Barnaby Rudge
by Charles Dickens

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About Author

Chapter One

In the year 1775, there stood upon the borders of Epping Forest, at a distance of about twelve miles from London—measuring from the Standard in Cornhill,' or rather from the spot on or near to which the Standard used to be in days of yore—a house of public entertainment called the Maypole; which fact was demonstrated to all such travellers as could neither read nor write (and at that time a vast number both of travellers and stay-at-homes were in this condition) by the emblem reared on the roadside over against the house, which, if not of those goodly proportions that Maypoles were wont to present in olden times, was a fair young ash, thirty feet in height, and straight as any arrow that ever English yeoman drew.

The Maypole—by which term from henceforth is meant the house, and not its sign—the Maypole was an old building, with more gable ends than a lazy man would care to count on a sunny day; huge zig-zag chimneys, out of which it seemed as though even smoke could not choose but come in more than naturally fantastic shapes,

imparted to it in its tortuous progress; and vast stables, gloomy, ruinous, and empty. The place was said to have been built in the days of King Henry the Eighth; and there was a legend, not only that Queen Elizabeth had slept there one night while upon a hunting excursion, to wit, in a certain oak-panelled room with a deep bay window, but that next morning, while standing on a mounting block before the door with one foot in the stirrup, the virgin monarch had then and there boxed and cuffed an unlucky page for some neglect of duty. The matter-of-fact and doubtful folks, of whom there were a few among the Maypole customers, as unluckily there always are in every little community, were inclined to look upon this tradition as rather apocryphal; but, whenever the landlord of that ancient hostelry appealed to the mounting block itself as evidence, and triumphantly pointed out that there it stood in the same place to that very day, the doubters never failed to be put down by a large majority, and all true believers exulted as in a victory.

Whether these, and many other stories of the like nature, were true or untrue, the Maypole was really an old house, a very old house, perhaps as old as it claimed to be, and perhaps older, which will sometimes happen with houses of an uncertain, as with ladies of a certain, age. Its windows were old diamond-pane lattices, its floors were sunken and uneven, its ceilings blackened by the hand of time, and heavy with massive beams. Over the doorway was an ancient porch, quaintly and grotesquely carved; and here on summer evenings the more favoured customers smoked and drank—ay, and sang many a good song too, sometimes—reposing on two grim-

looking high-backed settles, which, like the twin dragons of some fairy tale, guarded the entrance to the mansion.

In the chimneys of the disused rooms, swallows had built their nests for many a long year, and from earliest spring to latest autumn whole colonies of sparrows chirped and twittered in the eaves. There were more pigeons about the dreary stable-yard and out-buildings than anybody but the landlord could reckon up. The wheeling and circling flights of runts, fantails, tumblers, and pouters, were perhaps not quite consistent with the grave and sober character of the building, but the monotonous cooing, which never ceased to be raised by some among them all day long, suited it exactly, and seemed to lull it to rest. With its overhanging stories, drowsy little panes of glass, and front bulging out and projecting over the pathway, the old house looked as if it were nodding in its sleep. Indeed, it needed no very great stretch of fancy to detect in it other resemblances to humanity. The bricks of which it was built had originally been a deep dark red, but had grown yellow and discoloured like an old man's skin; the sturdy timbers had decayed like teeth; and here and there the ivy, like a warm garment to comfort it in its age, wrapt its green leaves closely round the time-worn walls.

It was a hale and hearty age though, still: and in the summer or autumn evenings, when the glow of the setting sun fell upon the oak and chestnut trees of the adjacent forest, the old house, partaking of its lustre, seemed their fit companion, and to have many good years of life in him yet.

The evening with which we have to do, was neither a summer nor an autumn one, but the twilight of a day in March, when the wind

howled dismally among the bare branches of the trees, and rumbling in the wide chimneys and driving the rain against the windows of the Maypole Inn, gave such of its frequenters as chanced to be there at the moment an undeniable reason for prolonging their stay, and caused the landlord to prophesy that the night would certainly clear at eleven o'clock precisely,—which by a remarkable coincidence was the hour at which he always closed his house.

The name of him upon whom the spirit of prophecy thus descended was John Willet, a burly, large-headed man with a fat face, which betokened profound obstinacy and slowness of apprehension, combined with a very strong reliance upon his own merits. It was John Willet's ordinary boast in his more placid moods that if he were slow he was sure; which assertion could, in one sense at least, be by no means gainsaid, seeing that he was in everything unquestionably the reverse of fast, and withal one of the most dogged and positive fellows in existence—always sure that what he thought or said or did was right, and holding it as a thing quite settled and ordained by the laws of nature and Providence, that anybody who said or did or thought otherwise must be inevitably and of necessity wrong.

Mr Willet walked slowly up to the window, flattened his fat nose against the cold glass, and shading his eyes that his sight might not be affected by the ruddy glow of the fire, looked abroad. Then he walked slowly back to his old seat in the chimney-corner, and, composing himself in it with a slight shiver, such as a man might give way to and so acquire an additional relish for the warm blaze, said, looking round upon his guests:

‘It’ll clear at eleven o’clock. No sooner and no later. Not before and not arterwards.’

‘How do you make out that?’ said a little man in the opposite corner. ‘The moon is past the full, and she rises at nine.’

John looked sedately and solemnly at his questioner until he had brought his mind to bear upon the whole of his observation, and then made answer, in a tone which seemed to imply that the moon was peculiarly his business and nobody else’s:

‘Never you mind about the moon. Don’t you trouble yourself about her. You let the moon alone, and I’ll let you alone.’

‘No offence I hope?’ said the little man.

Again John waited leisurely until the observation had thoroughly penetrated to his brain, and then replying, ‘No offence as YET,’ applied a light to his pipe and smoked in placid silence; now and then casting a sidelong look at a man wrapped in a loose riding- coat with huge cuffs ornamented with tarnished silver lace and large metal buttons, who sat apart from the regular frequenters of the house, and wearing a hat flapped over his face, which was still further shaded by the hand on which his forehead rested, looked unsociable enough.

There was another guest, who sat, booted and spurred, at some distance from the fire also, and whose thoughts—to judge from his folded arms and knitted brows, and from the untasted liquor before him—were occupied with other matters than the topics under discussion or the persons who discussed them. This was a young man of about eight-and-twenty, rather above the middle height, and though of somewhat slight figure, gracefully and strongly made. He

wore his own dark hair, and was accoutred in a riding dress, which together with his large boots (resembling in shape and fashion those worn by our Life Guardsmen at the present day), showed indisputable traces of the bad condition of the roads. But travel-stained though he was, he was well and even richly attired, and without being overdressed looked a gallant gentleman.

Lying upon the table beside him, as he had carelessly thrown them down, were a heavy riding-whip and a slouched hat, the latter worn no doubt as being best suited to the inclemency of the weather. There, too, were a pair of pistols in a holster-case, and a short riding-cloak. Little of his face was visible, except the long dark lashes which concealed his downcast eyes, but an air of careless ease and natural gracefulness of demeanour pervaded the figure, and seemed to comprehend even those slight accessories, which were all handsome, and in good keeping.

Towards this young gentleman the eyes of Mr Willet wandered but once, and then as if in mute inquiry whether he had observed his silent neighbour. It was plain that John and the young gentleman had often met before. Finding that his look was not returned, or indeed observed by the person to whom it was addressed, John gradually concentrated the whole power of his eyes into one focus, and brought it to bear upon the man in the flapped hat, at whom he came to stare in course of time with an intensity so remarkable, that it affected his fireside cronies, who all, as with one accord, took their pipes from their lips, and stared with open mouths at the stranger likewise.

The sturdy landlord had a large pair of dull fish-like eyes, and the little man who had hazarded the remark about the moon (and who was the parish-clerk and bell-ringer of Chigwell, a village hard by) had little round black shiny eyes like beads; moreover this little man wore at the knees of his rusty black breeches, and on his rusty black coat, and all down his long flapped waistcoat, little queer buttons like nothing except his eyes; but so like them, that as they twinkled and glistened in the light of the fire, which shone too in his bright shoe-buckles, he seemed all eyes from head to foot, and to be gazing with every one of them at the unknown customer. No wonder that a man should grow restless under such an inspection as this, to say nothing of the eyes belonging to short Tom Cobb the general chandler and post-office keeper, and long Phil Parkes the ranger, both of whom, infected by the example of their companions, regarded him of the flapped hat no less attentively.

The stranger became restless; perhaps from being exposed to this raking fire of eyes, perhaps from the nature of his previous meditations—most probably from the latter cause, for as he changed his position and looked hastily round, he started to find himself the object of such keen regard, and darted an angry and suspicious glance at the fireside group. It had the effect of immediately diverting all eyes to the chimney, except those of John Willet, who finding himself as it were, caught in the fact, and not being (as has been already observed) of a very ready nature, remained staring at his guest in a particularly awkward and disconcerted manner.

‘Well?’ said the stranger.

Well. There was not much in well. It was not a long speech. ‘I thought you gave an order,’ said the landlord, after a pause of two or three minutes for consideration.

The stranger took off his hat, and disclosed the hard features of a man of sixty or thereabouts, much weatherbeaten and worn by time, and the naturally harsh expression of which was not improved by a dark handkerchief which was bound tightly round his head, and, while it served the purpose of a wig, shaded his forehead, and almost hid his eyebrows. If it were intended to conceal or divert attention from a deep gash, now healed into an ugly seam, which when it was first inflicted must have laid bare his cheekbone, the object was but indifferently attained, for it could scarcely fail to be noted at a glance. His complexion was of a cadaverous hue, and he had a grizzly jagged beard of some three weeks’ date. Such was the figure (very meanly and poorly clad) that now rose from the seat, and stalking across the room sat down in a corner of the chimney, which the politeness or fears of the little clerk very readily assigned to him.

‘A highwayman!’ whispered Tom Cobb to Parkes the ranger.

‘Do you suppose highwaymen don’t dress handsomer than that?’ replied Parkes. ‘It’s a better business than you think for, Tom, and highwaymen don’t need or use to be shabby, take my word for it.’

Meanwhile the subject of their speculations had done due honour to the house by calling for some drink, which was promptly supplied by the landlord’s son Joe, a broad-shouldered strapping young fellow of twenty, whom it pleased his father still to consider a little boy, and to treat accordingly. Stretching out his hands to warm them by the blazing fire, the man turned his head towards the company, and after

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

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

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

‘Public-house, father!’ exclaimed Joe, ‘where’s the public-house within a mile or so of the Maypole? He means the great house—the Warren—naturally and of course. The old red brick house, sir, that stands in its own grounds—?’

‘Aye,’ said the stranger.

‘And that fifteen or twenty years ago stood in a park five times as broad, which with other and richer property has bit by bit changed hands and dwindled away—more’s the pity!’ pursued the young man.

‘Maybe,’ was the reply. ‘But my question related to the owner. What it has been I don’t care to know, and what it is I can see for myself.’

The heir-apparent to the Maypole pressed his finger on his lips, and glancing at the young gentleman already noticed, who had changed his attitude when the house was first mentioned, replied in a lower tone:

‘The owner’s name is Haredale, Mr Geoffrey Haredale, and’—again he glanced in the same direction as before—‘and a worthy gentleman too—hem!’

Paying as little regard to this admonitory cough, as to the significant gesture that had preceded it, the stranger pursued his questioning.

‘I turned out of my way coming here, and took the footpath that crosses the grounds. Who was the young lady that I saw entering a carriage? His daughter?’

‘Why, how should I know, honest man?’ replied Joe, contriving in the course of some arrangements about the hearth, to advance close to his questioner and pluck him by the sleeve, ‘I didn’t see the young lady, you know. Whew! There’s the wind again—AND rain—well it IS a night!’

Rough weather indeed!’ observed the strange man.

‘You’re used to it?’ said Joe, catching at anything which seemed to promise a diversion of the subject.

‘Pretty well,’ returned the other. ‘About the young lady—has Mr Haredale a daughter?’

‘No, no,’ said the young fellow fretfully, ‘he’s a single gentleman—he’s—be quiet, can’t you, man? Don’t you see this talk is not relished yonder?’

Regardless of this whispered remonstrance, and affecting not to hear it, his tormentor provokingly continued:

‘Single men have had daughters before now. Perhaps she may be his daughter, though he is not married.’

‘What do you mean?’ said Joe, adding in an undertone as he approached him again, ‘You’ll come in for it presently, I know you will!’

‘I mean no harm’—returned the traveller boldly, ‘and have said none that I know of. I ask a few questions—as any stranger may, and not unnaturally—about the inmates of a remarkable house in a neighbourhood which is new to me, and you are as aghast and

disturbed as if I were talking treason against King George. Perhaps you can tell me why, sir, for (as I say) I am a stranger, and this is Greek to me?'

The latter observation was addressed to the obvious cause of Joe Willet's discomposure, who had risen and was adjusting his riding-cloak preparatory to sallying abroad. Briefly replying that he could give him no information, the young man beckoned to Joe, and handing him a piece of money in payment of his reckoning, hurried out attended by young Willet himself, who taking up a candle followed to light him to the house-door.

While Joe was absent on this errand, the elder Willet and his three companions continued to smoke with profound gravity, and in a deep silence, each having his eyes fixed on a huge copper boiler that was suspended over the fire. After some time John Willet slowly shook his head, and thereupon his friends slowly shook theirs; but no man withdrew his eyes from the boiler, or altered the solemn expression of his countenance in the slightest degree.

At length Joe returned—very talkative and conciliatory, as though with a strong presentiment that he was going to be found fault with.

'Such a thing as love is!' he said, drawing a chair near the fire, and looking round for sympathy. 'He has set off to walk to London,—all the way to London. His nag gone lame in riding out here this blessed afternoon, and comfortably littered down in our stable at this minute; and he giving up a good hot supper and our best bed, because Miss Haredale has gone to a masquerade up in town, and he has set his heart upon seeing her! I don't think I could persuade myself to do

that, beautiful as she is,—but then I'm not in love (at least I don't think I am) and that's the whole difference.'

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

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

'Silence, sir!' cried his father.

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

'Such a inconsiderate lad!' murmured Tom Cobb.

'Putting himself forward and wringing the very nose off his own father's face!' exclaimed the parish-clerk, metaphorically.

'What HAVE I done?' reasoned poor Joe.

'Silence, sir!' returned his father, 'what do you mean by talking, when you see people that are more than two or three times your age, sitting still and silent and not dreaming of saying a word?'

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

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

'Ah to be sure!' muttered Parkes, nodding gravely to the other two who nodded likewise, observing under their breaths that that was the point.

'The proper time's no time, sir,' repeated John Willet; 'when I was your age I never talked, I never wanted to talk. I listened and improved myself that's what I did.'

'And you'd find your father rather a tough customer in argeyment, Joe, if anybody was to try and tackle him,' said Parkes.

‘For the matter o’ that, Phil!’ observed Mr Willet, blowing a long, thin, spiral cloud of smoke out of the corner of his mouth, and staring at it abstractedly as it floated away; ‘For the matter o’ that, Phil, argeyment is a gift of Natur. If Natur has gifted a man with powers of argeyment, a man has a right to make the best of ‘em, and has not a right to stand on false delicacy, and deny that he is so gifted; for that is a turning of his back on Natur, a flouting of her, a slighting of her precious caskets, and a proving of one’s self to be a swine that isn’t worth her scattering pearls before.’

The landlord pausing here for a very long time, Mr Parkes naturally concluded that he had brought his discourse to an end; and therefore, turning to the young man with some austerity, exclaimed:

‘You hear what your father says, Joe? You wouldn’t much like to tackle him in argeyment, I’m thinking, sir.’

‘IF,’ said John Willet, turning his eyes from the ceiling to the face of his interrupter, and uttering the monosyllable in capitals, to apprise him that he had put in his oar, as the vulgar say, with unbecoming and irreverent haste; ‘IF, sir, Natur has fixed upon me the gift of argeyment, why should I not own to it, and rather glory in the same? Yes, sir, I AM a tough customer that way. You are right, sir. My toughness has been proved, sir, in this room many and many a time, as I think you know; and if you don’t know,’ added John, putting his pipe in his mouth again, ‘so much the better, for I an’t proud and am not going to tell you.’

A general murmur from his three cronies, and a general shaking of heads at the copper boiler, assured John Willet that they had had good experience of his powers and needed no further evidence to

assure them of his superiority. John smoked with a little more dignity and surveyed them in silence.

‘It’s all very fine talking,’ muttered Joe, who had been fidgeting in his chair with divers uneasy gestures. ‘But if you mean to tell me that I’m never to open my lips—’

‘Silence, sir!’ roared his father. ‘No, you never are. When your opinion’s wanted, you give it. When you’re spoke to, you speak. When your opinion’s not wanted and you’re not spoke to, don’t you give an opinion and don’t you speak. The world’s undergone a nice alteration since my time, certainly. My belief is that there an’t any boys left—that there isn’t such a thing as a boy—that there’s nothing now between a male baby and a man—and that all the boys went out with his blessed Majesty King George the Second.’

‘That’s a very true observation, always excepting the young princes,’ said the parish-clerk, who, as the representative of church and state in that company, held himself bound to the nicest loyalty. ‘If it’s godly and righteous for boys, being of the ages of boys, to behave themselves like boys, then the young princes must be boys and cannot be otherwise.’

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

‘Certainly I have,’ replied the clerk.

‘Very good,’ said Mr Willet. ‘According to the constitution of mermaids, so much of a mermaid as is not a woman must be a fish. According to the constitution of young princes, so much of a young prince (if anything) as is not actually an angel, must be godly and righteous. Therefore if it’s becoming and godly and righteous in the

young princes (as it is at their ages) that they should be boys, they are and must be boys, and cannot by possibility be anything else.'

This elucidation of a knotty point being received with such marks of approval as to put John Willet into a good humour, he contented himself with repeating to his son his command of silence, and addressing the stranger, said:

'If you had asked your questions of a grown-up person—of me or any of these gentlemen—you'd have had some satisfaction, and wouldn't have wasted breath. Miss Haredale is Mr Geoffrey Haredale's niece.'

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

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

'Not dead!' cried the other.

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

The cronies nodded to each other, and Mr Parkes remarked in an undertone, shaking his head meanwhile as who should say, 'let no man contradict me, for I won't believe him,' that John Willet was in amazing force to-night, and fit to tackle a Chief Justice.

The stranger suffered a short pause to elapse, and then asked abruptly, 'What do you mean?'

'More than you think for, friend,' returned John Willet. 'Perhaps there's more meaning in them words than you suspect.'

'Perhaps there is,' said the strange man, gruffly; 'but what the devil do you speak in such mysteries for? You tell me, first, that a man is not alive, nor yet dead—then, that he's not dead in a common sort of way—then, that you mean a great deal more than I think for. To tell

you the truth, you may do that easily; for so far as I can make out, you mean nothing. What DO you mean, I ask again?'

'That,' returned the landlord, a little brought down from his dignity by the stranger's surliness, 'is a Maypole story, and has been any time these four-and-twenty years. That story is Solomon Daisy's story. It belongs to the house; and nobody but Solomon Daisy has ever told it under this roof, or ever shall—that's more.'

The man glanced at the parish-clerk, whose air of consciousness and importance plainly betokened him to be the person referred to, and, observing that he had taken his pipe from his lips, after a very long whiff to keep it alight, and was evidently about to tell his story without further solicitation, gathered his large coat about him, and shrinking further back was almost lost in the gloom of the spacious chimney-corner, except when the flame, struggling from under a great faggot, whose weight almost crushed it for the time, shot upward with a strong and sudden glare, and illumining his figure for a moment, seemed afterwards to cast it into deeper obscurity than before.

By this flickering light, which made the old room, with its heavy timbers and panelled walls, look as if it were built of polished ebony —the wind roaring and howling without, now rattling the latch and creaking the hinges of the stout oaken door, and now driving at the casement as though it would beat it in—by this light, and under circumstances so auspicious, Solomon Daisy began his tale:

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

Here he came to a dead stop, and made so long a pause that even John Willet grew impatient and asked why he did not proceed.

‘Cobb,’ said Solomon Daisy, dropping his voice and appealing to the post-office keeper; ‘what day of the month is this?’

‘The nineteenth.’

‘Of March,’ said the clerk, bending forward, ‘the nineteenth of March; that’s very strange.’

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

‘It was Mr Reuben Haredale, Mr Geoffrey’s elder brother, that twenty-two years ago was the owner of the Warren, which, as Joe has said—not that you remember it, Joe, for a boy like you can’t do that, but because you have often heard me say so—was then a much larger and better place, and a much more valuable property than it is now. His lady was lately dead, and he was left with one child—the Miss Haredale you have been inquiring about—who was then scarcely a year old.’

Although the speaker addressed himself to the man who had shown so much curiosity about this same family, and made a pause here as if expecting some exclamation of surprise or encouragement, the latter made no remark, nor gave any indication that he heard or was interested in what was said. Solomon therefore turned to his old companions, whose noses were brightly illuminated by the deep red glow from the bowls of their pipes; assured, by long experience, of their attention, and resolved to show his sense of such indecent behaviour.

‘Mr Haredale,’ said Solomon, turning his back upon the strange man, ‘left this place when his lady died, feeling it lonely like, and went up to London, where he stopped some months; but finding that place as lonely as this—as I suppose and have always heard say—

he suddenly came back again with his little girl to the Warren, bringing with him besides, that day, only two women servants, and his steward, and a gardener.'

Mr Daisy stopped to take a whiff at his pipe, which was going out, and then proceeded—at first in a snuffling tone, occasioned by keen enjoyment of the tobacco and strong pulling at the pipe, and afterwards with increasing distinctness:

'—Bringing with him two women servants, and his steward, and a gardener. The rest stopped behind up in London, and were to follow next day. It happened that that night, an old gentleman who lived at Chigwell Row, and had long been poorly, deceased, and an order came to me at half after twelve o'clock at night to go and toll the passing-bell.'

There was a movement in the little group of listeners, sufficiently indicative of the strong repugnance any one of them would have felt to have turned out at such a time upon such an errand. The clerk felt and understood it, and pursued his theme accordingly.

'It WAS a dreary thing, especially as the grave-digger was laid up in his bed, from long working in a damp soil and sitting down to take his dinner on cold tombstones, and I was consequently under obligation to go alone, for it was too late to hope to get any other companion. However, I wasn't unprepared for it; as the old gentleman had often made it a request that the bell should be tolled as soon as possible after the breath was out of his body, and he had been expected to go for some days. I put as good a face upon it as I could, and muffling myself up (for it was mortal cold), started out with a lighted lantern in one hand and the key of the church in the other.'

At this point of the narrative, the dress of the strange man rustled as if he had turned himself to hear more distinctly. Slightly pointing over his shoulder, Solomon elevated his eyebrows and nodded a silent inquiry to Joe whether this was the case. Joe shaded his eyes with his hand and peered into the corner, but could make out nothing, and so shook his head.

‘It was just such a night as this; blowing a hurricane, raining heavily, and very dark—I often think now, darker than I ever saw it before or since; that may be my fancy, but the houses were all close shut and the folks in doors, and perhaps there is only one other man who knows how dark it really was. I got into the church, chained the door back so that it should keep ajar—for, to tell the truth, I didn’t like to be shut in there alone—and putting my lantern on the stone seat in the little corner where the bell-rope is, sat down beside it to trim the candle.

‘I sat down to trim the candle, and when I had done so I could not persuade myself to get up again, and go about my work. I don’t know how it was, but I thought of all the ghost stories I had ever heard, even those that I had heard when I was a boy at school, and had forgotten long ago; and they didn’t come into my mind one after another, but all crowding at once, like. I recollected one story there was in the village, how that on a certain night in the year (it might be that very night for anything I knew), all the dead people came out of the ground and sat at the heads of their own graves till morning. This made me think how many people I had known, were buried between the church-door and the churchyard gate, and what a dreadful thing it would be to have to pass among them and know them again, so

earthy and unlike themselves. I had known all the niches and arches in the church from a child; still, I couldn't persuade myself that those were their natural shadows which I saw on the pavement, but felt sure there were some ugly figures hiding among 'em and peeping out. Thinking on in this way, I began to think of the old gentleman who was just dead, and I could have sworn, as I looked up the dark chancel, that I saw him in his usual place, wrapping his shroud about him and shivering as if he felt it cold. All this time I sat listening and listening, and hardly dared to breathe. At length I started up and took the bell-rope in my hands. At that minute there rang—not that bell, for I had hardly touched the rope—but another!

'I heard the ringing of another bell, and a deep bell too, plainly. It was only for an instant, and even then the wind carried the sound away, but I heard it. I listened for a long time, but it rang no more. I had heard of corpse candles, and at last I persuaded myself that this must be a corpse bell tolling of itself at midnight for the dead. I tolled my bell—how, or how long, I don't know—and ran home to bed as fast as I could touch the ground.

'I was up early next morning after a restless night, and told the story to my neighbours. Some were serious and some made light of it; I don't think anybody believed it real. But, that morning, Mr Reuben Haredale was found murdered in his bedchamber; and in his hand was a piece of the cord attached to an alarm-bell outside the roof, which hung in his room and had been cut asunder, no doubt by the murderer, when he seized it.

'That was the bell I heard.

‘A bureau was found opened, and a cash-box, which Mr Haredale had brought down that day, and was supposed to contain a large sum of money, was gone. The steward and gardener were both missing and both suspected for a long time, but they were never found, though hunted far and wide. And far enough they might have looked for poor Mr Rudge the steward, whose body—scarcely to be recognised by his clothes and the watch and ring he wore—was found, months afterwards, at the bottom of a piece of water in the grounds, with a deep gash in the breast where he had been stabbed with a knife. He was only partly dressed; and people all agreed that he had been sitting up reading in his own room, where there were many traces of blood, and was suddenly fallen upon and killed before his master.

Everybody now knew that the gardener must be the murderer, and though he has never been heard of from that day to this, he will be, mark my words. The crime was committed this day two-and-twenty years—on the nineteenth of March, one thousand seven hundred and fifty-three. On the nineteenth of March in some year—no matter when—I know it, I am sure of it, for we have always, in some strange way or other, been brought back to the subject on that day ever since—on the nineteenth of March in some year, sooner or later, that man will be discovered.’

Chapter Two

A strange story!' said the man who had been the cause of the narration.—'Stranger still if it comes about as you predict. Is that all?'

A question so unexpected, nettled Solomon Daisy not a little. By dint of relating the story very often, and ornamenting it (according to village report) with a few flourishes suggested by the various hearers from time to time, he had come by degrees to tell it with great effect; and 'Is that all?' after the climax, was not what he was accustomed to.

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

'I think so too. My horse, young man! He is but a hack hired from a roadside posting house, but he must carry me to London to- night.'

'To-night!' said Joe.

'To-night,' returned the other. 'What do you stare at? This tavern would seem to be a house of call for all the gaping idlers of the

neighbourhood!'

At this remark, which evidently had reference to the scrutiny he had undergone, as mentioned in the foregoing chapter, the eyes of John Willet and his friends were diverted with marvellous rapidity to the copper boiler again. Not so with Joe, who, being a mettlesome fellow, returned the stranger's angry glance with a steady look, and rejoined:

'It is not a very bold thing to wonder at your going on to-night. Surely you have been asked such a harmless question in an inn before, and in better weather than this. I thought you mightn't know the way, as you seem strange to this part.'

'The way—' repeated the other, irritably.

'Yes. DO you know it?'

'I'll—humph!—I'll find it,' replied the nian, waving his hand and turning on his heel. 'Landlord, take the reckoning here.'

John Willet did as he was desired; for on that point he was seldom slow, except in the particulars of giving change, and testing the goodness of any piece of coin that was proffered to him, by the application of his teeth or his tongue, or some other test, or in doubtful cases, by a long series of tests terminating in its rejection. The guest then wrapped his garments about him so as to shelter himself as effectually as he could from the rough weather, and without any word or sign of farewell betook himself to the stableyard. Here Joe (who had left the room on the conclusion of their short dialogue) was protecting himself and the horse from the rain under the shelter of an old penthouse roof.

‘He’s pretty much of my opinion,’ said Joe, patting the horse upon the neck. ‘I’ll wager that your stopping here to-night would please him better than it would please me.’

‘He and I are of different opinions, as we have been more than once on our way here,’ was the short reply.

‘So I was thinking before you came out, for he has felt your spurs, poor beast.’

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

‘You’ll know me again, I see,’ he said, marking the young fellow’s earnest gaze, when he had sprung into the saddle.

‘The man’s worth knowing, master, who travels a road he don’t know, mounted on a jaded horse, and leaves good quarters to do it on such a night as this.’

‘You have sharp eyes and a sharp tongue, I find.’

‘Both I hope by nature, but the last grows rusty sometimes for want of using.’

‘Use the first less too, and keep their sharpness for your sweethearts, boy,’ said the man.

So saying he shook his hand from the bridle, struck him roughly on the head with the butt end of his whip, and galloped away; dashing through the mud and darkness with a headlong speed, which few badly mounted horsemen would have cared to venture, even had they been thoroughly acquainted with the country; and which, to one who knew nothing of the way he rode, was attended at every step with great hazard and danger.

The roads, even within twelve miles of London, were at that time ill paved, seldom repaired, and very badly made. The way this rider traversed had been ploughed up by the wheels of heavy waggons, and rendered rotten by the frosts and thaws of the preceding winter, or possibly of many winters. Great holes and gaps had been worn into the soil, which, being now filled with water from the late rains, were not easily distinguishable even by day; and a plunge into any one of them might have brought down a surer-footed horse than the poor beast now urged forward to the utmost extent of his powers. Sharp flints and stones rolled from under his hoofs continually; the rider could scarcely see beyond the animal's head, or farther on either side than his own arm would have extended. At that time, too, all the roads in the neighbourhood of the metropolis were infested by footpads or highwaymen, and it was a night, of all others, in which any evil- disposed person of this class might have pursued his unlawful calling with little fear of detection.

Still, the traveller dashed forward at the same reckless pace, regardless alike of the dirt and wet which flew about his head, the profound darkness of the night, and the probability of encountering some desperate characters abroad. At every turn and angle, even where a deviation from the direct course might have been least expected, and could not possibly be seen until he was close upon it, he guided the bridle with an unerring hand, and kept the middle of the road. Thus he sped onward, raising himself in the stirrups, leaning his body forward until it almost touched the horse's neck, and flourishing his heavy whip above his head with the fervour of a madman.

There are times when, the elements being in unusual commotion, those who are bent on daring enterprises, or agitated by great thoughts, whether of good or evil, feel a mysterious sympathy with the tumult of nature, and are roused into corresponding violence. In the midst of thunder, lightning, and storm, many tremendous deeds have been committed; men, self-possessed before, have given a sudden loose to passions they could no longer control. The demons of wrath and despair have striven to emulate those who ride the whirlwind and direct the storm; and man, lashed into madness with the roaring winds and boiling waters, has become for the time as wild and merciless as the elements themselves.

Whether the traveller was possessed by thoughts which the fury of the night had heated and stimulated into a quicker current, or was merely impelled by some strong motive to reach his journey's end, on he swept more like a hunted phantom than a man, nor checked his pace until, arriving at some cross roads, one of which led by a longer route to the place whence he had lately started, he bore down so suddenly upon a vehicle which was coming towards him, that in the effort to avoid it he well-nigh pulled his horse upon his haunches, and narrowly escaped being thrown.

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

'A friend!' replied the traveller.

'A friend!' repeated the voice. 'Who calls himself a friend and rides like that, abusing Heaven's gifts in the shape of horseflesh, and endangering, not only his own neck (which might be no great matter) but the necks of other people?'

‘You have a lantern there, I see,’ said the traveller dismounting, ‘lend it me for a moment. You have wounded my horse, I think, with your shaft or wheel.’

‘Wounded him!’ cried the other, ‘if I haven’t killed him, it’s no fault of yours. What do you mean by galloping along the king’s highway like that, eh?’

‘Give me the light,’ returned the traveller, snatching it from his hand, ‘and don’t ask idle questions of a man who is in no mood for talking.’

‘If you had said you were in no mood for talking before, I should perhaps have been in no mood for lighting,’ said the voice. ‘Hows’ever as it’s the poor horse that’s damaged and not you, one of you is welcome to the light at all events—but it’s not the crusty one.’

The traveller returned no answer to this speech, but holding the light near to his panting and reeking beast, examined him in limb and carcass. Meanwhile, the other man sat very composedly in his vehicle, which was a kind of chaise with a depository for a large bag of tools, and watched his proceedings with a careful eye.

The looker-on was a round, red-faced, sturdy yeoman, with a double chin, and a voice husky with good living, good sleeping, good humour, and good health. He was past the prime of life, but Father Time is not always a hard parent, and, though he tarries for none of his children, often lays his hand lightly upon those who have used him well; making them old men and women inexorably enough, but leaving their hearts and spirits young and in full vigour. With such people the grey head is but the impression of the old fellow’s hand in

giving them his blessing, and every wrinkle but a notch in the quiet calendar of a well-spent life.

The person whom the traveller had so abruptly encountered was of this kind: bluff, hale, hearty, and in a green old age: at peace with himself, and evidently disposed to be so with all the world. Although muffled up in divers coats and handkerchiefs—one of which, passed over his crown, and tied in a convenient crease of his double chin, secured his three-cornered hat and bob-wig from blowing off his head—there was no disguising his plump and comfortable figure; neither did certain dirty finger-marks upon his face give it any other than an odd and comical expression, through which its natural good humour shone with undiminished lustre.

‘He is not hurt,’ said the traveller at length, raising his head and the lantern together.

‘You have found that out at last, have you?’ rejoined the old man. ‘My eyes have seen more light than yours, but I wouldn’t change with you.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Mean! I could have told you he wasn’t hurt, five minutes ago. Give me the light, friend; ride forward at a gentler pace; and good night.’

In handing up the lantern, the man necessarily cast its rays full on the speaker’s face. Their eyes met at the instant. He suddenly dropped it and crushed it with his foot.

‘Did you never see a locksmith before, that you start as if you had come upon a ghost?’ cried the old man in the chaise, ‘or is this,’ he added hastily, thrusting his hand into the tool basket and drawing out a hammer, ‘a scheme for robbing me? I know these roads, friend.

When I travel them, I carry nothing but a few shillings, and not a crown's worth of them. I tell you plainly, to save us both trouble, that there's nothing to be got from me but a pretty stout arm considering my years, and this tool, which, mayhap from long acquaintance with, I can use pretty briskly. You shall not have it all your own way, I promise you, if you play at that game. With these words he stood upon the defensive.

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

'Then what and who are you?' returned the locksmith. 'You know my name, it seems. Let me know yours.'

'I have not gained the information from any confidence of yours, but from the inscription on your cart which tells it to all the town,' replied the traveller.

'You have better eyes for that than you had for your horse, then,' said Varden, descending nimbly from his chaise; 'who are you? Let me see your face.'

While the locksmith alighted, the traveller had regained his saddle, from which he now confronted the old man, who, moving as the horse moved in chafing under the tightened rein, kept close beside him.

'Let me see your face, I say.'

'Stand off!'

'No masquerading tricks,' said the locksmith, 'and tales at the club to-morrow, how Gabriel Varden was frightened by a surly voice and a dark night. Stand—let me see your face.'

Finding that further resistance would only involve him in a personal struggle with an antagonist by no means to be despised, the traveller

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

Perhaps two men more powerfully contrasted, never opposed each other face to face. The ruddy features of the locksmith so set off and heightened the excessive paleness of the man on horseback, that he looked like a bloodless ghost, while the moisture, which hard riding had brought out upon his skin, hung there in dark and heavy drops, like dews of agony and death. The countenance of the old locksmith lighted up with the smile of one expecting to detect in this unpromising stranger some latent roguery of eye or lip, which should reveal a familiar person in that arch disguise, and spoil his jest. The face of the other, sullen and fierce, but shrinking too, was that of a man who stood at bay; while his firmly closed jaws, his puckered mouth, and more than all a certain stealthy motion of the hand within his breast, seemed to announce a desperate purpose very foreign to acting, or child's play.

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

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

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

'I don't,' said Gabriel; 'to be plain with you, friend, you don't carry in your countenance a letter of recommendation.'

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

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

'I will, at any cost,' rejoined the traveller. 'In proof of it, lay this to heart—that you were never in such peril of your life as you have been within these few moments; when you are within five minutes of

breathing your last, you will not be nearer death than you have been to-night!'

'Aye!' said the sturdy locksmith.

'Aye! and a violent death.'

'From whose hand?'

'From mine,' replied the traveller.

With that he put spurs to his horse, and rode away; at first plashing heavily through the mire at a smart trot, but gradually increasing in speed until the last sound of his horse's hoofs died away upon the wind; when he was again hurrying on at the same furious gallop, which had been his pace when the locksmith first encountered him.

Gabriel Varden remained standing in the road with the broken lantern in his hand, listening in stupefied silence until no sound reached his ear but the moaning of the wind, and the fast-falling rain; when he struck himself one or two smart blows in the breast by way of rousing himself, and broke into an exclamation of surprise.

'What in the name of wonder can this fellow be! a madman? a highwayman? a cut-throat? If he had not scoured off so fast, we'd have seen who was in most danger, he or I. I never nearer death than I have been to-night! I hope I may be no nearer to it for a score of years to come—if so, I'll be content to be no farther from it. My stars!—a pretty brag this to a stout man—pooh, pooh!'

Gabriel resumed his seat, and looked wistfully up the road by which the traveller had come; murmuring in a half whisper:

'The Maypole—two miles to the Maypole. I came the other road from the Warren after a long day's work at locks and bells, on

purpose that I should not come by the Maypole and break my promise to Martha by looking in—there's resolution! It would be dangerous to go on to London without a light; and it's four miles, and a good half mile besides, to the Halfway-House; and between this and that is the very place where one needs a light most. Two miles to the Maypole! I told Martha I wouldn't; I said I wouldn't, and I didn't —there's resolution!'

Repeating these two last words very often, as if to compensate for the little resolution he was going to show by piquing himself on the great resolution he had shown, Gabriel Varden quietly turned back, determining to get a light at the Maypole, and to take nothing but a light.

When he got to the Maypole, however, and Joe, responding to his well-known hail, came running out to the horse's head, leaving the door open behind him, and disclosing a delicious perspective of warmth and brightness—when the ruddy gleam of the fire, streaming through the old red curtains of the common room, seemed to bring with it, as part of itself, a pleasant hum of voices, and a fragrant odour of steaming grog and rare tobacco, all steeped as it were in the cheerful glow—when the shadows, flitting across the curtain, showed that those inside had risen from their snug seats, and were making room in the snuggest corner (how well he knew that corner!) for the honest locksmith, and a broad glare, suddenly streaming up, bespoke the goodness of the crackling log from which a brilliant train of sparks was doubtless at that moment whirling up the chimney in honour of his coming—when, superadded to these enticements, there stole upon him from the distant kitchen a gentle sound of

frying, with a musical clatter of plates and dishes, and a savoury smell that made even the boisterous wind a perfume—Gabriel felt his firmness oozing rapidly away. He tried to look stoically at the tavern, but his features would relax into a look of fondness. He turned his head the other way, and the cold black country seemed to frown him off, and drive him for a refuge into its hospitable arms.

‘The merciful man, Joe,’ said the locksmith, ‘is merciful to his beast. I’ll get out for a little while.’

And how natural it was to get out! And how unnatural it seemed for a sober man to be plodding wearily along through miry roads, encountering the rude buffets of the wind and pelting of the rain, when there was a clean floor covered with crisp white sand, a well swept hearth, a blazing fire, a table decorated with white cloth, bright pewter flagons, and other tempting preparations for a well- cooked meal—when there were these things, and company disposed to make the most of them, all ready to his hand, and entreating him to enjoyment!

Chapter Three

Such were the locksmith's thoughts when first seated in the snug corner, and slowly recovering from a pleasant defect of vision— pleasant, because occasioned by the wind blowing in his eyes—which made it a matter of sound policy and duty to himself, that he should take refuge from the weather, and tempted him, for the same reason, to aggravate a slight cough, and declare he felt but poorly. Such were still his thoughts more than a full hour afterwards, when, supper over, he still sat with shining jovial face in the same warm nook, listening to the cricket-like chirrup of little Solomon Daisy, and bearing no unimportant or slightly respected part in the social gossip round the Maypole fire.

'I wish he may be an honest man, that's all,' said Solomon, winding up a variety of speculations relative to the stranger, concerning whom Gabriel had compared notes with the company, and so raised a grave discussion; 'I wish he may be an honest man.'

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

‘I don’t,’ said Joe.

‘No!’ cried Gabriel.

‘No. He struck me with his whip, the coward, when he was mounted and I afoot, and I should be better pleased that he turned out what I think him.’

‘And what may that be, Joe?’

‘No good, Mr Varden. You may shake your head, father, but I say no good, and will say no good, and I would say no good a hundred times over, if that would bring him back to have the drubbing he deserves.’

‘Hold your tongue, sir,’ said John Willet.

‘I won’t, father. It’s all along of you that he ventured to do what he did. Seeing me treated like a child, and put down like a fool, HE plucks up a heart and has a fling at a fellow that he thinks—and may well think too—hasn’t a grain of spirit. But he’s mistaken, as I’ll show him, and as I’ll show all of you before long.’

‘Does the boy know what he’s a saying of!’ cried the astonished John Willet.

‘Father,’ returned Joe, ‘I know what I say and mean, well—better than you do when you hear me. I can bear with you, but I cannot bear the contempt that your treating me in the way you do, brings upon me from others every day. Look at other young men of my age. Have they no liberty, no will, no right to speak? Are they obliged to sit mumchance, and to be ordered about till they are the laughing-stock of young and old? I am a bye-word all over Chigwell, and I say—and it’s fairer my saying so now, than waiting till you are dead, and I have got your money—I say, that before long I shall be driven to break

such bounds, and that when I do, it won't be me that you'll have to blame, but your own self, and no other.'

John Willet was so amazed by the exasperation and boldness of his hopeful son, that he sat as one bewildered, staring in a ludicrous manner at the boiler, and endeavouring, but quite ineffectually, to collect his tardy thoughts, and invent an answer. The guests, scarcely less disturbed, were equally at a loss; and at length, with a variety of muttered, half-expressed condolences, and pieces of advice, rose to depart; being at the same time slightly muddled with liquor.

The honest locksmith alone addressed a few words of coherent and sensible advice to both parties, urging John Willet to remember that Joe was nearly arrived at man's estate, and should not be ruled with too tight a hand, and exhorting Joe himself to bear with his father's caprices, and rather endeavour to turn them aside by temperate remonstrance than by ill-timed rebellion. This advice was received as such advice usually is. On John Willet it made almost as much impression as on the sign outside the door, while Joe, who took it in the best part, avowed himself more obliged than he could well express, but politely intimated his intention nevertheless of taking his own course uninfluenced by anybody.

'You have always been a very good friend to me, Mr Varden,' he said, as they stood without, in the porch, and the locksmith was equipping himself for his journey home; 'I take it very kind of you to say all this, but the time's nearly come when the Maypole and I must part company.'

'Roving stones gather no moss, Joe,' said Gabriel.

‘Nor milestones much,’ replied Joe. ‘I’m little better than one here, and see as much of the world.’

‘Then, what would you do, Joe?’ pursued the locksmith, stroking his chin reflectively. ‘What could you be? Where could you go, you see?’

‘I must trust to chance, Mr Varden.’

‘A bad thing to trust to, Joe. I don’t like it. I always tell my girl when we talk about a husband for her, never to trust to chance, but to make sure beforehand that she has a good man and true, and then chance will neither make her nor break her. What are you fidgeting about there, Joe? Nothing gone in the harness, I hope?’

‘No no,’ said Joe—finding, however, something very engrossing to do in the way of strapping and buckling—‘Miss Dolly quite well?’

‘Hearty, thankye. She looks pretty enough to be well, and good too.’

‘She’s always both, sir’—

‘So she is, thank God!’

‘I hope,’ said Joe after some hesitation, ‘that you won’t tell this story against me—this of my having been beat like the boy they’d make of me—at all events, till I have met this man again and settled the account. It’ll be a better story then.’

‘Why who should I tell it to?’ returned Gabriel. ‘They know it here, and I’m not likely to come across anybody else who would care about it.’

‘That’s true enough,’ said the young fellow with a sigh. ‘I quite forgot that. Yes, that’s true!’

So saying, he raised his face, which was very red,—no doubt from the exertion of strapping and buckling as aforesaid,—and giving the reins to the old man, who had by this time taken his seat, sighed again and bade him good night.

‘Good night!’ cried Gabriel. ‘Now think better of what we have just been speaking of; and don’t be rash, there’s a good fellow! I have an interest in you, and wouldn’t have you cast yourself away. Good night!’

Returning his cheery farewell with cordial goodwill, Joe Willet lingered until the sound of wheels ceased to vibrate in his ears, and then, shaking his head mournfully, re-entered the house.

Gabriel Varden went his way towards London, thinking of a great many things, and most of all of flaming terms in which to relate his adventure, and so account satisfactorily to Mrs Varden for visiting the Maypole, despite certain solemn covenants between himself and that lady. Thinking begets, not only thought, but drowsiness occasionally, and the more the locksmith thought, the more sleepy he became.

A man may be very sober—or at least firmly set upon his legs on that neutral ground which lies between the confines of perfect sobriety and slight tipsiness—and yet feel a strong tendency to mingle up present circumstances with others which have no manner of connection with them; to confound all consideration of persons, things, times, and places; and to jumble his disjointed thoughts together in a kind of mental kaleidoscope, producing combinations as unexpected as they are transitory. This was Gabriel Varden’s state, as, nodding in his dog sleep, and leaving his horse to pursue a

road with which he was well acquainted, he got over the ground unconsciously, and drew nearer and nearer home. He had roused himself once, when the horse stopped until the turnpike gate was opened, and had cried a lusty ‘good night!’ to the toll- keeper; but then he awoke out of a dream about picking a lock in the stomach of the Great Mogul, and even when he did wake, mixed up the turnpike man with his mother-in-law who had been dead twenty years. It is not surprising, therefore, that he soon relapsed, and jogged heavily along, quite insensible to his progress.

And, now, he approached the great city, which lay outstretched before him like a dark shadow on the ground, reddening the sluggish air with a deep dull light, that told of labyrinths of public ways and shops, and swarms of busy people. Approaching nearer and nearer yet, this halo began to fade, and the causes which produced it slowly to develop themselves. Long lines of poorly lighted streets might be faintly traced, with here and there a lighter spot, where lamps were clustered round a square or market, or round some great building; after a time these grew more distinct, and the lamps themselves were visible; slight yellow specks, that seemed to be rapidly snuffed out, one by one, as intervening obstacles hid them from the sight. Then, sounds arose—the striking of church clocks, the distant bark of dogs, the hum of traffic in the streets; then outlines might be traced—tall steeples looming in the air, and piles of unequal roofs oppressed by chimneys; then, the noise swelled into a louder sound, and forms grew more distinct and numerous still, and London—visible in the darkness by its own faint light, and not by that of Heaven—was at hand.

The locksmith, however, all unconscious of its near vicinity, still jogged on, half sleeping and half waking, when a loud cry at no great distance ahead, roused him with a start.

For a moment or two he looked about him like a man who had been transported to some strange country in his sleep, but soon recognising familiar objects, rubbed his eyes lazily and might have relapsed again, but that the cry was repeated—not once or twice or thrice, but many times, and each time, if possible, with increased vehemence. Thoroughly aroused, Gabriel, who was a bold man and not easily daunted, made straight to the spot, urging on his stout little horse as if for life or death.

The matter indeed looked sufficiently serious, for, coming to the place whence the cries had proceeded, he descried the figure of a man extended in an apparently lifeless state upon the pathway, and, hovering round him, another person with a torch in his hand, which he waved in the air with a wild impatience, redoubling meanwhile those cries for help which had brought the locksmith to the spot.

‘What’s here to do?’ said the old man, alighting. ‘How’s this— what —Barnaby?’

The bearer of the torch shook his long loose hair back from his eyes, and thrusting his face eagerly into that of the locksmith, fixed upon him a look which told his history at once.

‘You know me, Barnaby?’ said Varden.

He nodded—not once or twice, but a score of times, and that with a fantastic exaggeration which would have kept his head in motion for an hour, but that the locksmith held up his finger, and fixing his

eye sternly upon him caused him to desist; then pointed to the body with an inquiring look.

‘There’s blood upon him,’ said Barnaby with a shudder. ‘It makes me sick!’

‘How came it there?’ demanded Varden.

‘Steel, steel, steel!’ he replied fiercely, imitating with his hand the thrust of a sword.

‘Is he robbed?’ said the locksmith.

Barnaby caught him by the arm, and nodded ‘Yes;’ then pointed towards the city.

‘Oh!’ said the old man, bending over the body and looking round as he spoke into Barnaby’s pale face, strangely lighted up by something that was NOT intellect. ‘The robber made off that way, did he? Well, well, never mind that just now. Hold your torch this way—a little farther off—so. Now stand quiet, while I try to see what harm is done.’

With these words, he applied himself to a closer examination of the prostrate form, while Barnaby, holding the torch as he had been directed, looked on in silence, fascinated by interest or curiosity, but repelled nevertheless by some strong and secret horror which convulsed him in every nerve.

As he stood, at that moment, half shrinking back and half bending forward, both his face and figure were full in the strong glare of the link, and as distinctly revealed as though it had been broad day. He was about three-and-twenty years old, and though rather spare, of a fair height and strong make. His hair, of which he had a great profusion, was red, and hanging in disorder about his face and

shoulders, gave to his restless looks an expression quite unearthly—enhanced by the paleness of his complexion, and the glassy lustre of his large protruding eyes. Startling as his aspect was, the features were good, and there was something even plaintive in his wan and haggard aspect. But, the absence of the soul is far more terrible in a living man than in a dead one; and in this unfortunate being its noblest powers were wanting.

His dress was of green, clumsily trimmed here and there—apparently by his own hands—with gaudy lace; brightest where the cloth was most worn and soiled, and poorest where it was at the best. A pair of tawdry ruffles dangled at his wrists, while his throat was nearly bare. He had ornamented his hat with a cluster of peacock's feathers, but they were limp and broken, and now trailed negligently down his back. Girt to his side was the steel hilt of an old sword without blade or scabbard; and some particoloured ends of ribands and poor glass toys completed the ornamental portion of his attire. The fluttered and confused disposition of all the motley scraps that formed his dress, bespoke, in a scarcely less degree than his eager and unsettled manner, the disorder of his mind, and by a grotesque contrast set off and heightened the more impressive wildness of his face.

'Barnaby,' said the locksmith, after a hasty but careful inspection, 'this man is not dead, but he has a wound in his side, and is in a fainting-fit.'

'I know him, I know him!' cried Barnaby, clapping his hands.

'Know him?' repeated the locksmith.

‘Hush!’ said Barnaby, laying his fingers upon his lips. ‘He went out to-day a wooing. I wouldn’t for a light guinea that he should never go a wooing again, for, if he did, some eyes would grow dim that are now as bright as—see, when I talk of eyes, the stars come out! Whose eyes are they? If they are angels’ eyes, why do they look down here and see good men hurt, and only wink and sparkle all the night?’

‘Now Heaven help this silly fellow,’ murmured the perplexed locksmith; ‘can he know this gentleman? His mother’s house is not far off; I had better see if she can tell me who he is. Barnaby, my man, help me to put him in the chaise, and we’ll ride home together.’

‘I can’t touch him!’ cried the idiot falling back, and shuddering as with a strong spasm; he’s bloody!’

‘It’s in his nature, I know,’ muttered the locksmith, ‘it’s cruel to ask him, but I must have help. Barnaby—good Barnaby—dear Barnaby—if you know this gentleman, for the sake of his life and everybody’s life that loves him, help me to raise him and lay him down.’

‘Cover him then, wrap him close—don’t let me see it—smell it—hear the word. Don’t speak the word—don’t!’

‘No, no, I’ll not. There, you see he’s covered now. Gently. Well done, well done!’

They placed him in the carriage with great ease, for Barnaby was strong and active, but all the time they were so occupied he shivered from head to foot, and evidently experienced an ecstasy of terror.

This accomplished, and the wounded man being covered with Varden’s own greatcoat which he took off for the purpose, they proceeded onward at a brisk pace: Barnaby gaily counting the stars

upon his fingers, and Gabriel inwardly congratulating himself upon having an adventure now, which would silence Mrs Varden on the subject of the Maypole, for that night, or there was no faith in woman.

Chapter Four

In the venerable suburb—it was a suburb once—of Clerkenwell, towards that part of its confines which is nearest to the Charter House, and in one of those cool, shady Streets, of which a few, widely scattered and dispersed, yet remain in such old parts of the metropolis,—each tenement quietly vegetating like an ancient citizen who long ago retired from business, and dozing on in its infirmity until in course of time it tumbles down, and is replaced by some extravagant young heir, flaunting in stucco and ornamental work, and all the vanities of modern days,—in this quarter, and in a street of this description, the business of the present chapter lies.

At the time of which it treats, though only six-and-sixty years ago, a very large part of what is London now had no existence. Even in the brains of the wildest speculators, there had sprung up no long rows of streets connecting Highgate with Whitechapel, no assemblages of palaces in the swampy levels, nor little cities in the open fields. Although this part of town was then, as now, parcelled

out in streets, and plentifully peopled, it wore a different aspect. There were gardens to many of the houses, and trees by the pavement side; with an air of freshness breathing up and down, which in these days would be sought in vain. Fields were nigh at hand, through which the New River took its winding course, and where there was merry haymaking in the summer time. Nature was not so far removed, or hard to get at, as in these days; and although there were busy trades in Clerkenwell, and working jewellers by scores, it was a purer place, with farm-houses nearer to it than many modern Londoners would readily believe, and lovers' walks at no great distance, which turned into squalid courts, long before the lovers of this age were born, or, as the phrase goes, thought of.

In one of these streets, the cleanest of them all, and on the shady side of the way—for good housewives know that sunlight damages their cherished furniture, and so choose the shade rather than its intrusive glare—there stood the house with which we have to deal. It was a modest building, not very straight, not large, not tall; not bold-faced, with great staring windows, but a shy, blinking house, with a conical roof going up into a peak over its garret window of four small panes of glass, like a cocked hat on the head of an elderly gentleman with one eye. It was not built of brick or lofty stone, but of wood and plaster; it was not planned with a dull and wearisome regard to regularity, for no one window matched the other, or seemed to have the slightest reference to anything besides itself.

The shop—for it had a shop—was, with reference to the first floor, where shops usually are; and there all resemblance between it and any other shop stopped short and ceased. People who went in and

out didn’t go up a flight of steps to it, or walk easily in upon a level with the street, but dived down three steep stairs, as into a cellar. Its floor was paved with stone and brick, as that of any other cellar might be; and in lieu of window framed and glazed it had a great black wooden flap or shutter, nearly breast high from the ground, which turned back in the day-time, admitting as much cold air as light, and very often more. Behind this shop was a wainscoted parlour, looking first into a paved yard, and beyond that again into a little terrace garden, raised some feet above it. Any stranger would have supposed that this wainscoted parlour, saving for the door of communication by which he had entered, was cut off and detached from all the world; and indeed most strangers on their first entrance were observed to grow extremely thoughtful, as weighing and pondering in their minds whether the upper rooms were only approachable by ladders from without; never suspecting that two of the most unassuming and unlikely doors in existence, which the most ingenious mechanician on earth must of necessity have supposed to be the doors of closets, opened out of this room—each without the smallest preparation, or so much as a quarter of an inch of passage—upon two dark winding flights of stairs, the one upward, the other downward, which were the sole means of communication between that chamber and the other portions of the house.

With all these oddities, there was not a neater, more scrupulously tidy, or more punctiliously ordered house, in Clerkenwell, in London, in all England. There were not cleaner windows, or whiter floors, or brighter Stoves, or more highly shining articles of furniture in old mahogany; there was not more rubbing, scrubbing, burnishing and

polishing, in the whole street put together. Nor was this excellence attained without some cost and trouble and great expenditure of voice, as the neighbours were frequently reminded when the good lady of the house overlooked and assisted in its being put to rights on cleaning days—which were usually from Monday morning till Saturday night, both days inclusive.

Leaning against the door-post of this, his dwelling, the locksmith stood early on the morning after he had met with the wounded man, gazing disconsolately at a great wooden emblem of a key, painted in vivid yellow to resemble gold, which dangled from the house-front, and swung to and fro with a mournful creaking noise, as if complaining that it had nothing to unlock. Sometimes, he looked over his shoulder into the shop, which was so dark and dingy with numerous tokens of his trade, and so blackened by the smoke of a little forge, near which his ‘prentice was at work, that it would have been difficult for one unused to such espials to have distinguished anything but various tools of uncouth make and shape, great bunches of rusty keys, fragments of iron, half-finished locks, and such like things, which garnished the walls and hung in clusters from the ceiling.

After a long and patient contemplation of the golden key, and many such backward glances, Gabriel stepped into the road, and stole a look at the upper windows. One of them chanced to be thrown open at the moment, and a roguish face met his; a face lighted up by the loveliest pair of sparkling eyes that ever locksmith looked upon; the face of a pretty, laughing, girl; dimpled and fresh,

and healthful—the very impersonation of good-humour and blooming beauty.

‘Hush!’ she whispered, bending forward and pointing archly to the window underneath. ‘Mother is still asleep.’

‘Still, my dear,’ returned the locksmith in the same tone. ‘You talk as if she had been asleep all night, instead of little more than half an hour. But I’m very thankful. Sleep’s a blessing—no doubt about it.’ The last few words he muttered to himself.

‘How cruel of you to keep us up so late this morning, and never tell us where you were, or send us word!’ said the girl.

‘Ah Dolly, Dolly!’ returned the locksmith, shaking his head, and smiling, ‘how cruel of you to run upstairs to bed! Come down to breakfast, madcap, and come down lightly, or you’ll wake your mother. She must be tired, I am sure—I am.’

Keeping these latter words to himself, and returning his daughter’s nod, he was passing into the workshop, with the smile she had awakened still beaming on his face, when he just caught sight of his ‘prentice’s brown paper cap ducking down to avoid observation, and shrinking from the window back to its former place, which the wearer no sooner reached than he began to hammer lustily.

‘Listening again, Simon!’ said Gabriel to himself. ‘That’s bad. What in the name of wonder does he expect the girl to say, that I always catch him listening when SHE speaks, and never at any other time! A bad habit, Sim, a sneaking, underhanded way. Ah! you may hammer, but you won’t beat that out of me, if you work at it till your time’s up!’

So saying, and shaking his head gravely, he re-entered the workshop, and confronted the subject of these remarks.

‘There’s enough of that just now,’ said the locksmith. ‘You needn’t make any more of that confounded clatter. Breakfast’s ready.’

‘Sir,’ said Sim, looking up with amazing politeness, and a peculiar little bow cut short off at the neck, ‘I shall attend you immediately.’

‘I suppose,’ muttered Gabriel, ‘that’s out of the ‘Prentice’s Garland or the ‘Prentice’s Delight, or the ‘Prentice’s Warbler, or the Prentice’s Guide to the Gallows, or some such improving textbook. Now he’s going to beautify himself—here’s a precious locksmith!’

Quite unconscious that his master was looking on from the dark corner by the parlour door, Sim threw off the paper cap, sprang from his seat, and in two extraordinary steps, something between skating and minuet dancing, bounded to a washing place at the other end of the shop, and there removed from his face and hands all traces of his previous work—practising the same step all the time with the utmost gravity. This done, he drew from some concealed place a little scrap of looking-glass, and with its assistance arranged his hair, and ascertained the exact state of a little carbuncle on his nose. Having now completed his toilet, he placed the fragment of mirror on a low bench, and looked over his shoulder at so much of his legs as could be reflected in that small compass, with the greatest possible complacency and satisfaction.

Sim, as he was called in the locksmith’s family, or Mr Simon Tappertit, as he called himself, and required all men to style him out of doors, on holidays, and Sundays out,—was an old-fashioned, thin-faced, sleek-haired, sharp-nosed, small-eyed little fellow, very little

more than five feet high, and thoroughly convinced in his own mind that he was above the middle size; rather tall, in fact, than otherwise. Of his figure, which was well enough formed, though somewhat of the leanest, he entertained the highest admiration; and with his legs, which, in knee-breeches, were perfect curiosities of littleness, he was enraptured to a degree amounting to enthusiasm. He also had some majestic, shadowy ideas, which had never been quite fathomed by his intimate friends, concerning the power of his eye. Indeed he had been known to go so far as to boast that he could utterly quell and subdue the haughtiest beauty by a simple process, which he termed ‘eyeing her over;’ but it must be added, that neither of this faculty, nor of the power he claimed to have, through the same gift, of vanquishing and heaving down dumb animals, even in a rabid state, had he ever furnished evidence which could be deemed quite satisfactory and conclusive.

It may be inferred from these premises, that in the small body of Mr Tappertit there was locked up an ambitious and aspiring soul. As certain liquors, confined in casks too cramped in their dimensions, will ferment, and fret, and chafe in their imprisonment, so the spiritual essence or soul of Mr Tappertit would sometimes fume within that precious cask, his body, until, with great foam and froth and splutter, it would force a vent, and carry all before it. It was his custom to remark, in reference to any one of these occasions, that his soul had got into his head; and in this novel kind of intoxication many scrapes and mishaps befell him, which he had frequently concealed with no small difficulty from his worthy master.

Sim Tappertit, among the other fancies upon which his before-mentioned soul was for ever feasting and regaling itself (and which fancies, like the liver of Prometheus, grew as they were fed upon), had a mighty notion of his order; and had been heard by the servant-maid openly expressing his regret that the ‘prentices no longer carried clubs wherewith to mace the citizens: that was his strong expression. He was likewise reported to have said that in former times a stigma had been cast upon the body by the execution of George Barnwell, to which they should not have basely submitted, but should have demanded him of the legislature— temperately at first; then by an appeal to arms, if necessary—to be dealt with as they in their wisdom might think fit. These thoughts always led him to consider what a glorious engine the ‘prentices might yet become if they had but a master spirit at their head; and then he would darkly, and to the terror of his hearers, hint at certain reckless fellows that he knew of, and at a certain Lion Heart ready to become their captain, who, once afoot, would make the Lord Mayor tremble on his throne.

In respect of dress and personal decoration, Sim Tappertit was no less of an adventurous and enterprising character. He had been seen, beyond dispute, to pull off ruffles of the finest quality at the corner of the street on Sunday nights, and to put them carefully in his pocket before returning home; and it was quite notorious that on all great holiday occasions it was his habit to exchange his plain steel knee-buckles for a pair of glittering paste, under cover of a friendly post, planted most conveniently in that same spot. Add to this that he was in years just twenty, in his looks much older, and in conceit at

least two hundred; that he had no objection to be jested with, touching his admiration of his master's daughter; and had even, when called upon at a certain obscure tavern to pledge the lady whom he honoured with his love, toasted, with many winks and leers, a fair creature whose Christian name, he said, began with a D —;—and as much is known of Sim Tappertit, who has by this time followed the locksmith in to breakfast, as is necessary to be known in making his acquaintance.

It was a substantial meal; for, over and above the ordinary tea equipage, the board creaked beneath the weight of a jolly round of beef, a ham of the first magnitude, and sundry towers of buttered Yorkshire cake, piled slice upon slice in most alluring order. There was also a goodly jug of well-browned clay, fashioned into the form of an old gentleman, not by any means unlike the locksmith, atop of whose bald head was a fine white froth answering to his wig, indicative, beyond dispute, of sparkling home-brewed ale. But, better far than fair home-brewed, or Yorkshire cake, or ham, or beef, or anything to eat or drink that earth or air or water can supply, there sat, presiding over all, the locksmith's rosy daughter, before whose dark eyes even beef grew insignificant, and malt became as nothing.

Fathers should never kiss their daughters when young men are by. It's too much. There are bounds to human endurance. So thought Sim Tappertit when Gabriel drew those rosy lips to his—those lips within Sim's reach from day to day, and yet so far off. He had a respect for his master, but he wished the Yorkshire cake might choke him.

‘Father,’ said the locksmith’s daughter, when this salute was over, and they took their seats at table, ‘what is this I hear about last night?’

‘All true, my dear; true as the Gospel, Doll.’

‘Young Mr Chester robbed, and lying wounded in the road, when you came up!’

‘Ay—Mr Edward. And beside him, Barnaby, calling for help with all his might. It was well it happened as it did; for the road’s a lonely one, the hour was late, and, the night being cold, and poor Barnaby even less sensible than usual from surprise and fright, the young gentleman might have met his death in a very short time.’

‘I dread to think of it!’ cried his daughter with a shudder. ‘How did you know him?’

‘Know him!’ returned the locksmith. ‘I didn’t know him—how could I? I had never seen him, often as I had heard and spoken of him. I took him to Mrs Rudge’s; and she no sooner saw him than the truth came out.’

‘Miss Emma, father—If this news should reach her, enlarged upon as it is sure to be, she will go distracted.’

‘Why, lookye there again, how a man suffers for being good-natured,’ said the locksmith. ‘Miss Emma was with her uncle at the masquerade at Carlisle House, where she had gone, as the people at the Warren told me, sorely against her will. What does your blockhead father when he and Mrs Rudge have laid their heads together, but goes there when he ought to be abed, makes interest with his friend the doorkeeper, slips him on a mask and domino, and mixes with the masquers.’

‘And like himself to do so!’ cried the girl, putting her fair arm round his neck, and giving him a most enthusiastic kiss.

‘Like himself!’ repeated Gabriel, affecting to grumble, but evidently delighted with the part he had taken, and with her praise. ‘Very like himself—so your mother said. However, he mingled with the crowd, and prettily worried and badgered he was, I warrant you, with people squeaking, “Don’t you know me?” and “I’ve found you out,” and all that kind of nonsense in his ears. He might have wandered on till now, but in a little room there was a young lady who had taken off her mask, on account of the place being very warm, and was sitting there alone.’

‘And that was she?’ said his daughter hastily.

‘And that was she,’ replied the locksmith; ‘and I no sooner whispered to her what the matter was—as softly, Doll, and with nearly as much art as you could have used yourself—than she gives a kind of scream and faints away.’

‘What did you do—what happened next?’ asked his daughter. ‘Why, the masks came flocking round, with a general noise and hubbub, and I thought myself in luck to get clear off, that’s all,’ rejoined the locksmith. ‘What happened when I reached home you may guess, if you didn’t hear it. Ah! Well, it’s a poor heart that never rejoices.—Put Toby this way, my dear.’

This Toby was the brown jug of which previous mention has been made. Applying his lips to the worthy old gentleman’s benevolent forehead, the locksmith, who had all this time been ravaging among the eatables, kept them there so long, at the same time raising the vessel slowly in the air, that at length Toby stood on his head upon

his nose, when he smacked his lips, and set him on the table again with fond reluctance.

Although Sim Tappertit had taken no share in this conversation, no part of it being addressed to him, he had not been wanting in such silent manifestations of astonishment, as he deemed most compatible with the favourable display of his eyes. Regarding the pause which now ensued, as a particularly advantageous opportunity for doing great execution with them upon the locksmith's daughter (who he had no doubt was looking at him in mute admiration), he began to screw and twist his face, and especially those features, into such extraordinary, hideous, and unparalleled contortions, that Gabriel, who happened to look towards him, was stricken with amazement.

'Why, what the devil's the matter with the lad?' cried the locksmith. 'Is he choking?'

'Who?' demanded Sim, with some disdain.

'Who? Why, you,' returned his master. 'What do you mean by making those horrible faces over your breakfast?'

'Faces are matters of taste, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, rather discomfited; not the less so because he saw the locksmith's daughter smiling.

'Sim,' rejoined Gabriel, laughing heartily. 'Don't be a fool, for I'd rather see you in your senses. These young fellows,' he added, turning to his daughter, 'are always committing some folly or another. There was a quarrel between Joe Willet and old John last night though I can't say Joe was much in fault either. He'll be missing one of these mornings, and will have gone away upon some wild-goose

errand, seeking his fortune.—Why, what's the matter, Doll? YOU are making faces now. The girls are as bad as the boys every bit!'

'It's the tea,' said Dolly, turning alternately very red and very white, which is no doubt the effect of a slight scald—'so very hot.'

Mr Tappertit looked immensely big at a quartern loaf on the table, and breathed hard.

'Is that all?' returned the locksmith. 'Put some more milk in it.—Yes, I am sorry for Joe, because he is a likely young fellow, and gains upon one every time one sees him. But he'll start off, you'll find. Indeed he told me as much himself!'

'Indeed!' cried Dolly in a faint voice. 'In-deed!'

'Is the tea tickling your throat still, my dear?' said the locksmith.

But, before his daughter could make him any answer, she was taken with a troublesome cough, and it was such a very unpleasant cough, that, when she left off, the tears were starting in her bright eyes. The good-natured locksmith was still patting her on the back and applying such gentle restoratives, when a message arrived from Mrs Varden, making known to all whom it might concern, that she felt too much indisposed to rise after her great agitation and anxiety of the previous night; and therefore desired to be immediately accommodated with the little black teapot of strong mixed tea, a couple of rounds of buttered toast, a middling-sized dish of beef and ham cut thin, and the Protestant Manual in two volumes post octavo. Like some other ladies who in remote ages flourished upon this globe, Mrs Varden was most devout when most ill-tempered. Whenever she and her husband were at unusual variance, then the Protestant Manual was in high feather.

Knowing from experience what these requests portended, the triumvirate broke up; Dolly, to see the orders executed with all despatch; Gabriel, to some out-of-door work in his little chaise; and Sim, to his daily duty in the workshop, to which retreat he carried the big look, although the loaf remained behind.

Indeed the big look increased immensely, and when he had tied his apron on, became quite gigantic. It was not until he had several times walked up and down with folded arms, and the longest strides be could take, and had kicked a great many small articles out of his way, that his lip began to curl. At length, a gloomy derision came upon his features, and he smiled; uttering meanwhile with supreme contempt the monosyllable ‘Joe!’

‘I eyed her over, while he talked about the fellow,’ he said, ‘and that was of course the reason of her being confused. Joe!’

He walked up and down again much quicker than before, and if possible with longer strides; sometimes stopping to take a glance at his legs, and sometimes to jerk out, and cast from him, another ‘Joe!’ In the course of a quarter of an hour or so he again assumed the paper cap and tried to work. No. It could not be done.

‘I’ll do nothing to-day,’ said Mr Tappertit, dashing it down again, ‘but grind. I’ll grind up all the tools. Grinding will suit my present humour well. Joe!’

Whirr-r-r-r. The grindstone was soon in motion; the sparks were flying off in showers. This was the occupation for his heated spirit.

Whirr-r-r-r-r-r-r.

‘Something will come of this!’ said Mr Tappertit, pausing as if in triumph, and wiping his heated face upon his sleeve. ‘Something will

come of this. I hope it mayn’t be human gore!’

Whirr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r.

Chapter Five

As soon as the business of the day was over, the locksmith sallied forth, alone, to visit the wounded gentleman and ascertain the progress of his recovery. The house where he had left him was in a by-street in Southwark, not far from London Bridge; and thither he hied with all speed, bent upon returning with as little delay as might be, and getting to bed betimes.

The evening was boisterous—scarcely better than the previous night had been. It was not easy for a stout man like Gabriel to keep his legs at the street corners, or to make head against the high wind, which often fairly got the better of him, and drove him back some paces, or, in defiance of all his energy, forced him to take shelter in an arch or doorway until the fury of the gust was spent. Occasionally a hat or wig, or both, came spinning and trundling past him, like a mad thing; while the more serious spectacle of falling tiles and slates, or of masses of brick and mortar or fragments of stone-coping rattling upon the pavement near at hand, and splitting into fragments,

did not increase the pleasure of the journey, or make the way less dreary.

‘A trying night for a man like me to walk in!’ said the locksmith, as he knocked softly at the widow’s door. ‘I’d rather be in old John’s chimney-corner, faith!’

‘Who’s there?’ demanded a woman’s voice from within. Being answered, it added a hasty word of welcome, and the door was quickly opened.

She was about forty—perhaps two or three years older—with a cheerful aspect, and a face that had once been pretty. It bore traces of affliction and care, but they were of an old date, and Time had smoothed them. Any one who had bestowed but a casual glance on Barnaby might have known that this was his mother, from the strong resemblance between them; but where in his face there was wildness and vacancy, in hers there was the patient composure of long effort and quiet resignation.

One thing about this face was very strange and startling. You could not look upon it in its most cheerful mood without feeling that it had some extraordinary capacity of expressing terror. It was not on the surface. It was in no one feature that it lingered. You could not take the eyes or mouth, or lines upon the cheek, and say, if this or that were otherwise, it would not be so. Yet there it always lurked—something for ever dimly seen, but ever there, and never absent for a moment. It was the faintest, palest shadow of some look, to which an instant of intense and most unutterable horror only could have given birth; but indistinct and feeble as it was, it did suggest what

that look must have been, and fixed it in the mind as if it had had existence in a dream.

More faintly imaged, and wanting force and purpose, as it were, because of his darkened intellect, there was this same stamp upon the son. Seen in a picture, it must have had some legend with it, and would have haunted those who looked upon the canvas. They who knew the Maypole story, and could remember what the widow was, before her husband's and his master's murder, understood it well. They recollected how the change had come, and could call to mind that when her son was born, upon the very day the deed was known, he bore upon his wrist what seemed a smear of blood but half washed out.

'God save you, neighbour!' said the locksmith, as he followed her, with the air of an old friend, into a little parlour where a cheerful fire was burning.

'And you,' she answered smiling. 'Your kind heart has brought you here again. Nothing will keep you at home, I know of old, if there are friends to serve or comfort, out of doors.'

'Tut, tut,' returned the locksmith, rubbing his hands and warming them. 'You women are such talkers. What of the patient, neighbour?'

'He is sleeping now. He was very restless towards daylight, and for some hours tossed and tumbled sadly. But the fever has left him, and the doctor says he will soon mend. He must not be removed until to-morrow.'

'He has had visitors to-day—humph?' said Gabriel, slyly.

'Yes. Old Mr Chester has been here ever since we sent for him, and had not been gone many minutes when you knocked.'

‘No ladies?’ said Gabriel, elevating his eyebrows and looking disappointed.

‘A letter,’ replied the widow.

‘Come. That’s better than nothing!’ replied the locksmith. ‘Who was the bearer?’

‘Barnaby, of course.’

‘Barnaby’s a jewel!’ said Varden; ‘and comes and goes with ease where we who think ourselves much wiser would make but a poor hand of it. He is not out wandering, again, I hope?’

‘Thank Heaven he is in his bed; having been up all night, as you know, and on his feet all day. He was quite tired out. Ah, neighbour, if I could but see him oftener so—if I could but tame down that terrible restlessness—’

‘In good time,’ said the locksmith, kindly, ‘in good time—don’t be down-hearted. To my mind he grows wiser every day.’

The widow shook her head. And yet, though she knew the locksmith sought to cheer her, and spoke from no conviction of his own, she was glad to hear even this praise of her poor benighted son.

‘He will be a ‘cute man yet,’ resumed the locksmith. ‘Take care, when we are growing old and foolish, Barnaby doesn’t put us to the blush, that’s all. But our other friend,’ he added, looking under the table and about the floor—‘sharpest and cunningest of all the sharp and cunning ones—where’s he?’

‘In Barnaby’s room,’ rejoined the widow, with a faint smile.

‘Ah! He’s a knowing blade!’ said Varden, shaking his head. ‘I should be sorry to talk secrets before him. Oh! He’s a deep

customer. I've no doubt he can read, and write, and cast accounts if he chooses. What was that? Him tapping at the door?'

'No,' returned the widow. 'It was in the street, I think. Hark! Yes. There again! 'Tis some one knocking softly at the shutter. Who can it be!'

They had been speaking in a low tone, for the invalid lay overhead, and the walls and ceilings being thin and poorly built, the sound of their voices might otherwise have disturbed his slumber. The party without, whoever it was, could have stood close to the shutter without hearing anything spoken; and, seeing the light through the chinks and finding all so quiet, might have been persuaded that only one person was there.

'Some thief or ruffian maybe,' said the locksmith. 'Give me the light.'

'No, no,' she returned hastily. 'Such visitors have never come to this poor dwelling. Do you stay here. You're within call, at the worst. I would rather go myself—alone.'

'Why?' said the locksmith, unwillingly relinquishing the candle he had caught up from the table.

'Because—I don't know why—because the wish is so strong upon me,' she rejoined. 'There again—do not detain me, I beg of you!'

Gabriel looked at her, in great surprise to see one who was usually so mild and quiet thus agitated, and with so little cause. She left the room and closed the door behind her. She stood for a moment as if hesitating, with her hand upon the lock. In this short interval the knocking came again, and a voice close to the window—a voice the

locksmith seemed to recollect, and to have some disagreeable association with—whispered ‘Make haste.’

The words were uttered in that low distinct voice which finds its way so readily to sleepers’ ears, and wakes them in a fright. For a moment it startled even the locksmith; who involuntarily drew back from the window, and listened.

The wind rumbling in the chimney made it difficult to hear what passed, but he could tell that the door was opened, that there was the tread of a man upon the creaking boards, and then a moment’s silence—broken by a suppressed something which was not a shriek, or groan, or cry for help, and yet might have been either or all three; and the words ‘My God!’ uttered in a voice it chilled him to hear.

He rushed out upon the instant. There, at last, was that dreadful look—the very one he seemed to know so well and yet had never seen before—upon her face. There she stood, frozen to the ground, gazing with starting eyes, and livid cheeks, and every feature fixed and ghastly, upon the man he had encountered in the dark last night. His eyes met those of the locksmith. It was but a flash, an instant, a breath upon a polished glass, and he was gone.

The locksmith was upon him—had the skirts of his streaming garment almost in his grasp—when his arms were tightly clutched, and the widow flung herself upon the ground before him.

‘The other way—the other way,’ she cried. ‘He went the other way. Turn—turn!’

‘The other way! I see him now,’ rejoined the locksmith, pointing—‘yonder—there—there is his shadow passing by that light. What—who is this? Let me go.’

‘Come back, come back!’ exclaimed the woman, clasping him; ‘Do not touch him on your life. I charge you, come back. He carries other lives besides his own. Come back!’

‘What does this mean?’ cried the locksmith.

‘No matter what it means, don’t ask, don’t speak, don’t think about it. He is not to be followed, checked, or stopped. Come back!’

The old man looked at her in wonder, as she writhed and clung about him; and, borne down by her passion, suffered her to drag him into the house. It was not until she had chained and double-locked the door, fastened every bolt and bar with the heat and fury of a maniac, and drawn him back into the room, that she turned upon him, once again, that stony look of horror, and, sinking down into a chair, covered her face, and shuddered, as though the hand of death were on her.

Chapter Six

Beyond all measure astonished by the strange occurrences which had passed with so much violence and rapidity, the locksmith gazed upon the shuddering figure in the chair like one half stupefied, and would have gazed much longer, had not his tongue been loosened by compassion and humanity.

‘You are ill,’ said Gabriel. ‘Let me call some neighbour in.’

‘Not for the world,’ she rejoined, motioning to him with her trembling hand, and holding her face averted. ‘It is enough that you have been by, to see this.’

‘Nay, more than enough—or less,’ said Gabriel.

‘Be it so,’ she returned. ‘As you like. Ask me no questions, I entreat you.’

‘Neighbour,’ said the locksmith, after a pause. ‘Is this fair, or reasonable, or just to yourself? Is it like you, who have known me so long and sought my advice in all matters—like you, who from a girl have had a strong mind and a staunch heart?’

‘I have need of them,’ she replied. ‘I am growing old, both in years and care. Perhaps that, and too much trial, have made them weaker than they used to be. Do not speak to me.’

‘How can I see what I have seen, and hold my peace!’ returned the locksmith. ‘Who was that man, and why has his coming made this change in you?’

She was silent, but held to the chair as though to save herself from falling on the ground.

‘I take the licence of an old acquaintance, Mary,’ said the locksmith, ‘who has ever had a warm regard for you, and maybe has tried to prove it when he could. Who is this ill-favoured man, and what has he to do with you? Who is this ghost, that is only seen in the black nights and bad weather? How does he know, and why does he haunt, this house, whispering through chinks and crevices, as if there was that between him and you, which neither durst so much as speak aloud of? Who is he?’

‘You do well to say he haunts this house,’ returned the widow, faintly. ‘His shadow has been upon it and me, in light and darkness, at noonday and midnight. And now, at last, he has come in the body!’

‘But he wouldn’t have gone in the body,’ returned the locksmith with some irritation, ‘if you had left my arms and legs at liberty. What riddle is this?’

‘It is one,’ she answered, rising as she spoke, ‘that must remain for ever as it is. I dare not say more than that.’

‘Dare not!’ repeated the wondering locksmith.

‘Do not press me,’ she replied. ‘I am sick and faint, and every faculty of life seems dead within me.—No!—Do not touch me, either.’

Gabriel, who had stepped forward to render her assistance, fell back as she made this hasty exclamation, and regarded her in silent wonder.

‘Let me go my way alone,’ she said in a low voice, ‘and let the hands of no honest man touch mine to-night.’ When she had tottered to the door, she turned, and added with a stronger effort, ‘This is a secret, which, of necessity, I trust to you. You are a true man. As you have ever been good and kind to me,—keep it. If any noise was heard above, make some excuse—say anything but what you really saw, and never let a word or look between us, recall this circumstance. I trust to you. Mind, I trust to you. How much I trust, you never can conceive.’

Casting her eyes upon him for an instant, she withdrew, and left him there alone.

Gabriel, not knowing what to think, stood staring at the door with a countenance full of surprise and dismay. The more he pondered on what had passed, the less able he was to give it any favourable interpretation. To find this widow woman, whose life for so many years had been supposed to be one of solitude and retirement, and who, in her quiet suffering character, had gained the good opinion and respect of all who knew her—to find her linked mysteriously with an ill-omened man, alarmed at his appearance, and yet favouring his escape, was a discovery that pained as much as startled him. Her reliance on his secrecy, and his tacit acquiescence, increased his distress of mind. If he had spoken boldly, persisted in questioning her, detained her when she rose to leave the room, made any kind of

protest, instead of silently compromising himself, as he felt he had done, he would have been more at ease.

‘Why did I let her say it was a secret, and she trusted it to me!’ said Gabriel, putting his wig on one side to scratch his head with greater ease, and looking ruefully at the fire. ‘I have no more readiness than old John himself. Why didn’t I say firmly, “You have no right to such secrets, and I demand of you to tell me what this means,” instead of standing gaping at her, like an old moon- calf as I am! But there’s my weakness. I can be obstinate enough with men if need be, but women may twist me round their fingers at their pleasure.’

He took his wig off outright as he made this reflection, and, warming his handkerchief at the fire began to rub and polish his bald head with it, until it glistened again.

‘And yet,’ said the locksmith, softening under this soothing process, and stopping to smile, ‘it MAY be nothing. Any drunken brawler trying to make his way into the house, would have alarmed a quiet soul like her. But then’—and here was the vexation—‘how came it to be that man; how comes he to have this influence over her; how came she to favour his getting away from me; and, more than all, how came she not to say it was a sudden fright, and nothing more? It’s a sad thing to have, in one minute, reason to mistrust a person I have known so long, and an old sweetheart into the bargain; but what else can I do, with all this upon my mind!— Is that Barnaby outside there?’

‘Ay!’ he cried, looking in and nodding. ‘Sure enough it’s Barnaby—how did you guess?’

‘By your shadow,’ said the locksmith.

‘Oho!’ cried Barnaby, glancing over his shoulder, ‘He’s a merry fellow, that shadow, and keeps close to me, though I AM silly. We have such pranks, such walks, such runs, such gambols on the grass! Sometimes he’ll be half as tall as a church steeple, and sometimes no bigger than a dwarf. Now, he goes on before, and now behind, and anon he’ll be stealing on, on this side, or on that, stopping whenever I stop, and thinking I can’t see him, though I have my eye on him sharp enough. Oh! he’s a merry fellow. Tell me—is he silly too? I think he is.’

‘Why?’ asked Gabriel.

‘Because be never tires of mocking me, but does it all day long.—Why don’t you come?’

‘Where?’

‘Upstairs. He wants you. Stay—where’s HIS shadow? Come. You’re a wise man; tell me that.’

‘Beside him, Barnaby; beside him, I suppose,’ returned the locksmith.

‘No!’ he replied, shaking his head. ‘Guess again.’

‘Gone out a walking, maybe?’

‘He has changed shadows with a woman,’ the idiot whispered in his ear, and then fell back with a look of triumph. ‘Her shadow’s always with him, and his with her. That’s sport I think, eh?’

‘Barnaby,’ said the locksmith, with a grave look; ‘come hither, lad.’

‘I know what you want to say. I know!’ he replied, keeping away from him. ‘But I’m cunning, I’m silent. I only say so much to you—are

you ready?' As he spoke, he caught up the light, and waved it with a wild laugh above his head.

'Softly—gently,' said the locksmith, exerting all his influence to keep him calm and quiet. 'I thought you had been asleep.'

'So I HAVE been asleep,' he rejoined, with widely-opened eyes. 'There have been great faces coming and going—close to my face, and then a mile away—low places to creep through, whether I would or no—high churches to fall down from—strange creatures crowded up together neck and heels, to sit upon the bed—that's sleep, eh?'

'Dreams, Barnaby, dreams,' said the locksmith.

'Dreams!' he echoed softly, drawing closer to him. 'Those are not dreams.'

'What are,' replied the locksmith, 'if they are not?'

'I dreamed,' said Barnaby, passing his arm through Varden's, and peering close into his face as he answered in a whisper, 'I dreamed just now that something—it was in the shape of a man—followed me — came softly after me—wouldn't let me be—but was always hiding and crouching, like a cat in dark corners, waiting till I should pass; when it crept out and came softly after me.—Did you ever see me run?'

'Many a time, you know.'

'You never saw me run as I did in this dream. Still it came creeping on to worry me. Nearer, nearer, nearer—I ran faster— leaped—sprung out of bed, and to the window—and there, in the street below—but he is waiting for us. Are you coming?'

'What in the street below, Barnaby?' said Varden, imagining that he traced some connection between this vision and what had

actually occurred.

Barnaby looked into his face, muttered incoherently, waved the light above his head again, laughed, and drawing the locksmith's arm more tightly through his own, led him up the stairs in silence.

They entered a homely bedchamber, garnished in a scanty way with chairs, whose spindle-shanks bespoke their age, and other furniture of very little worth; but clean and neatly kept. Reclining in an easy-chair before the fire, pale and weak from waste of blood, was Edward Chester, the young gentleman who had been the first to quit the Maypole on the previous night, and who, extending his hand to the locksmith, welcomed him as his preserver and friend.

'Say no more, sir, say no more,' said Gabriel. 'I hope I would have done at least as much for any man in such a strait, and most of all for you, sir. A certain young lady,' he added, with some hesitation, 'has done us many a kind turn, and we naturally feel—I hope I give you no offence in saying this, sir?'

The young man smiled and shook his head; at the same time moving in his chair as if in pain.

'It's no great matter,' he said, in answer to the locksmith's sympathising look, 'a mere uneasiness arising at least as much from being cooped up here, as from the slight wound I have, or from the loss of blood. Be seated, Mr Varden.'

'If I may make so bold, Mr Edward, as to lean upon your chair,' returned the locksmith, accommodating his action to his speech, and bending over him, 'I'll stand here for the convenience of speaking low. Barnaby is not in his quietest humour to-night, and at such times talking never does him good.'

They both glanced at the subject of this remark, who had taken a seat on the other side of the fire, and, smiling vacantly, was making puzzles on his fingers with a skein of string.

‘Pray, tell me, sir,’ said Varden, dropping his voice still lower, ‘exactly what happened last night. I have my reason for inquiring. You left the Maypole, alone?’

‘And walked homeward alone, until I had nearly reached the place where you found me, when I heard the gallop of a horse.’

‘Behind you?’ said the locksmith.

‘Indeed, yes—behind me. It was a single rider, who soon overtook me, and checking his horse, inquired the way to London.’

‘You were on the alert, sir, knowing how many highwaymen there are, scouring the roads in all directions?’ said Varden.

‘I was, but I had only a stick, having imprudently left my pistols in their holster-case with the landlord’s son. I directed him as he desired. Before the words had passed my lips, he rode upon me furiously, as if bent on trampling me down beneath his horse’s hoofs. In starting aside, I slipped and fell. You found me with this stab and an ugly bruise or two, and without my purse—in which he found little enough for his pains. And now, Mr Varden,’ he added, shaking the locksmith by the hand, ‘saving the extent of my gratitude to you, you know as much as I.’

‘Except,’ said Gabriel, bending down yet more, and looking cautiously towards their silent neighhour, ‘except in respect of the robber himself. What like was he, sir? Speak low, if you please. Barnaby means no harm, but I have watched him oftener than you, and I know, little as you would think it, that he’s listening now.’

It required a strong confidence in the locksmith's veracity to lead any one to this belief, for every sense and faculty that Barnahy possessed, seemed to be fixed upon his game, to the exclusion of all other things. Something in the young man's face expressed this opinion, for Gabriel repeated what he had just said, more earnestly than before, and with another glance towards Barnaby, again asked what like the man was.

'The night was so dark,' said Edward, 'the attack so sudden, and he so wrapped and muffled up, that I can hardly say. It seems that—'

'Don't mention his name, sir,' returned the locksmith, following his look towards Barnaby; 'I know HE saw him. I want to know what YOU saw.'

'All I remember is,' said Edward, 'that as he checked his horse his hat was blown off. He caught it, and replaced it on his head, which I observed was bound with a dark handkerchief. A stranger entered the Maypole while I was there, whom I had not seen—for I had sat apart for reasons of my own—and when I rose to leave the room and glanced round, he was in the shadow of the chimney and hidden from my sight. But, if he and the robber were two different persons, their voices were strangely and most remarkably alike; for directly the man addressed me in the road, I recognised his speech again.'

'It is as I feared. The very man was here to-night,' thought the locksmith, changing colour. 'What dark history is this!'

'Halloa!' cried a hoarse voice in his ear. 'Halloa, halloa, halloa! Bow wow wow. What's the matter here! Hal-loa!'

The speaker—who made the locksmith start as if he had been some supernatural agent—was a large raven, who had perched

upon the top of the easy-chair, unseen by him and Edward, and listened with a polite attention and a most extraordinary appearance of comprehending every word, to all they had said up to this point; turning his head from one to the other, as if his office were to judge between them, and it were of the very last importance that he should not lose a word.

‘Look at him!’ said Varden, divided between admiration of the bird and a kind of fear of him. ‘Was there ever such a knowing imp as that! Oh he’s a dreadful fellow!’

The raven, with his head very much on one side, and his bright eye shining like a diamond, preserved a thoughtful silence for a few seconds, and then replied in a voice so hoarse and distant, that it seemed to come through his thick feathers rather than out of his mouth.

‘Halloa, halloa, halloa! What’s the matter here! Keep up your spirits. Never say die. Bow wow wow. I’m a devil, I’m a devil, I’m a devil. Hurrah!’—And then, as if exulting in his infernal character, he began to whistle.

‘I more than half believe he speaks the truth. Upon my word I do,’ said Varden. ‘Do you see how he looks at me, as if he knew what I was saying?’

To which the bird, balancing himself on tiptoe, as it were, and moving his body up and down in a sort of grave dance, rejoined, ‘I’m a devil, I’m a devil, I’m a devil,’ and flapped his wings against his sides as if he were bursting with laughter. Barnaby clapped his hands, and fairly rolled upon the ground in an ecstasy of delight.

‘Strange companions, sir,’ said the locksmith, shaking his head, and looking from one to the other. ‘The bird has all the wit.’

‘Strange indeed!’ said Edward, holding out his forefinger to the raven, who, in acknowledgment of the attention, made a dive at it immediately with his iron bill. ‘Is he old?’

‘A mere boy, sir,’ replied the locksmith. ‘A hundred and twenty, or thereabouts. Call him down, Barnaby, my man.’

‘Call him!’ echoed Barnaby, sitting upright upon the floor, and staring vacantly at Gabriel, as he thrust his hair back from his face. ‘But who can make him come! He calls me, and makes me go where he will. He goes on before, and I follow. He’s the master, and I’m the man. Is that the truth, Grip?’

The raven gave a short, comfortable, confidential kind of croak;—a most expressive croak, which seemed to say, ‘You needn’t let these fellows into our secrets. We understand each other. It’s all right.’

‘I make HIM come?’ cried Barnaby, pointing to the bird. ‘Him, who never goes to sleep, or so much as winks!—Why, any time of night, you may see his eyes in my dark room, shining like two sparks. And every night, and all night too, he’s broad awake, talking to himself, thinking what he shall do to-morrow, where we shall go, and what he shall steal, and hide, and bury. I make HIM come! Ha ha ha!’

On second thoughts, the bird appeared disposed to come of himself. After a short survey of the ground, and a few sidelong looks at the ceiling and at everybody present in turn, he fluttered to the floor, and went to Barnaby—not in a hop, or walk, or run, but in a pace like that of a very particular gentleman with exceedingly tight boots on, trying to walk fast over loose pebbles. Then, stepping into

his extended hand, and condescending to be held out at arm's length, he gave vent to a succession of sounds, not unlike the drawing of some eight or ten dozen of long corks, and again asserted his brimstone birth and parentage with great distinctness.

The locksmith shook his head—perhaps in some doubt of the creature's being really nothing but a bird—perhaps in pity for Bamaby, who by this time had him in his arms, and was rolling about, with him, on the ground. As he raised his eyes from the poor fellow he encountered those of his mother, who had entered the room, and was looking on in silence.

She was quite white in the face, even to her lips, but had wholly subdued her emotion, and wore her usual quiet look. Varden fancied as he glanced at her that she shrunk from his eye; and that she busied herself about the wounded gentleman to avoid him the better.

It was time he went to bed, she said. He was to be removed to his own home on the morrow, and he had already exceeded his time for sitting up, by a full hour. Acting on this hint, the locksmith prepared to take his leave.

'By the bye,' said Edward, as he shook him by the hand, and looked from him to Mrs Rudge and back again, 'what noise was that below? I heard your voice in the midst of it, and should have inquired before, but our other conversation drove it from my memory. What was it?'

The locksmith looked towards her, and bit his lip. She leant against the chair, and bent her eyes upon the ground. Barnaby too— he was listening.

—‘Some mad or drunken fellow, sir,’ Varden at length made answer, looking steadily at the widow as he spoke. ‘He mistook the house, and tried to force an entrance.’

She breathed more freely, but stood quite motionless. As the locksmith said ‘Good night,’ and Barnaby caught up the candle to light him down the stairs, she took it from him, and charged him—with more haste and earnestness than so slight an occasion appeared to warrant—not to stir. The raven followed them to satisfy himself that all was right below, and when they reached the street-door, stood on the bottom stair drawing corks out of number.

With a trembling hand she unfastened the chain and bolts, and turned the key. As she had her hand upon the latch, the locksmith said in a low voice,

‘I have told a lie to-night, for your sake, Mary, and for the sake of bygone times and old acquaintance, when I would scorn to do so for my own. I hope I may have done no harm, or led to none. I can’t help the suspicions you have forced upon me, and I am loth, I tell you plainly, to leave Mr Edward here. Take care he comes to no hurt. I doubt the safety of this roof, and am glad he leaves it so soon. Now, let me go.’

For a moment she hid her face in her hands and wept; but resisting the strong impulse which evidently moved her to reply, opened the door—no wider than was sufficient for the passage of his body— and motioned him away. As the locksmith stood upon the step, it was chained and locked behind him, and the raven, in furtherance of these precautions, barked like a lusty house-dog.

‘In league with that ill-looking figure that might have fallen from a gibbet—he listening and hiding here—Barnaby first upon the spot last night—can she who has always borne so fair a name be guilty of such crimes in secret!’ said the locksmith, musing. ‘Heaven forgive me if I am wrong, and send me just thoughts; but she is poor, the temptation may be great, and we daily hear of things as strange.—Ay, bark away, my friend. If there’s any wickedness going on, that raven’s in it, I’ll be sworn.’

Chapter Seven

Mrs Varden was a lady of what is commonly called an uncertain temper—a phrase which being interpreted signifies a temper tolerably certain to make everybody more or less uncomfortable. Thus it generally happened, that when other people were merry, Mrs Varden was dull; and that when other people were dull, Mrs Varden was disposed to be amazingly cheerful. Indeed the worthy housewife was of such a capricious nature, that she not only attained a higher pitch of genius than Macbeth, in respect of her ability to be wise, amazed, temperate and furious, loyal and neutral in an instant, but would sometimes ring the changes backwards and forwards on all possible moods and flights in one short quarter of an hour; performing, as it were, a kind of triple bob major on the peal of instruments in the female belfry, with a skilfulness and rapidity of execution that astonished all who heard her.

It had been observed in this good lady (who did not want for personal attractions, being plump and buxom to look at, though like

her fair daughter, somewhat short in stature) that this uncertainty of disposition strengthened and increased with her temporal prosperity; and divers wise men and matrons, on friendly terms with the locksmith and his family, even went so far as to assert, that a tumble down some half-dozen rounds in the world's ladder—such as the breaking of the bank in which her husband kept his money, or some little fall of that kind—would be the making of her, and could hardly fail to render her one of the most agreeable companions in existence. Whether they were right or wrong in this conjecture, certain it is that minds, like bodies, will often fall into a pimpled ill-conditioned state from mere excess of comfort, and like them, are often successfully cured by remedies in themselves very nauseous and unpalatable.

Mrs Varden's chief aider and abettor, and at the same time her principal victim and object of wrath, was her single domestic servant, one Miss Miggs; or as she was called, in conformity with those prejudices of society which lop and top from poor hand- maidens all such genteel excrescences—Miggs. This Miggs was a tall young lady, very much addicted to pattens in private life; slender and shrewish, of a rather uncomfortable figure, and though not absolutely ill-looking, of a sharp and acid visage. As a general principle and abstract proposition, Miggs held the male sex to be utterly contemptible and unworthy of notice; to be fickle, false, base, sottish, inclined to perjury, and wholly undeserving. When particularly exasperated against them (which, scandal said, was when Sim Tappertit slighted her most) she was accustomed to wish with great emphasis that the whole race of women could but die off, in order

that the men might be brought to know the real value of the blessings by which they set so little store; nay, her feeling for her order ran so high, that she sometimes declared, if she could only have good security for a fair, round number—say ten thousand—of young virgins following her example, she would, to spite mankind, hang, drown, stab, or poison herself, with a joy past all expression.

It was the voice of Miggs that greeted the locksmith, when he knocked at his own house, with a shrill cry of ‘Who’s there?’

‘Me, girl, me,’ returned Gabriel.

What, already, sir!’ said Miggs, opening the door with a look of surprise. ‘We were just getting on our nightcaps to sit up,—me and mistress. Oh, she has been SO bad!’

Miggs said this with an air of uncommon candour and concern; but the parlour-door was standing open, and as Gabriel very well knew for whose ears it was designed, he regarded her with anything but an approving look as he passed in.

‘Master’s come home, mim,’ cried Miggs, running before him into the parlour. ‘You was wrong, mim, and I was right. I thought he wouldn’t keep us up so late, two nights running, mim. Master’s always considerate so far. I’m so glad, mim, on your account. I’m a little’—here Miggs simpered—‘a little sleepy myself; I’ll own it now, mim, though I said I wasn’t when you asked me. It ain’t of no consequence, mim, of course.’

‘You had better,’ said the locksmith, who most devoutly wished that Barnaby’s raven was at Miggs’s ankles, ‘you had better get to bed at once then.’

‘Thanking you kindly, sir,’ returned Miggs, ‘I couldn’t take my rest in peace, nor fix my thoughts upon my prayers, otherways than that I knew mistress was comfortable in her bed this night; by rights she ought to have been there, hours ago.’

‘You’re talkative, mistress,’ said Varden, pulling off his greatcoat, and looking at her askew.

‘Taking the hint, sir,’ cried Miggs, with a flushed face, ‘and thanking you for it most kindly, I will make bold to say, that if I give offence by having consideration for my mistress, I do not ask your pardon, but am content to get myself into trouble and to be in suffering.’

Here Mrs Varden, who, with her countenance shrouded in a large nightcap, had been all this time intent upon the Protestant Manual, looked round, and acknowledged Miggs’s championship by commanding her to hold her tongue.

Every little bone in Miggs’s throat and neck developed itself with a spitefulness quite alarming, as she replied, ‘Yes, mim, I will.’

‘How do you find yourself now, my dear?’ said the locksmith, taking a chair near his wife (who had resumed her book), and rubbing his knees hard as he made the inquiry.

‘You’re very anxious to know, an’t you?’ returned Mrs Varden, with her eyes upon the print. ‘You, that have not been near me all day, and wouldn’t have been if I was dying!’

‘My dear Martha—’ said Gabriel.

Mrs Varden turned over to the next page; then went back again to the bottom line over leaf to be quite sure of the last words; and then went on reading with an appearance of the deepest interest and study.

‘My dear Martha,’ said the locksmith, ‘how can you say such things, when you know you don’t mean them? If you were dying! Why, if there was anything serious the matter with you, Martha, shouldn’t I be in constant attendance upon you?’

‘Yes!’ cried Mrs Varden, bursting into tears, ‘yes, you would. I don’t doubt it, Varden. Certainly you would. That’s as much as to tell me that you would be hovering round me like a vulture, waiting till the breath was out of my body, that you might go and marry somebody else.’

Miggs groaned in sympathy—a little short groan, checked in its birth, and changed into a cough. It seemed to say, ‘I can’t help it. It’s wrung from me by the dreadful brutality of that monster master.’

‘But you’ll break my heart one of these days,’ added Mrs Varden, with more resignation, ‘and then we shall both be happy. My only desire is to see Dolly comfortably settled, and when she is, you may settle ME as soon as you like.’

‘Ah!’ cried Miggs—and coughed again.

Poor Gabriel twisted his wig about in silence for a long time, and then said mildly, ‘Has Dolly gone to bed?’

‘Your master speaks to you,’ said Mrs Varden, looking sternly over her shoulder at Miss Miggs in waiting.

‘No, my dear, I spoke to you,’ suggested the locksmith.

‘Did you hear me, Miggs?’ cried the obdurate lady, stamping her foot upon the ground. ‘YOU are beginning to despise me now, are you? But this is example!’

At this cruel rebuke, Miggs, whose tears were always ready, for large or small parties, on the shortest notice and the most

reasonable terms, fell a crying violently; holding both her hands tight upon her heart meanwhile, as if nothing less would prevent its splitting into small fragments. Mrs Varden, who likewise possessed that faculty in high perfection, wept too, against Miggs; and with such effect that Miggs gave in after a time, and, except for an occasional sob, which seemed to threaten some remote intention of breaking out again, left her mistress in possession of the field. Her superiority being thoroughly asserted, that lady soon desisted likewise, and fell into a quiet melancholy.

The relief was so great, and the fatiguing occurrences of last night so completely overpowered the locksmith, that he nodded in his chair, and would doubtless have slept there all night, but for the voice of Mrs Varden, which, after a pause of some five minutes, awoke him with a start.

'If I am ever,' said Mrs V.—not scolding, but in a sort of monotonous remonstrance—'in spirits, if I am ever cheerful, if I am ever more than usually disposed to be talkative and comfortable, this is the way I am treated.'

'Such spirits as you was in too, mim, but half an hour ago!' cried Miggs. 'I never see such company!'

'Because,' said Mrs Varden, 'because I never interfere or interrupt; because I never question where anybody comes or goes; because my whole mind and soul is bent on saving where I can save, and labouring in this house;—therefore, they try me as they do.'

'Martha,' urged the locksmith, endeavouring to look as wakeful as possible, 'what is it you complain of? I really came home with every wish and desire to be happy. I did, indeed.'

‘What do I complain of!’ retorted his wife. ‘Is it a chilling thing to have one’s husband sulking and falling asleep directly he comes home—to have him freezing all one’s warm-heartedness, and throwing cold water over the fireside? Is it natural, when I know he went out upon a matter in which I am as much interested as anybody can be, that I should wish to know all that has happened, or that he should tell me without my begging and praying him to do it? Is that natural, or is it not?’

‘I am very sorry, Martha,’ said the good-natured locksmith. ‘I was really afraid you were not disposed to talk pleasantly; I’ll tell you everything; I shall only be too glad, my dear.’

‘No, Varden,’ returned his wife, rising with dignity. ‘I dare say—thank you! I’m not a child to be corrected one minute and petted the next—I’m a little too old for that, Varden. Miggs, carry the light.—YOU can be cheerful, Miggs, at least’

Miggs, who, to this moment, had been in the very depths of compassionate despondency, passed instantly into the liveliest state conceivable, and tossing her head as she glanced towards the locksmith, bore off her mistress and the light together.

‘Now, who would think,’ thought Varden, shrugging his shoulders and drawing his chair nearer to the fire, ‘that that woman could ever be pleasant and agreeable? And yet she can be. Well, well, all of us have our faults. I’ll not be hard upon hers. We have been man and wife too long for that.’

He dozed again—not the less pleasantly, perhaps, for his hearty temper. While his eyes were closed, the door leading to the upper

stairs was partially opened; and a head appeared, which, at sight of him, hastily drew back again.

‘I wish,’ murmured Gabriel, waking at the noise, and looking round the room, ‘I wish somebody would marry Miggs. But that’s impossible! I wonder whether there’s any madman alive, who would marry Miggs!’

This was such a vast speculation that he fell into a doze again, and slept until the fire was quite burnt out. At last he roused himself; and having double-locked the street-door according to custom, and put the key in his pocket, went off to bed.

He had not left the room in darkness many minutes, when the head again appeared, and Sim Tappertit entered, bearing in his hand a little lamp.

‘What the devil business has he to stop up so late!’ muttered Sim, passing into the workshop, and setting it down upon the forge. ‘Here’s half the night gone already. There’s only one good that has ever come to me, out of this cursed old rusty mechanical trade, and that’s this piece of ironmongery, upon my soul!’

As he spoke, he drew from the right hand, or rather right leg pocket of his smalls, a clumsy large-sized key, which he inserted cautiously in the lock his master had secured, and softly opened the door. That done, he replaced his piece of secret workmanship in his pocket; and leaving the lamp burning, and closing the door carefully and without noise, stole out into the street—as little suspected by the locksmith in his sound deep sleep, as by Barnaby himself in his phantom-haunted dreams.

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