence and fortune, I own I should wish that

fortune to flow into the coffers of Britannia.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, 'Britannia must take her chance. I am

bound to say that she has never done much for me, and that I have no

particular wish upon the subject.'

'Micawber,' returned Mrs. Micawber, 'there, you are wrong. You are going

out, Micawber, to this distant clime, to strengthen, not to weaken, the

connexion between yourself and Albion.'

'The connexion in question, my love,' rejoined Mr. Micawber, 'has not

laid me, I repeat, under that load of personal obligation, that I am at

all sensitive as to the formation of another connexion.'

'Micawber,' returned Mrs. Micawber. 'There, I again say, you are wrong.

You do not know your power, Micawber. It is that which will strengthen,

even in this step you are about to take, the connexion between yourself

and Albion.'

Mr. Micawber sat in his elbow-chair, with his eyebrows raised; half

receiving and half repudiating Mrs. Micawber's views as they were

stated, but very sensible of their foresight.

'My dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'I wish Mr. Micawber to

feel his position. It appears to me highly important that Mr. Micawber

should, from the hour of his embarkation, feel his position. Your old

knowledge of me, my dear Mr. Copperfield, will have told you that I have

not the sanguine disposition of Mr. Micawber. My disposition is, if I

may say so, eminently practical. I know that this is a long voyage. I

know that it will involve many privations and inconveniences. I cannot

shut my eyes to those facts. But I also know what Mr. Micawber is.

I know the latent power of Mr. Micawber. And therefore I consider it

vitally important that Mr. Micawber should feel his position.'

'My love,' he observed, 'perhaps you will allow me to remark that it is

barely possible that I DO feel my position at the present moment.'

'I think not, Micawber,' she rejoined. 'Not fully. My dear Mr.

Copperfield, Mr. Micawber's is not a common case. Mr. Micawber is going

to a distant country expressly in order that he may be fully understood

and appreciated for the first time. I wish Mr. Micawber to take his

stand upon that vessel's prow, and firmly say, "This country I am

come to conquer! Have you honours? Have you riches? Have you posts of

profitable pecuniary emolument? Let them be brought forward. They are

mine!"'

Mr. Micawber, glancing at us all, seemed to think there was a good deal

in this idea.

'I wish Mr. Micawber, if I make myself understood,' said Mrs. Micawber,

in her argumentative tone, 'to be the Caesar of his own fortunes. That,

my dear Mr. Copperfield, appears to me to be his true position. From

the first moment of this voyage, I wish Mr. Micawber to stand upon

that vessel's prow and say, "Enough of delay: enough of disappointment:

enough of limited means. That was in the old country. This is the new.

Produce your reparation. Bring it forward!"'

Mr. Micawber folded his arms in a resolute manner, as if he were then

stationed on the figure-head.

'And doing that,' said Mrs. Micawber, '--feeling his position--am I not

right in saying that Mr. Micawber will strengthen, and not weaken, his

connexion with Britain? An important public character arising in that

hemisphere, shall I be told that its influence will not be felt at home?

Can I be so weak as to imagine that Mr. Micawber, wielding the rod of

talent and of power in Australia, will be nothing in England? I am but

a woman; but I should be unworthy of myself and of my papa, if I were

guilty of such absurd weakness.'

Mrs. Micawber's conviction that her arguments were unanswerable, gave

a moral elevation to her tone which I think I had never heard in it

before.

'And therefore it is,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that I the more wish, that,

at a future period, we may live again on the parent soil. Mr. Micawber

may be--I cannot disguise from myself that the probability is, Mr.

Micawber will be--a page of History; and he ought then to be represented

in the country which gave him birth, and did NOT give him employment!'

'My love,' observed Mr. Micawber, 'it is impossible for me not to be

touched by your affection. I am always willing to defer to your good

sense. What will be--will be. Heaven forbid that I should grudge my

native country any portion of the wealth that may be accumulated by our

descendants!'

'That's well,' said my aunt, nodding towards Mr. Peggotty, 'and I drink

my love to you all, and every blessing and success attend you!'

Mr. Peggotty put down the two children he had been nursing, one on each

knee, to join Mr. and Mrs. Micawber in drinking to all of us in return;

and when he and the Micawbers cordially shook hands as comrades, and his

brown face brightened with a smile, I felt that he would make his way,

establish a good name, and be beloved, go where he would.

Even the children were instructed, each to dip a wooden spoon into Mr.

Micawber's pot, and pledge us in its contents. When this was done, my

aunt and Agnes rose, and parted from the emigrants. It was a sorrowful

farewell. They were all crying; the children hung about Agnes to the

last; and we left poor Mrs. Micawber in a very distressed condition,

sobbing and weeping by a dim candle, that must have made the room look,

from the river, like a miserable light-house.

I went down again next morning to see that they were away. They had

departed, in a boat, as early as five o'clock. It was a wonderful

instance to me of the gap such partings make, that although my

association of them with the tumble-down public-house and the wooden

stairs dated only from last night, both seemed dreary and deserted, now

that they were gone.

In the afternoon of the next day, my old nurse and I went down to

Gravesend. We found the ship in the river, surrounded by a crowd

of boats; a favourable wind blowing; the signal for sailing at her

mast-head. I hired a boat directly, and we put off to her; and getting

through the little vortex of confusion of which she was the centre, went

on board.

Mr. Peggotty was waiting for us on deck. He told me that Mr. Micawber

had just now been arrested again (and for the last time) at the suit of

Heep, and that, in compliance with a request I had made to him, he had

paid the money, which I repaid him. He then took us down between decks;

and there, any lingering fears I had of his having heard any rumours of

what had happened, were dispelled by Mr. Micawber's coming out of the

gloom, taking his arm with an air of friendship and protection, and

telling me that they had scarcely been asunder for a moment, since the

night before last.

It was such a strange scene to me, and so confined and dark, that, at

first, I could make out hardly anything; but, by degrees, it cleared, as

my eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, and I seemed to stand in

a picture by OSTADE. Among the great beams, bulks, and ringbolts of the

ship, and the emigrant-berths, and chests, and bundles, and barrels, and

heaps of miscellaneous baggage--'lighted up, here and there, by dangling

lanterns; and elsewhere by the yellow daylight straying down a windsail

or a hatchway--were crowded groups of people, making new friendships,

taking leave of one another, talking, laughing, crying, eating and

drinking; some, already settled down into the possession of their few

feet of space, with their little households arranged, and tiny children

established on stools, or in dwarf elbow-chairs; others, despairing of

a resting-place, and wandering disconsolately. From babies who had but a

week or two of life behind them, to crooked old men and women who seemed

to have but a week or two of life before them; and from ploughmen bodily

carrying out soil of England on their boots, to smiths taking away

samples of its soot and smoke upon their skins; every age and occupation

appeared to be crammed into the narrow compass of the 'tween decks.

As my eye glanced round this place, I thought I saw sitting, by an open

port, with one of the Micawber children near her, a figure like Emily's;

it first attracted my attention, by another figure parting from it with

a kiss; and as it glided calmly away through the disorder, reminding

me of--Agnes! But in the rapid motion and confusion, and in the

unsettlement of my own thoughts, I lost it again; and only knew that

the time was come when all visitors were being warned to leave the ship;

that my nurse was crying on a chest beside me; and that Mrs. Gummidge,

assisted by some younger stooping woman in black, was busily arranging

Mr. Peggotty's goods.

'Is there any last wured, Mas'r Davy?' said he. 'Is there any one

forgotten thing afore we parts?'

'One thing!' said I. 'Martha!'

He touched the younger woman I have mentioned on the shoulder, and

Martha stood before me.

'Heaven bless you, you good man!' cried I. 'You take her with you!'

She answered for him, with a burst of tears. I could speak no more at

that time, but I wrung his hand; and if ever I have loved and honoured

any man, I loved and honoured that man in my soul.

The ship was clearing fast of strangers. The greatest trial that I had,

remained. I told him what the noble spirit that was gone, had given me

in charge to say at parting. It moved him deeply. But when he charged

me, in return, with many messages of affection and regret for those deaf

ears, he moved me more.

The time was come. I embraced him, took my weeping nurse upon my arm,

and hurried away. On deck, I took leave of poor Mrs. Micawber. She was

looking distractedly about for her family, even then; and her last words

to me were, that she never would desert Mr. Micawber.

We went over the side into our boat, and lay at a little distance, to

see the ship wafted on her course. It was then calm, radiant sunset.

She lay between us, and the red light; and every taper line and spar was

visible against the glow. A sight at once so beautiful, so mournful, and

so hopeful, as the glorious ship, lying, still, on the flushed water,

with all the life on board her crowded at the bulwarks, and there

clustering, for a moment, bare-headed and silent, I never saw.

Silent, only for a moment. As the sails rose to the wind, and the ship

began to move, there broke from all the boats three resounding cheers,

which those on board took up, and echoed back, and which were echoed

and re-echoed. My heart burst out when I heard the sound, and beheld the

waving of the hats and handkerchiefs--and then I saw her!

Then I saw her, at her uncle's side, and trembling on his shoulder. He

pointed to us with an eager hand; and she saw us, and waved her last

good-bye to me. Aye, Emily, beautiful and drooping, cling to him with

the utmost trust of thy bruised heart; for he has clung to thee, with

all the might of his great love!

Surrounded by the rosy light, and standing high upon the deck, apart

together, she clinging to him, and he holding her, they solemnly passed

away. The night had fallen on the Kentish hills when we were rowed

ashore--and fallen darkly upon me.

CHAPTER 58. ABSENCE

It was a long and gloomy night that gathered on me, haunted by the

ghosts of many hopes, of many dear remembrances, many errors, many

unavailing sorrows and regrets.

I went away from England; not knowing, even then, how great the shock

was, that I had to bear. I left all who were dear to me, and went away;

and believed that I had borne it, and it was past. As a man upon a

field of battle will receive a mortal hurt, and scarcely know that he is

struck, so I, when I was left alone with my undisciplined heart, had no

conception of the wound with which it had to strive.

The knowledge came upon me, not quickly, but little by little, and grain

by grain. The desolate feeling with which I went abroad, deepened

and widened hourly. At first it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow,

wherein I could distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees,

it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost--love,

friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered--my first trust,

my first affection, the whole airy castle of my life; of all that

remained--a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to

the dark horizon.

If my grief were selfish, I did not know it to be so. I mourned for my

child-wife, taken from her blooming world, so young. I mourned for him

who might have won the love and admiration of thousands, as he had won

mine long ago. I mourned for the broken heart that had found rest in the

stormy sea; and for the wandering remnants of the simple home, where I

had heard the night-wind blowing, when I was a child.

From the accumulated sadness into which I fell, I had at length no hope

of ever issuing again. I roamed from place to place, carrying my burden

with me everywhere. I felt its whole weight now; and I drooped beneath

it, and I said in my heart that it could never be lightened.

When this despondency was at its worst, I believed that I should die.

Sometimes, I thought that I would like to die at home; and actually

turned back on my road, that I might get there soon. At other times, I

passed on farther away,--from city to city, seeking I know not what, and

trying to leave I know not what behind.

It is not in my power to retrace, one by one, all the weary phases of

distress of mind through which I passed. There are some dreams that can

only be imperfectly and vaguely described; and when I oblige myself to

look back on this time of my life, I seem to be recalling such a dream.

I see myself passing on among the novelties of foreign towns, palaces,

cathedrals, temples, pictures, castles, tombs, fantastic streets--the

old abiding places of History and Fancy--as a dreamer might; bearing my

painful load through all, and hardly conscious of the objects as they

fade before me. Listlessness to everything, but brooding sorrow, was the

night that fell on my undisciplined heart. Let me look up from it--as

at last I did, thank Heaven!--and from its long, sad, wretched dream, to

dawn.

For many months I travelled with this ever-darkening cloud upon my

mind. Some blind reasons that I had for not returning home--reasons then

struggling within me, vainly, for more distinct expression--kept me

on my pilgrimage. Sometimes, I had proceeded restlessly from place to

place, stopping nowhere; sometimes, I had lingered long in one spot. I

had had no purpose, no sustaining soul within me, anywhere.

I was in Switzerland. I had come out of Italy, over one of the great

passes of the Alps, and had since wandered with a guide among the

by-ways of the mountains. If those awful solitudes had spoken to my

heart, I did not know it. I had found sublimity and wonder in the dread

heights and precipices, in the roaring torrents, and the wastes of ice

and snow; but as yet, they had taught me nothing else.

I came, one evening before sunset, down into a valley, where I was to

rest. In the course of my descent to it, by the winding track along

the mountain-side, from which I saw it shining far below, I think some

long-unwonted sense of beauty and tranquillity, some softening influence

awakened by its peace, moved faintly in my breast. I remember pausing

once, with a kind of sorrow that was not all oppressive, not quite

despairing. I remember almost hoping that some better change was

possible within me.

I came into the valley, as the evening sun was shining on the remote

heights of snow, that closed it in, like eternal clouds. The bases of

the mountains forming the gorge in which the little village lay, were

richly green; and high above this gentler vegetation, grew forests of

dark fir, cleaving the wintry snow-drift, wedge-like, and stemming the

avalanche. Above these, were range upon range of craggy steeps, grey

rock, bright ice, and smooth verdure-specks of pasture, all gradually

blending with the crowning snow. Dotted here and there on the

mountain's-side, each tiny dot a home, were lonely wooden cottages, so

dwarfed by the towering heights that they appeared too small for toys.

So did even the clustered village in the valley, with its wooden bridge

across the stream, where the stream tumbled over broken rocks, and

roared away among the trees. In the quiet air, there was a sound of

distant singing--shepherd voices; but, as one bright evening cloud

floated midway along the mountain's-side, I could almost have believed

it came from there, and was not earthly music. All at once, in this

serenity, great Nature spoke to me; and soothed me to lay down my weary

head upon the grass, and weep as I had not wept yet, since Dora died!

I had found a packet of letters awaiting me but a few minutes before,

and had strolled out of the village to read them while my supper was

making ready. Other packets had missed me, and I had received none for a

long time. Beyond a line or two, to say that I was well, and had arrived

at such a place, I had not had fortitude or constancy to write a letter

since I left home.

The packet was in my hand. I opened it, and read the writing of Agnes.

She was happy and useful, was prospering as she had hoped. That was all

she told me of herself. The rest referred to me.

She gave me no advice; she urged no duty on me; she only told me, in her

own fervent manner, what her trust in me was. She knew (she said) how

such a nature as mine would turn affliction to good. She knew how trial

and emotion would exalt and strengthen it. She was sure that in my every

purpose I should gain a firmer and a higher tendency, through the grief

I had undergone. She, who so gloried in my fame, and so looked forward

to its augmentation, well knew that I would labour on. She knew that in

me, sorrow could not be weakness, but must be strength. As the endurance

of my childish days had done its part to make me what I was, so greater

calamities would nerve me on, to be yet better than I was; and so, as

they had taught me, would I teach others. She commended me to God, who

had taken my innocent darling to His rest; and in her sisterly affection

cherished me always, and was always at my side go where I would; proud

of what I had done, but infinitely prouder yet of what I was reserved to

do.

I put the letter in my breast, and thought what had I been an hour ago!

When I heard the voices die away, and saw the quiet evening cloud grow

dim, and all the colours in the valley fade, and the golden snow upon

the mountain-tops become a remote part of the pale night sky, yet felt

that the night was passing from my mind, and all its shadows clearing,

there was no name for the love I bore her, dearer to me, henceforward,

than ever until then.

I read her letter many times. I wrote to her before I slept. I told her

that I had been in sore need of her help; that without her I was not,

and I never had been, what she thought me; but that she inspired me to

be that, and I would try.

I did try. In three months more, a year would have passed since the

beginning of my sorrow. I determined to make no resolutions until the

expiration of those three months, but to try. I lived in that valley,

and its neighbourhood, all the time.

The three months gone, I resolved to remain away from home for some

time longer; to settle myself for the present in Switzerland, which was

growing dear to me in the remembrance of that evening; to resume my pen;

to work.

I resorted humbly whither Agnes had commended me; I sought out Nature,

never sought in vain; and I admitted to my breast the human interest

I had lately shrunk from. It was not long, before I had almost as many

friends in the valley as in Yarmouth: and when I left it, before the

winter set in, for Geneva, and came back in the spring, their cordial

greetings had a homely sound to me, although they were not conveyed in

English words.

I worked early and late, patiently and hard. I wrote a Story, with a

purpose growing, not remotely, out of my experience, and sent it to

Traddles, and he arranged for its publication very advantageously for

me; and the tidings of my growing reputation began to reach me from

travellers whom I encountered by chance. After some rest and change, I

fell to work, in my old ardent way, on a new fancy, which took strong

possession of me. As I advanced in the execution of this task, I felt it

more and more, and roused my utmost energies to do it well. This was my

third work of fiction. It was not half written, when, in an interval of

rest, I thought of returning home.

For a long time, though studying and working patiently, I had accustomed

myself to robust exercise. My health, severely impaired when I left

England, was quite restored. I had seen much. I had been in many

countries, and I hope I had improved my store of knowledge.

I have now recalled all that I think it needful to recall here, of this

term of absence--with one reservation. I have made it, thus far, with

no purpose of suppressing any of my thoughts; for, as I have elsewhere

said, this narrative is my written memory. I have desired to keep the

most secret current of my mind apart, and to the last. I enter on it

now. I cannot so completely penetrate the mystery of my own heart, as

to know when I began to think that I might have set its earliest and

brightest hopes on Agnes. I cannot say at what stage of my grief

it first became associated with the reflection, that, in my wayward

boyhood, I had thrown away the treasure of her love. I believe I may

have heard some whisper of that distant thought, in the old unhappy loss

or want of something never to be realized, of which I had been sensible.

But the thought came into my mind as a new reproach and new regret, when

I was left so sad and lonely in the world.

If, at that time, I had been much with her, I should, in the weakness of

my desolation, have betrayed this. It was what I remotely dreaded when I

was first impelled to stay away from England. I could not have borne

to lose the smallest portion of her sisterly affection; yet, in that

betrayal, I should have set a constraint between us hitherto unknown.

I could not forget that the feeling with which she now regarded me had

grown up in my own free choice and course. That if she had ever loved me

with another love--and I sometimes thought the time was when she might

have done so--I had cast it away. It was nothing, now, that I had

accustomed myself to think of her, when we were both mere children,

as one who was far removed from my wild fancies. I had bestowed my

passionate tenderness upon another object; and what I might have done,

I had not done; and what Agnes was to me, I and her own noble heart had

made her.

In the beginning of the change that gradually worked in me, when I

tried to get a better understanding of myself and be a better man, I

did glance, through some indefinite probation, to a period when I might

possibly hope to cancel the mistaken past, and to be so blessed as

to marry her. But, as time wore on, this shadowy prospect faded, and

departed from me. If she had ever loved me, then, I should hold her

the more sacred; remembering the confidences I had reposed in her, her

knowledge of my errant heart, the sacrifice she must have made to be my

friend and sister, and the victory she had won. If she had never loved

me, could I believe that she would love me now?

I had always felt my weakness, in comparison with her constancy and

fortitude; and now I felt it more and more. Whatever I might have been

to her, or she to me, if I had been more worthy of her long ago, I was

not now, and she was not. The time was past. I had let it go by, and had

deservedly lost her.

That I suffered much in these contentions, that they filled me with

unhappiness and remorse, and yet that I had a sustaining sense that it

was required of me, in right and honour, to keep away from myself, with

shame, the thought of turning to the dear girl in the withering of my

hopes, from whom I had frivolously turned when they were bright and

fresh--which consideration was at the root of every thought I had

concerning her--is all equally true. I made no effort to conceal from

myself, now, that I loved her, that I was devoted to her; but I brought

the assurance home to myself, that it was now too late, and that our

long-subsisting relation must be undisturbed.

I had thought, much and often, of my Dora's shadowing out to me what

might have happened, in those years that were destined not to try us;

I had considered how the things that never happen, are often as much

realities to us, in their effects, as those that are accomplished. The

very years she spoke of, were realities now, for my correction; and

would have been, one day, a little later perhaps, though we had parted

in our earliest folly. I endeavoured to convert what might have been

between myself and Agnes, into a means of making me more self-denying,

more resolved, more conscious of myself, and my defects and errors.

Thus, through the reflection that it might have been, I arrived at the

conviction that it could never be.

These, with their perplexities and inconsistencies, were the shifting

quicksands of my mind, from the time of my departure to the time of my

return home, three years afterwards. Three years had elapsed since the

sailing of the emigrant ship; when, at that same hour of sunset, and in

the same place, I stood on the deck of the packet vessel that brought me

home, looking on the rosy water where I had seen the image of that ship

reflected.

Three years. Long in the aggregate, though short as they went by. And

home was very dear to me, and Agnes too--but she was not mine--she was

never to be mine. She might have been, but that was past!

CHAPTER 59. RETURN

I landed in London on a wintry autumn evening. It was dark and raining,

and I saw more fog and mud in a minute than I had seen in a year. I

walked from the Custom House to the Monument before I found a coach;

and although the very house-fronts, looking on the swollen gutters, were

like old friends to me, I could not but admit that they were very dingy

friends.

I have often remarked--I suppose everybody has--that one's going away

from a familiar place, would seem to be the signal for change in it.

As I looked out of the coach window, and observed that an old house on

Fish-street Hill, which had stood untouched by painter, carpenter, or

bricklayer, for a century, had been pulled down in my absence; and that

a neighbouring street, of time-honoured insalubrity and inconvenience,

was being drained and widened; I half expected to find St. Paul's

Cathedral looking older.

For some changes in the fortunes of my friends, I was prepared. My aunt

had long been re-established at Dover, and Traddles had begun to get

into some little practice at the Bar, in the very first term after my

departure. He had chambers in Gray's Inn, now; and had told me, in his

last letters, that he was not without hopes of being soon united to the

dearest girl in the world.

They expected me home before Christmas; but had no idea of my returning

so soon. I had purposely misled them, that I might have the pleasure of

taking them by surprise. And yet, I was perverse enough to feel a chill

and disappointment in receiving no welcome, and rattling, alone and

silent, through the misty streets.

The well-known shops, however, with their cheerful lights, did something

for me; and when I alighted at the door of the Gray's Inn Coffee-house,

I had recovered my spirits. It recalled, at first, that so-different

time when I had put up at the Golden Cross, and reminded me of the

changes that had come to pass since then; but that was natural.

'Do you know where Mr. Traddles lives in the Inn?' I asked the waiter,

as I warmed myself by the coffee-room fire.

'Holborn Court, sir. Number two.'

'Mr. Traddles has a rising reputation among the lawyers, I believe?'

said I.

'Well, sir,' returned the waiter, 'probably he has, sir; but I am not

aware of it myself.'

This waiter, who was middle-aged and spare, looked for help to a waiter

of more authority--a stout, potential old man, with a double chin,

in black breeches and stockings, who came out of a place like a

churchwarden's pew, at the end of the coffee-room, where he kept company

with a cash-box, a Directory, a Law-list, and other books and papers.

'Mr. Traddles,' said the spare waiter. 'Number two in the Court.'

The potential waiter waved him away, and turned, gravely, to me.

'I was inquiring,' said I, 'whether Mr. Traddles, at number two in the

Court, has not a rising reputation among the lawyers?'

'Never heard his name,' said the waiter, in a rich husky voice.

I felt quite apologetic for Traddles.

'He's a young man, sure?' said the portentous waiter, fixing his eyes

severely on me. 'How long has he been in the Inn?'

'Not above three years,' said I.

The waiter, who I supposed had lived in his churchwarden's pew for forty

years, could not pursue such an insignificant subject. He asked me what

I would have for dinner?

I felt I was in England again, and really was quite cast down on

Traddles's account. There seemed to be no hope for him. I meekly ordered

a bit of fish and a steak, and stood before the fire musing on his

obscurity.

As I followed the chief waiter with my eyes, I could not help thinking

that the garden in which he had gradually blown to be the flower he

was, was an arduous place to rise in. It had such a prescriptive,

stiff-necked, long-established, solemn, elderly air. I glanced about the

room, which had had its sanded floor sanded, no doubt, in exactly the

same manner when the chief waiter was a boy--if he ever was a boy,

which appeared improbable; and at the shining tables, where I saw

myself reflected, in unruffled depths of old mahogany; and at the lamps,

without a flaw in their trimming or cleaning; and at the comfortable

green curtains, with their pure brass rods, snugly enclosing the boxes;

and at the two large coal fires, brightly burning; and at the rows of

decanters, burly as if with the consciousness of pipes of expensive old

port wine below; and both England, and the law, appeared to me to be

very difficult indeed to be taken by storm. I went up to my bedroom

to change my wet clothes; and the vast extent of that old wainscoted

apartment (which was over the archway leading to the Inn, I remember),

and the sedate immensity of the four-post bedstead, and the indomitable

gravity of the chests of drawers, all seemed to unite in sternly

frowning on the fortunes of Traddles, or on any such daring youth. I

came down again to my dinner; and even the slow comfort of the meal,

and the orderly silence of the place--which was bare of guests, the Long

Vacation not yet being over--were eloquent on the audacity of Traddles,

and his small hopes of a livelihood for twenty years to come.

I had seen nothing like this since I went away, and it quite dashed my

hopes for my friend. The chief waiter had had enough of me. He came near

me no more; but devoted himself to an old gentleman in long gaiters, to

meet whom a pint of special port seemed to come out of the cellar of its

own accord, for he gave no order. The second waiter informed me, in a

whisper, that this old gentleman was a retired conveyancer living in the

Square, and worth a mint of money, which it was expected he would leave

to his laundress's daughter; likewise that it was rumoured that he had

a service of plate in a bureau, all tarnished with lying by, though more

than one spoon and a fork had never yet been beheld in his chambers

by mortal vision. By this time, I quite gave Traddles up for lost; and

settled in my own mind that there was no hope for him.

Being very anxious to see the dear old fellow, nevertheless, I

dispatched my dinner, in a manner not at all calculated to raise me in

the opinion of the chief waiter, and hurried out by the back way. Number

two in the Court was soon reached; and an inscription on the door-post

informing me that Mr. Traddles occupied a set of chambers on the top

storey, I ascended the staircase. A crazy old staircase I found it to

be, feebly lighted on each landing by a club--headed little oil wick,

dying away in a little dungeon of dirty glass.

In the course of my stumbling upstairs, I fancied I heard a pleasant

sound of laughter; and not the laughter of an attorney or barrister, or

attorney's clerk or barrister's clerk, but of two or three merry girls.

Happening, however, as I stopped to listen, to put my foot in a hole

where the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn had left a plank deficient,

I fell down with some noise, and when I recovered my footing all was

silent.

Groping my way more carefully, for the rest of the journey, my heart

beat high when I found the outer door, which had Mr. TRADDLES painted on

it, open. I knocked. A considerable scuffling within ensued, but nothing

else. I therefore knocked again.

A small sharp-looking lad, half-footboy and half-clerk, who was very

much out of breath, but who looked at me as if he defied me to prove it

legally, presented himself.

'Is Mr. Traddles within?' I said.

'Yes, sir, but he's engaged.'

'I want to see him.'

After a moment's survey of me, the sharp-looking lad decided to let me

in; and opening the door wider for that purpose, admitted me, first,

into a little closet of a hall, and next into a little sitting-room;

where I came into the presence of my old friend (also out of breath),

seated at a table, and bending over papers.

'Good God!' cried Traddles, looking up. 'It's Copperfield!' and rushed

into my arms, where I held him tight.

'All well, my dear Traddles?'

'All well, my dear, dear Copperfield, and nothing but good news!'

We cried with pleasure, both of us.

'My dear fellow,' said Traddles, rumpling his hair in his excitement,

which was a most unnecessary operation, 'my dearest Copperfield, my

long-lost and most welcome friend, how glad I am to see you! How

brown you are! How glad I am! Upon my life and honour, I never was so

rejoiced, my beloved Copperfield, never!'

I was equally at a loss to express my emotions. I was quite unable to

speak, at first.

'My dear fellow!' said Traddles. 'And grown so famous! My glorious

Copperfield! Good gracious me, WHEN did you come, WHERE have you come

from, WHAT have you been doing?'

Never pausing for an answer to anything he said, Traddles, who had

clapped me into an easy-chair by the fire, all this time impetuously

stirred the fire with one hand, and pulled at my neck-kerchief with

the other, under some wild delusion that it was a great-coat. Without

putting down the poker, he now hugged me again; and I hugged him; and,

both laughing, and both wiping our eyes, we both sat down, and shook

hands across the hearth.

'To think,' said Traddles, 'that you should have been so nearly coming

home as you must have been, my dear old boy, and not at the ceremony!'

'What ceremony, my dear Traddles?'

'Good gracious me!' cried Traddles, opening his eyes in his old way.

'Didn't you get my last letter?'

'Certainly not, if it referred to any ceremony.'

'Why, my dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, sticking his hair upright

with both hands, and then putting his hands on my knees, 'I am married!'

'Married!' I cried joyfully.

'Lord bless me, yes!' said Traddles--'by the Reverend Horace--to

Sophy--down in Devonshire. Why, my dear boy, she's behind the window

curtain! Look here!'

To my amazement, the dearest girl in the world came at that same

instant, laughing and blushing, from her place of concealment. And a

more cheerful, amiable, honest, happy, bright-looking bride, I believe

(as I could not help saying on the spot) the world never saw. I kissed

her as an old acquaintance should, and wished them joy with all my might

of heart.

'Dear me,' said Traddles, 'what a delightful re-union this is! You are

so extremely brown, my dear Copperfield! God bless my soul, how happy I

am!'

'And so am I,' said I.

'And I am sure I am!' said the blushing and laughing Sophy.

'We are all as happy as possible!' said Traddles. 'Even the girls are

happy. Dear me, I declare I forgot them!'

'Forgot?' said I.

'The girls,' said Traddles. 'Sophy's sisters. They are staying with us.

They have come to have a peep at London. The fact is, when--was it you

that tumbled upstairs, Copperfield?'

'It was,' said I, laughing.

'Well then, when you tumbled upstairs,' said Traddles, 'I was romping

with the girls. In point of fact, we were playing at Puss in the Corner.

But as that wouldn't do in Westminster Hall, and as it wouldn't look

quite professional if they were seen by a client, they decamped. And

they are now--listening, I have no doubt,' said Traddles, glancing at

the door of another room.

'I am sorry,' said I, laughing afresh, 'to have occasioned such a

dispersion.'

'Upon my word,' rejoined Traddles, greatly delighted, 'if you had seen

them running away, and running back again, after you had knocked, to

pick up the combs they had dropped out of their hair, and going on in

the maddest manner, you wouldn't have said so. My love, will you fetch

the girls?'

Sophy tripped away, and we heard her received in the adjoining room with

a peal of laughter.

'Really musical, isn't it, my dear Copperfield?' said Traddles. 'It's

very agreeable to hear. It quite lights up these old rooms. To an

unfortunate bachelor of a fellow who has lived alone all his life, you

know, it's positively delicious. It's charming. Poor things, they have

had a great loss in Sophy--who, I do assure you, Copperfield is, and

ever was, the dearest girl!--and it gratifies me beyond expression

to find them in such good spirits. The society of girls is a very

delightful thing, Copperfield. It's not professional, but it's very

delightful.'

Observing that he slightly faltered, and comprehending that in the

goodness of his heart he was fearful of giving me some pain by what he

had said, I expressed my concurrence with a heartiness that evidently

relieved and pleased him greatly.

'But then,' said Traddles, 'our domestic arrangements are, to say

the truth, quite unprofessional altogether, my dear Copperfield. Even

Sophy's being here, is unprofessional. And we have no other place of

abode. We have put to sea in a cockboat, but we are quite prepared to

rough it. And Sophy's an extraordinary manager! You'll be surprised how

those girls are stowed away. I am sure I hardly know how it's done!'

'Are many of the young ladies with you?' I inquired.

'The eldest, the Beauty is here,' said Traddles, in a low confidential

voice, 'Caroline. And Sarah's here--the one I mentioned to you as having

something the matter with her spine, you know. Immensely better! And the

two youngest that Sophy educated are with us. And Louisa's here.'

'Indeed!' cried I.

'Yes,' said Traddles. 'Now the whole set--I mean the chambers--is only

three rooms; but Sophy arranges for the girls in the most wonderful way,

and they sleep as comfortably as possible. Three in that room,' said

Traddles, pointing. 'Two in that.'

I could not help glancing round, in search of the accommodation

remaining for Mr. and Mrs. Traddles. Traddles understood me.

'Well!' said Traddles, 'we are prepared to rough it, as I said just now,

and we did improvise a bed last week, upon the floor here. But there's

a little room in the roof--a very nice room, when you're up there--which

Sophy papered herself, to surprise me; and that's our room at present.

It's a capital little gipsy sort of place. There's quite a view from

it.'

'And you are happily married at last, my dear Traddles!' said I. 'How

rejoiced I am!'

'Thank you, my dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, as we shook hands

once more. 'Yes, I am as happy as it's possible to be. There's your old

friend, you see,' said Traddles, nodding triumphantly at the flower-pot

and stand; 'and there's the table with the marble top! All the other

furniture is plain and serviceable, you perceive. And as to plate, Lord

bless you, we haven't so much as a tea-spoon.'

'All to be earned?' said I, cheerfully.

'Exactly so,' replied Traddles, 'all to be earned. Of course we have

something in the shape of tea-spoons, because we stir our tea. But

they're Britannia metal.'

'The silver will be the brighter when it comes,' said I.

'The very thing we say!' cried Traddles. 'You see, my dear Copperfield,'

falling again into the low confidential tone, 'after I had delivered my

argument in DOE dem. JIPES versus WIGZIELL, which did me great service

with the profession, I went down into Devonshire, and had some serious

conversation in private with the Reverend Horace. I dwelt upon the fact

that Sophy--who I do assure you, Copperfield, is the dearest girl!--'

'I am certain she is!' said I.

'She is, indeed!' rejoined Traddles. 'But I am afraid I am wandering

from the subject. Did I mention the Reverend Horace?'

'You said that you dwelt upon the fact--'

'True! Upon the fact that Sophy and I had been engaged for a long

period, and that Sophy, with the permission of her parents, was more

than content to take me--in short,' said Traddles, with his old frank

smile, 'on our present Britannia-metal footing. Very well. I then

proposed to the Reverend Horace--who is a most excellent clergyman,

Copperfield, and ought to be a Bishop; or at least ought to have enough

to live upon, without pinching himself--that if I could turn the corner,

say of two hundred and fifty pounds, in one year; and could see my

way pretty clearly to that, or something better, next year; and could

plainly furnish a little place like this, besides; then, and in that

case, Sophy and I should be united. I took the liberty of representing

that we had been patient for a good many years; and that the

circumstance of Sophy's being extraordinarily useful at home, ought not

to operate with her affectionate parents, against her establishment in

life--don't you see?'

'Certainly it ought not,' said I.

'I am glad you think so, Copperfield,' rejoined Traddles, 'because,

without any imputation on the Reverend Horace, I do think parents, and

brothers, and so forth, are sometimes rather selfish in such cases.

Well! I also pointed out, that my most earnest desire was, to be useful

to the family; and that if I got on in the world, and anything should

happen to him--I refer to the Reverend Horace--'

'I understand,' said I.

'--Or to Mrs. Crewler--it would be the utmost gratification of my

wishes, to be a parent to the girls. He replied in a most admirable

manner, exceedingly flattering to my feelings, and undertook to obtain

the consent of Mrs. Crewler to this arrangement. They had a dreadful

time of it with her. It mounted from her legs into her chest, and then

into her head--'

'What mounted?' I asked.

'Her grief,' replied Traddles, with a serious look. 'Her feelings

generally. As I mentioned on a former occasion, she is a very superior

woman, but has lost the use of her limbs. Whatever occurs to harass

her, usually settles in her legs; but on this occasion it mounted to the

chest, and then to the head, and, in short, pervaded the whole system

in a most alarming manner. However, they brought her through it by

unremitting and affectionate attention; and we were married yesterday

six weeks. You have no idea what a Monster I felt, Copperfield, when I

saw the whole family crying and fainting away in every direction! Mrs.

Crewler couldn't see me before we left--couldn't forgive me, then, for

depriving her of her child--but she is a good creature, and has done so

since. I had a delightful letter from her, only this morning.'

'And in short, my dear friend,' said I, 'you feel as blest as you

deserve to feel!'

'Oh! That's your partiality!' laughed Traddles. 'But, indeed, I am in a

most enviable state. I work hard, and read Law insatiably. I get up at

five every morning, and don't mind it at all. I hide the girls in the

daytime, and make merry with them in the evening. And I assure you I am

quite sorry that they are going home on Tuesday, which is the day before

the first day of Michaelmas Term. But here,' said Traddles, breaking off

in his confidence, and speaking aloud, 'ARE the girls! Mr. Copperfield,

Miss Crewler--Miss Sarah--Miss Louisa--Margaret and Lucy!'

They were a perfect nest of roses; they looked so wholesome and fresh.

They were all pretty, and Miss Caroline was very handsome; but there was

a loving, cheerful, fireside quality in Sophy's bright looks, which was

better than that, and which assured me that my friend had chosen well.

We all sat round the fire; while the sharp boy, who I now divined had

lost his breath in putting the papers out, cleared them away again, and

produced the tea-things. After that, he retired for the night, shutting

the outer door upon us with a bang. Mrs. Traddles, with perfect pleasure

and composure beaming from her household eyes, having made the tea, then

quietly made the toast as she sat in a corner by the fire.

She had seen Agnes, she told me while she was toasting. 'Tom' had taken

her down into Kent for a wedding trip, and there she had seen my aunt,

too; and both my aunt and Agnes were well, and they had all talked of

nothing but me. 'Tom' had never had me out of his thoughts, she really

believed, all the time I had been away. 'Tom' was the authority for

everything. 'Tom' was evidently the idol of her life; never to be shaken

on his pedestal by any commotion; always to be believed in, and done

homage to with the whole faith of her heart, come what might.

The deference which both she and Traddles showed towards the Beauty,

pleased me very much. I don't know that I thought it very reasonable;

but I thought it very delightful, and essentially a part of their

character. If Traddles ever for an instant missed the tea-spoons that

were still to be won, I have no doubt it was when he handed the Beauty

her tea. If his sweet-tempered wife could have got up any self-assertion

against anyone, I am satisfied it could only have been because she was

the Beauty's sister. A few slight indications of a rather petted and

capricious manner, which I observed in the Beauty, were manifestly

considered, by Traddles and his wife, as her birthright and natural

endowment. If she had been born a Queen Bee, and they labouring Bees,

they could not have been more satisfied of that.

But their self-forgetfulness charmed me. Their pride in these girls, and

their submission of themselves to all their whims, was the pleasantest

little testimony to their own worth I could have desired to see. If

Traddles were addressed as 'a darling', once in the course of that

evening; and besought to bring something here, or carry something there,

or take something up, or put something down, or find something, or fetch

something, he was so addressed, by one or other of his sisters-in-law,

at least twelve times in an hour. Neither could they do anything without

Sophy. Somebody's hair fell down, and nobody but Sophy could put it up.

Somebody forgot how a particular tune went, and nobody but Sophy could

hum that tune right. Somebody wanted to recall the name of a place in

Devonshire, and only Sophy knew it. Something was wanted to be written

home, and Sophy alone could be trusted to write before breakfast in

the morning. Somebody broke down in a piece of knitting, and no one but

Sophy was able to put the defaulter in the right direction. They were

entire mistresses of the place, and Sophy and Traddles waited on them.

How many children Sophy could have taken care of in her time, I can't

imagine; but she seemed to be famous for knowing every sort of song that

ever was addressed to a child in the English tongue; and she sang dozens

to order with the clearest little voice in the world, one after another

(every sister issuing directions for a different tune, and the Beauty

generally striking in last), so that I was quite fascinated. The best

of all was, that, in the midst of their exactions, all the sisters had

a great tenderness and respect both for Sophy and Traddles. I am sure,

when I took my leave, and Traddles was coming out to walk with me to the

coffee-house, I thought I had never seen an obstinate head of hair, or

any other head of hair, rolling about in such a shower of kisses.

Altogether, it was a scene I could not help dwelling on with pleasure,

for a long time after I got back and had wished Traddles good night. If

I had beheld a thousand roses blowing in a top set of chambers, in that

withered Gray's Inn, they could not have brightened it half so much.

The idea of those Devonshire girls, among the dry law-stationers and the

attorneys' offices; and of the tea and toast, and children's songs, in

that grim atmosphere of pounce and parchment, red-tape, dusty wafers,

ink-jars, brief and draft paper, law reports, writs, declarations, and

bills of costs; seemed almost as pleasantly fanciful as if I had

dreamed that the Sultan's famous family had been admitted on the roll of

attorneys, and had brought the talking bird, the singing tree, and the

golden water into Gray's Inn Hall. Somehow, I found that I had taken

leave of Traddles for the night, and come back to the coffee-house, with

a great change in my despondency about him. I began to think he would

get on, in spite of all the many orders of chief waiters in England.

Drawing a chair before one of the coffee-room fires to think about him

at my leisure, I gradually fell from the consideration of his happiness

to tracing prospects in the live-coals, and to thinking, as they broke

and changed, of the principal vicissitudes and separations that had

marked my life. I had not seen a coal fire, since I had left England

three years ago: though many a wood fire had I watched, as it crumbled

into hoary ashes, and mingled with the feathery heap upon the hearth,

which not inaptly figured to me, in my despondency, my own dead hopes.

I could think of the past now, gravely, but not bitterly; and could

contemplate the future in a brave spirit. Home, in its best sense, was

for me no more. She in whom I might have inspired a dearer love, I had

taught to be my sister. She would marry, and would have new claimants on

her tenderness; and in doing it, would never know the love for her that

had grown up in my heart. It was right that I should pay the forfeit of

my headlong passion. What I reaped, I had sown.

I was thinking. And had I truly disciplined my heart to this, and could

I resolutely bear it, and calmly hold the place in her home which she

had calmly held in mine,--when I found my eyes resting on a countenance

that might have arisen out of the fire, in its association with my early

remembrances.

Little Mr. Chillip the Doctor, to whose good offices I was indebted in

the very first chapter of this history, sat reading a newspaper in the

shadow of an opposite corner. He was tolerably stricken in years by this

time; but, being a mild, meek, calm little man, had worn so easily, that

I thought he looked at that moment just as he might have looked when he

sat in our parlour, waiting for me to be born.

Mr. Chillip had left Blunderstone six or seven years ago, and I had

never seen him since. He sat placidly perusing the newspaper, with his

little head on one side, and a glass of warm sherry negus at his

elbow. He was so extremely conciliatory in his manner that he seemed to

apologize to the very newspaper for taking the liberty of reading it.

I walked up to where he was sitting, and said, 'How do you do, Mr.

Chillip?'

He was greatly fluttered by this unexpected address from a stranger, and

replied, in his slow way, 'I thank you, sir, you are very good. Thank

you, sir. I hope YOU are well.'

'You don't remember me?' said I.

'Well, sir,' returned Mr. Chillip, smiling very meekly, and shaking his

head as he surveyed me, 'I have a kind of an impression that something

in your countenance is familiar to me, sir; but I couldn't lay my hand

upon your name, really.'

'And yet you knew it, long before I knew it myself,' I returned.

'Did I indeed, sir?' said Mr. Chillip. 'Is it possible that I had the

honour, sir, of officiating when--?'

'Yes,' said I.

'Dear me!' cried Mr. Chillip. 'But no doubt you are a good deal changed

since then, sir?'

'Probably,' said I.

'Well, sir,' observed Mr. Chillip, 'I hope you'll excuse me, if I am

compelled to ask the favour of your name?'

On my telling him my name, he was really moved. He quite shook hands

with me--which was a violent proceeding for him, his usual course being

to slide a tepid little fish-slice, an inch or two in advance of his

hip, and evince the greatest discomposure when anybody grappled with

it. Even now, he put his hand in his coat-pocket as soon as he could

disengage it, and seemed relieved when he had got it safe back.

'Dear me, sir!' said Mr. Chillip, surveying me with his head on one

side. 'And it's Mr. Copperfield, is it? Well, sir, I think I should have

known you, if I had taken the liberty of looking more closely at you.

There's a strong resemblance between you and your poor father, sir.'

'I never had the happiness of seeing my father,' I observed.

'Very true, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, in a soothing tone. 'And very much

to be deplored it was, on all accounts! We are not ignorant, sir,' said

Mr. Chillip, slowly shaking his little head again, 'down in our part of

the country, of your fame. There must be great excitement here, sir,'

said Mr. Chillip, tapping himself on the forehead with his forefinger.

'You must find it a trying occupation, sir!'

'What is your part of the country now?' I asked, seating myself near

him.

'I am established within a few miles of Bury St. Edmund's, sir,' said

Mr. Chillip. 'Mrs. Chillip, coming into a little property in that

neighbourhood, under her father's will, I bought a practice down there,

in which you will be glad to hear I am doing well. My daughter is

growing quite a tall lass now, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, giving his little

head another little shake. 'Her mother let down two tucks in her frocks

only last week. Such is time, you see, sir!'

As the little man put his now empty glass to his lips, when he made this

reflection, I proposed to him to have it refilled, and I would keep him

company with another. 'Well, sir,' he returned, in his slow way, 'it's

more than I am accustomed to; but I can't deny myself the pleasure

of your conversation. It seems but yesterday that I had the honour of

attending you in the measles. You came through them charmingly, sir!'

I acknowledged this compliment, and ordered the negus, which was soon

produced. 'Quite an uncommon dissipation!' said Mr. Chillip, stirring

it, 'but I can't resist so extraordinary an occasion. You have no

family, sir?'

I shook my head.

'I was aware that you sustained a bereavement, sir, some time ago,' said

Mr. Chillip. 'I heard it from your father-in-law's sister. Very decided

character there, sir?'

'Why, yes,' said I, 'decided enough. Where did you see her, Mr.

Chillip?'

'Are you not aware, sir,' returned Mr. Chillip, with his placidest

smile, 'that your father-in-law is again a neighbour of mine?'

'No,' said I.

'He is indeed, sir!' said Mr. Chillip. 'Married a young lady of that

part, with a very good little property, poor thing.---And this action

of the brain now, sir? Don't you find it fatigue you?' said Mr. Chillip,

looking at me like an admiring Robin.

I waived that question, and returned to the Murdstones. 'I was aware of

his being married again. Do you attend the family?' I asked.

'Not regularly. I have been called in,' he replied. 'Strong

phrenological developments of the organ of firmness, in Mr. Murdstone

and his sister, sir.'

I replied with such an expressive look, that Mr. Chillip was emboldened

by that, and the negus together, to give his head several short shakes,

and thoughtfully exclaim, 'Ah, dear me! We remember old times, Mr.

Copperfield!'

'And the brother and sister are pursuing their old course, are they?'

said I.

'Well, sir,' replied Mr. Chillip, 'a medical man, being so much in

families, ought to have neither eyes nor ears for anything but his

profession. Still, I must say, they are very severe, sir: both as to

this life and the next.'

'The next will be regulated without much reference to them, I dare say,'

I returned: 'what are they doing as to this?'

Mr. Chillip shook his head, stirred his negus, and sipped it.

'She was a charming woman, sir!' he observed in a plaintive manner.

'The present Mrs. Murdstone?'

A charming woman indeed, sir,' said Mr. Chillip; 'as amiable, I am sure,

as it was possible to be! Mrs. Chillip's opinion is, that her spirit

has been entirely broken since her marriage, and that she is all but

melancholy mad. And the ladies,' observed Mr. Chillip, timorously, 'are

great observers, sir.'

'I suppose she was to be subdued and broken to their detestable mould,

Heaven help her!' said I. 'And she has been.'

'Well, sir, there were violent quarrels at first, I assure you,' said

Mr. Chillip; 'but she is quite a shadow now. Would it be considered

forward if I was to say to you, sir, in confidence, that since the

sister came to help, the brother and sister between them have nearly

reduced her to a state of imbecility?'

I told him I could easily believe it.

'I have no hesitation in saying,' said Mr. Chillip, fortifying himself

with another sip of negus, 'between you and me, sir, that her mother

died of it--or that tyranny, gloom, and worry have made Mrs. Murdstone

nearly imbecile. She was a lively young woman, sir, before marriage, and

their gloom and austerity destroyed her. They go about with her, now,

more like her keepers than her husband and sister-in-law. That was

Mrs. Chillip's remark to me, only last week. And I assure you, sir, the

ladies are great observers. Mrs. Chillip herself is a great observer!'

'Does he gloomily profess to be (I am ashamed to use the word in such

association) religious still?' I inquired.

'You anticipate, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, his eyelids getting quite

red with the unwonted stimulus in which he was indulging. 'One of Mrs.

Chillip's most impressive remarks. Mrs. Chillip,' he proceeded, in the

calmest and slowest manner, 'quite electrified me, by pointing out

that Mr. Murdstone sets up an image of himself, and calls it the Divine

Nature. You might have knocked me down on the flat of my back, sir,

with the feather of a pen, I assure you, when Mrs. Chillip said so. The

ladies are great observers, sir?'

'Intuitively,' said I, to his extreme delight.

'I am very happy to receive such support in my opinion, sir,' he

rejoined. 'It is not often that I venture to give a non-medical opinion,

I assure you. Mr. Murdstone delivers public addresses sometimes, and it

is said,--in short, sir, it is said by Mrs. Chillip,--that the darker

tyrant he has lately been, the more ferocious is his doctrine.'

'I believe Mrs. Chillip to be perfectly right,' said I.

'Mrs. Chillip does go so far as to say,' pursued the meekest of little

men, much encouraged, 'that what such people miscall their religion, is

a vent for their bad humours and arrogance. And do you know I must say,

sir,' he continued, mildly laying his head on one side, 'that I DON'T

find authority for Mr. and Miss Murdstone in the New Testament?'

'I never found it either!' said I.

'In the meantime, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, 'they are much disliked;

and as they are very free in consigning everybody who dislikes them

to perdition, we really have a good deal of perdition going on in

our neighbourhood! However, as Mrs. Chillip says, sir, they undergo a

continual punishment; for they are turned inward, to feed upon their own

hearts, and their own hearts are very bad feeding. Now, sir, about that

brain of yours, if you'll excuse my returning to it. Don't you expose it

to a good deal of excitement, sir?'

I found it not difficult, in the excitement of Mr. Chillip's own brain,

under his potations of negus, to divert his attention from this topic

to his own affairs, on which, for the next half-hour, he was quite

loquacious; giving me to understand, among other pieces of information,

that he was then at the Gray's Inn Coffee-house to lay his professional

evidence before a Commission of Lunacy, touching the state of mind of a

patient who had become deranged from excessive drinking. 'And I assure

you, sir,' he said, 'I am extremely nervous on such occasions. I could

not support being what is called Bullied, sir. It would quite unman

me. Do you know it was some time before I recovered the conduct of that

alarming lady, on the night of your birth, Mr. Copperfield?'

I told him that I was going down to my aunt, the Dragon of that night,

early in the morning; and that she was one of the most tender-hearted

and excellent of women, as he would know full well if he knew her

better. The mere notion of the possibility of his ever seeing her again,

appeared to terrify him. He replied with a small pale smile, 'Is she so,

indeed, sir? Really?' and almost immediately called for a candle, and

went to bed, as if he were not quite safe anywhere else. He did not

actually stagger under the negus; but I should think his placid little

pulse must have made two or three more beats in a minute, than it had

done since the great night of my aunt's disappointment, when she struck

at him with her bonnet.

Thoroughly tired, I went to bed too, at midnight; passed the next day on

the Dover coach; burst safe and sound into my aunt's old parlour while

she was at tea (she wore spectacles now); and was received by her, and

Mr. Dick, and dear old Peggotty, who acted as housekeeper, with open

arms and tears of joy. My aunt was mightily amused, when we began to

talk composedly, by my account of my meeting with Mr. Chillip, and of

his holding her in such dread remembrance; and both she and Peggotty

had a great deal to say about my poor mother's second husband, and 'that

murdering woman of a sister',--on whom I think no pain or penalty would

have induced my aunt to bestow any Christian or Proper Name, or any

other designation.

CHAPTER 60. AGNES

My aunt and I, when we were left alone, talked far into the night. How

the emigrants never wrote home, otherwise than cheerfully and hopefully;

how Mr. Micawber had actually remitted divers small sums of money, on

account of those 'pecuniary liabilities', in reference to which he had

been so business-like as between man and man; how Janet, returning into

my aunt's service when she came back to Dover, had finally carried out

her renunciation of mankind by entering into wedlock with a thriving

tavern-keeper; and how my aunt had finally set her seal on the same

great principle, by aiding and abetting the bride, and crowning the

marriage-ceremony with her presence; were among our topics--already

more or less familiar to me through the letters I had had. Mr. Dick,

as usual, was not forgotten. My aunt informed me how he incessantly

occupied himself in copying everything he could lay his hands on, and

kept King Charles the First at a respectful distance by that semblance

of employment; how it was one of the main joys and rewards of her life

that he was free and happy, instead of pining in monotonous restraint;

and how (as a novel general conclusion) nobody but she could ever fully

know what he was.

'And when, Trot,' said my aunt, patting the back of my hand, as we sat

in our old way before the fire, 'when are you going over to Canterbury?'

'I shall get a horse, and ride over tomorrow morning, aunt, unless you

will go with me?'

'No!' said my aunt, in her short abrupt way. 'I mean to stay where I

am.'

Then, I should ride, I said. I could not have come through Canterbury

today without stopping, if I had been coming to anyone but her.

She was pleased, but answered, 'Tut, Trot; MY old bones would have

kept till tomorrow!' and softly patted my hand again, as I sat looking

thoughtfully at the fire.

Thoughtfully, for I could not be here once more, and so near Agnes,

without the revival of those regrets with which I had so long been

occupied. Softened regrets they might be, teaching me what I had failed

to learn when my younger life was all before me, but not the less

regrets. 'Oh, Trot,' I seemed to hear my aunt say once more; and I

understood her better now--'Blind, blind, blind!'

We both kept silence for some minutes. When I raised my eyes, I found

that she was steadily observant of me. Perhaps she had followed the

current of my mind; for it seemed to me an easy one to track now, wilful

as it had been once.

'You will find her father a white-haired old man,' said my aunt, 'though

a better man in all other respects--a reclaimed man. Neither will you

find him measuring all human interests, and joys, and sorrows, with his

one poor little inch-rule now. Trust me, child, such things must shrink

very much, before they can be measured off in that way.'

'Indeed they must,' said I.

'You will find her,' pursued my aunt, 'as good, as beautiful, as

earnest, as disinterested, as she has always been. If I knew higher

praise, Trot, I would bestow it on her.'

There was no higher praise for her; no higher reproach for me. Oh, how

had I strayed so far away!

'If she trains the young girls whom she has about her, to be like

herself,' said my aunt, earnest even to the filling of her eyes with

tears, 'Heaven knows, her life will be well employed! Useful and happy,

as she said that day! How could she be otherwise than useful and happy!'

'Has Agnes any--' I was thinking aloud, rather than speaking.

'Well? Hey? Any what?' said my aunt, sharply.

'Any lover,' said I.

'A score,' cried my aunt, with a kind of indignant pride. 'She might

have married twenty times, my dear, since you have been gone!'

'No doubt,' said I. 'No doubt. But has she any lover who is worthy of

her? Agnes could care for no other.'

My aunt sat musing for a little while, with her chin upon her hand.

Slowly raising her eyes to mine, she said:

'I suspect she has an attachment, Trot.'

'A prosperous one?' said I.

'Trot,' returned my aunt gravely, 'I can't say. I have no right to tell

you even so much. She has never confided it to me, but I suspect it.'

She looked so attentively and anxiously at me (I even saw her tremble),

that I felt now, more than ever, that she had followed my late thoughts.

I summoned all the resolutions I had made, in all those many days and

nights, and all those many conflicts of my heart.

'If it should be so,' I began, 'and I hope it is-'

'I don't know that it is,' said my aunt curtly. 'You must not be ruled

by my suspicions. You must keep them secret. They are very slight,

perhaps. I have no right to speak.'

'If it should be so,' I repeated, 'Agnes will tell me at her own good

time. A sister to whom I have confided so much, aunt, will not be

reluctant to confide in me.'

My aunt withdrew her eyes from mine, as slowly as she had turned them

upon me; and covered them thoughtfully with her hand. By and by she

put her other hand on my shoulder; and so we both sat, looking into the

past, without saying another word, until we parted for the night.

I rode away, early in the morning, for the scene of my old school-days.

I cannot say that I was yet quite happy, in the hope that I was gaining

a victory over myself; even in the prospect of so soon looking on her

face again.

The well-remembered ground was soon traversed, and I came into the quiet

streets, where every stone was a boy's book to me. I went on foot to the

old house, and went away with a heart too full to enter. I returned; and

looking, as I passed, through the low window of the turret-room where

first Uriah Heep, and afterwards Mr. Micawber, had been wont to sit,

saw that it was a little parlour now, and that there was no office.

Otherwise the staid old house was, as to its cleanliness and order,

still just as it had been when I first saw it. I requested the new maid

who admitted me, to tell Miss Wickfield that a gentleman who waited on

her from a friend abroad, was there; and I was shown up the grave old

staircase (cautioned of the steps I knew so well), into the unchanged

drawing-room. The books that Agnes and I had read together, were on

their shelves; and the desk where I had laboured at my lessons, many

a night, stood yet at the same old corner of the table. All the little

changes that had crept in when the Heeps were there, were changed again.

Everything was as it used to be, in the happy time.

I stood in a window, and looked across the ancient street at the

opposite houses, recalling how I had watched them on wet afternoons,

when I first came there; and how I had used to speculate about the

people who appeared at any of the windows, and had followed them with my

eyes up and down stairs, while women went clicking along the pavement in

pattens, and the dull rain fell in slanting lines, and poured out of the

water-spout yonder, and flowed into the road. The feeling with which

I used to watch the tramps, as they came into the town on those wet

evenings, at dusk, and limped past, with their bundles drooping over

their shoulders at the ends of sticks, came freshly back to me; fraught,

as then, with the smell of damp earth, and wet leaves and briar, and the

sensation of the very airs that blew upon me in my own toilsome journey.

The opening of the little door in the panelled wall made me start and

turn. Her beautiful serene eyes met mine as she came towards me. She

stopped and laid her hand upon her bosom, and I caught her in my arms.

'Agnes! my dear girl! I have come too suddenly upon you.'

'No, no! I am so rejoiced to see you, Trotwood!'

'Dear Agnes, the happiness it is to me, to see you once again!'

I folded her to my heart, and, for a little while, we were both silent.

Presently we sat down, side by side; and her angel-face was turned upon

me with the welcome I had dreamed of, waking and sleeping, for whole

years.

She was so true, she was so beautiful, she was so good,--I owed her so

much gratitude, she was so dear to me, that I could find no utterance

for what I felt. I tried to bless her, tried to thank her, tried to tell

her (as I had often done in letters) what an influence she had upon me;

but all my efforts were in vain. My love and joy were dumb.

With her own sweet tranquillity, she calmed my agitation; led me back to

the time of our parting; spoke to me of Emily, whom she had visited,

in secret, many times; spoke to me tenderly of Dora's grave. With the

unerring instinct of her noble heart, she touched the chords of my

memory so softly and harmoniously, that not one jarred within me; I

could listen to the sorrowful, distant music, and desire to shrink from

nothing it awoke. How could I, when, blended with it all, was her dear

self, the better angel of my life?

'And you, Agnes,' I said, by and by. 'Tell me of yourself. You have

hardly ever told me of your own life, in all this lapse of time!'

'What should I tell?' she answered, with her radiant smile. 'Papa is

well. You see us here, quiet in our own home; our anxieties set at rest,

our home restored to us; and knowing that, dear Trotwood, you know all.'

'All, Agnes?' said I.

She looked at me, with some fluttering wonder in her face.

'Is there nothing else, Sister?' I said.

Her colour, which had just now faded, returned, and faded again. She

smiled; with a quiet sadness, I thought; and shook her head.

I had sought to lead her to what my aunt had hinted at; for, sharply

painful to me as it must be to receive that confidence, I was to

discipline my heart, and do my duty to her. I saw, however, that she was

uneasy, and I let it pass.

'You have much to do, dear Agnes?'

'With my school?' said she, looking up again, in all her bright

composure.

'Yes. It is laborious, is it not?'

'The labour is so pleasant,' she returned, 'that it is scarcely grateful

in me to call it by that name.'

'Nothing good is difficult to you,' said I.

Her colour came and went once more; and once more, as she bent her head,

I saw the same sad smile.

'You will wait and see papa,' said Agnes, cheerfully, 'and pass the

day with us? Perhaps you will sleep in your own room? We always call it

yours.'

I could not do that, having promised to ride back to my aunt's at night;

but I would pass the day there, joyfully.

'I must be a prisoner for a little while,' said Agnes, 'but here are the

old books, Trotwood, and the old music.'

'Even the old flowers are here,' said I, looking round; 'or the old

kinds.'

'I have found a pleasure,' returned Agnes, smiling, 'while you have been

absent, in keeping everything as it used to be when we were children.

For we were very happy then, I think.'

'Heaven knows we were!' said I.

'And every little thing that has reminded me of my brother,' said Agnes,

with her cordial eyes turned cheerfully upon me, 'has been a welcome

companion. Even this,' showing me the basket-trifle, full of keys, still

hanging at her side, 'seems to jingle a kind of old tune!'

She smiled again, and went out at the door by which she had come.

It was for me to guard this sisterly affection with religious care. It

was all that I had left myself, and it was a treasure. If I once shook

the foundations of the sacred confidence and usage, in virtue of which

it was given to me, it was lost, and could never be recovered. I set

this steadily before myself. The better I loved her, the more it behoved

me never to forget it.

I walked through the streets; and, once more seeing my old adversary the

butcher--now a constable, with his staff hanging up in the shop--went

down to look at the place where I had fought him; and there meditated

on Miss Shepherd and the eldest Miss Larkins, and all the idle loves and

likings, and dislikings, of that time. Nothing seemed to have survived

that time but Agnes; and she, ever a star above me, was brighter and

higher.

When I returned, Mr. Wickfield had come home, from a garden he had, a

couple of miles or so out of town, where he now employed himself almost

every day. I found him as my aunt had described him. We sat down to

dinner, with some half-dozen little girls; and he seemed but the shadow

of his handsome picture on the wall.

The tranquillity and peace belonging, of old, to that quiet ground in my

memory, pervaded it again. When dinner was done, Mr. Wickfield taking no

wine, and I desiring none, we went up-stairs; where Agnes and her little

charges sang and played, and worked. After tea the children left us; and

we three sat together, talking of the bygone days.

'My part in them,' said Mr. Wickfield, shaking his white head, 'has much

matter for regret--for deep regret, and deep contrition, Trotwood, you

well know. But I would not cancel it, if it were in my power.'

I could readily believe that, looking at the face beside him.

'I should cancel with it,' he pursued, 'such patience and devotion, such

fidelity, such a child's love, as I must not forget, no! even to forget

myself.'

'I understand you, sir,' I softly said. 'I hold it--I have always held

it--in veneration.'

'But no one knows, not even you,' he returned, 'how much she has done,

how much she has undergone, how hard she has striven. Dear Agnes!'

She had put her hand entreatingly on his arm, to stop him; and was very,

very pale.

'Well, well!' he said with a sigh, dismissing, as I then saw, some trial

she had borne, or was yet to bear, in connexion with what my aunt had

told me. 'Well! I have never told you, Trotwood, of her mother. Has

anyone?'

'Never, sir.'

'It's not much--though it was much to suffer. She married me in

opposition to her father's wish, and he renounced her. She prayed him

to forgive her, before my Agnes came into this world. He was a very hard

man, and her mother had long been dead. He repulsed her. He broke her

heart.'

Agnes leaned upon his shoulder, and stole her arm about his neck.

'She had an affectionate and gentle heart,' he said; 'and it was broken.

I knew its tender nature very well. No one could, if I did not. She

loved me dearly, but was never happy. She was always labouring, in

secret, under this distress; and being delicate and downcast at the time

of his last repulse--for it was not the first, by many--pined away

and died. She left me Agnes, two weeks old; and the grey hair that you

recollect me with, when you first came.' He kissed Agnes on her cheek.

'My love for my dear child was a diseased love, but my mind was all

unhealthy then. I say no more of that. I am not speaking of myself,

Trotwood, but of her mother, and of her. If I give you any clue to what

I am, or to what I have been, you will unravel it, I know. What Agnes

is, I need not say. I have always read something of her poor mother's

story, in her character; and so I tell it you tonight, when we three are

again together, after such great changes. I have told it all.'

His bowed head, and her angel-face and filial duty, derived a more

pathetic meaning from it than they had had before. If I had wanted

anything by which to mark this night of our re-union, I should have

found it in this.

Agnes rose up from her father's side, before long; and going softly to

her piano, played some of the old airs to which we had often listened in

that place.

'Have you any intention of going away again?' Agnes asked me, as I was

standing by.

'What does my sister say to that?'

'I hope not.'

'Then I have no such intention, Agnes.'

'I think you ought not, Trotwood, since you ask me,' she said, mildly.

'Your growing reputation and success enlarge your power of doing good;

and if I could spare my brother,' with her eyes upon me, 'perhaps the

time could not.'

'What I am, you have made me, Agnes. You should know best.'

'I made you, Trotwood?'

'Yes! Agnes, my dear girl!' I said, bending over her. 'I tried to tell

you, when we met today, something that has been in my thoughts since

Dora died. You remember, when you came down to me in our little

room--pointing upward, Agnes?'

'Oh, Trotwood!' she returned, her eyes filled with tears. 'So loving, so

confiding, and so young! Can I ever forget?'

'As you were then, my sister, I have often thought since, you have ever

been to me. Ever pointing upward, Agnes; ever leading me to something

better; ever directing me to higher things!'

She only shook her head; through her tears I saw the same sad quiet

smile.

'And I am so grateful to you for it, Agnes, so bound to you, that there

is no name for the affection of my heart. I want you to know, yet don't

know how to tell you, that all my life long I shall look up to you,

and be guided by you, as I have been through the darkness that is past.

Whatever betides, whatever new ties you may form, whatever changes may

come between us, I shall always look to you, and love you, as I do now,

and have always done. You will always be my solace and resource, as you

have always been. Until I die, my dearest sister, I shall see you always

before me, pointing upward!'

She put her hand in mine, and told me she was proud of me, and of what I

said; although I praised her very far beyond her worth. Then she went

on softly playing, but without removing her eyes from me. 'Do you know,

what I have heard tonight, Agnes,' said I, strangely seems to be a part

of the feeling with which I regarded you when I saw you first--with

which I sat beside you in my rough school-days?'

'You knew I had no mother,' she replied with a smile, 'and felt kindly

towards me.'

'More than that, Agnes, I knew, almost as if I had known this story,

that there was something inexplicably gentle and softened, surrounding

you; something that might have been sorrowful in someone else (as I can

now understand it was), but was not so in you.'

She softly played on, looking at me still.

'Will you laugh at my cherishing such fancies, Agnes?'

'No!'

'Or at my saying that I really believe I felt, even then, that you could

be faithfully affectionate against all discouragement, and never cease

to be so, until you ceased to live?---Will you laugh at such a dream?'

'Oh, no! Oh, no!'

For an instant, a distressful shadow crossed her face; but, even in the

start it gave me, it was gone; and she was playing on, and looking at me

with her own calm smile.

As I rode back in the lonely night, the wind going by me like a restless

memory, I thought of this, and feared she was not happy. I was not

happy; but, thus far, I had faithfully set the seal upon the Past, and,

thinking of her, pointing upward, thought of her as pointing to that

sky above me, where, in the mystery to come, I might yet love her with

a love unknown on earth, and tell her what the strife had been within me

when I loved her here.

CHAPTER 61. I AM SHOWN TWO INTERESTING PENITENTS

For a time--at all events until my book should be completed, which would

be the work of several months--I took up my abode in my aunt's house at

Dover; and there, sitting in the window from which I had looked out at

the moon upon the sea, when that roof first gave me shelter, I quietly

pursued my task.

In pursuance of my intention of referring to my own fictions only when

their course should incidentally connect itself with the progress of my

story, I do not enter on the aspirations, the delights, anxieties, and

triumphs of my art. That I truly devoted myself to it with my strongest

earnestness, and bestowed upon it every energy of my soul, I have

already said. If the books I have written be of any worth, they will

supply the rest. I shall otherwise have written to poor purpose, and the

rest will be of interest to no one.

Occasionally, I went to London; to lose myself in the swarm of life

there, or to consult with Traddles on some business point. He had

managed for me, in my absence, with the soundest judgement; and my

worldly affairs were prospering. As my notoriety began to bring upon

me an enormous quantity of letters from people of whom I had no

knowledge--chiefly about nothing, and extremely difficult to answer--I

agreed with Traddles to have my name painted up on his door. There, the

devoted postman on that beat delivered bushels of letters for me; and

there, at intervals, I laboured through them, like a Home Secretary of

State without the salary.

Among this correspondence, there dropped in, every now and then, an

obliging proposal from one of the numerous outsiders always lurking

about the Commons, to practise under cover of my name (if I would take

the necessary steps remaining to make a proctor of myself), and pay me

a percentage on the profits. But I declined these offers; being already

aware that there were plenty of such covert practitioners in existence,

and considering the Commons quite bad enough, without my doing anything

to make it worse.

The girls had gone home, when my name burst into bloom on Traddles's

door; and the sharp boy looked, all day, as if he had never heard of

Sophy, shut up in a back room, glancing down from her work into a sooty

little strip of garden with a pump in it. But there I always found her,

the same bright housewife; often humming her Devonshire ballads when no

strange foot was coming up the stairs, and blunting the sharp boy in his

official closet with melody.

I wondered, at first, why I so often found Sophy writing in a copy-book;

and why she always shut it up when I appeared, and hurried it into the

table-drawer. But the secret soon came out. One day, Traddles (who had

just come home through the drizzling sleet from Court) took a paper out

of his desk, and asked me what I thought of that handwriting?

'Oh, DON'T, Tom!' cried Sophy, who was warming his slippers before the

fire.

'My dear,' returned Tom, in a delighted state, 'why not? What do you say

to that writing, Copperfield?'

'It's extraordinarily legal and formal,' said I. 'I don't think I ever

saw such a stiff hand.'

'Not like a lady's hand, is it?' said Traddles.

'A lady's!' I repeated. 'Bricks and mortar are more like a lady's hand!'

Traddles broke into a rapturous laugh, and informed me that it was

Sophy's writing; that Sophy had vowed and declared he would need a

copying-clerk soon, and she would be that clerk; that she had acquired

this hand from a pattern; and that she could throw off--I forget how

many folios an hour. Sophy was very much confused by my being told all

this, and said that when 'Tom' was made a judge he wouldn't be so ready

to proclaim it. Which 'Tom' denied; averring that he should always be

equally proud of it, under all circumstances.

'What a thoroughly good and charming wife she is, my dear Traddles!'

said I, when she had gone away, laughing.

'My dear Copperfield,' returned Traddles, 'she is, without any

exception, the dearest girl! The way she manages this place; her

punctuality, domestic knowledge, economy, and order; her cheerfulness,

Copperfield!'

'Indeed, you have reason to commend her!' I returned. 'You are a happy

fellow. I believe you make yourselves, and each other, two of the

happiest people in the world.'

'I am sure we ARE two of the happiest people,' returned Traddles. 'I

admit that, at all events. Bless my soul, when I see her getting up

by candle-light on these dark mornings, busying herself in the day's

arrangements, going out to market before the clerks come into the Inn,

caring for no weather, devising the most capital little dinners out of

the plainest materials, making puddings and pies, keeping everything in

its right place, always so neat and ornamental herself, sitting up

at night with me if it's ever so late, sweet-tempered and encouraging

always, and all for me, I positively sometimes can't believe it,

Copperfield!'

He was tender of the very slippers she had been warming, as he put them

on, and stretched his feet enjoyingly upon the fender.

'I positively sometimes can't believe it,' said Traddles. 'Then our

pleasures! Dear me, they are inexpensive, but they are quite wonderful!

When we are at home here, of an evening, and shut the outer door, and

draw those curtains--which she made--where could we be more snug? When

it's fine, and we go out for a walk in the evening, the streets

abound in enjoyment for us. We look into the glittering windows of the

jewellers' shops; and I show Sophy which of the diamond-eyed serpents,

coiled up on white satin rising grounds, I would give her if I could

afford it; and Sophy shows me which of the gold watches that are

capped and jewelled and engine-turned, and possessed of the horizontal

lever-escape-movement, and all sorts of things, she would buy for me if

she could afford it; and we pick out the spoons and forks, fish-slices,

butter-knives, and sugar-tongs, we should both prefer if we could both

afford it; and really we go away as if we had got them! Then, when we

stroll into the squares, and great streets, and see a house to let,

sometimes we look up at it, and say, how would THAT do, if I was made

a judge? And we parcel it out--such a room for us, such rooms for the

girls, and so forth; until we settle to our satisfaction that it

would do, or it wouldn't do, as the case may be. Sometimes, we go at

half-price to the pit of the theatre--the very smell of which is cheap,

in my opinion, at the money--and there we thoroughly enjoy the play:

which Sophy believes every word of, and so do I. In walking home,

perhaps we buy a little bit of something at a cook's-shop, or a little

lobster at the fishmongers, and bring it here, and make a splendid

supper, chatting about what we have seen. Now, you know, Copperfield, if

I was Lord Chancellor, we couldn't do this!'

'You would do something, whatever you were, my dear Traddles,' thought

I, 'that would be pleasant and amiable. And by the way,' I said aloud,

'I suppose you never draw any skeletons now?'

'Really,' replied Traddles, laughing, and reddening, 'I can't wholly

deny that I do, my dear Copperfield. For being in one of the back rows

of the King's Bench the other day, with a pen in my hand, the fancy came

into my head to try how I had preserved that accomplishment. And I am

afraid there's a skeleton--in a wig--on the ledge of the desk.'

After we had both laughed heartily, Traddles wound up by looking with a

smile at the fire, and saying, in his forgiving way, 'Old Creakle!'

'I have a letter from that old--Rascal here,' said I. For I never was

less disposed to forgive him the way he used to batter Traddles, than

when I saw Traddles so ready to forgive him himself.

'From Creakle the schoolmaster?' exclaimed Traddles. 'No!'

'Among the persons who are attracted to me in my rising fame and

fortune,' said I, looking over my letters, 'and who discover that they

were always much attached to me, is the self-same Creakle. He is not

a schoolmaster now, Traddles. He is retired. He is a Middlesex

Magistrate.'

I thought Traddles might be surprised to hear it, but he was not so at

all.

'How do you suppose he comes to be a Middlesex Magistrate?' said I.

'Oh dear me!' replied Traddles, 'it would be very difficult to answer

that question. Perhaps he voted for somebody, or lent money to somebody,

or bought something of somebody, or otherwise obliged somebody, or

jobbed for somebody, who knew somebody who got the lieutenant of the

county to nominate him for the commission.'

'On the commission he is, at any rate,' said I. 'And he writes to me

here, that he will be glad to show me, in operation, the only true

system of prison discipline; the only unchallengeable way of making

sincere and lasting converts and penitents--which, you know, is by

solitary confinement. What do you say?'

'To the system?' inquired Traddles, looking grave.

'No. To my accepting the offer, and your going with me?'

'I don't object,' said Traddles.

'Then I'll write to say so. You remember (to say nothing of our

treatment) this same Creakle turning his son out of doors, I suppose,

and the life he used to lead his wife and daughter?'

'Perfectly,' said Traddles.

'Yet, if you'll read his letter, you'll find he is the tenderest of

men to prisoners convicted of the whole calendar of felonies,' said I;

'though I can't find that his tenderness extends to any other class of

created beings.'

Traddles shrugged his shoulders, and was not at all surprised. I had not

expected him to be, and was not surprised myself; or my observation of

similar practical satires would have been but scanty. We arranged the

time of our visit, and I wrote accordingly to Mr. Creakle that evening.

On the appointed day--I think it was the next day, but no

matter--Traddles and I repaired to the prison where Mr. Creakle was

powerful. It was an immense and solid building, erected at a vast

expense. I could not help thinking, as we approached the gate, what

an uproar would have been made in the country, if any deluded man had

proposed to spend one half the money it had cost, on the erection of an

industrial school for the young, or a house of refuge for the deserving

old.

In an office that might have been on the ground-floor of the Tower of

Babel, it was so massively constructed, we were presented to our old

schoolmaster; who was one of a group, composed of two or three of the

busier sort of magistrates, and some visitors they had brought. He

received me, like a man who had formed my mind in bygone years, and

had always loved me tenderly. On my introducing Traddles, Mr. Creakle

expressed, in like manner, but in an inferior degree, that he had always

been Traddles's guide, philosopher, and friend. Our venerable instructor

was a great deal older, and not improved in appearance. His face was

as fiery as ever; his eyes were as small, and rather deeper set. The

scanty, wet-looking grey hair, by which I remembered him, was almost

gone; and the thick veins in his bald head were none the more agreeable

to look at.

After some conversation among these gentlemen, from which I might have

supposed that there was nothing in the world to be legitimately taken

into account but the supreme comfort of prisoners, at any expense, and

nothing on the wide earth to be done outside prison-doors, we began

our inspection. It being then just dinner-time, we went, first into the

great kitchen, where every prisoner's dinner was in course of being set

out separately (to be handed to him in his cell), with the regularity

and precision of clock-work. I said aside, to Traddles, that I wondered

whether it occurred to anybody, that there was a striking contrast

between these plentiful repasts of choice quality, and the dinners, not

to say of paupers, but of soldiers, sailors, labourers, the great bulk

of the honest, working community; of whom not one man in five hundred

ever dined half so well. But I learned that the 'system' required high

living; and, in short, to dispose of the system, once for all, I found

that on that head and on all others, 'the system' put an end to all

doubts, and disposed of all anomalies. Nobody appeared to have the least

idea that there was any other system, but THE system, to be considered.

As we were going through some of the magnificent passages, I inquired of

Mr. Creakle and his friends what were supposed to be the main advantages

of this all-governing and universally over-riding system? I found

them to be the perfect isolation of prisoners--so that no one man in

confinement there, knew anything about another; and the reduction of

prisoners to a wholesome state of mind, leading to sincere contrition

and repentance.

Now, it struck me, when we began to visit individuals in their cells,

and to traverse the passages in which those cells were, and to have the

manner of the going to chapel and so forth, explained to us, that there

was a strong probability of the prisoners knowing a good deal about each

other, and of their carrying on a pretty complete system of intercourse.

This, at the time I write, has been proved, I believe, to be the case;

but, as it would have been flat blasphemy against the system to have

hinted such a doubt then, I looked out for the penitence as diligently

as I could.

And here again, I had great misgivings. I found as prevalent a fashion

in the form of the penitence, as I had left outside in the forms of the

coats and waistcoats in the windows of the tailors' shops. I found a

vast amount of profession, varying very little in character: varying

very little (which I thought exceedingly suspicious), even in words. I

found a great many foxes, disparaging whole vineyards of inaccessible

grapes; but I found very few foxes whom I would have trusted within

reach of a bunch. Above all, I found that the most professing men were

the greatest objects of interest; and that their conceit, their vanity,

their want of excitement, and their love of deception (which many

of them possessed to an almost incredible extent, as their histories

showed), all prompted to these professions, and were all gratified by

them.

However, I heard so repeatedly, in the course of our goings to and fro,

of a certain Number Twenty Seven, who was the Favourite, and who really

appeared to be a Model Prisoner, that I resolved to suspend my judgement

until I should see Twenty Seven. Twenty Eight, I understood, was also

a bright particular star; but it was his misfortune to have his glory

a little dimmed by the extraordinary lustre of Twenty Seven. I heard so

much of Twenty Seven, of his pious admonitions to everybody around him,

and of the beautiful letters he constantly wrote to his mother (whom he

seemed to consider in a very bad way), that I became quite impatient to

see him.

I had to restrain my impatience for some time, on account of Twenty

Seven being reserved for a concluding effect. But, at last, we came to

the door of his cell; and Mr. Creakle, looking through a little hole in

it, reported to us, in a state of the greatest admiration, that he was

reading a Hymn Book.

There was such a rush of heads immediately, to see Number Twenty Seven

reading his Hymn Book, that the little hole was blocked up, six or seven

heads deep. To remedy this inconvenience, and give us an opportunity of

conversing with Twenty Seven in all his purity, Mr. Creakle directed the

door of the cell to be unlocked, and Twenty Seven to be invited out into

the passage. This was done; and whom should Traddles and I then behold,

to our amazement, in this converted Number Twenty Seven, but Uriah Heep!

He knew us directly; and said, as he came out--with the old writhe,--

'How do you do, Mr. Copperfield? How do you do, Mr. Traddles?'

This recognition caused a general admiration in the party. I rather

thought that everyone was struck by his not being proud, and taking

notice of us.

'Well, Twenty Seven,' said Mr. Creakle, mournfully admiring him. 'How do

you find yourself today?'

'I am very umble, sir!' replied Uriah Heep.

'You are always so, Twenty Seven,' said Mr. Creakle.

Here, another gentleman asked, with extreme anxiety: 'Are you quite

comfortable?'

'Yes, I thank you, sir!' said Uriah Heep, looking in that direction.

'Far more comfortable here, than ever I was outside. I see my follies,

now, sir. That's what makes me comfortable.'

Several gentlemen were much affected; and a third questioner, forcing

himself to the front, inquired with extreme feeling: 'How do you find

the beef?'

'Thank you, sir,' replied Uriah, glancing in the new direction of this

voice, 'it was tougher yesterday than I could wish; but it's my duty to

bear. I have committed follies, gentlemen,' said Uriah, looking round

with a meek smile, 'and I ought to bear the consequences without

repining.' A murmur, partly of gratification at Twenty Seven's celestial

state of mind, and partly of indignation against the Contractor who had

given him any cause of complaint (a note of which was immediately made

by Mr. Creakle), having subsided, Twenty Seven stood in the midst of

us, as if he felt himself the principal object of merit in a highly

meritorious museum. That we, the neophytes, might have an excess of

light shining upon us all at once, orders were given to let out Twenty

Eight.

I had been so much astonished already, that I only felt a kind of

resigned wonder when Mr. Littimer walked forth, reading a good book!

'Twenty Eight,' said a gentleman in spectacles, who had not yet spoken,

'you complained last week, my good fellow, of the cocoa. How has it been

since?'

'I thank you, sir,' said Mr. Littimer, 'it has been better made. If I

might take the liberty of saying so, sir, I don't think the milk which

is boiled with it is quite genuine; but I am aware, sir, that there is

a great adulteration of milk, in London, and that the article in a pure

state is difficult to be obtained.'

It appeared to me that the gentleman in spectacles backed his Twenty

Eight against Mr. Creakle's Twenty Seven, for each of them took his own

man in hand.

'What is your state of mind, Twenty Eight?' said the questioner in

spectacles.

'I thank you, sir,' returned Mr. Littimer; 'I see my follies now, sir.

I am a good deal troubled when I think of the sins of my former

companions, sir; but I trust they may find forgiveness.'

'You are quite happy yourself?' said the questioner, nodding

encouragement.

'I am much obliged to you, sir,' returned Mr. Littimer. 'Perfectly so.'

'Is there anything at all on your mind now?' said the questioner. 'If

so, mention it, Twenty Eight.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Littimer, without looking up, 'if my eyes have not

deceived me, there is a gentleman present who was acquainted with me

in my former life. It may be profitable to that gentleman to know, sir,

that I attribute my past follies, entirely to having lived a thoughtless

life in the service of young men; and to having allowed myself to be led

by them into weaknesses, which I had not the strength to resist. I hope

that gentleman will take warning, sir, and will not be offended at my

freedom. It is for his good. I am conscious of my own past follies. I

hope he may repent of all the wickedness and sin to which he has been a

party.'

I observed that several gentlemen were shading their eyes, each with one

hand, as if they had just come into church.

'This does you credit, Twenty Eight,' returned the questioner. 'I should

have expected it of you. Is there anything else?'

'Sir,' returned Mr. Littimer, slightly lifting up his eyebrows, but not

his eyes, 'there was a young woman who fell into dissolute courses, that

I endeavoured to save, sir, but could not rescue. I beg that gentleman,

if he has it in his power, to inform that young woman from me that

I forgive her her bad conduct towards myself, and that I call her to

repentance--if he will be so good.'

'I have no doubt, Twenty Eight,' returned the questioner, 'that the

gentleman you refer to feels very strongly--as we all must--what you

have so properly said. We will not detain you.'

'I thank you, sir,' said Mr. Littimer. 'Gentlemen, I wish you a good

day, and hoping you and your families will also see your wickedness, and

amend!'

With this, Number Twenty Eight retired, after a glance between him and

Uriah; as if they were not altogether unknown to each other, through

some medium of communication; and a murmur went round the group, as his

door shut upon him, that he was a most respectable man, and a beautiful

case.

'Now, Twenty Seven,' said Mr. Creakle, entering on a clear stage with

his man, 'is there anything that anyone can do for you? If so, mention

it.'

'I would umbly ask, sir,' returned Uriah, with a jerk of his malevolent

head, 'for leave to write again to mother.'

'It shall certainly be granted,' said Mr. Creakle.

'Thank you, sir! I am anxious about mother. I am afraid she ain't safe.'

Somebody incautiously asked, what from? But there was a scandalized

whisper of 'Hush!'

'Immortally safe, sir,' returned Uriah, writhing in the direction of

the voice. 'I should wish mother to be got into my state. I never should

have been got into my present state if I hadn't come here. I wish mother

had come here. It would be better for everybody, if they got took up,

and was brought here.'

This sentiment gave unbounded satisfaction--greater satisfaction, I

think, than anything that had passed yet.

'Before I come here,' said Uriah, stealing a look at us, as if he would

have blighted the outer world to which we belonged, if he could, 'I was

given to follies; but now I am sensible of my follies. There's a deal

of sin outside. There's a deal of sin in mother. There's nothing but sin

everywhere--except here.'

'You are quite changed?' said Mr. Creakle.

'Oh dear, yes, sir!' cried this hopeful penitent.

'You wouldn't relapse, if you were going out?' asked somebody else.

'Oh de-ar no, sir!'

'Well!' said Mr. Creakle, 'this is very gratifying. You have addressed

Mr. Copperfield, Twenty Seven. Do you wish to say anything further to

him?'

'You knew me, a long time before I came here and was changed, Mr.

Copperfield,' said Uriah, looking at me; and a more villainous look

I never saw, even on his visage. 'You knew me when, in spite of my

follies, I was umble among them that was proud, and meek among them that

was violent--you was violent to me yourself, Mr. Copperfield. Once, you

struck me a blow in the face, you know.'

General commiseration. Several indignant glances directed at me.

'But I forgive you, Mr. Copperfield,' said Uriah, making his forgiving

nature the subject of a most impious and awful parallel, which I shall

not record. 'I forgive everybody. It would ill become me to bear malice.

I freely forgive you, and I hope you'll curb your passions in future. I

hope Mr. W. will repent, and Miss W., and all of that sinful lot. You've

been visited with affliction, and I hope it may do you good; but you'd

better have come here. Mr. W. had better have come here, and Miss W.

too. The best wish I could give you, Mr. Copperfield, and give all of

you gentlemen, is, that you could be took up and brought here. When I

think of my past follies, and my present state, I am sure it would be

best for you. I pity all who ain't brought here!'

He sneaked back into his cell, amidst a little chorus of approbation;

and both Traddles and I experienced a great relief when he was locked

in.

It was a characteristic feature in this repentance, that I was fain to

ask what these two men had done, to be there at all. That appeared to be

the last thing about which they had anything to say. I addressed

myself to one of the two warders, who, I suspected from certain latent

indications in their faces, knew pretty well what all this stir was

worth.

'Do you know,' said I, as we walked along the passage, 'what felony was

Number Twenty Seven's last "folly"?'

The answer was that it was a Bank case.

'A fraud on the Bank of England?' I asked. 'Yes, sir. Fraud, forgery,

and conspiracy. He and some others. He set the others on. It was a deep

plot for a large sum. Sentence, transportation for life. Twenty Seven

was the knowingest bird of the lot, and had very nearly kept himself

safe; but not quite. The Bank was just able to put salt upon his

tail--and only just.'

'Do you know Twenty Eight's offence?'

'Twenty Eight,' returned my informant, speaking throughout in a low

tone, and looking over his shoulder as we walked along the passage, to

guard himself from being overheard, in such an unlawful reference

to these Immaculates, by Creakle and the rest; 'Twenty Eight (also

transportation) got a place, and robbed a young master of a matter of

two hundred and fifty pounds in money and valuables, the night before

they were going abroad. I particularly recollect his case, from his

being took by a dwarf.'

'A what?'

'A little woman. I have forgot her name?'

'Not Mowcher?'

'That's it! He had eluded pursuit, and was going to America in a flaxen

wig, and whiskers, and such a complete disguise as never you see in all

your born days; when the little woman, being in Southampton, met

him walking along the street--picked him out with her sharp eye in a

moment--ran betwixt his legs to upset him--and held on to him like grim

Death.'

'Excellent Miss Mowcher!' cried I.

'You'd have said so, if you had seen her, standing on a chair in the

witness-box at the trial, as I did,' said my friend. 'He cut her face

right open, and pounded her in the most brutal manner, when she took

him; but she never loosed her hold till he was locked up. She held so

tight to him, in fact, that the officers were obliged to take 'em

both together. She gave her evidence in the gamest way, and was highly

complimented by the Bench, and cheered right home to her lodgings. She

said in Court that she'd have took him single-handed (on account of what

she knew concerning him), if he had been Samson. And it's my belief she

would!'

It was mine too, and I highly respected Miss Mowcher for it.

We had now seen all there was to see. It would have been in vain to

represent to such a man as the Worshipful Mr. Creakle, that Twenty Seven

and Twenty Eight were perfectly consistent and unchanged; that exactly

what they were then, they had always been; that the hypocritical knaves

were just the subjects to make that sort of profession in such a place;

that they knew its market-value at least as well as we did, in the

immediate service it would do them when they were expatriated; in

a word, that it was a rotten, hollow, painfully suggestive piece of

business altogether. We left them to their system and themselves, and

went home wondering.

'Perhaps it's a good thing, Traddles,' said I, 'to have an unsound Hobby

ridden hard; for it's the sooner ridden to death.'

'I hope so,' replied Traddles.

CHAPTER 62. A LIGHT SHINES ON MY WAY

The year came round to Christmas-time, and I had been at home above

two months. I had seen Agnes frequently. However loud the general voice

might be in giving me encouragement, and however fervent the emotions

and endeavours to which it roused me, I heard her lightest word of

praise as I heard nothing else.

At least once a week, and sometimes oftener, I rode over there, and

passed the evening. I usually rode back at night; for the old unhappy

sense was always hovering about me now--most sorrowfully when I left

her--and I was glad to be up and out, rather than wandering over the

past in weary wakefulness or miserable dreams. I wore away the longest

part of many wild sad nights, in those rides; reviving, as I went, the

thoughts that had occupied me in my long absence.

Or, if I were to say rather that I listened to the echoes of those

thoughts, I should better express the truth. They spoke to me from afar

off. I had put them at a distance, and accepted my inevitable place.

When I read to Agnes what I wrote; when I saw her listening face; moved

her to smiles or tears; and heard her cordial voice so earnest on the

shadowy events of that imaginative world in which I lived; I thought

what a fate mine might have been--but only thought so, as I had thought

after I was married to Dora, what I could have wished my wife to be.

My duty to Agnes, who loved me with a love, which, if I disquieted, I

wronged most selfishly and poorly, and could never restore; my matured

assurance that I, who had worked out my own destiny, and won what I

had impetuously set my heart on, had no right to murmur, and must bear;

comprised what I felt and what I had learned. But I loved her: and now

it even became some consolation to me, vaguely to conceive a distant day

when I might blamelessly avow it; when all this should be over; when I

could say 'Agnes, so it was when I came home; and now I am old, and I

never have loved since!'

She did not once show me any change in herself. What she always had been

to me, she still was; wholly unaltered.

Between my aunt and me there had been something, in this connexion,

since the night of my return, which I cannot call a restraint, or an

avoidance of the subject, so much as an implied understanding that we

thought of it together, but did not shape our thoughts into words. When,

according to our old custom, we sat before the fire at night, we often

fell into this train; as naturally, and as consciously to each other, as

if we had unreservedly said so. But we preserved an unbroken silence. I

believed that she had read, or partly read, my thoughts that night; and

that she fully comprehended why I gave mine no more distinct expression.

This Christmas-time being come, and Agnes having reposed no new

confidence in me, a doubt that had several times arisen in my

mind--whether she could have that perception of the true state of

my breast, which restrained her with the apprehension of giving me

pain--began to oppress me heavily. If that were so, my sacrifice was

nothing; my plainest obligation to her unfulfilled; and every poor

action I had shrunk from, I was hourly doing. I resolved to set this

right beyond all doubt;--if such a barrier were between us, to break it

down at once with a determined hand.

It was--what lasting reason have I to remember it!--a cold, harsh,

winter day. There had been snow, some hours before; and it lay, not

deep, but hard-frozen on the ground. Out at sea, beyond my window, the

wind blew ruggedly from the north. I had been thinking of it, sweeping

over those mountain wastes of snow in Switzerland, then inaccessible to

any human foot; and had been speculating which was the lonelier, those

solitary regions, or a deserted ocean.

'Riding today, Trot?' said my aunt, putting her head in at the door.

'Yes,' said I, 'I am going over to Canterbury. It's a good day for a

ride.'

'I hope your horse may think so too,' said my aunt; 'but at present he

is holding down his head and his ears, standing before the door there,

as if he thought his stable preferable.'

My aunt, I may observe, allowed my horse on the forbidden ground, but

had not at all relented towards the donkeys.

'He will be fresh enough, presently!' said I.

'The ride will do his master good, at all events,' observed my aunt,

glancing at the papers on my table. 'Ah, child, you pass a good many

hours here! I never thought, when I used to read books, what work it was

to write them.'

'It's work enough to read them, sometimes,' I returned. 'As to the

writing, it has its own charms, aunt.'

'Ah! I see!' said my aunt. 'Ambition, love of approbation, sympathy, and

much more, I suppose? Well: go along with you!'

'Do you know anything more,' said I, standing composedly before her--she

had patted me on the shoulder, and sat down in my chair--'of that

attachment of Agnes?'

She looked up in my face a little while, before replying:

'I think I do, Trot.'

'Are you confirmed in your impression?' I inquired.

'I think I am, Trot.'

She looked so steadfastly at me: with a kind of doubt, or pity, or

suspense in her affection: that I summoned the stronger determination to

show her a perfectly cheerful face.

'And what is more, Trot--' said my aunt.

'Yes!'

'I think Agnes is going to be married.'

'God bless her!' said I, cheerfully.

'God bless her!' said my aunt, 'and her husband too!'

I echoed it, parted from my aunt, and went lightly downstairs, mounted,

and rode away. There was greater reason than before to do what I had

resolved to do.

How well I recollect the wintry ride! The frozen particles of ice,

brushed from the blades of grass by the wind, and borne across my face;

the hard clatter of the horse's hoofs, beating a tune upon the ground;

the stiff-tilled soil; the snowdrift, lightly eddying in the chalk-pit

as the breeze ruffled it; the smoking team with the waggon of old hay,

stopping to breathe on the hill-top, and shaking their bells musically;

the whitened slopes and sweeps of Down-land lying against the dark sky,

as if they were drawn on a huge slate!

I found Agnes alone. The little girls had gone to their own homes now,

and she was alone by the fire, reading. She put down her book on seeing

me come in; and having welcomed me as usual, took her work-basket and

sat in one of the old-fashioned windows.

I sat beside her on the window-seat, and we talked of what I was doing,

and when it would be done, and of the progress I had made since my last

visit. Agnes was very cheerful; and laughingly predicted that I should

soon become too famous to be talked to, on such subjects.

'So I make the most of the present time, you see,' said Agnes, 'and talk

to you while I may.'

As I looked at her beautiful face, observant of her work, she raised her

mild clear eyes, and saw that I was looking at her.

'You are thoughtful today, Trotwood!'

'Agnes, shall I tell you what about? I came to tell you.'

She put aside her work, as she was used to do when we were seriously

discussing anything; and gave me her whole attention.

'My dear Agnes, do you doubt my being true to you?'

'No!' she answered, with a look of astonishment.

'Do you doubt my being what I always have been to you?'

'No!' she answered, as before.

'Do you remember that I tried to tell you, when I came home, what a debt

of gratitude I owed you, dearest Agnes, and how fervently I felt towards

you?'

'I remember it,' she said, gently, 'very well.'

'You have a secret,' said I. 'Let me share it, Agnes.'

She cast down her eyes, and trembled.

'I could hardly fail to know, even if I had not heard--but from other

lips than yours, Agnes, which seems strange--that there is someone upon

whom you have bestowed the treasure of your love. Do not shut me out of

what concerns your happiness so nearly! If you can trust me, as you say

you can, and as I know you may, let me be your friend, your brother, in

this matter, of all others!'

With an appealing, almost a reproachful, glance, she rose from the

window; and hurrying across the room as if without knowing where, put

her hands before her face, and burst into such tears as smote me to the

heart.

And yet they awakened something in me, bringing promise to my heart.

Without my knowing why, these tears allied themselves with the quietly

sad smile which was so fixed in my remembrance, and shook me more with

hope than fear or sorrow.

'Agnes! Sister! Dearest! What have I done?'

'Let me go away, Trotwood. I am not well. I am not myself. I will speak

to you by and by--another time. I will write to you. Don't speak to me

now. Don't! don't!'

I sought to recollect what she had said, when I had spoken to her on

that former night, of her affection needing no return. It seemed a very

world that I must search through in a moment. 'Agnes, I cannot bear

to see you so, and think that I have been the cause. My dearest girl,

dearer to me than anything in life, if you are unhappy, let me share

your unhappiness. If you are in need of help or counsel, let me try to

give it to you. If you have indeed a burden on your heart, let me try to

lighten it. For whom do I live now, Agnes, if it is not for you!'

'Oh, spare me! I am not myself! Another time!' was all I could

distinguish.

Was it a selfish error that was leading me away? Or, having once a clue

to hope, was there something opening to me that I had not dared to think

of?

'I must say more. I cannot let you leave me so! For Heaven's sake,

Agnes, let us not mistake each other after all these years, and all

that has come and gone with them! I must speak plainly. If you have any

lingering thought that I could envy the happiness you will confer; that

I could not resign you to a dearer protector, of your own choosing; that

I could not, from my removed place, be a contented witness of your joy;

dismiss it, for I don't deserve it! I have not suffered quite in vain.

You have not taught me quite in vain. There is no alloy of self in what

I feel for you.'

She was quiet now. In a little time, she turned her pale face towards

me, and said in a low voice, broken here and there, but very clear:

'I owe it to your pure friendship for me, Trotwood--which, indeed, I do

not doubt--to tell you, you are mistaken. I can do no more. If I have

sometimes, in the course of years, wanted help and counsel, they have

come to me. If I have sometimes been unhappy, the feeling has passed

away. If I have ever had a burden on my heart, it has been lightened

for me. If I have any secret, it is--no new one; and is--not what you

suppose. I cannot reveal it, or divide it. It has long been mine, and

must remain mine.'

'Agnes! Stay! A moment!'

She was going away, but I detained her. I clasped my arm about her

waist. 'In the course of years!' 'It is not a new one!' New thoughts and

hopes were whirling through my mind, and all the colours of my life were

changing.

'Dearest Agnes! Whom I so respect and honour--whom I so devotedly love!

When I came here today, I thought that nothing could have wrested this

confession from me. I thought I could have kept it in my bosom all our

lives, till we were old. But, Agnes, if I have indeed any new-born hope

that I may ever call you something more than Sister, widely different

from Sister!--'

Her tears fell fast; but they were not like those she had lately shed,

and I saw my hope brighten in them.

'Agnes! Ever my guide, and best support! If you had been more mindful

of yourself, and less of me, when we grew up here together, I think my

heedless fancy never would have wandered from you. But you were so

much better than I, so necessary to me in every boyish hope and

disappointment, that to have you to confide in, and rely upon in

everything, became a second nature, supplanting for the time the first

and greater one of loving you as I do!'

Still weeping, but not sadly--joyfully! And clasped in my arms as she

had never been, as I had thought she never was to be!

'When I loved Dora--fondly, Agnes, as you know--'

'Yes!' she cried, earnestly. 'I am glad to know it!'

'When I loved her--even then, my love would have been incomplete,

without your sympathy. I had it, and it was perfected. And when I lost

her, Agnes, what should I have been without you, still!'

Closer in my arms, nearer to my heart, her trembling hand upon my

shoulder, her sweet eyes shining through her tears, on mine!

'I went away, dear Agnes, loving you. I stayed away, loving you. I

returned home, loving you!'

And now, I tried to tell her of the struggle I had had, and the

conclusion I had come to. I tried to lay my mind before her, truly, and

entirely. I tried to show her how I had hoped I had come into the better

knowledge of myself and of her; how I had resigned myself to what that

better knowledge brought; and how I had come there, even that day, in my

fidelity to this. If she did so love me (I said) that she could take me

for her husband, she could do so, on no deserving of mine, except upon

the truth of my love for her, and the trouble in which it had ripened to

be what it was; and hence it was that I revealed it. And O, Agnes, even

out of thy true eyes, in that same time, the spirit of my child-wife

looked upon me, saying it was well; and winning me, through thee, to

tenderest recollections of the Blossom that had withered in its bloom!

'I am so blest, Trotwood--my heart is so overcharged--but there is one

thing I must say.'

'Dearest, what?'

She laid her gentle hands upon my shoulders, and looked calmly in my

face.

'Do you know, yet, what it is?'

'I am afraid to speculate on what it is. Tell me, my dear.'

'I have loved you all my life!'

O, we were happy, we were happy! Our tears were not for the trials (hers

so much the greater) through which we had come to be thus, but for the

rapture of being thus, never to be divided more!

We walked, that winter evening, in the fields together; and the blessed

calm within us seemed to be partaken by the frosty air. The early stars

began to shine while we were lingering on, and looking up to them, we

thanked our GOD for having guided us to this tranquillity.

We stood together in the same old-fashioned window at night, when the

moon was shining; Agnes with her quiet eyes raised up to it; I following

her glance. Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and,

toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy, forsaken and neglected, who

should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own.

It was nearly dinner-time next day when we appeared before my aunt. She

was up in my study, Peggotty said: which it was her pride to keep in

readiness and order for me. We found her, in her spectacles, sitting by

the fire.

'Goodness me!' said my aunt, peering through the dusk, 'who's this

you're bringing home?'

'Agnes,' said I.

As we had arranged to say nothing at first, my aunt was not a little

discomfited. She darted a hopeful glance at me, when I said 'Agnes'; but

seeing that I looked as usual, she took off her spectacles in despair,

and rubbed her nose with them.

She greeted Agnes heartily, nevertheless; and we were soon in the

lighted parlour downstairs, at dinner. My aunt put on her spectacles

twice or thrice, to take another look at me, but as often took them

off again, disappointed, and rubbed her nose with them. Much to the

discomfiture of Mr. Dick, who knew this to be a bad symptom.

'By the by, aunt,' said I, after dinner; 'I have been speaking to Agnes

about what you told me.'

'Then, Trot,' said my aunt, turning scarlet, 'you did wrong, and broke

your promise.'

'You are not angry, aunt, I trust? I am sure you won't be, when you

learn that Agnes is not unhappy in any attachment.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said my aunt.

As my aunt appeared to be annoyed, I thought the best way was to cut her

annoyance short. I took Agnes in my arm to the back of her chair, and we

both leaned over her. My aunt, with one clap of her hands, and one look

through her spectacles, immediately went into hysterics, for the first

and only time in all my knowledge of her.

The hysterics called up Peggotty. The moment my aunt was restored, she

flew at Peggotty, and calling her a silly old creature, hugged her with

all her might. After that, she hugged Mr. Dick (who was highly honoured,

but a good deal surprised); and after that, told them why. Then, we were

all happy together.

I could not discover whether my aunt, in her last short conversation

with me, had fallen on a pious fraud, or had really mistaken the state

of my mind. It was quite enough, she said, that she had told me Agnes

was going to be married; and that I now knew better than anyone how true

it was.

We were married within a fortnight. Traddles and Sophy, and Doctor and

Mrs. Strong, were the only guests at our quiet wedding. We left them

full of joy; and drove away together. Clasped in my embrace, I held the

source of every worthy aspiration I had ever had; the centre of myself,

the circle of my life, my own, my wife; my love of whom was founded on a

rock!

'Dearest husband!' said Agnes. 'Now that I may call you by that name, I

have one thing more to tell you.'

'Let me hear it, love.'

'It grows out of the night when Dora died. She sent you for me.'

'She did.'

'She told me that she left me something. Can you think what it was?'

I believed I could. I drew the wife who had so long loved me, closer to

my side.

'She told me that she made a last request to me, and left me a last

charge.'

'And it was--'

'That only I would occupy this vacant place.'

And Agnes laid her head upon my breast, and wept; and I wept with her,

though we were so happy.

CHAPTER 63. A VISITOR

What I have purposed to record is nearly finished; but there is yet an

incident conspicuous in my memory, on which it often rests with delight,

and without which one thread in the web I have spun would have a

ravelled end.

I had advanced in fame and fortune, my domestic joy was perfect, I had

been married ten happy years. Agnes and I were sitting by the fire, in

our house in London, one night in spring, and three of our children were

playing in the room, when I was told that a stranger wished to see me.

He had been asked if he came on business, and had answered No; he had

come for the pleasure of seeing me, and had come a long way. He was an

old man, my servant said, and looked like a farmer.

As this sounded mysterious to the children, and moreover was like the

beginning of a favourite story Agnes used to tell them, introductory

to the arrival of a wicked old Fairy in a cloak who hated everybody, it

produced some commotion. One of our boys laid his head in his mother's

lap to be out of harm's way, and little Agnes (our eldest child) left

her doll in a chair to represent her, and thrust out her little heap

of golden curls from between the window-curtains, to see what happened

next.

'Let him come in here!' said I.

There soon appeared, pausing in the dark doorway as he entered, a hale,

grey-haired old man. Little Agnes, attracted by his looks, had run to

bring him in, and I had not yet clearly seen his face, when my wife,

starting up, cried out to me, in a pleased and agitated voice, that it

was Mr. Peggotty!

It WAS Mr. Peggotty. An old man now, but in a ruddy, hearty, strong old

age. When our first emotion was over, and he sat before the fire with

the children on his knees, and the blaze shining on his face, he looked,

to me, as vigorous and robust, withal as handsome, an old man, as ever I

had seen.

'Mas'r Davy,' said he. And the old name in the old tone fell so

naturally on my ear! 'Mas'r Davy, 'tis a joyful hour as I see you, once

more, 'long with your own trew wife!'

'A joyful hour indeed, old friend!' cried I.

'And these heer pretty ones,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'To look at these heer

flowers! Why, Mas'r Davy, you was but the heighth of the littlest of

these, when I first see you! When Em'ly warn't no bigger, and our poor

lad were BUT a lad!'

'Time has changed me more than it has changed you since then,' said I.

'But let these dear rogues go to bed; and as no house in England but

this must hold you, tell me where to send for your luggage (is the old

black bag among it, that went so far, I wonder!), and then, over a glass

of Yarmouth grog, we will have the tidings of ten years!'

'Are you alone?' asked Agnes.

'Yes, ma'am,' he said, kissing her hand, 'quite alone.'

We sat him between us, not knowing how to give him welcome enough; and

as I began to listen to his old familiar voice, I could have fancied he

was still pursuing his long journey in search of his darling niece.

'It's a mort of water,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'fur to come across, and

on'y stay a matter of fower weeks. But water ('specially when 'tis salt)

comes nat'ral to me; and friends is dear, and I am heer. --Which is

verse,' said Mr. Peggotty, surprised to find it out, 'though I hadn't

such intentions.'

'Are you going back those many thousand miles, so soon?' asked Agnes.

'Yes, ma'am,' he returned. 'I giv the promise to Em'ly, afore I come

away. You see, I doen't grow younger as the years comes round, and if

I hadn't sailed as 'twas, most like I shouldn't never have done 't. And

it's allus been on my mind, as I must come and see Mas'r Davy and your

own sweet blooming self, in your wedded happiness, afore I got to be too

old.'

He looked at us, as if he could never feast his eyes on us sufficiently.

Agnes laughingly put back some scattered locks of his grey hair, that he

might see us better.

'And now tell us,' said I, 'everything relating to your fortunes.'

'Our fortuns, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined, 'is soon told. We haven't fared

nohows, but fared to thrive. We've allus thrived. We've worked as we

ought to 't, and maybe we lived a leetle hard at first or so, but

we have allus thrived. What with sheep-farming, and what with

stock-farming, and what with one thing and what with t'other, we are as

well to do, as well could be. Theer's been kiender a blessing fell upon

us,' said Mr. Peggotty, reverentially inclining his head, 'and we've

done nowt but prosper. That is, in the long run. If not yesterday, why

then today. If not today, why then tomorrow.'

'And Emily?' said Agnes and I, both together.

'Em'ly,' said he, 'arter you left her, ma'am--and I never heerd her

saying of her prayers at night, t'other side the canvas screen, when we

was settled in the Bush, but what I heerd your name--and arter she and

me lost sight of Mas'r Davy, that theer shining sundown--was that low,

at first, that, if she had know'd then what Mas'r Davy kep from us so

kind and thowtful, 'tis my opinion she'd have drooped away. But theer

was some poor folks aboard as had illness among 'em, and she took care

of them; and theer was the children in our company, and she took care of

them; and so she got to be busy, and to be doing good, and that helped

her.'

'When did she first hear of it?' I asked.

'I kep it from her arter I heerd on 't,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'going

on nigh a year. We was living then in a solitary place, but among the

beautifullest trees, and with the roses a-covering our Beein to the

roof. Theer come along one day, when I was out a-working on the land, a

traveller from our own Norfolk or Suffolk in England (I doen't rightly

mind which), and of course we took him in, and giv him to eat and drink,

and made him welcome. We all do that, all the colony over. He'd got an

old newspaper with him, and some other account in print of the storm.

That's how she know'd it. When I came home at night, I found she know'd

it.'

He dropped his voice as he said these words, and the gravity I so well

remembered overspread his face.

'Did it change her much?' we asked.

'Aye, for a good long time,' he said, shaking his head; 'if not to this

present hour. But I think the solitoode done her good. And she had a

deal to mind in the way of poultry and the like, and minded of it, and

come through. I wonder,' he said thoughtfully, 'if you could see my

Em'ly now, Mas'r Davy, whether you'd know her!'

'Is she so altered?' I inquired.

'I doen't know. I see her ev'ry day, and doen't know; But, odd-times, I

have thowt so. A slight figure,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking at the fire,

'kiender worn; soft, sorrowful, blue eyes; a delicate face; a pritty

head, leaning a little down; a quiet voice and way--timid a'most. That's

Em'ly!'

We silently observed him as he sat, still looking at the fire.

'Some thinks,' he said, 'as her affection was ill-bestowed; some, as her

marriage was broken off by death. No one knows how 'tis. She might have

married well, a mort of times, "but, uncle," she says to me, "that's

gone for ever." Cheerful along with me; retired when others is by;

fond of going any distance fur to teach a child, or fur to tend a sick

person, or fur to do some kindness tow'rds a young girl's wedding (and

she's done a many, but has never seen one); fondly loving of her uncle;

patient; liked by young and old; sowt out by all that has any trouble.

That's Em'ly!'

He drew his hand across his face, and with a half-suppressed sigh looked

up from the fire.

'Is Martha with you yet?' I asked.

'Martha,' he replied, 'got married, Mas'r Davy, in the second year. A

young man, a farm-labourer, as come by us on his way to market with his

mas'r's drays--a journey of over five hundred mile, theer and back--made

offers fur to take her fur his wife (wives is very scarce theer), and

then to set up fur their two selves in the Bush. She spoke to me fur to

tell him her trew story. I did. They was married, and they live fower

hundred mile away from any voices but their own and the singing birds.'

'Mrs. Gummidge?' I suggested.

It was a pleasant key to touch, for Mr. Peggotty suddenly burst into a

roar of laughter, and rubbed his hands up and down his legs, as he had

been accustomed to do when he enjoyed himself in the long-shipwrecked

boat.

'Would you believe it!' he said. 'Why, someun even made offer fur to

marry her! If a ship's cook that was turning settler, Mas'r Davy, didn't

make offers fur to marry Missis Gummidge, I'm Gormed--and I can't say no

fairer than that!'

I never saw Agnes laugh so. This sudden ecstasy on the part of Mr.

Peggotty was so delightful to her, that she could not leave off

laughing; and the more she laughed the more she made me laugh, and the

greater Mr. Peggotty's ecstasy became, and the more he rubbed his legs.

'And what did Mrs. Gummidge say?' I asked, when I was grave enough.

'If you'll believe me,' returned Mr. Peggotty, 'Missis Gummidge, 'stead

of saying "thank you, I'm much obleeged to you, I ain't a-going fur

to change my condition at my time of life," up'd with a bucket as was

standing by, and laid it over that theer ship's cook's head 'till he

sung out fur help, and I went in and reskied of him.'

Mr. Peggotty burst into a great roar of laughter, and Agnes and I both

kept him company.

'But I must say this, for the good creetur,' he resumed, wiping his

face, when we were quite exhausted; 'she has been all she said she'd

be to us, and more. She's the willingest, the trewest, the

honestest-helping woman, Mas'r Davy, as ever draw'd the breath of life.

I have never know'd her to be lone and lorn, for a single minute,

not even when the colony was all afore us, and we was new to it. And

thinking of the old 'un is a thing she never done, I do assure you,

since she left England!'

'Now, last, not least, Mr. Micawber,' said I. 'He has paid off every

obligation he incurred here--even to Traddles's bill, you remember my

dear Agnes--and therefore we may take it for granted that he is doing

well. But what is the latest news of him?'

Mr. Peggotty, with a smile, put his hand in his breast-pocket, and

produced a flat-folded, paper parcel, from which he took out, with much

care, a little odd-looking newspaper.

'You are to understan', Mas'r Davy,' said he, 'as we have left the

Bush now, being so well to do; and have gone right away round to Port

Middlebay Harbour, wheer theer's what we call a town.'

'Mr. Micawber was in the Bush near you?' said I.

'Bless you, yes,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and turned to with a will. I never

wish to meet a better gen'l'man for turning to with a will. I've seen

that theer bald head of his a perspiring in the sun, Mas'r Davy, till I

a'most thowt it would have melted away. And now he's a Magistrate.'

'A Magistrate, eh?' said I.

Mr. Peggotty pointed to a certain paragraph in the newspaper, where I

read aloud as follows, from the Port Middlebay Times:

'The public dinner to our distinguished fellow-colonist and townsman,

WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, Port Middlebay District Magistrate, came

off yesterday in the large room of the Hotel, which was crowded to

suffocation. It is estimated that not fewer than forty-seven persons

must have been accommodated with dinner at one time, exclusive of the

company in the passage and on the stairs. The beauty, fashion, and

exclusiveness of Port Middlebay, flocked to do honour to one so

deservedly esteemed, so highly talented, and so widely popular. Doctor

Mell (of Colonial Salem-House Grammar School, Port Middlebay) presided,

and on his right sat the distinguished guest. After the removal of the

cloth, and the singing of Non Nobis (beautifully executed, and in which

we were at no loss to distinguish the bell-like notes of that gifted

amateur, WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, JUNIOR), the usual loyal and

patriotic toasts were severally given and rapturously received. Doctor

Mell, in a speech replete with feeling, then proposed "Our distinguished

Guest, the ornament of our town. May he never leave us but to better

himself, and may his success among us be such as to render his bettering

himself impossible!" The cheering with which the toast was received

defies description. Again and again it rose and fell, like the waves

of ocean. At length all was hushed, and WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE,

presented himself to return thanks. Far be it from us, in the present

comparatively imperfect state of the resources of our establishment,

to endeavour to follow our distinguished townsman through the

smoothly-flowing periods of his polished and highly-ornate address!

Suffice it to observe, that it was a masterpiece of eloquence; and that

those passages in which he more particularly traced his own successful

career to its source, and warned the younger portion of his auditory

from the shoals of ever incurring pecuniary liabilities which they were

unable to liquidate, brought a tear into the manliest eye present. The

remaining toasts were DOCTOR MELL; Mrs. MICAWBER (who gracefully bowed

her acknowledgements from the side-door, where a galaxy of beauty was

elevated on chairs, at once to witness and adorn the gratifying scene),

Mrs. RIDGER BEGS (late Miss Micawber); Mrs. MELL; WILKINS MICAWBER,

ESQUIRE, JUNIOR (who convulsed the assembly by humorously remarking that

he found himself unable to return thanks in a speech, but would do so,

with their permission, in a song); Mrs. MICAWBER'S FAMILY (well known,

it is needless to remark, in the mother-country), &c. &c. &c. At the

conclusion of the proceedings the tables were cleared as if by art-magic

for dancing. Among the votaries of TERPSICHORE, who disported themselves

until Sol gave warning for departure, Wilkins Micawber, Esquire, Junior,

and the lovely and accomplished Miss Helena, fourth daughter of Doctor

Mell, were particularly remarkable.'

I was looking back to the name of Doctor Mell, pleased to have

discovered, in these happier circumstances, Mr. Mell, formerly poor

pinched usher to my Middlesex magistrate, when Mr. Peggotty pointing

to another part of the paper, my eyes rested on my own name, and I read

thus:

'TO DAVID COPPERFIELD, ESQUIRE,

'THE EMINENT AUTHOR.

'My Dear Sir,

'Years have elapsed, since I had an opportunity of ocularly perusing the

lineaments, now familiar to the imaginations of a considerable portion

of the civilized world.

'But, my dear Sir, though estranged (by the force of circumstances over

which I have had no control) from the personal society of the friend and

companion of my youth, I have not been unmindful of his soaring flight.

Nor have I been debarred,

Though seas between us braid ha' roared,

(BURNS) from participating in the intellectual feasts he has spread

before us.

'I cannot, therefore, allow of the departure from this place of an

individual whom we mutually respect and esteem, without, my dear Sir,

taking this public opportunity of thanking you, on my own behalf, and,

I may undertake to add, on that of the whole of the Inhabitants of Port

Middlebay, for the gratification of which you are the ministering agent.

'Go on, my dear Sir! You are not unknown here, you are not

unappreciated. Though "remote", we are neither "unfriended",

"melancholy", nor (I may add) "slow". Go on, my dear Sir, in your Eagle

course! The inhabitants of Port Middlebay may at least aspire to watch

it, with delight, with entertainment, with instruction!

'Among the eyes elevated towards you from this portion of the globe,

will ever be found, while it has light and life,

'The

'Eye

'Appertaining to

'WILKINS MICAWBER,

'Magistrate.'

I found, on glancing at the remaining contents of the newspaper, that

Mr. Micawber was a diligent and esteemed correspondent of that journal.

There was another letter from him in the same paper, touching a bridge;

there was an advertisement of a collection of similar letters by him, to

be shortly republished, in a neat volume, 'with considerable additions';

and, unless I am very much mistaken, the Leading Article was his also.

We talked much of Mr. Micawber, on many other evenings while Mr.

Peggotty remained with us. He lived with us during the whole term of his

stay,--which, I think, was something less than a month,--and his sister

and my aunt came to London to see him. Agnes and I parted from him

aboard-ship, when he sailed; and we shall never part from him more, on

earth.

But before he left, he went with me to Yarmouth, to see a little tablet

I had put up in the churchyard to the memory of Ham. While I was copying

the plain inscription for him at his request, I saw him stoop, and

gather a tuft of grass from the grave and a little earth.

'For Em'ly,' he said, as he put it in his breast. 'I promised, Mas'r

Davy.'

CHAPTER 64. A LAST RETROSPECT

And now my written story ends. I look back, once more--for the last

time--before I close these leaves.

I see myself, with Agnes at my side, journeying along the road of life.

I see our children and our friends around us; and I hear the roar of

many voices, not indifferent to me as I travel on.

What faces are the most distinct to me in the fleeting crowd? Lo, these;

all turning to me as I ask my thoughts the question!

Here is my aunt, in stronger spectacles, an old woman of four-score

years and more, but upright yet, and a steady walker of six miles at a

stretch in winter weather.

Always with her, here comes Peggotty, my good old nurse, likewise in

spectacles, accustomed to do needle-work at night very close to the

lamp, but never sitting down to it without a bit of wax candle, a

yard-measure in a little house, and a work-box with a picture of St.

Paul's upon the lid.

The cheeks and arms of Peggotty, so hard and red in my childish days,

when I wondered why the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples,

are shrivelled now; and her eyes, that used to darken their whole

neighbourhood in her face, are fainter (though they glitter still);

but her rough forefinger, which I once associated with a pocket

nutmeg-grater, is just the same, and when I see my least child catching

at it as it totters from my aunt to her, I think of our little parlour

at home, when I could scarcely walk. My aunt's old disappointment is set

right, now. She is godmother to a real living Betsey Trotwood; and Dora

(the next in order) says she spoils her.

There is something bulky in Peggotty's pocket. It is nothing smaller

than the Crocodile Book, which is in rather a dilapidated condition by

this time, with divers of the leaves torn and stitched across, but which

Peggotty exhibits to the children as a precious relic. I find it very

curious to see my own infant face, looking up at me from the Crocodile

stories; and to be reminded by it of my old acquaintance Brooks of

Sheffield.

Among my boys, this summer holiday time, I see an old man making giant

kites, and gazing at them in the air, with a delight for which there

are no words. He greets me rapturously, and whispers, with many nods

and winks, 'Trotwood, you will be glad to hear that I shall finish the

Memorial when I have nothing else to do, and that your aunt's the most

extraordinary woman in the world, sir!'

Who is this bent lady, supporting herself by a stick, and showing me

a countenance in which there are some traces of old pride and beauty,

feebly contending with a querulous, imbecile, fretful wandering of the

mind? She is in a garden; and near her stands a sharp, dark, withered

woman, with a white scar on her lip. Let me hear what they say.

'Rosa, I have forgotten this gentleman's name.'

Rosa bends over her, and calls to her, 'Mr. Copperfield.'

'I am glad to see you, sir. I am sorry to observe you are in mourning. I

hope Time will be good to you.'

Her impatient attendant scolds her, tells her I am not in mourning, bids

her look again, tries to rouse her.

'You have seen my son, sir,' says the elder lady. 'Are you reconciled?'

Looking fixedly at me, she puts her hand to her forehead, and moans.

Suddenly, she cries, in a terrible voice, 'Rosa, come to me. He is

dead!' Rosa kneeling at her feet, by turns caresses her, and quarrels

with her; now fiercely telling her, 'I loved him better than you ever

did!'--now soothing her to sleep on her breast, like a sick child. Thus

I leave them; thus I always find them; thus they wear their time away,

from year to year.

What ship comes sailing home from India, and what English lady is this,

married to a growling old Scotch Croesus with great flaps of ears? Can

this be Julia Mills?

Indeed it is Julia Mills, peevish and fine, with a black man to carry

cards and letters to her on a golden salver, and a copper-coloured woman

in linen, with a bright handkerchief round her head, to serve her Tiffin

in her dressing-room. But Julia keeps no diary in these days; never

sings Affection's Dirge; eternally quarrels with the old Scotch Croesus,

who is a sort of yellow bear with a tanned hide. Julia is steeped in

money to the throat, and talks and thinks of nothing else. I liked her

better in the Desert of Sahara.

Or perhaps this IS the Desert of Sahara! For, though Julia has a stately

house, and mighty company, and sumptuous dinners every day, I see no

green growth near her; nothing that can ever come to fruit or flower.

What Julia calls 'society', I see; among it Mr. Jack Maldon, from his

Patent Place, sneering at the hand that gave it him, and speaking to me

of the Doctor as 'so charmingly antique'. But when society is the name

for such hollow gentlemen and ladies, Julia, and when its breeding is

professed indifference to everything that can advance or can retard

mankind, I think we must have lost ourselves in that same Desert of

Sahara, and had better find the way out.

And lo, the Doctor, always our good friend, labouring at his Dictionary

(somewhere about the letter D), and happy in his home and wife. Also

the Old Soldier, on a considerably reduced footing, and by no means so

influential as in days of yore!

Working at his chambers in the Temple, with a busy aspect, and his hair

(where he is not bald) made more rebellious than ever by the constant

friction of his lawyer's-wig, I come, in a later time, upon my dear old

Traddles. His table is covered with thick piles of papers; and I say, as

I look around me:

'If Sophy were your clerk, now, Traddles, she would have enough to do!'

'You may say that, my dear Copperfield! But those were capital days,

too, in Holborn Court! Were they not?'

'When she told you you would be a judge? But it was not the town talk

then!'

'At all events,' says Traddles, 'if I ever am one--' 'Why, you know you

will be.'

'Well, my dear Copperfield, WHEN I am one, I shall tell the story, as I

said I would.'

We walk away, arm in arm. I am going to have a family dinner with

Traddles. It is Sophy's birthday; and, on our road, Traddles discourses

to me of the good fortune he has enjoyed.

'I really have been able, my dear Copperfield, to do all that I had most

at heart. There's the Reverend Horace promoted to that living at four

hundred and fifty pounds a year; there are our two boys receiving the

very best education, and distinguishing themselves as steady scholars

and good fellows; there are three of the girls married very comfortably;

there are three more living with us; there are three more keeping house

for the Reverend Horace since Mrs. Crewler's decease; and all of them

happy.'

'Except--' I suggest.

'Except the Beauty,' says Traddles. 'Yes. It was very unfortunate that

she should marry such a vagabond. But there was a certain dash and glare

about him that caught her. However, now we have got her safe at our

house, and got rid of him, we must cheer her up again.'

Traddles's house is one of the very houses--or it easily may have

been--which he and Sophy used to parcel out, in their evening walks. It

is a large house; but Traddles keeps his papers in his dressing-room

and his boots with his papers; and he and Sophy squeeze themselves into

upper rooms, reserving the best bedrooms for the Beauty and the girls.

There is no room to spare in the house; for more of 'the girls' are

here, and always are here, by some accident or other, than I know how

to count. Here, when we go in, is a crowd of them, running down to

the door, and handing Traddles about to be kissed, until he is out of

breath. Here, established in perpetuity, is the poor Beauty, a widow

with a little girl; here, at dinner on Sophy's birthday, are the three

married girls with their three husbands, and one of the husband's

brothers, and another husband's cousin, and another husband's sister,

who appears to me to be engaged to the cousin. Traddles, exactly the

same simple, unaffected fellow as he ever was, sits at the foot of the

large table like a Patriarch; and Sophy beams upon him, from the head,

across a cheerful space that is certainly not glittering with Britannia

metal.

And now, as I close my task, subduing my desire to linger yet, these

faces fade away. But one face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by

which I see all other objects, is above them and beyond them all. And

that remains.

I turn my head, and see it, in its beautiful serenity, beside me.

My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear

presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company.

O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life

indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me, like the shadows

which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!