

Ten Girls from Dickens eBook

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THE MARCHIONESS

[Illustration: *The marchioness and Dick Swiveller*]

THE MARCHIONESS

The Marchioness was a small servant employed by Sampson Brass and his sister Sally, as general house-worker and drudge, in which capacity she was discovered by Mr. Richard Swiveller, upon the very first day of his entering the Brass establishment as clerk.

The Brasses' house was a small one in Bevis Marks, London, having upon its door a plate, "Brass, Solicitor," and a bill tied to the knocker, "First floor to let to a single gentleman," and served not only as habitation, but likewise as office for Sampson Brass,—of none too good legal repute,—and his sister; a gaunt, bony copy of her red-haired brother, who was his housekeeper, as well as his business partner.

When the Brasses decided to keep a clerk, Richard Swiveller was chosen to fill the place; and be it known to whom it may concern, that the said Richard was the merriest, laziest, weakest, most kind-hearted fellow who ever sowed a large crop of wild oats, and by a sudden stroke of good-luck found himself raised to a salaried position.

Clad in a blue jacket with a double row of gilt buttons, bought for aquatic expeditions, but now dedicated to office purposes, Richard entered upon his new duties, and during that first afternoon, while Mr. Brass and his sister were temporarily absent from the office, he began a minute examination of its contents.

Then, after assuaging his thirst with a pint of mild porter, and receiving and dismissing three or four small boys who dropped in on legal errands from other attorneys, with about as correct an understanding of their business as would have been shown by a clown in a pantomime under similar circumstances, he tried his hand at a pen-and-ink caricature of Miss Brass, in which work he was busily engaged, when there came a rapping at the office-door.

"Come in!" said Dick. "Don't stand on ceremony. The business will get rather complicated if I have many more customers. Come in!"

"Oh, please," said a little voice very low down in the doorway, "will you come and show the lodgings?"

Dick leaned over the table, and descried a small slipshod girl in a dirty coarse apron and bib, which left nothing of her visible but her face and feet. She might as well have been dressed in a violin case.

“Why, who are you?” said Dick.

To which the only reply was, “Oh, please, will you come and show the lodgings?”

There never was such an old-fashioned child in her looks and manner. She must have been at work from her cradle. She seemed as much afraid of Dick, as Dick was amazed at her.

“I haven’t got anything to do with the lodgings,” said Dick. “Tell ’em to call again.”

“Oh, but please will you come and show the lodgings?” returned the girl; “it’s eighteen shillings a week, and us finding plate and linen. Boots and clothes is extra, and fires in winter-time is eightpence a day.”

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"Why don't you show 'em yourself? You seem to know all about 'em," said Dick.

"Miss Sally said I wasn't to, because people wouldn't believe the attendance was good if they saw how small I was, first."

"Well, but they'll see how small you are afterwards, won't they?" said Dick.

"Ah! but then they'll have taken 'em for a fortnight certain," replied the child, with a shrewd look; "and people don't like moving when they're once settled."

"This is a queer sort of thing," muttered Dick, rising. "What do you mean to say you are—the cook?"

"Yes; I do plain cooking," replied the child. "I'm housemaid too. I do all the work of the house."

Just then certain sounds on the passage and staircase seemed to denote the applicant's impatience. Richard Swiveller, therefore, hurried out to meet and treat with the single gentleman.

He was a little surprised to perceive that the sounds were occasioned by the progress upstairs of a trunk, which the single gentleman and his coachman were endeavoring to convey up the steep ascent. Mr. Swiveller followed slowly behind, entering a new protest on every stair against the house of Mr. Sampson Brass being thus taken by storm.

To these remonstrances the single gentleman answered not a word, but when the trunk was at last got into the bedroom, sat down upon it, and wiped his bald head with his handkerchief. He then announced abruptly that he would take the room for two years, whereupon, handing a ten-pound note to the astonished Mr. Swiveller, he began to make ready to retire, as if it were night instead of day, and Mr. Swiveller walked downstairs into the office again, filled with wonderment concerning both the strange new lodger and the small servant who had appeared to answer the bell.

After that day, one circumstance troubled Mr. Swiveller's mind very much, and that was, that the small servant always remained somewhere in the bowels of the earth under Bevis Marks, and never came to the surface unless a bell rang, when she would answer it, and immediately disappear again. She never went out, or came into the office, or had a clean face, or took off the coarse apron, or looked out of any of the windows, or stood at the street door for a breath of air, or had any rest or enjoyment whatever. Nobody ever came to see her, nobody spoke of her, nobody cared about her.

"Now," said Dick, one day, walking up and down with his hands in his pockets; "I'd give something—if I had it—to know how they use that child, and where they keep her. I *should* like to know how they use her!"

At that moment he caught a glimpse of Miss Brass flitting down the kitchen stairs. “And, by Jove!” thought Dick, “She’s going to feed the small servant. Now or never!”

First peeping over the handrail, he groped his way down, and arrived at the kitchen door immediately after Miss Brass had entered the same, bearing in her hand a cold leg of mutton.

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It was a very dark, miserable place, very low and very damp; the walls disfigured by a thousand rents and blotches. The water was trickling out of a leaky butt, and a most wretched cat was lapping up the drops with the sickly eagerness of starvation. The grate was screwed up so tight as to hold no more than a thin sandwich of fire. Everything was locked up; the coal-cellar, the candle-box, the salt-box, the meat-safe, were all padlocked. There was nothing that a beetle could have lunched on.

The small servant stood with humility in presence of Miss Sally, and hung her head.

"Are you there?" said Miss Sally.

"Yes ma'am," was the answer, in a weak voice.

"Go further away from the leg of mutton, or you'll be picking it, I know," said Miss Sally.

The girl withdrew into a corner, while Miss Brass opened the safe, and brought from it a dreary waste of cold potatoes, looking as eatable as Stonehenge. This she placed before the small servant, and then, taking up a great carving-knife, made a mighty show of sharpening it.

"Do you see this?" she said, slicing off about two square inches of cold mutton, and holding it out on the point of a fork.

The small servant looked hard enough at it with her hungry eyes to see every shred of it and answered, "Yes."

"Then don't you ever go and say," retorted Miss Sally, "that you hadn't meat here. There, eat it up."

This was soon done.

"Now, do you want any more?" said Miss Sally.

The hungry creature answered with a faint "No." They were evidently going through an established form.

"You've been helped once to meat," said Miss Brass, summing up the facts; "you have had as much as you can eat: you're asked if you want any more, and you answer 'No.' Then don't you ever go and say you were allowanced,—mind that!"

With those words, Miss Sally put the meat away, locked the meat-safe, and then overlooked the small servant while she finished the potatoes. After that, without the smallest cause, she rapped the child with the blade of the knife, now on her hand, now on her head, and now on her back. Then, after walking slowly backward towards the door, she darted suddenly forward, and falling on the small servant again, gave her

some hard blows with her clenched fists. The victim cried, but in a subdued manner, as if she feared to raise her voice; and Miss Sally ascended the stairs just as Richard had safely reached the office, fairly beside himself with anger over the poor child's misery and ill-treatment.

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During the following weeks, when he had become accustomed to the routine of work which he was expected to accomplish, and being often left alone in the office, Richard Swiveller began to find time hang heavy on his hands. For the better preservation of his cheerfulness, therefore, he accustomed himself to play at cribbage with a dummy. While he was silently conducting one of these games Mr. Swiveller began to think that he heard a kind of hard breathing sound, in the direction of the door, which it occurred to him, after some reflection, must proceed from the small servant, who always had a cold from damp living. Looking intently that way, he plainly distinguished an eye gleaming and glistening at the keyhole; and having now no doubt that his suspicions were correct he stole softly to the door, and pounced upon her before she was aware of his approach.

"Oh! I didn't mean any harm, indeed, upon my word I didn't," cried the small servant; "it's so very dull downstairs. Please don't you tell upon me, please don't."

"Tell upon you!" said Dick. "Do you mean to say you were looking through the keyhole for company?"

"Yes, upon my word I was," replied the small servant.

"How long have you been cooling your eye there?" said Dick.

"Oh, ever since you first began to play them cards, and long before."

"Well—come in," said Mr. Swiveller, after a little consideration. "Here—sit down, and I'll teach you how to play."

"Oh! I durstn't do it," rejoined the small servant; "Miss Sally 'ud kill me if she knowed I come up here."

"Have you got a fire downstairs?" said Dick.

"A very little one," replied the small servant.

"Miss Sally couldn't kill me if she knowed I went down there, so I'll come," said Richard, putting the cards into his pocket. "Why, how thin you are! What do you mean by it?"

"It an't my fault."

"Could you eat any bread and meat?" said Dick, taking down his hat "Yes? Ah! I thought so. Did you ever taste beer?"

"I had a sip of it once," said the small servant.

“Here’s a state of things!” cried Mr. Swiveller, raising his eyes to the ceiling. “She never tasted it—it can’t be tasted in a sip! Why, how old are you?”

“I don’t know.”

Mr. Swiveller opened his eyes very wide, and appeared thoughtful for a moment; then, bidding the child mind the door until he came back, vanished straightway.

Presently he returned, followed by a boy from the public-house, who bore a plate of bread and beef, and a great pot filled with choice purl. Relieving the boy of his burden, and charging his little companion to fasten the door to prevent surprise, Mr. Swiveller followed her into the kitchen.

“There!” said Richard, putting the plate before her. “First of all, clear that off, and then you’ll see what’s next.”

The small servant needed no second bidding, and the plate was soon empty.

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"Next," said Dick, handing the purl, "take a pull at that, but moderate your transports, for you're not used to it. Well, is it good?"

"Oh, *isn't* it!" said the small servant.

Mr. Swiveller appeared immensely gratified over her enjoyment, and when she had satisfied her hunger, applied himself to teaching her the game, which she soon learned tolerably well, being both sharp-witted and cunning.

"Now," said Mr. Swiveller, "to make it seem more real and pleasant, I shall call you the Marchioness, do you hear?"

The small servant nodded.

"Then, Marchioness," said Mr. Swiveller, "fire away!"

The Marchioness, holding her cards very tight in both hands, considered which to play, and Mr. Swiveller, assuming the gay and fashionable air which such society required, waited for her lead.

They had played several rubbers, when the striking of ten o'clock rendered Mr. Swiveller mindful of the flight of time, and of the expediency of withdrawing before Mr. Sampson and Miss Sally Brass returned.

"With which object in view, Marchioness," said Mr. Swiveller gravely. "I shall ask your ladyship's permission to put the board in my pocket, and to retire. The Baron Sampson Brasso and his fair sister are, you tell me, at the Play?" added Mr. Swiveller, leaning his left arm heavily upon the table, and raising his voice and his right leg after the manner of a theatrical bandit.

The Marchioness nodded.

"Ha!" said Mr. Swiveller, with a portentous frown. "'Tis well. Marchioness!—but no matter. Some wine there, ho! Marchioness, your health."

The small servant, who was not so well acquainted with theatrical conventionalities as Mr. Swiveller, was rather alarmed by his manner, and showed it so plainly that he felt it necessary to discharge his brigand bearing for one more suitable to private life.

"I suppose," said Dick, "that they consult together a good deal, and talk about a great many people—about me, for instance, sometimes, eh, Marchioness?"

The Marchioness nodded amazingly.

"Complimentary?" asked Mr. Swiveller.

The Marchioness shook her head violently.

“H’m!” Dick muttered. “Would it be any breach of confidence, Marchioness, to relate what they say of the humble individual who has now the honor to—?”

“Miss Sally says you are a funny chap,” replied his friend.

“Well, Marchioness,” said Mr. Swiveller, “that’s not uncomplimentary. Merriment, Marchioness, is not a bad of a degrading quality. Old King Cole was himself a merry old soul, if we may put any faith in the pages of history.”

“But she says,” pursued his companion, “that you aren’t to be trusted.”

“Why, really, Marchioness,” said Mr. Swiveller thoughtfully, “it’s a popular prejudice, and yet I’m sure I don’t know why, for I’ve been trusted in my time to a considerable amount, and I can safely say that I never forsook my trust, until it deserted me—never. Mr. Brass is of the same opinion, I suppose?”

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His friend nodded again, adding imploringly, "But don't you ever tell upon me, or I shall be beat to death."

"Marchioness," said Mr. Swiveller, rising, "the word of a gentleman is as good as his bond—sometimes better, as in the present case, where his bond might prove but a doubtful sort of security. I'm your friend, and I hope we shall play many more rubbers together. But, Marchioness," added Richard, "it occurs to me that you must be in the constant habit of airing your eye at keyholes to know this."

"I only wanted," replied the trembling Marchioness, "to know where the key of the meat-safe was hid—that was all; and I wouldn't have taken much if I had found it—only enough to squench my hunger."

"You didn't find it, then?" said Dick, "but, of course, you didn't, or of course you'd be plumper. Good-night, Marchioness, fare thee well, and if forever, then forever fare thee well. And put up the chain, Marchioness, in case of accidents!"

Upon repairing to Bevis Marks on the following morning, he found Miss Brass much agitated over the disappearance from the office of several small articles, as well as three half crowns, and Richard felt much troubled over the matter, saying to himself, "Then, by Jove, I'm afraid the Marchioness is done for!"

The more he discussed the subject in his thoughts, the more probable it appeared to Dick that the miserable little servant was the culprit. When he considered on what a spare allowance of food she lived, how neglected and untaught she was, and how her natural cunning had been sharpened by necessity and privation, he scarcely doubted it. And yet he pitied her so much, and felt so unwilling to have a matter of such gravity disturbing the oddity of their acquaintance, that he thought, rather than receive fifty pounds down, he would have the Marchioness proved innocent.

While the subject of the thefts was under discussion, Kit Nubbles, a lad in the employ of a Mr. Garland, passed through the office, on his way upstairs to the room of the Brasses' lodger, the single gentleman, who was an intimate friend of Kit's employer. The single gentleman having been confined to his room for some time by a slight illness, it had become Kit's daily custom to convey to him messages and notes from Mr. Garland, and not infrequently Sampson Brass would detain the lad in the office for a few words of pleasant conversation.

Having discharged his errand, Kit came downstairs again, finding no one in the office except Mr. Brass, who, after greeting him affably, requested him to mind the office for one minute while he ran upstairs. Mr. Brass returned almost immediately, Mr. Swiveller came in too, at the same instant, likewise Miss Sally, and Kit, released, at once set off on a run towards home, eager to make up for lost time. As he was running, he was

suddenly arrested and held in restraint, by no less a person than Sampson Brass himself, accompanied by Mr. Swiveller.

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A five-pound note was missing from the office. Kit had been alone there for some minutes. Who could have taken it but Kit?

Pleased to have suspicion diverted from the Marchioness, but loath to help in so unpleasant an affair, Mr. Swiveller reluctantly assisted in bearing the captive back to the office, Kit protesting his innocence at every step. They searched him, and there under the lining of his hat was the missing bank-note!

Still protesting his innocence, and completely stunned by the calamity which had come upon him, the lad was borne off to prison, where, after eleven weary days had dragged away, he was brought to trial. Richard Swiveller was called as a witness against Kit, and told his tale with reluctance, and an evident desire to make the best of it, for the lad's sake. His kind heart was also touched with pity for Kit's poor widowed mother, who sobbed out again and again, that she had never had cause to doubt her son's honesty, and she never would.

When the trial was ended, and Kit found guilty, Richard bore the lad's fainting mother swiftly off in a coach he had ready for the purpose, and on the way comforted her in his own peculiar fashion, perpetrating the most astounding absurdities of quotation from song and poem that ever were heard. Reaching her home, he stayed till she was recovered; then returned to Bevis Marks, where Mr. Brass met him with the news that his services would be no longer required in the establishment.

Feeling sure that this verdict was in consequence of his defence of Kit, Mr. Swiveller took his dismissal in profound silence, and turned his back upon Bevis Marks, big with designs for the comforting of Kit's mother, and the aid of Kit himself. His only regret in regard to the matter was in having to leave the Marchioness alone and unprotected in the hands of the Brasses, and little did he dream that to the small servant herself, to the Marchioness, rather than to him, Kit and his mother were to owe their heaviest debt of gratitude—but it was so to be.

That very night Mr. Richard was seized with an alarming illness, and in twenty-four hours was stricken with a raging fever, and lay tossing upon his hot, uneasy bed, unconscious of anything but weariness and worry and pain, until at length he sank into a deep sleep. He awoke, and with a sensation of blissful rest better than sleep itself, began to dimly remember, and to think what a long night it had been, and to wonder whether he had not been delirious once or twice. Still, he felt indifferent and happy, and having no curiosity to pursue the subject, remained in a waking slumber until his attention was attracted by a cough. This made him doubt whether he had locked his door last night, and feel a little surprised at having a companion in the room. But he lacked energy to follow up this train of thought, and in a luxury of repose, lay staring at some green stripes on the bed furniture, and associating them strangely, with patches of fresh turf, while the yellow ground between made gravel walks, and so helped out a long perspective of trim gardens.

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He was rambling in imagination on these terraces, when he heard the cough once more. Raising himself a little in the bed, he looked about him.

The same room, certainly, but with what unbounded astonishment did he see bottles, and basins, and articles of linen airing by the fire—all very clean and neat, but quite different from anything he had left there when he went to bed! The atmosphere too filled with a cool smell of herbs and vinegar; the floor newly sprinkled; the—the what?—the Marchioness!

Yes; playing cribbage with herself at the table. There she sat, intent upon her game, coughing now and then in a subdued manner, as if she feared to disturb him, going through all the mysteries of cribbage as if she had been in full practice from her cradle!

Mr. Swiveller contemplated these things for a short time, then laid his head on the pillow again.

“I’m dreaming,” thought Richard, “that’s clear. When I went to bed my hands were not made of egg-shells, and now I can almost see through ’em. If this is not a dream, I have woke up, by mistake, in an Arabian Night instead of a London one. But I have no doubt I’m asleep. Not the least.”

Here the small servant had another cough.

“Very remarkable!” thought Mr. Swiveller. “I never dreamed such a real cough as that before. There’s another—and another—I say!—I’m dreaming rather fast!”

“It’s an Arabian Night; that’s what it is,” said Richard. “I’m in Damascus or Grand Cairo. The Marchioness is a Genie and having had a wager with another Genie about who is the handsomest young man alive, and the worthiest to be the husband of the Princess of China, has brought me away, room and all, to compare us together.”

Not feeling quite satisfied with this explanation, Mr. Swiveller determined to take the first opportunity of addressing his companion. An occasion soon presented itself. The Marchioness dealt, turned up a knave, and omitted to take the usual advantage, upon which Mr. Swiveller called out as loud as he could—“Two for his heels!”

The Marchioness jumped up quickly, and clapped her hands.

“Arabian Night certainly,” thought Mr. Swiveller; “they always clap their hands, instead of ringing the bell. Now for the two thousand black slaves with jars and jewels on their heads!”

It appeared however, that she had only clapped her hands for joy, as directly afterward she began to laugh, and then to cry, declaring, not in choice Arabic, but in familiar English, that she was “so glad she didn’t know what to do.”

“Marchioness,” said Mr. Swiveller, “will you have the goodness to inform me where I shall find my voice; and what has become of my flesh?”

The Marchioness only shook her head mournfully, and cried again, whereupon Mr. Swiveller (being very weak) felt his own eyes affected likewise.

“I begin to infer, Marchioness,” said Richard, after a pause, “that I have been ill.”

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"You just have!" replied the small servant, wiping her eyes. "Haven't you been a-talking nonsense!"

"Oh!", said Dick. "Very ill, Marchioness, have I been?"

"Dead, all but," replied the small servant. "I never thought you'd get better."

Mr. Swiveller was silent for a long period. By and by he inquired how long he had been there.

"Three weeks to-morrow." replied the small servant, "three long slow weeks."

The bare thought of having been in such extremity caused Richard to fall into another silence. The Marchioness, having arranged the bedclothes more comfortably, and felt that his hands and forehead were quite cool, cried a little more, and then applied herself to getting tea ready, and making some thin dry toast.

While she was thus engaged Mr. Swiveller looked on with a grateful heart, very much astonished to see how thoroughly at home she made herself. She propped him up with pillows, and looked on with unutterable satisfaction, while he took his poor meal with a relish which the greatest dainties of the earth might have failed to provoke. Having cleared away, and disposed everything comfortably about him again, she sat down to take her own tea.

"Marchioness," said Mr. Swiveller, "have you seen Sally lately?"

"Seen her!" cried the small servant. "Bless you, I've run away!"

Mr. Swiveller immediately laid himself down again, and so remained for about five minutes. After that lapse of time he resumed his sitting posture, and inquired,—

"And where do you live, Marchioness?"

"Live!" cried the small servant. "Here!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Swiveller.

With that he fell down flat again, as suddenly as if he had been shot. Thus he remained until she had finished her meal, when being propped up again he opened a further conversation.

"And so," said Dick, "you have run away?"

"Yes," said the Marchioness; "and they've been a 'tising of me."

“Been—I beg your pardon,” said Dick. “What have they been doing?”

“Been a ’tising of me—’tising, you know, in the newspapers,” rejoined the Marchioness.

“Aye, aye,” said Dick, “Advertising?”

The small servant nodded and winked.

“Tell me,” continued Richard, “how it was that you thought of coming here?”

“Why, you see,” returned the Marchioness, “when you was gone, I hadn’t any friend at all, and I didn’t know where you was to be found, you know. But one morning, when I was near the office keyhole I heard somebody saying that she lived here, and was the lady whose house you lodged at, and that you was took very bad, and wouldn’t nobody come and take care of you. Mr. Brass, he says, ‘It’s no business of mine,’ he says; and Miss Sally she says, ‘He’s a funny chap, but it’s no business of mine;’ and the lady went away. So I run away that night, and come here, and told ’em you was my brother, and I’ve been here ever since.”

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"This poor little Marchioness has been wearing herself to death!" cried Dick.

"No, I haven't," she replied, "not a bit of it. Don't you mind about me. I like sitting up, and I've often had a sleep, bless you, in one of them chairs. But if you could have seen how you tried to jump out o' winder, and if you could have heard how you used to keep on singing and making speeches, you wouldn't have believed it—I'm so glad you're better, Mr. Liverer."

"Liverer, indeed!" said Dick thoughtfully. "It's well I am a liverer. I strongly suspect I should have died, Marchioness, but for you."

At this point, Mr. Swiveller took the small servant's hand in his, struggling to express his thanks, but she quickly changed the theme, urging him to shut his eyes and take a little rest. Being indeed fatigued, he needed but little urging, and fell into a slumber, from which he waked in about half an hour, after which his small friend helped him to sit up again.

"Marchioness," said Richard suddenly, "What has become of Kit?"

"He has been sentenced to transportation for a great many years," she said.

"Has he gone?" asked Dick, "His mother, what has become of her?"

His nurse shook her head, and answered that she knew nothing about them. "But if I thought," said she presently, "that you'd not put yourself into another fever, I could tell you something—but I won't, now. Wait till you're better, then I'll tell you."

Dick looked very earnestly at his little friend, and urged her to tell him the worst at once.

Unable to resist his fervent adjurations, the Marchioness spoke thus:

"Well! Before I run away, I used to sleep in the kitchen. Miss Sally used to keep the key of the door in her pocket, and she always come down at night to take away the candle and rake out the fire. Then she left me to go to bed in the dark, locked the door on the outside, and kept me locked up till she came down in the morning and let me out. I was terrible afraid of being kept like this, because if there was a fire, I thought they might forget me, you know. So, whenever I see an old key, I picked it up and tried if it would fit the door, and at last I found a key that did fit it. They kept me very short," said the small servant, "so I used to come out at night after they'd gone to bed, and feel about in the dark, for bits of biscuit, or sangwitches, or even pieces of orange-peel to put into cold water, and make believe it was wine. If you make believe very much, it's quite nice," continued the small servant; "but if you don't, you know, it seems as if it would bear a little more seasoning! Well, one or two nights before the young man was took, I come upstairs while Mr. Brass and Miss Sally was a-sittin by the office fire and talking softly

together. They whispered and laughed for a long time, about there being no danger if it was well done; that they must do what their best client,

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Quilp, desired, and that for his own reasons, he hated Kit, and wanted to have his reputation ruined. Then Mr. Brass pulls out his pocket-book, and says, 'Well, here it is—Quilp's own five-pound note. Kit is coming to-morrow morning, I know. I'll hold him in conversation, and put this property in his hat, and then convict him of theft. And if that don't get Kit out of Mr. Quilp's way, and satisfy his grudge against the lad,' he said, 'the devil's in it.' Then they seemed to be moving away, and I was afraid to stop any longer. There!"

The small servant was so much agitated herself that she made no effort to restrain Mr. Swiveller when he sat up in bed, and hastily demanded whether this story had been told to anybody.

"How could it be?" replied his nurse. "When I heard 'em say that you was gone, and so was the lodger, and ever since I come here, you've been out of your senses, so what would have been the good of telling you then?"

"Marchioness," said Mr. Swiveller, "if you'll do me the favor to retire for a few minutes, and see what sort of a night it is, I'll get up,"

"You mustn't think of such a thing," cried his nurse.

"I must indeed," said the patient. "Whereabouts are my clothes?"

"Oh, I'm so glad—you haven't got any," replied the Marchioness.

"Ma'am!" said Mr. Swiveller, in great astonishment.

"I've been obliged to sell them, every one, to get the things that was ordered for you. But don't take on about that," urged the Marchioness, as Dick fell back upon his pillow, "you're too weak to stand indeed."

"I'm afraid," said Richard dolefully, "that you're right. Now, what is to be done?"

It occurred to him, on very little reflection, that the first step to take would be to communicate with Kit's employer, Mr. Garland, or with his son Mr. Abel, at once. It was possible that Mr. Abel had not yet left his office. In as little time as it takes to tell it, the small servant had the address on a piece of paper, and a description of father and son, which would enable her to recognize either without difficulty. Armed with these slender powers, she hurried away, commissioned to bring either Mr. Garland or Mr. Abel bodily to Mr. Swiveller's apartment.

“I suppose,” said Dick, as she closed the door slowly, and peeped into the room again, to make sure that he was comfortable, “I suppose there’s nothing left—not so much as a waistcoat?”

“No, nothing.”

“Its embarrassing,” said Mr. Swiveller, “in case of fire—even an umbrella would be something—but you did quite right, dear Marchioness. I should have died without you.”

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The small servant went swiftly on her way, towards the office of the Notary, Mr. Witherden, where Mr. Garland was to be found. She had no bonnet, only a great cap on her head, which in some old time had been worn by Sally Brass;—and her shoes being extremely large and slipshod, flew off every now and then, and were difficult to find. Indeed the poor little creature experienced so much trouble and delay from having to grope for them in the mud, and suffered so much jostling, pushing, and squeezing in these researches, that between it, and her fear of being recognized by some one, and carried back by force to the Brasses, when she at last reached the Notary's office, she was fairly worn out, and could not refrain from tears. But to have got there was a comfort, and she found Mr. Abel in the act of entering his pony-chaise and driving away. There was nothing for her to do but to run after the chaise and call to Mr. Abel to stop. Being out of breath, she was unable to make him hear. The case was desperate, for the pony was quickening his pace. The Marchioness hung on behind for a few moments, and feeling she could go no farther, clambered by a vigorous effort into the hinder seat, where she remained in silence, until she had to some degree recovered her breath, and become accustomed to the novelty of her position, when she uttered close into Mr. Abel's ear the words,—

"I say, sir."

He turned his head quickly enough then, and stopping the pony, cried with some trepidation, "God bless me! what is this?"

"Don't be frightened, sir," replied the still panting messenger. "Oh, I've run such a way after you!"

"What do you want with me?" said Mr. Abel. "How did you come here?"

"I got in behind," replied the Marchioness. "Oh, please drive on, sir—don't stop—and go towards the City, will you? and oh—do please make haste, because it is of consequence. There's somebody wants to see you there. He sent me to say, would you come directly, and that he knows all about Kit, and could save him yet, and prove his innocence."

"What do you tell me, child?"

"The truth, upon my word and honor, I do. But please to drive on—quick, please! I've been such a time gone, he'll think I'm lost"

Mr. Abel urged the pony forward, and at last they arrived at the door of Mr. Swiveller's lodgings.

"See! It's that room up there," said the Marchioness, pointing to one where there was a faint light. "Come!"

Mr. Abel who was naturally timid, hesitated; for he had heard of people being decoyed into strange places, to be robbed and murdered, under circumstances very like the present, by guides very like the Marchioness. His regard for Kit, however, overcame every other consideration. So he suffered his companion to lead him up the dark and narrow stair, into a dimly lighted sick-chamber, where a man was lying tranquilly in bed, in whose wasted face he recognized the features of Richard Swiveller.

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"Why, how is this?" said Mr. Abel, kindly, "You have been ill?"

"Very," replied Dick, "Nearly dead. You might have chanced to hear of your Richard on his bier, but for the friend I sent to fetch you. Another shake of the hand, Marchioness, if you please. Sit down, sir."

Mr. Abel seemed rather astonished to hear of the quality of his guide, and took a chair by the bedside.

"I have sent for you, sir," said Dick—"but she told you on what account?"

"She did. I am quite bewildered by all this. I really don't know what to say or think," replied Mr. Abel.

"You'll say that presently," retorted Dick. "Marchioness, take a seat on the bed, will you? Now, tell this gentleman all that you told me, and be particular."

The story was repeated, without any deviation or omission, after which Richard Swiveller took the word again;

"You have heard it all," said Richard. "I'm too giddy and queer to suggest anything, but you and your friends will know what to do. After this long delay, every minute is an age. Don't stop to say one word to me, but go! If you lose another minute in looking at me, sir, I'll never forgive you!"

Mr. Abel needed no more persuasion. To Dick's unbounded delight he was gone in an instant, and Mr. Swiveller, exhausted by the interview, was soon asleep, murmuring 'Strew, then, oh strew a bed of rushes. Here will we stay till morning blushes.' "Good-night, Marchioness!"

On awaking in the morning, he became conscious of whispering voices in his room, and espied Mr. Garland, Mr. Abel, and two other gentlemen talking earnestly with the Marchioness. Upon perceiving the invalid to be awake, Mr. Garland stretched out his hand, and inquired how Mr. Swiveller felt; adding

"And what can we do for you?"

"If you could make the Marchioness yonder, a Marchioness in real, sober earnest," returned Dick, "I'd thank you to get it done offhand. But as you can't, the question is, what is it best to do for Kit?"

Gathering around Mr. Swiveller's bedside, the group of gentlemen then proceeded to discuss in detail all the evidence against Sampson Brass, as contained in the confession of the Marchioness, and what course was wisest to pursue in the matter. After which the gentlemen took their leaves for a time, or Richard Swiveller must

assuredly have been driven into another fever, in consequence of having entered into such an exciting discussion.

Mr. Abel alone remained behind, very often looking at his watch and the room-door, until the reason of his watchfulness was disclosed when Mr. Swiveller was roused from a short nap by the delivery at his door of a mighty hamper, which, being opened, disgorged such treasures of tea, and coffee, and wine, and rusk, and oranges, and grapes, and fowls, and calvesfoot jelly, and other delicate restoratives, that the small servant stood rooted to the spot, with her mouth and

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eyes watering in unison, and her power of speech quite gone. With the hamper appeared also a nice old lady, who bustled about on tiptoe, began to make chicken-broth, and peel oranges for the sick man, and to ply the small servant with glasses of wine, and choice bits of everything. The whole of which was so bewildering that Mr. Swiveller, when he had taken two oranges and a little jelly, was fain to lie down and fall asleep again, from sheer inability to entertain such wonders in his mind.

Meanwhile the other gentlemen, who had left Richard Swiveller's room, had retired to a coffee-house near by, from whence they sent a peremptory and mysterious summons to Miss Sally Brass to favor them with her company there as soon as possible. To this she replied by an almost immediate appearance, whereupon, without any loss of time, she was confronted with the tale of the small servant. While it was being related for her benefit, Sampson Brass himself suddenly opened the door of the coffee-house and joined the astonished group. Hearing the certain proofs of his guilt so clearly related, he saw that evasion was useless, and made a full confession of the scheme whereby Kit was to have been doomed, but laying the entire blame, however, upon the rich little dwarf, Quilp, saying that he could not afford to lose his rich client, nor the large bribe he offered for the arrest of the lad, Kit.

Having secured the desired confession, the gentlemen hastened back to Mr. Swiveller's room with the glad tidings, adding that it would now be possible to accomplish the lad's immediate release, after making which joyful statement, they took their departure for the night, leaving the invalid with the small servant and one of their number, Mr. Witherden, the notary, who remained behind to be the bearer of good news to the invalid.

"I have been making some inquiries about you," said Mr. Witherden, "little thinking that I should find you under such circumstances as those which have brought us together. You are the nephew of Rebecca Swiveller, spinster, deceased, of Cheselbourne, in Dorsetshire."

"Deceased!" cried Dick.

"Deceased. And by the terms of her will, you have fallen into an annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds a year; I think I may congratulate you upon that."

"Sir," said Dick, sobbing and laughing together, "you may. For, please God, we'll make a scholar of the poor Marchioness yet. And she shall walk in silk attire, and siller have to spare, or may I never rise from this bed again!"

Mr. Swiveller, recovering very slowly from his illness, even with the strong tonic of his good fortune, and entering into the receipt of his annuity, bought for the Marchioness a

handsome stock of clothes, and put her to school forthwith, in redemption of the vow he had made upon his fevered bed.

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After casting about for some time for a name which should be worthy of her, he decided in favor of Sophronia Sphynx, as being euphonious and genteel, and, furthermore, indicative of mystery. Under this title the Marchioness repaired in tears to the school of his selection, from which, as she soon distanced all competitors, she was removed before the lapse of many quarters to one of a higher grade. It is but bare justice to Mr. Swiveller to say that although the expense of her education kept him in straightened circumstances for half-a-dozen years, he never slackened in his zeal, and always held himself sufficiently repaid by the accounts he heard of her advancement.

In a word, Mr. Swiveller kept the Marchioness at this establishment until she was, at a moderate guess, full nineteen years of age, at which time, thanks to her earliest friend and most loyal champion, Richard Swiveller, the shadows of a bitter past had been chased from her memory by a happy present, and she was as good-looking, clever, and good-humored a young woman as ever a real Marchioness might have been.

MORLEENA KENWIGS

[Illustration: *The Kenwigses*]

MORLEENA KENWIGS

The family who went by the designation of “The Kenwigses” were the wife and olive branches of one Mr. Kenwigs, a turner in ivory, who was looked upon as a person of some consideration where he lodged, inasmuch as he occupied the whole of the first floor, comprising a suite of two rooms. Mrs. Kenwigs too, was quite a lady in her manners, and of a very genteel family, having an uncle, Mr. Lillyvick, who collected a water-rate, and who she fondly hoped, would make her children his heirs. Besides which distinction, the two eldest of her little girls went twice a week to a dancing-school in the neighborhood, and had flaxen hair tied with blue ribbons, hanging in luxuriant pigtails down their backs, and wore little white trousers with frills round the ankles;—for all of which reasons Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs, and the four olive Kenwigses, and the baby, were considered quite important persons to know.

Upon the eighth anniversary of Mrs. Kenwigs’ marriage to Mr. Kenwigs, they entertained a select party of friends, and on that occasion, after supper had been served, the group gathered by the fireside; Mr. Lillyvick being stationed in a large arm-chair, and the four little Kenwigses disposed on a small form in front of the company, with their flaxen tails towards them, and their faces to the fire; an arrangement which was no sooner perfected than Mrs. Kenwigs was overpowered by the feelings of a mother, and fell upon Mr. Kenwigs’ shoulder, dissolved in tears.

“They are so beautiful!” she said, sobbing. “I can—not help it, and it don’t signify! Oh, they’re too beautiful to live—much too beautiful!”

On hearing this alarming presentiment of their early death, all four little girls raised a hideous cry, and, burying their faces in their mother’s lap simultaneously, screamed until the eight flaxen tails vibrated; Mrs. Kenwigs meanwhile clasping them alternately to her bosom, with attitudes expressive of distraction.

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At length, however, she permitted herself to be soothed, and the little Kenwigses were distributed among the company, to prevent the possibility of Mrs. Kenwigs being again overcome by the blaze of their united beauty, after which, Morleena, the eldest olive branch—whose name had been composed by Mrs. Kenwigs herself for the especial benefit of her daughter—danced a dance. It was a very beautiful figure, comprising a great deal of work for the arms, and was received with unbounded applause, as were the various accomplishments displayed by others of the party. The affair was proceeding most successfully when Mr. Lillyvick took offence at a remark made by Mr. Kenwigs, and sat swelling and fuming in offended dignity for some minutes, then burst out in words of indignation. Here was an untoward event! The great man,—the rich relation—who had it in his power to make Morleena an heiress, and the very baby a legatee—was offended. Gracious powers, where would this end!

“I am very sorry, sir,” said Mr. Kenwigs humbly, but the apology was not accepted, and Mr. Lillyvick continued to repeat; “Morleena, child, my hat! Morleena, my hat!” until Mrs. Kenwigs sunk back in her chair, overcome with grief, while the four little girls (privately instructed to that effect) clasped their uncle’s drab shorts in their arms, and prayed him to remain.

“Mr. Lillyvick,” said Kenwigs, “I hope for the sake of your niece that you won’t object to being reconciled.”

The collector’s face relaxed, as the company added their entreaties to those of their host. He gave up his hat and held out his hand.

“There, Kenwigs,” he said. “And let me tell you at the same time, to show you how much out of temper I was, that if I had gone away without another word, it would have made no difference respecting that pound or two which I shall leave among your children when I die.”

“Morleena Kenwigs,” cried her mother, in a torrent of affection; “go down upon your knees to your dear uncle and beg him to love you all his life through, for he’s more an angel than a man, and I’ve always said so.”

Miss Morleena, approaching to do homage, was summarily caught up and kissed by Mr. Lillyvick, and thereupon Mrs. Kenwigs herself darted forward and kissed the collector, and all was forgiven and forgotten.

No further wave of trouble ruffled the feelings of the party until suddenly there came shrill and piercing screams from an upper room in which the infant Kenwigs was enshrined, guarded by a small girl hired for the purpose. Rushing to the door, Mrs. Kenwigs began to wring her hands and shriek dismally, amid which cries, and the wails of the four little girls, a stranger ran downstairs with the baby in his arms, explaining hastily that, visiting a friend in a room above, he had heard the cries, and found the

baby's guardian asleep with her hair on fire. This explanation over, the baby, who was unhurt, and who rejoiced in

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the name of Lillyvick Kenwigs, was instantly almost suffocated under the caresses of the audience, and squeezed to his mother's bosom until he roared again. Then, after drinking the health of the child's preserver, the company made the discovery that it was nigh two o'clock, whereat they took their leave, with flattering expressions of the pleasure they had enjoyed, to which Mr. and Mrs. Kenwigs replied by thanking them, and hoping they had enjoyed themselves only half as well as they said they had.

The young man, Nicholas Nickleby by name, who had rescued the baby, made such an impression upon Mrs. Kenwigs that she felt impelled to propose through the friend whom he had been visiting, that he should instruct the four little Kenwigses in the French language at the weekly stipend of five shillings; being at the rate of one shilling per week, per each Miss Kenwigs, and one shilling over until such time as the baby might be able to take it out in grammar.

This proposition was accepted with alacrity by Nicholas, who betook himself to the Kenwigs' apartment with all speed. Here he found the four Miss Kenwigses on their form of audience, and the baby in a dwarf porter's chair, with a deal tray before it, amusing himself with a toy horse, while Mrs. Kenwigs spoke to the little girls of the superior advantages they enjoyed above other children. "But I hope," she said, "that that will not make them proud; but that they will bless their own good fortune which has born them superior to common people's children. And when you go out in the streets, or elsewhere, I desire that you don't boast of it to the other children," continued Mrs. Kenwigs, "and that if you must say anything about it, you don't say no more than 'we've got a private master comes to teach us at home, but we ain't proud, because Ma says its sinful,' Do you hear, Morleena?"

Upon the eldest Miss Kenwigs replying meekly that she did, permission was conceded for the lesson to commence, and accordingly the four Miss Kenwigses again arranged themselves upon their form, in a row, with their tails all one way, while Nicholas Nickleby began his preliminary explanations.

Some months after this, the Kenwigses were thrown into a fever of rage and disappointment, by receiving the cruel news of their Uncle Lillyvick's marriage, which blow was a terrible one to Mrs. Kenwigs, blighting her hopes for her children's future. After weeping and wailing in the most agonized fashion, Mrs. Kenwigs drew herself up in proud defiance, and denounced her uncle in terms direct and plain, stating that he should never again darken her doors. In this terrible state of affairs, it remained for Morleena of the flaxen tails, to bring about a family re-union, and in this way:

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It had come to pass that she had received an invitation to repair next day, per steamer from Westminster bridge, unto the Eel-Pie Island at Twickenham, there to make merry upon a cold collation, and to dance in the open air to the music of a locomotive band; the steamer having been engaged by a dancing-master for his numerous pupils, one of whom had extended an invitation to Miss Morleena, and Mrs. Kenwigs rightly deemed the honor of the family was involved in her daughter making the most splendid appearance possible. Now, between the Italian-ironing of frills, the flouncing of trousers, the trimming of frocks, the faintings from overwork and the comings-to again, incidental to the occasion, Mrs. Kenwigs had been so entirely occupied, that she had not observed, until within half an hour before, that the flaxen tails of Miss Morleena were in a manner, run to seed; and that unless she were put under the hands of a skilful hairdresser she never could achieve that signal triumph over the daughters of all other people, anything less than which would be tantamount to defeat. This discovery drove Mrs. Kenwigs to despair, for the hairdresser lived three streets and eight dangerous crossings off, and there was nobody to take her. So Mrs. Kenwigs first slapped Miss Kenwigs for being the cause of her vexation, and then shed tears.

"I can't help it, ma," replied Morleena, also in tears, "my hair *will* grow!" While they were both still bemoaning and weeping, a fellow lodger in the house came upon them, and hearing of their difficulty, offered to escort Miss Morleena to the barber-shop, and at once led her in safety to that establishment. The proprietor, knowing she had three sisters, each with two flaxen tails, and all good for sixpence apiece a month at least, promptly deserted an old gentleman whom he had just lathered for shaving, and waited on the young lady himself. The old gentleman raising his head, Miss Kenwigs noticed his face and uttered a shrill little scream,—it was her Uncle Lillyvick!

Hearing his name pronounced, Mr. Lillyvick groaned, then coughed to hide it, and consigning himself to the hands of an assistant, commenced a colloquy with Miss Morleena's escort, rather striving to escape the notice of Miss Morleena herself, and so remarkable did this behavior seem to her, that at the imminent hazard of having her ear sliced off, she could not forbear looking round at him some score of times.

The cutting and curling being at last concluded, the old gentleman, who had been finished some time, and simply waiting, rose to go also, and walked out of the establishment with Miss Morleena and her escort, proceeding with them, in profound silence until they had nearly reached Miss Morleena's home, when he asked if her family had been very much overpowered by the news of his marriage.

"It made ma cry when she knew it," answered Miss Morleena, "and pa was very low in his spirits, but he is better now, and I was very ill, but I am better too."

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“Would you give your great-uncle Lillyvick a kiss, if he was to ask you, Morleena?” said the collector, with some hesitation.

“Yes, Uncle Lillyvick, I would,” returned Miss Morleena with no hesitation whatsoever, whereupon Mr. Lillyvick caught her in his arms and kissed her, and being by this time at the door of the house, he walked straight up into the Kenwigses’ sitting-room and put her down in their midst. The surprise and delight that reigned in the bosom of the Kenwigses at the unexpected sight, was only heightened by the joyful intelligence that their uncle’s married life had been both brief and unsatisfactory, and by his further statement:

“Out of regard for you, Susan and Kenwigs, I shall to-morrow morning settle upon your children, and make payable to their survivors when they come of age, or marry, that money which I once meant to leave ’em in my will. The deed shall be executed to-morrow!”

Overcome by this noble and generous offer, and by their emotion, Mr. Kenwigs, Mrs. Kenwigs, and Miss Morleena Kenwigs all began to sob together, and the noise communicating itself to the next room where the other children lay a-bed, and causing them to cry too, Mr. Kenwigs rushed wildly in, and bringing them out in his arms, by two and two, tumbled them down in their night-caps and gowns at the feet of Mr. Lillyvick, and called upon them to thank and bless him.

And this wonderful domestic scene,—this family reconciliation was brought about by Miss Morleena, eldest of the four little Kenwigses, with the flaxen tails!

LITTLE NELL

[Illustration: *Little Nell and her grandfather*]

LITTLE NELL

There was once an old man, whose daughter dying, left in his care two orphan children, a son twelve years old, and little Nell, a younger girl. The grandfather was now an old and feeble man, but gathering himself together as best he could, he began to trade;—in pictures first—and then in curious ancient things, and from the Old Curiosity Shop, as it was called, he was able to obtain a slender income.

The boy grew into a wayward youth, and soon quitted his grandfather’s home for companions more suited to his taste, but sweet little Nell remained, and grew so like her mother, that when the old man had her on his knee, and looked into her mild blue eyes, he felt as if his daughter had come back, a child again.



The old man and little Nell dwelt alone,—he loving her with a passionate devotion, and haunted with a fearful dread lest she should be left to a life of poverty and want, when he should be called to leave her. This fear so overmastered him that it led him to the gaming-table, and—for her sake—he became a professional gambler, hoping to lay by a vast fortune for her future use. But he lost heavily and constantly, until his slender resources were exhausted, and he was obliged to borrow money from the rich little dwarf money-lender, Quilp, pledging his stock as security for the loans.

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But of all this Little Nell knew nothing, or she would have implored him to give up the dangerous practice. She only knew that, after her monotonous days, unchecked by variety and uncheered by pleasant companionship, the old man, who seemed always agitated by some hidden care, and weak and wandering in his mind, taking his cloak and hat and stick, would pass from the house, leaving her alone through the dreary evenings and long solitary nights.

It was not the absence of such pleasures as make young hearts beat high, that brought tears to Nell's eyes. It was the sight of the old man's feeble state of mind and body, and the fear that some night he should fail to come home, having been overtaken by illness or sudden death. Such fears as these drove the roses from her smooth young cheeks, and stilled the songs which before had rung through the dim old shop, while the gay, lightsome step passed among the dusty treasures. Now she seldom smiled or sang, and among the few bits of comedy in her sad days, were the visits of Kit Nubbles, her grandfather's errand boy, a shock-headed, shambling, comical lad, whose devotion to the beautiful child verged on worship. Appreciating Nell's loneliness, Kit visited the shop as often as possible, and the exquisite oddity and awkwardness of his manner so amused her that at sight of him she would give way to genuine merriment. Kit himself, being always flattered by the sensation he produced, would often burst into a loud roar, and stand with his mouth wide open, and his eyes nearly shut, laughing violently.

Twice every week Nell gave the lad a writing lesson, to the great mirth and enjoyment of them both, and each time Kit tucked up his sleeves, squared his elbows, and put his face very close to the copy-book, squinting horribly at the lines, fairly wallowing in blots, and daubing himself with ink up to the roots of his hair,—and if he did by accident form a letter properly, he immediately smeared it out again with his arm—and at every fresh mistake there was a fresh burst of merriment from the child and from poor Kit himself.

But of such happy times sweet Nell had few, and she became more anxious about her grandfather's health, as he became daily more worried over the secret which he would not share with her, and which preyed upon his mind and body with increasing ravages.

Fortune did not favor his ventures, and Quilp, having discovered for what purpose he borrowed such large sums, refused him further loans. In an agony of apprehension for the future, the old man told Nell that he had had heavy losses, that they would soon be beggars.

"What if we are?" said the child boldly. "Let us be beggars, and be happy."

"Beggars—and happy!" said the old man. "Poor child!"

"Dear grandfather," cried the girl, with an energy which shone in her flushed face, trembling voice, and impassioned, gestures, "O, hear me pray that we may beg, or work in open roads or fields, to earn a scanty living, rather than live as we do now."

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“Nelly!” said the old man.

“Yes, yes, rather than live as we do now,” the child repeated, “do not let me see such change in you, and not know why, or I shall break my heart and die. Dear grandfather, let us leave this sad place to-morrow, and beg our way from door to door.”

The old man covered his face with his hands, as the child added, “Let us be beggars. I have no fear but we shall have enough: I’m sure we shall. Let us walk through country places, and never think of money again, or anything that can make you sad, but rest at nights, and have the sun and wind on our faces in the day, and thank God together! Let us never set foot in dark rooms or melancholy houses any more, but wander up and down wherever we like to go, and when you are tired, you shall stop to rest in the pleasantest places we can find, and I will go and beg for both.”

The child’s voice was lost in sobs as she dropped upon the old man’s neck; nor did she weep alone.

That very day news came that the Old Curiosity Shop and its contents would at once pass into Quilp’s hands, in payment of the old man’s debts. In vain he pleaded for one more chance to redeem himself—for one more loan—Quilp was firm in his refusal of further help, and little Nell found the old man, overcome by the news, lying upon the floor of his room, alarmingly ill. For weeks he lay raving in the delirium of fever, little Nell alone beside him, nursing him with a single-hearted devotion. The house was no longer theirs; even the sick chamber they retained by special favor until such time as the old man could be removed. Meanwhile, Mr. Quilp had taken formal possession of the premises, and to make sure that no more business was transacted in the shop, was encamped in the back parlor. So keen was Nell’s dread of even the sound of the dwarfs voice, that she lived in continual apprehension of meeting him on the stairs, or in the passage, and seldom stirred from her grandfather’s room.

At length the old man began to mend—he was patient and quiet, easily amused, and made no complaint, but his mind was forever weakened, and he seemed to have only a dazed recollection of what had happened. Even when Quilp told him that in two days he must be moved out of the shop, he seemed not to take it to heart, wandering around the house, a very child in act and thought. But a change came over him on the second evening; as he and little Nell sat silently together. He was moved—shed tears—begged Nell’s forgiveness for what he had made her suffer—seemed like one coming out of a dream—and urged her to help him in acting upon what they had talked of doing long before.

“We will not stop here another day,” he said, “we will go far away from here. We will travel afoot through the fields and woods, and by the side of rivers, and trust ourselves to God in the places where He dwells. It is far better to lie down at night beneath an open sky than to rest in close rooms, which are always full of care and weary dreams.

Thou and I together, Nell, may be cheerful and happy yet, and learn to forget this time, as if it had never been.”

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"We will be happy," cried the child. "We never can be, here!"

"No, we never can again—never again—that's truly said," rejoined the old man. "Let us steal away to-morrow morning, early and softly, that we may not be seen or heard—and leave no trace or track for them to follow by. Poor Nell! Thy cheek is pale, and thy eyes are heavy with watching and weeping for me; but thou wilt be well again, and merry too, when we are far away. To-morrow morning, dear, we will turn our faces from this scene of sorrow, and be as free and happy as the birds."

The child's heart beat high with hope and confidence. She had no thought of hunger or cold, or thirst, or suffering. She saw in this a relief from the gloomy solitude in which she had lived, an escape from the heartless people by whom she had been surrounded in her late time of trial, the restoration of the old man's health and peace, and a life of tranquil happiness. Sun, and stream, and meadow, and summer days shone brightly in her view, and there was no dark tint in all the sparkling picture.

The old man had slept for some hours soundly, and she was yet busily engaged in preparing for their flight. There were a few articles of clothing for herself to carry, and a few for him, and a staff to support his feeble steps. But this was not all her task, for now she must say farewell to her own little room, where she had so often knelt down and prayed at night—prayed for the time which she hoped was dawning now! There were some trifles there, which she would have liked to take away, but that was impossible. She wept bitterly to leave her poor bird behind, until the idea occurred to her that it might fall into the hands of Kit, who would keep and cherish it for her sake. She was calmed and comforted by this thought, and went to rest with a lighter heart.

At length the day began to glimmer, when she arose and dressed herself for the journey, and with the old man, trod lightly down the stairs. At last they reached the ground-floor, got the door open without noise, and passing into the street, stood still.

"Which way?" said the child.

The old man looked irresolutely and helplessly to the right and left, then at her, and shook his head. It was plain that she was henceforth his guide and leader. The child felt it, but had no doubts or misgivings, and putting her hand in his, led him gently away.

It was the beginning of a day in June; the deep blue sky unsullied by a cloud, and teeming with brilliant light. The streets were as yet free of passengers, the houses and shops were closed, and the healthy air of morning fell like breath from angels on the sleeping town.

The old man and the child passed on through the glad silence, elate with hope and pleasure. Every object was bright and fresh; nothing reminded them, otherwise than by contrast, of the monotony and restraint they had left behind.

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Forth from the city, while it yet slumbered, went the two poor adventurers, wandering they knew not whither, often pressing each other's hands, or exchanging a smile, as they pursued their way through the city streets, through the haunts of traffic and great commerce, where business was already rife. The old man looked about him with a bewildered gaze, for these were places that he hoped to shun, nor did he seem at ease until at last they felt that they were clear of London, and sat down to rest, and eat their frugal breakfast from little Nell's basket.

The freshness of the day, the singing of the birds, the beauty of the waving grass, the wild flowers, and the thousand exquisite scents and sounds that floated in the air, sunk into their breasts, and made them very glad. The child had repeated her artless prayers once that morning, more earnestly, perhaps, than she had ever done in her life; but as she felt all this, they rose to her lips again. The old man took off his hat—he had no memory for the words—but he said Amen, and that they were very good.

"Are you tired?" asked the child. "Are you sure you don't feel ill from this long walk?"

"I shall never feel ill again, now that we are once away," was his reply. "Let us be stirring, Nell. We are too near to stop and be at rest. Come!"

They were now in the open country, through which they walked all day, and slept that night at a cottage where beds were let to travellers. Next morning they were afoot again, and still kept on until nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, when they stopped at a laborer's hut, asking permission to rest awhile and buy a draught of milk. The request was granted, and after having some refreshments and rest, Nell yielded to the old man's fretful demand to travel on again, and they trudged forward for another mile, thankful for a lift given them by a kindly driver going their way, for they could scarcely crawl along. To them the jolting cart was a luxurious carriage, and the ride the most delicious in the world. Nell had scarcely settled herself in one corner of the cart when she fell fast asleep, and was only awakened by its stopping when their ways parted. The driver pointing out the town in the near distance, directed them to take the path leading through the churchyard. Accordingly, to this spot they directed their weary steps, and presently came upon two men who were seated upon the grass. It was not difficult to divine that they were itinerant showmen—exhibitors of the freaks of Punch—for, perched cross-legged upon a tombstone behind them, was a figure of that hero himself, his nose and chin as hooked, and his face as beaming as usual; while scattered upon the ground, and jumbled together in a long box, were the other persons of the drama. The hero's wife and one child, the hobby-horse, the doctor, the foreign gentleman, the executioner, and the devil, all were here. Their owners had evidently come to that spot to make some needful repairs in their stock, for one of them was engaged in binding together a small gallows with thread, while the other was intent upon fixing a new black wig.

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They greeted the strangers with a nod, and the old man sitting down beside them, and looking at the figures with extreme delight, began to talk. While they chatted, Mr. Short, a little merry, red-faced man with twinkling eyes, turning over the figures in the box, drew one forth, saying ruefully to his companion, Codlin by name: "Look here, here's all this Judy's clothes falling to pieces again. You haven't got needle and thread, I suppose?"

The little man shook his head, and seeing that they were at a loss, Nell said timidly:

"I have a needle, sir, in my basket, and thread too. Will you let me try to mend it for you? I think I could do it neater than you could."

As Mr. Codlin had nothing to urge against a proposal so seasonable, Nelly was soon busily engaged in her task, and accomplishing it to a miracle. While she was thus engaged, the merry little man looked at her with an interest which did not appear to be diminished when he glanced at her helpless companion. When she had finished her work, he thanked her, and inquired whither they were travelling.

"N-no further to-night, I think," said the child, looking toward her grandfather.

"If you're wanting a place to stop at," the man remarked, "I should advise you to take up at the same house with us. The long, low, white house there. It's very cheap."

The old man, who would have remained in the churchyard all night if his new acquaintances had stayed there too, yielded to this suggestion a ready and rapturous assent, and they all rose and walked away together to the public house, where, after witnessing an exhibition of the show, they had a good supper, but Nell was too tired to eat, and was grateful when they retired to the loft where they were to rest. The old man was uneasy when he had lain down, and begged that Nell would come and sit at his bedside as she had done for so many nights. She sat there till he slept, then went to her own room and sat thinking of the life that was before them.

She had a little money, but it was very little, and when that was gone, they must begin to beg. There was one piece of gold among it, and an emergency might come when its worth to them might be increased a hundredfold. It would be best to hide this coin, and never produce it unless their case was absolutely desperate. Her resolution taken, she sewed the piece of gold into her dress, and going to bed with a lighter heart, sunk into a deep slumber.

On the following morning, Mr. Short asked Nell, "And where are you going to-day?"

"Indeed I hardly know," replied the child.

"We're going on to the races," said the little man. "If you'd like to have us for company, let us travel together."

“Well go with you,” said the old man eagerly. “Nell—with them, with them.”

The child considered for a moment, and reflecting that she must soon beg, and could scarcely do so at a better place, thanked the little man for his offer, and said they would accompany him.

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Presently they started off and made a long day's journey, and were yet upon the road when night came on. Threatening clouds soon gave place to a heavy rain, and the party took refuge for the night in a roadside inn, where they found a mighty fire blazing upon the hearth, and savory smells coming from iron pots.

Furnished with slippers and dry garments, and overpowered by the warmth and comfort of the room and the fatigue they had undergone, Nelly and the old man had not long taken seats in the warm chimney-corner when they fell asleep.

"Who are they?" whispered the landlord.

Short and Codlin shook their heads. "They're no harm," said Short. "Depend upon that I tell you what—it's plain that the old man aren't in his right mind—I believe that he's given his friends the slip and persuaded this delicate young creature, all along of her fondness for him, to be his guide and travelling companion—where to, he knows no more than the man in the moon. Now I'm not a-goin' to stand that. I'm not a-goin' to see this fair young child a-falling into bad hands, and getting among people that she's no more fit for, than they are to get among angels as their ordinary chums. Therefore when they dewelop an intention of parting company from us, I shall take measures for detainin' of 'em and restoring them to their friends, who, I dare say, have had their disconsolation pasted up on every wall in London by this time.

"Short," said Mr. Codlin, "it's possible there may be uncommon good sense in what you've said. If there is, and there should be a reward, Short, remember that we are partners in everything!"

His companion had only time to nod a brief assent to this proposition, for the child awoke at the instant, as strange footsteps were heard without, and fresh company entered.

These were no other than four very dismal dogs, who came pattering in, headed by an old bandy dog, who erected himself upon his hind legs, and looked around at his companions, who immediately stood upon their hind legs in a grave and melancholy row. These dogs each wore a kind of little coat of some gaudy color, trimmed with tarnished spangles, and one of them had a cap upon his head, tied under his chin, which had fallen down upon his nose, and completely obscured one eye. Add to this, that the gaudy coats were all wet through with rain, and that the wearers were all splashed and dirty, and some idea may be formed of the unusual appearance of the new visitors to the inn. Jerry, the manager of these dancing dogs, disencumbering himself of a barrel-organ, and retaining in his hand a small whip, came up to the fire and entered into conversation. The landlord then busied himself in laying the cloth for supper, which, being at length ready to serve, little Nell ventured to say grace, and supper began.

At this juncture the poor dogs were standing upon their hind legs quite surprisingly. The child, having pity on them, was about to cast some morsels of food to them before she tasted it herself, hungry though she was, when their master interposed.

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"No, my dear, no, not an atom from anybody's hand but mine, please. That dog," said Jerry, pointing out the old leader of the troop, and speaking in a terrible voice, "lost a half-penny to-day. He goes without his supper."

The unfortunate creature dropped upon his forelegs directly, wagged his tail, and looked imploringly at his master.

"You must be more careful, sir," said Jerry, walking coolly to the chair where he had placed the organ, and setting the stop. "Come here. Now, sir, you play away at that while we have supper, and leave off if you dare."

The dog immediately began to grind most mournful music. His master, having shown him the whip, called up the others, who, at his directions, formed in a row, standing upright as a file of soldiers.

"Now, gentlemen," said Jerry, looking at them attentively, "the dog whose name is called, eats. Carlo!"

The lucky individual whose name was called, snapped up the morsel thrown towards him, but none of the others moved a muscle. Meanwhile the dog in disgrace ground hard at the organ, sometimes in quick time, sometimes in slow, but never leaving off for an instant. When the knives and forks rattled very much, or any of his fellows got an unusually large piece of fat, he accompanied the music with a short howl; but he immediately checked it on his master looking around, and applied himself with increased diligence to the Old Hundredth.

That night, from various conversations in which Codlin and Short took pains to engage her, little Nell began to have misgivings concerning their protestations of friendship, and to suspect their motives. These misgivings made the child anxious and uneasy, as the party travelled on towards the town where the races were to begin next day.

It was dark when they reached the town, and there all was tumult and confusion. The streets were filled with throngs of people, the church-bells rang out their noisy peals, and flags streamed from windows and house-tops, while shrill flageolets and deafening drums added to the uproar.

Through this delirious scene, the child, frightened and repelled by all she saw, led on her bewildered charge, clinging close to her conductor, and trembling lest she should be separated from him, and left to find her way alone. Quickening their steps they made for the racecourse, which was upon an open heath. There were many people here, none of the best-favored or best clad, busily erecting tents, but the child felt it an escape from the town, and drew her breath more freely. After a scanty supper, she and the old man lay down to rest in a corner of a tent, and slept, despite the busy preparations that were going on around them all night long.

And now they had come to the time when they must beg their bread. Soon after sunrise in the morning Nell stole out, and plucked a few wild roses and such humble flowers, to make into little nosegays and offer to the ladies in the carriages when the company arrived. Her thoughts were not idle while she was thus employed. When she returned and was seated beside the old man, tying her flowers together, while Codlin and Short lay dozing in another corner, she said in a low voice:

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“Grandfather, don’t look at those I talk of, and don’t seem as if I spoke of anything but what I’m about. What was that you told me before we left the old house?—that if they knew what we were going to do, they would say that you were mad, and part us?”

The old man turned to her with an aspect of wild terror; but she checked him by a look, adding, “Grandfather, these men suspect that we have secretly left our friends, and mean to carry us before some gentlemen, and have us taken care of, and sent back. If you let your hand tremble so, we can never get away from them, but if you’re only quiet now, we shall do so easily.”

“How?” muttered the old man. “Dear Nelly, how? They will shut me up in a stone room, dark and cold, and chain me to the wall, Nell—flog me with whips, and never let me see thee more!”

“You’re trembling again!” said the child. “Keep close to me all day. I shall find a time when we can steal away. When I do, mind you come with me, and do not stop or speak a word. Hush! that’s all.”

“Halloa! what are you up to, my dear?” said Mr. Codlin, raising his head and yawning.

“Making some nosegays,” the child replied; “I’m going to try to sell some. Will you have one?—as a present, I mean.” Mr. Codlin stuck it in his buttonhole with an air of ineffable complacency, and laid himself down again.

As the morning wore on, the tents assumed a more brilliant appearance. Men, who had lounged about in smock frocks and leather leggings, came out in silken vests and hats and plumes, as jugglers or mountebanks. Black-eyed gypsy girls, hooded in showy handkerchiefs, sallied forth to tell fortunes. The dancing dogs, the stilts, the little lady and the tall man and all the other attractions, with organs out of number, and bands innumerable, emerged from the corners in which they had passed the night, and flourished boldly in the sun.

Along the uncleared course, Short led his party, sounding the brazen trumpet, and at his heels went Thomas Codlin, bearing the show, and keeping his eyes on Nelly and her grandfather, as they rather lingered in the rear. The child bore upon her arm the little basket with her flowers, and sometimes stopped, with timid looks, to offer them at some gay carriage, but, alas! there were many bolder beggars there, adepts at their trade, and although some ladies smiled gently as they shook their heads, and others cried: “See, what a pretty face!” they let the pretty face pass on, and never thought that it looked tired or hungry, and among all that gay throng, there was but one lady, who, taking her flowers, put money in the child’s trembling hand.

At length, late in the day, Mr. Codlin pitched the show in a convenient spot, and the spectators were soon in the very triumph of the scene. The child, sitting down with the

old man close behind it, was roused from her meditation by a loud laugh at some witticism of Mr. Short.

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If they were ever to get away unseen, that was the very moment. Short and Codlin were absorbed in giving the show, and in coaxing sixpences from the people's pockets, and the spectators were looking on with laughing faces. That was the moment for escape. They seized it and fled.

They made a path through booths, and carriages, and throngs of people, and never once stopped to look behind, but creeping under the brow of the hill at a quick pace, made for the open fields, and not until they were quite exhausted ventured to sit down to rest upon the borders of a little wood, and some time elapsed before the child could reassure her trembling companion, or restore him to a state of moderate tranquillity. His terrors affected her. Separation from her grandfather was the greatest evil she could dread; and feeling for the time, as though, go where they would, they were to be hunted down, and could never be safe in hiding, her heart failed her, and her courage drooped. Then, remembering how weak her companion was, and how destitute and helpless he would be if she failed him, she was animated with new strength and fortitude, and assured him that they had nothing to fear. Luring him onward through the woods with happy looks and smiles, the serenity which she had at first assumed, stole into her breast in earnest. The old man cast no longer fearful looks behind, but felt at ease and cheerful, for the further they passed into the deep green shade of the woods, the more they felt that the tranquil mind of God was there, and shed its peace on them.

At length the path brought them to a public road which to their great joy at last led into the centre of a small village. Uncertain where to seek a lodging, they approached an old man sitting in a garden before his cottage. He was the schoolmaster, and had "School" written over his window in black letters. He was a pale, simple-looking man, and sat among his flowers and beehives, taking no notice of the travellers, until Nell approached him, dropping a curtsy, and asking if he could direct them anywhere to obtain a shelter for the night.

"You have been walking a long way?" said the schoolmaster.

"A long way, sir," the child replied.

"You're a young traveller, my child," he said, laying his hand gently on her head. "Your grandchild, friend?"

"Aye, sir," cried the old man, "and the stay and comfort of my life."

"Come in," said the schoolmaster.

Without further preface, he conducted them into his little schoolroom, which was parlor and kitchen likewise, and told them they were welcome to remain till morning. Before they had done thanking him, he spread the table, and besought them to eat and drink.

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After a sound night's rest in the little cottage, Nell rose early, and was attempting to make the room in which she had supped last night neat and comfortable, when their kind host came in. She asked leave to prepare breakfast, and the three soon partook of it together. While the meal was in progress, their host remarked that the old man stood in need of rest, and that he should be glad of their company for another night. It required no great persuasion to induce the child to answer that they would remain. She was happy to show her gratitude to the kind schoolmaster by performing such household duties as his little cottage stood in need of. When these were done, she took some needlework from her basket, and sat down beside the lattice, where the honeysuckle and woodbine filled the room with their delicious breath. Her grandfather was basking in the sun outside, breathing the perfume of the flowers, and idly watching the clouds as they floated on before the light summer wind. Presently the schoolmaster took his seat behind his desk, and as he seemed pleased to have little Nell beside him, she busied herself with her work, entering into conversation with the schoolmaster while the scholars conned their lessons, and watching the boys with eager and attentive interest.

Upon the following morning there remained for the travellers only to take leave of the poor schoolmaster, and wander forth once more. With a trembling and reluctant hand, the child held out to their kind host the money which the lady had given her at the races for her flowers, faltering in her thanks, and blushing as she offered it. But he bade her put it up, and kissing her cheek, wished her good fortune and happiness, adding, "If you ever pass this way again, you will not forget the little village school?"

"We shall never forget it, sir," rejoined Nell, "nor ever forget to be grateful to you for your kindness to us."

They bade him farewell very many times, often looking back, until they could see him no more. They trudged onward now at a quicker pace, resolving to keep the main road, and go wherever it might lead them. The afternoon had worn away into a beautiful evening when the road struck across a common. On the border of this common, a caravan was drawn up to rest.

It was not a shabby, dingy cart, but a smart little house upon wheels, with white dimity curtains festooning the windows, and window-shutters of green picked out with panels of a staring red. Neither was it a poor caravan drawn by a single donkey or emaciated horse, for a pair of horses in pretty good condition were released from the shafts, and grazing upon the frowzy grass. Neither was it a gypsy caravan, for at the open door (graced with a bright brass knocker) sat a Christian lady, stout and comfortable to look upon, who wore a large bonnet, trembling with bows. And that it was not an unprovided or destitute caravan, was clear from this lady's occupation, which was the very refreshing one of drinking tea. The tea things were set forth upon a drum covered with a napkin; and there sat this roving lady, taking her tea and enjoying the prospect. As she was in the act of setting down her cup, she beheld an old man and a young child

walking slowly by, and glancing at her proceedings with eyes of modest but hungry admiration.

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"Hey!" cried the lady of the caravan, "Yes, to be sure—Who won the Helter-Skelter Plate?"

"Won what, ma'am?" asked Nell.

"The Helter-Skelter Plate at the races, child. Can't you say who won the Helter-Skelter Plate when you're asked a question civilly?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

"Don't know!" repeated the lady of the caravan; "Why, you were there. I saw you with my own eyes."

Nell was not a little alarmed to hear this, supposing that the lady might be intimately acquainted with the firm of Short and Codlin; but what followed tended to reassure her.

"And very sorry I was," said the lady of the caravan, "to see you in company with a Punch—a low practical, vulgar wretch, that people should scorn to look at."

"I was not there by choice," rejoined the child; "we didn't know our way, and the two men were very kind to us, and let us travel with them. Do you—do you know them, ma'am?"

"Know 'em, child!" cried the lady of the caravan in a sort of shriek. "Know them! But you're young and inexperienced, and that's your excuse for asking sich a question. Do I look as if I know'd them? Does this caravan look as if it know'd 'em?"

"No, ma'am, no," said the child, fearing that she had committed some grievous fault, "I beg your pardon."

It was granted immediately, and the child then explained that they had left the races on the first day, and were travelling to the next town, and ventured to inquire how far it was. The stout lady's reply was rather discouraging, and Nell could scarcely repress a tear at hearing that it was eight miles off. Her grandfather made no complaint, and the two were about to pass on, when the lady of the caravan called to the child to return. Beckoning to her to ascend the steps, she asked,—“Are you hungry?”

"Not very, but we are tired, and it's—it is a long way."

"Well, hungry or not, you had better have some tea," rejoined her new acquaintance. "I suppose you're agreeable to that, old gentleman?"

The grandfather humbly pulled off his hat, and thanked her, and sitting down, they made a hearty meal, enjoying it to the utmost.

While they were thus engaged, the lady of the caravan held a short conversation with her driver, after which she informed Nell that she and her grandfather were to go forward in the caravan with her, for which kindness Nell thanked the lady with unaffected earnestness. She helped with great alacrity to put away the tea-things, and mounted into the vehicle, followed by her delighted grandfather. Their patroness then shut the door, and away they went, with a great noise of flapping, and creaking, and straining, and the bright brass knocker, knocking one perpetual double knock of its own accord as they jolted heavily along.

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When they had travelled slowly forward for some short distance, Nell looked around the caravan, and observed it more closely. One half of it was carpeted, with a sleeping place, after the fashion of a berth on board ship, partitioned off at the farther end, which was shaded with fair, white curtains, and looked comfortable enough,—though by what kind of gymnastic exercise the lady of the caravan ever contrived to get into it,—was an unfathomable mystery. The other half served for a kitchen, and was fitted up with a stove, whose small chimney passed through the roof. It held, also, a closet or larder, and the necessary cooking utensils, which latter necessities hung upon the walls, which in the other portion of the establishment were decorated with a number of well-thumbed musical instruments.

Presently the old man fell asleep, and the lady of the caravan invited Nell to come and sit beside her.

“Well, child,” she said, “how do you like this way of travelling?”

Nell replied that she thought that it was very pleasant indeed. Instead of speaking again, the lady of the caravan sat looking at the child for a long time in silence, then getting up, brought out a roll of canvas about a yard in width, which she laid upon the floor, and spread open with her foot until it nearly reached from one end of the caravan to the other.

“There, child,” she said, “read that.”

Nell walked down it, and read aloud, in enormous black letters, the inscription, “*Jarley’s wax-work.*”

“Read it again,” said the lady complacently.

“Jarley’s Wax-Work,” repeated Nell.

“That’s me,” said the lady. “I am Mrs. Jarley.”

The lady of the caravan then unfolded another scroll, whereon was the inscription, “One hundred figures the full size of life,” then several smaller ones with such inscriptions as, “The genuine and only Jarley,” “Jarley is the delight of the nobility and gentry,” “The royal family are the patrons of Jarley.” When she had exhibited these to the astonished child, she brought forth hand-bills, some of which were couched in the form of parodies on popular melodies, as, “Believe me, if all Jarley’s Wax-Work so rare,” “I saw thy show in youthful prime,” “Over the water to Jarley.” While others were composed with a view to the lighter and more facetious spirits, as a parody on the favorite air of “If I had a donkey,” beginning:

“If I know’d a donkey what wouldn’t go
To see *Mrs. Jarley’s wax-work* show,

Do you think I'd acknowledge him?
Oh, no, no!
Then run to Jarley's"—

besides other compositions in prose, all having the same moral—namely, that the reader must make haste to Jarley's, and that children and servants were admitted at half price, Mrs. Jarley then rolled these testimonials up, and having put them carefully away, sat down and looked at the child in triumph.

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"I never saw any wax-work, ma'am," said Nell. "Is it funnier than Punch?"

"Funnier!" said Mrs. Jarley, in a shrill voice. "It is not funny at all."

"Oh!" said Nell, with all possible humility.

"It isn't funny at all," repeated Mrs. Jarley. "It's calm and classical. No low beatings and knockings about, no jokings and squeakings, like your precious Punches, but always the same, with a constantly unchanging air of coldness and gentility; and so life-like, that if wax-work only spoke and walked about, you'd hardly know the difference."

"Is it here, ma'am?" asked Nell, whose curiosity was awakened by this description.

"Is what here, child?"

"The wax-work, ma'am."

"Why, bless you, child, what are you thinking of? How could such a collection be here? It's gone on in the other wans to the room where it'll be exhibited the day after to-morrow. You're going to the same town, and you'll see it, I dare say."

"I shall not be in the town, I think, ma'am," said the child.

This answer appeared to greatly astonish Mrs. Jarley, who asked so many questions that Nell was led to tell her some of the details concerning their poverty and wanderings, after which the lady of the caravan relapsed into a thoughtful silence. At length she shook off her fit of meditation, and held a long conversation with the driver, which conference being concluded, she beckoned Nell to approach.

"And the old gentleman, too," said Mrs. Jarley. "I want to have a word with him. Do you want a good situation for your granddaughter, master? If you do, I can put her in the way of getting one. What do you say?"

"I can't leave her, ma'am," answered the old man. "What would become of me without her?"

"I should have thought you were old enough to take care of yourself, if you ever will be," retorted Mrs. Jarley sharply.

"But he never will be," whispered the child. "Pray do not speak harshly to him. We are very thankful to you," she added aloud. "But neither of us could part from the other, if all the wealth of the world were halved between us."

Mrs. Jarley was a little disconcerted by this reception of her proposal, but presently she addressed the grandfather again:

“If you’re really disposed to employ yourself,” she said, “you could help to dust the figures, and take the checks, and so forth. What I want your granddaughter for is to point ’em out to the company. It’s not a common offer, bear in mind,” said the lady. “It’s Jarley’s wax-work, remember. The duties very light and genteel, the company particularly select. There is none of your open-air wagrancy at Jarley’s, recollect; there is no tarpaulin and saw-dust at Jarley’s, remember. Every expectation held out in the hand-bills is realized to the utmost, and the whole forms an effect of imposing brilliancy hitherto unrivalled in this kingdom. Remember that the price of admission is only sixpence, and that this is an opportunity which may never occur again!”

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Descending from the sublime to the details of common life, when she had reached this point, Mrs. Jarley remarked that she could pledge herself to no specific salary until she had tested Nell's ability, but that she could promise both good board and lodging for the child and her grandfather. Her offer was thankfully accepted.

"And you'll never be sorry for it," said Mrs. Jarley. "I'm pretty sure of that. So, as that's all settled, let us have a bit of supper."

In the mean while the caravan blundered on, and came at last upon a town, near midnight. As it was too late to repair to the exhibition rooms, they drew up near to another caravan bearing the great name of Jarley, which being empty, was assigned to the old man as his sleeping-place. As for Nell herself, she was to sleep in Mrs. Jarley's own travelling-carriage as a signal mark of that lady's favor.

On the following morning Nell was put to work at once, helping to unpack the chests and arrange the draperies in the exhibition rooms. When this was accomplished, the stupendous collection of figures was uncovered, standing more or less unsteadily upon their legs, and all their countenances expressing great surprise. All the gentlemen were very pigeon-breasted and very blue about the beards, and all the ladies were miraculous figures; and all the ladies and all the gentlemen were looking intensely nowhere, and staring with extraordinary earnestness at nothing.

When Nell had exhausted her first raptures at this glorious sight, Mrs. Jarley ordered the room to be cleared of all but herself and the child, and was at great pains to instruct Nell in her duty.

"That," said Mrs. Jarley, in her exhibition tones, as Nell touched a figure, "is an unfortunate maid-of-honor in the time of Queen Elizabeth, who died from pricking her finger in consequence of working upon a Sunday. Observe the blood which is trickling from her finger; also the gold-eyed needle of the period, with which she is at work."

All this Nell repeated twice or thrice, pointing to the finger and the needle at the right times, and then passed on to the next.

"That, ladies and gentlemen," said Mrs. Jarley, "is Jasper Packlemerton, who courted and married fourteen wives, and destroyed them all by tickling the soles of their feet when they were sleeping in the consciousness of innocence and virtue. On being brought to the scaffold, and asked if he was sorry for what he had done, he replied yes, he was sorry for having let 'em off so easy, and hoped all Christian husbands would pardon him the offence. Let this be a warning to all young ladies to be particular in the character of the gentlemen of their choice. Observe that his fingers are curved, as if in the act of tickling, and that his face is represented with a wink, as he appeared when committing his barbarous murders."

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When Nell knew all about Mr. Packlemerton, and could say it without faltering, Mrs. Jarley passed on to the fat man, and then to the thin man, the tall man, the short man, the old lady who died of dancing at a hundred and thirty-two, the wild boy of the woods, the woman who poisoned fourteen families with pickled walnuts, and other historical characters, and interesting but misguided individuals. So well did Nell profit by her instructions, that at the end of a couple of hours, she was in full possession of the history of the whole establishment, and perfectly competent to the enlightenment of visitors, and Mrs. Jarley was not slow to express her admiration at this happy result.

In the midst of the various devices used later for attracting visitors to the exhibition, little Nell was not forgotten. The cart in which the Brigand usually made his perambulations, being gayly dressed with flags and streamers, and the Brigand placed therein, Nell sat beside him, decorated with artificial flowers, and rode slowly through the town every morning, dispersing hand-bills from a basket to the sound of drum and trumpet. The beauty of the child, coupled with her gentle and timid bearing, produced quite a sensation in the little country place: the Brigand, became a mere secondary consideration, and important only as part of the show of which she was the chief attraction, Grown-up folks began to be interested in the bright-eyed girl, and some score of little boys fell desperately in love, and constantly left inclosures of nuts and apples at the wax-work door.

This desirable impression was not lost on Mrs. Jarley, who, lest Nell should become too cheap, sent the Brigand out alone again, and kept her in the exhibition room, where she described the figures every half-hour, to the great satisfaction of admiring audiences.

Although her duties were sufficiently laborious, Nell found the lady of the caravan a very kind and considerate person indeed. As her popularity procured her various little fees from the visitors, on which her patroness never demanded any toll, and as her grandfather too was well-treated and useful, Nell had no cause for anxiety until one holiday evening, when they went out together for a walk. They had been closely confined for some days, and the weather being warm, had strolled a long distance, when they were caught in a most terrific thunder-shower, from which they sought refuge in a roadside tavern, where some men sat playing cards with a pile of silver money between them. When the old man's eye lighted upon them, the child saw with alarm that his whole appearance underwent a complete change. His face was flushed and eager, his breath came short and quick, and the hand he laid upon her arm trembled so violently, that she shook beneath its grasp. To his frenzied appeal for money, Nell repeated a firm refusal, but he was insistent.

"Give me the money," he exclaimed—"I must have it. There there—that's my dear Nell. I'll right thee one day, child, never fear!"

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She took from her pocket a little purse. He seized it, and hastened to the other side of the screen where the two men were playing. Almost immediately they invited him to join their game, whereupon, throwing Nell's purse down upon the table, he gathered up the cards as a miser would clutch at gold. The child sat by and watched the game in a perfect agony of fear, regardless of the run of luck; and mindful only of the desperate passion which had its hold upon her grandfather, losses and gains were to her alike.

The storm had raged for full three hours, when at length the play came to an end. Nell's little purse lay empty, and still the old man sat poring over the cards until the child laid her arm upon his shoulder, telling him that it was near midnight.

Now Nell had still the piece of gold, and considering the lateness of the hour, and into what a state of consternation they would throw Mrs. Jarley by knocking her up at that hour, proposed to her grandfather that they stay where they were for the night. As they would leave very early in the morning, the child was anxious to pay for their entertainment before they retired, but as she felt the necessity of concealing her little hoard from her grandfather, and had to change the piece of gold, she took it out secretly, and following the landlord into the bar, tendered it to him there. She was returning, when she fancied she saw a figure gliding in at the door. There was only a dark passage between this door and the place where she had changed the money, and being very certain that no person had passed in or out while she stood there, she felt that she had been watched. She was still thinking of this, when a girl came to light her to bed.

It was a great gloomy house, which the flaring candles seemed to make yet more gloomy, and the child did not feel comfortable when she was left alone. She could not help thinking of the figure stealing through the passage downstairs. At last a broken and fitful sleep stole upon her. A deeper slumber followed this—and then—What! That figure in the room! A figure was there, it crouched and slunk along, stealing round the bed. She had no voice to cry for help, no power to move,—on it came—silently and stealthily to the bed's head. There it remained, motionless as she. At length, it busied its hands in something, and she heard the chink of money. Then it dropped upon its hands and knees, and crawled away. It reached the door at last, the steps creaked beneath its noiseless tread, and it was gone.

The first impulse of the child was not to be alone—and with no consciousness of having moved, she gained the door. Once in her grandfather's room, she would be safe. An idea flashed suddenly upon her—what if the figure should enter there, and have a design upon the old man's life? She turned faint and sick. She saw it creeping in front of her. It went in. Not knowing what she meant to do, but meaning to preserve him, or be killed herself, she staggered forward and looked in.

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What sight was that which met her view?

The bed was smooth and empty. And at a table sat the old man himself—the only living creature there—his white face pinched and sharpened by the greediness which made his eyes unnaturally bright—counting the money of which his hands had robbed her.

With steps more unsteady than those with which she had approached the room, the child groped her way back into her own chamber. The terror which she had lately felt was nothing compared with that which now oppressed her. The grey-haired old man, gliding like a ghost into her room, and acting the thief, while he supposed her fast asleep, then bearing off his prize, and hanging over it with the ghastly exultation she had witnessed, was far more dreadful than anything her wildest fancy could have suggested. The feeling which beset her was one of uncertain horror. She had no fear of the dear old grandfather, but the man she had seen that night seemed like another creature in his shape. She could scarcely connect her own affectionate companion, save by his loss, with this old man, so like yet so unlike him. She had wept to see him dull and quiet. How much greater cause she had for weeping now!

She sat thinking of these things, until she felt it would be a relief to hear his voice, or if he were asleep, even to see him, and so she stole down the passage again. Looking into the room, she saw him lying calmly on his bed, fast asleep. She had no fear as she looked upon his slumbering features, but she had a deep and weighty sorrow, and it found its relief in tears.

“God bless him,” said the child, softly kissing his placid cheek. “I see too well now that they would indeed part us if they found us out, and shut him up from the light of the sun and sky. He has only me. God bless us both!”

Lighting her candle, she retreated as silently as she had come, and gaining her own room once more, sat up during the remainder of that long, long miserable night. Upon searching her pocket on the following morning she found her money was all gone—not a sixpence remained.

“Grandfather,” she said in a tremulous voice, after they had walked about a mile on their road in silence, “Do you think they are honest people at the house yonder? I ask because I lost some money last night—out of my bedroom, I am sure. Unless it was taken by some one in jest—only in jest, dear grandfather, which would make me laugh heartily if I could but know it—”

“Who would take money in jest?” returned the old man in a hurried manner. “Those who take money, take it to keep. Don’t talk of jest.”

“Then it was stolen out of my room, dear,” said the child, whose last hope was destroyed by the manner of this reply.

“But is there no more, Nell,” said the old man—“no more anywhere? Was it all taken—was there nothing left?”

“Nothing,” replied the child.

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"We must get more," said the old man, "we must earn it, Nell—hoard it up, scrape it together, come by it somehow. Never mind this loss. Tell nobody of it, and perhaps we may regain it. Don't ask how—we may regain it, and a great deal more, but tell nobody, or trouble may come of it. And so they took it out of thy room, when thou wert asleep!" He added in a compassionate tone, very different from the secret, cunning way in which he had spoken until now. "Poor Nell, poor little Nell!"

The child hung down her head and wept. It was not the lightest part of her sorrow that this was done for her.

"Let me persuade you, dear grandfather," she said earnestly, "Oh, do let me persuade you to think no more of gains or losses, and to try no fortune but the fortune we pursue together. Only remember what we have been since that bright morning when we turned our backs upon that unhappy house for the last time," continued Nell. "Think what beautiful things we have seen, and how contented we have felt, and why was this blessed change?"

He stopped her with a motion of his hand, and bade her talk to him no more just then, for he was busy. After a time he kissed her cheek, and walked on, looking as if he were painfully trying to collect his thoughts. Once she saw tears in his eyes. When they had gone on thus for some time, he took her hand in his, as he was accustomed to do, with nothing of the violence or animation of his late manner; and by degrees settled down into his usual quiet way, and suffered her to lead him where she would.

As Nell had anticipated, they found Mrs. Jarley was not yet out of bed, and that although she had suffered some uneasiness on their account, she had felt sure that being overtaken by the storm, they had sought the nearest shelter for the night. And as they sat down to breakfast, she requested Nell to go that morning to Miss Monflather's Boarding and Day School to present its principal with a parcel of new bills, as her establishment had yet sent but half-a-dozen representatives to see the stupendous wax-work collection. Nell's expedition met with no success, to Mrs. Jarley's great indignation, and Nell would have been disappointed herself at its failure, had she not had anxieties of a deeper kind to occupy her thoughts.

That evening, as she had dreaded, her grandfather stole away, and did not come back until the night was far spent. Worn out as she was, she sat up alone until he returned—penniless, broken spirited, and wretched, but still hotly bent upon his infatuation.

"Give me money," he said wildly, "I must have money, Nell. It shall be paid thee back with gallant interest one day, but all the money which comes into thy hands must be mine—not for myself, but to use for thee. Remember, Nell, to use for thee!"

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What could the child do, with the knowledge she had, but give him every penny that came into her hands, lest he should be tempted on to rob their benefactress? If she told the truth (so thought the child) he would be treated as a madman; if she did not supply him with money, he would supply himself; supplying him, she fed the fire that burned him, and put him perhaps beyond recovery. Distracted by these thoughts, tortured by a crowd of apprehensions whenever he was absent, and dreading alike his stay and his return, the color forsook her cheek, her eyes grew dim, and her heart was oppressed and heavy.

One evening, wandering alone not far from home, the child came suddenly upon a gypsy camp, and looking at the group of men around the fire saw to her horror and dismay that one was her grandfather. The others she recognized as the card-players at the public-house on the eventful night of the storm. Drawing near, where she could listen unseen, she heard their conversation; heard them obtain her grandfather's promise to rob Mrs. Jarley of the tin box in which she kept her savings—and to play a game of cards with them, with its contents for stakes.

"God be merciful to us!" cried the child, "and help us in this trying hour! What shall I do to save him?"

The remainder of the conversation related merely to the execution of their project, after which the old man shook hands with his tempters, and withdrew. Then Nell crept away, fled home as quickly as she could, and threw herself upon her bed, distracted. The first idea that flashed upon her mind was instant flight. Then she remembered that the crime was not to be committed until next night, and there was time for resolving what to do. Then she was distracted with a horrible fear that he might be committing it at that moment. She stole to the room where the money was, and looked in. God be praised! he was not there, and Mrs. Jarley was sleeping soundly. She went back to her own room, and tried to prepare herself for bed, but who could sleep—sleep! distracted by such terrors? They came upon her more and more strongly yet. Half-undressed, and with her hair in wild disorder, she flew to the old man's bedside, and roused him from his sleep.

"What's this?" he cried, starting up in bed, and fixing his eyes upon her spectral face.

"I have had a dreadful dream," said the child. "A dreadful, horrible dream! I have had it once before. It is a dream of gray-haired men like you, in darkened rooms by night, robbing the sleepers of their gold. Up, up!" The old man shook in every joint, and folded his hands like one who prays.

"Not to me," said the child, "Not to me—to heaven, to save us from such deeds! This dream is too real. I cannot sleep—I cannot stay here—I cannot leave you alone under the roof where such dreams come. We must fly. There is no time to lose;" said the child. "Up! and away with me!"

“To-night?” murmured the old man.

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"Yes, to-night," replied the child. "To-morrow night will be too late. Nothing but flight can save us. Up!"

The old man arose, his forehead bedewed with the cold sweat of fear, and bending before the child, as if she had been an angel messenger sent to lead him where she would, made ready to follow her. She took him by the hand and led him on. She took him to her own chamber, and, still holding him by the hand, as if she feared to lose him for an instant, gathered together the little stock she had, and hung her basket on her arm. The old man took his wallet from her hands, his staff too, and then she led him forth.

Through the streets their trembling feet passed quickly, and at last the child looked back upon the sleeping town, on the far-off river, on the distant hills; and as she did so, she clasped the hand she held less firmly, and bursting into tears, fell upon the old man's neck. Her momentary weakness passed, she again summoned the resolution to keep steadily in view the one idea that they were flying from disgrace and crime, and that her grandfather's preservation depended solely on her firmness. While he, subdued and abashed, seemed to shrink and cower down before her, the child herself was sensible of a new feeling within her which elevated her nature, and inspired her with an energy and confidence she had never known. "I have saved him," she thought, "in all distresses and dangers I will remember that."

At any other time the recollection of having deserted the friend who had shown them so much homely kindness, without a word of justification, would have filled her with sorrow and regret. But now, all other considerations were lost in the new uncertainties and anxieties, and in the desperation of their condition.

In the pale moonlight, which lent a wanness of its own to the delicate face where thoughtful care already mingled with a winning grace and loveliness of youth, the too bright eye, the spiritual head, the lips that pressed each other with such high resolve and courage of the heart, the slight figure, firm in its bearing, and yet so very weak, told their silent tale; but told it only to the wind that rustled by. The night crept on apace, the moon went down and when the sun had climbed into the sky, and there was warmth in its cheerful beams, they laid them down to sleep upon a bank hard by some water.

But Nell retained her grasp upon the old man's arm, and long after he was slumbering soundly, watched him with untiring eyes. Fatigue stole over her at last; her grasp relaxed, and they slept side by side. A confusion of voices, mingling with her dreams, awoke her, and she discovered a man of rough appearance standing over her, while his companions were looking on from a canal-boat which had come close to the bank while she was sleeping. The man spoke to Nell, asking what was the matter, and where she and her grandfather were going. Nell faltered, pointing at hazard toward the west—and upon the man inquiring if she meant a certain town which he named, Nell, to avoid more questioning, said "Yes, that was the place." After asking some other questions, he

mounted one of the horses towing the boat, which at once went on. Presently it stopped again, and the man beckoned to Nell: "You may go with us if you like," he said. "We're going to the same place."

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The child hesitated for one moment. Thinking that the men whom she had seen with her grandfather might perhaps in their eagerness for the booty, follow them, and regain their influence over him, and that if they went on the canal-boat all traces of them must be surely lost—accepted the offer. Before she had any more time for consideration, she and her grandfather were on board, gliding smoothly down the canal, through the bright water.

They did not reach their destination until the following morning, and Nell was glad indeed when the trip was ended, for the noisy rugged fellows on the boat were rough enough to make her heart palpitate for fear, but though they quarrelled among themselves, they were civil enough to their two passengers; and at length the boat floated into its destination. The men were occupied directly, and the child and her grandfather, after waiting in vain to thank them, or ask whither they should go, passed out into a crowded noisy street of a manufacturing village, and stood, in the pouring rain, distressed and confused. Evening came on. They were still wandering up and down, bewildered by the hurry they beheld, but had no part in. Shivering with the cold and damp, ill in body, and sick to death at heart, the child needed her utmost resolution to creep along. No prospect of relief appearing, they retraced their steps to the wharf, hoping to be allowed to sleep on board the boat that night. But here again they were disappointed, for the gate was closed.

“Why did you bring me here?” asked the old man fiercely, “I cannot bear these close eternal streets. We came from a quiet part. Why did you force me to leave it?”

“Because I must have that dream I told you of, no more,” said the child, “and we must live among poor people or it will come again. Dear grandfather, you are old and weak, I know; but look at me. I never will complain if you will not, but I have some suffering indeed.”

“Ah! Poor, houseless, wandering, motherless child!” cried the old man, gazing as if for the first time upon her anxious face, her travel-stained dress, and bruised and swollen feet. “Has all my agony of care brought her to this at last? Was I a happy man once, and have I lost happiness and all I had, for this?”

Wandering on, they took shelter in an old doorway from which the figure of a man came forth, who, touched with the misery of their situation, and with Nell's drenched condition, offered them such lodging as he had at his command, in the great foundry where he was employed. He led them through the bewildering sights and deafening sounds of the huge building, to his furnace, and there spread Nell's little cloak upon a heap of ashes, and showing her where to hang her outer clothes to dry, signed to her and the old man to lie down and sleep. The warmth of her bed, combined with her great fatigue, caused the tumult of the place to lull the child to sleep, and the old man was stretched beside her, as she lay and dreamed. On the following morning her friend shared his breakfast with the child and her grandfather, and parting with them left in Nell's hand

two battered smoke-encrusted penny pieces. Who knows but they shone as brightly in the eyes of angels as golden gifts that have been chronicled on tombs?

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With an intense longing for pure air and open country, they toiled slowly on, the child walking with extreme difficulty, for the pains that racked her joints were of no common severity, and every exertion increased them. But they wrung from her no complaint, as the two proceeded slowly on, clearing the town in course of time. They slept that night with nothing between them and the sky, amid the horrors of a manufacturing suburb, and who shall tell the terrors of that night to the young wandering child.

And yet she had no fear for herself, for she was past it, but put up a prayer for the old man. A penny loaf was all that they had had that day. It was very little, but even hunger was forgotten in the strange tranquillity that crept over her senses. So very weak and spent she felt as she lay down, so very calm and unresisting, that she had no thought of any wants of her own, but prayed that God would raise up some friend for him. Morning came—much weaker, yet the child made no complaint—she felt a hopelessness of their ever being extricated together from that forlorn place; a dull conviction that she was very ill, perhaps dying; but no fear or anxiety. Objects appeared more dim, the noise less, the path more uneven, for sometimes she stumbled, and became roused, as it were, in the effort to prevent herself from falling. Poor child! The cause was in her tottering feet.

They were dragging themselves along toward evening and the child felt that the time was close at hand when she could bear no more. Before them she saw a traveller reading from a book which he carried.

It was not an easy matter to come up with him, and beseech his aid, for he walked fast. At length he stopped, to look more attentively at some passage in his book. Animated with a ray of hope, the child shot on before her grandfather, and going close to the stranger without rousing him by the sound of her footsteps, began faintly to implore his help.

He turned his head. Nell clapped her hands together, uttered a wild shriek, and fell senseless at his feet. It was no other than the poor schoolmaster. Scarcely less moved and surprised than the child herself, he stood for a moment, silent and confounded by the unexpected apparition, without even presence of mind to raise her from the ground. But, quickly recovering his self-possession, and dropping on one knee beside her, he endeavored to restore her to herself.

“She is quite exhausted,” he said, glancing upward into the old man’s face. “You have taxed her powers too far, friend.”

“She is perishing of want,” rejoined the old man. “I never thought how weak and ill she was, till now.”

Casting a look upon him, half-reproachful and half-compassionate, the schoolmaster took the child in his arms, and bore her away at his utmost speed to a small inn within sight.

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The landlady came running in, with hot brandy and water, with which and other restoratives, the child was so far recovered as to be able to thank them in a faint voice. Without suffering her to speak another word, the woman carried her off to bed, and after having been made warm and comfortable, she had a visit from the doctor himself, who ordered rest and nourishment. As Nell evinced extraordinary uneasiness on being apart from her grandfather, he took his supper with her. Finding her still restless on this head, they made him up a bed in an inner room, to which he presently retired. The key of this chamber happening to be on that side of the door which was in Nell's room; she turned it on him, when the landlady had withdrawn, and crept to bed again with a thankful heart.

In the morning the child was better, but so weak that she would at least require a day's rest and careful nursing before she could proceed upon her journey. The schoolmaster decided to remain also, and that evening visited Nell in her room. His frank kindness, and the affectionate earnestness of his speech and manner, gave the child a confidence in him. She told him all—that they had no friend or relative—and that she sought a home in some remote place, where the temptation before which her grandfather had fallen would never enter, and her late sorrows and distresses could have no place.

The schoolmaster heard her with astonishment, and with admiration for the heroism and patience of one so young. He then told her that he had been appointed clerk and schoolmaster to a village a long way off, at five-and-thirty pounds a year, and that he was on his way there now. He concluded by saying that she and her grandfather must accompany him, and that he would endeavor to find them some occupation by which they could subsist.

Accordingly next evening they travelled on, with Nell comfortably bestowed in a stage-wagon among the softer packages, her grandfather and the schoolmaster walking on beside the driver, and the landlady and all the good folks of the inn screaming out their good wishes and farewells.

It was a fine clear autumn morning, when they came upon the village of their destination, and every bit of scenery, and stick and stone looked beautiful to the child who had passed through such scenes of poverty and horror. Leaving Nell and her grandfather upon the church porch, the schoolmaster hurried off to present a letter, and to make inquiries concerning his new position. After a long time he appeared, jingling a bundle of rusty keys, and quite breathless with pleasure and haste. As a result of his exertions on their behalf, Nell and her grandfather were to occupy a small house next to the one apportioned to him. Having disburdened himself of this great surprise, the schoolmaster then told Nell that the house which was henceforth to be hers, had been occupied by an old person who kept the keys of the church, opened and closed it for the services, and showed it to strangers; that she had died not many weeks ago, and nobody having yet been found to fill the office, he had made bold to ask for it for her and

her grandfather. As a result of his testimony to their ability and honesty, they were already appointed to the vacant post.

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"There's a small allowance of money," said the schoolmaster. "It is not much, but enough to live upon in this retired spot. By clubbing our funds together, we shall do bravely; no fear of that."

"Heaven bless and prosper you!" sobbed the child.

"Amen, my dear," returned her friend cheerfully, "and all of us, as it will, and has, in leading us through sorrow and trouble, to this tranquil life. But we must look at my house now. Come!"

To make their dwellings habitable, and as full of comfort as they could, was now their pleasant care, and in a short time each had a cheerful fire crackling on the hearth. Nell, busily plying her needle, repaired the tattered window-hangings, and made them whole and decent. The schoolmaster swept the ground before the door, trimmed the long grass, trained the ivy and creeping plants, and gave to the outer walls a cheery air of home. The old man lent his aid to both, went here and there on little patient services and was happy. Neighbors too, proffered their help, or sent their children with such small presents or loans as the strangers needed most. It was a busy day, and night came on all too soon.

They took their supper together, and when they had finished it, drew round the fire and discussed their future plans. Before they separated, the schoolmaster read some prayers aloud; and then, full of gratitude and happiness, they parted for the night.

When every sound was hushed, and her grandfather sleeping, the child lingered before the dying embers, and thought of her past fortunes as if they had been a dream, and the deep and thoughtful feelings which absorbed her, gave her no sensation of terror or alarm. A change had been gradually stealing over her, in the time of her loneliness and sorrow. With failing strength and heightened resolution, there had sprung up a purified and altered mind; there had grown in her bosom those blessed hopes and thoughts which are the portion of few but the weak and drooping. There were none to see the frail figure as it glided from the fire and leaned pensively at the casement; none but the stars to look into the upturned face and read its history.

It was long before the child closed the window, and approached her bed—but when she did—it was to sink into a sleep filled with sweet and happy dreams.

With the morning came the renewal of yesterday's labors, the revival of its pleasant thoughts, the restoration of its energies, cheerfulness and hope. They worked gayly until noon, and then visited the clergyman, who received them kindly, and at once showed an interest in Nell. The schoolmaster had already told her story. They had no other friends or home to leave, he said, and had come to share his fortunes. He loved the child as though she were his own.

“Well, well,” said the clergyman. “Let it be as you desire, she is very young.”

“Old in adversity and trial, sir,” replied the schoolmaster.

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“God help her. Let her rest and forget them,” said the old gentleman. “But an old church is a gloomy place for one so young as you, my child.”

“Oh no, sir,” returned Nell, “I have no such thoughts, indeed.”

“I would rather see her dancing on the green at night,” said the old gentleman, laying his hand upon her head, “than have her sitting in the shadow of our mouldering arches. You must look to this, and see that her heart does not grow heavy among the solemn ruins.”

After more kind words, they withdrew, and from that time Nell’s heart was filled with a serene and peaceful joy, and she occupied herself with such light tasks as were hers to accomplish, and the peace of the simple village moved her deeply, while more and more she grew to love the old and silent chapel.

She sat down one day in this old and silent place, among the stark figures on the tombs and gazing round with a feeling of awe tempered with calm delight, felt that now she was happy and at rest. She took a Bible and read; then laying it down, thought of the summer days and bright springtime that would come—of the rays of sun that would fall in aslant upon the sleeping forms—of the song of birds, and growth of buds and blossoms out of doors—What if the spot awakened thoughts of death? Die who would, these sights and sounds would still go on, as happily as ever. It would be no pain to sleep amidst them.

She left the chapel, and climbed to its turret-top. Oh! the glory of the sudden burst of light; the freshness of the fields and woods, meeting the bright blue sky; everything so beautiful and happy! It was like passing from death to life; it was drawing nearer heaven. And yet the dim old chapel had for her a depth of fascination which the outer world did not possess. Again that day, twice, she stole back to the chapel, and read from the same book, or indulged in the same quiet train of thought. Even when night fell, she sat like one rooted to the spot until they found her there and took her home. She looked pale but very happy, but as the schoolmaster stooped down to kiss her cheek, he thought he felt a tear upon his face.

From a village bachelor, who took great interest in the beautiful child, Nell soon learned the histories connected with every tomb and gravestone, with every gallery, wall, and crypt in the dim old church. These she treasured in her mind, dwelling on them often in her thoughts and repeating them to those sightseers who cared to hear them. Her duties were not arduous, but she did not regain her strength, and in her grandfather’s mind sprang up a solicitude about her which never left him. From the time of his awakening to her weakness, never did he have any care for himself, any thought of his own comfort, which could distract his attention from the gentle object of his love and care, He would follow her up and down, waiting till she should tire, and lean upon his arm—he would sit opposite

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to her, content to watch and look, until she raised her head and smiled upon him as of old—he would discharge by stealth those household duties which tasked her powers too heavily—he would rise in the night to listen to her breathing in her sleep. He who knows all, can only know what hopes and fears and thoughts of deep affection were in that one disordered brain, and what a change had fallen upon the poor old man.

Weeks crept on—sometimes the child, exhausted, would pass whole evenings on a couch beside the fire. At such times, the schoolmaster would read aloud to her, and seldom an evening passed but the bachelor came in and took his turn at reading. During the daytime the child was mostly out of doors, and all the strangers who came to see the church, praised the child's beauty and sense, and all the neighbors, and all the villagers, and the very schoolboys grew to have a fondness for poor Nell.

Meanwhile, in that busy world which Nell and her grandfather had left behind them so many months before, there had appeared a stranger, who gave up all his time and energy to endeavoring to trace the wanderers. He was Nell's grandfather's younger brother, who had for many years been a traveller in distant lands, with almost no information of his brother. His thoughts began to revert constantly to the days when they were boys together, and obeying the impulse which impelled him, he hastened home, arriving one evening at his brother's door, only to find the wanderers gone.

By dint of ceaseless watchfulness and vigilance, at last he gained a clue to their retreat, and lost no time in following it up, taking with him Kit Nubbles, the errand-boy at the Shop in old days, who, though now in the employ of kind Mr. Garland, was still loyal to the memory of his beloved Miss Nelly—and only too grateful to be allowed to go in search of her, with the stranger whom she would not recognize. So together they journeyed to the peaceful village, where Nell and her grandfather were hidden, Kit carrying with him Nell's bird in his own cage. She would be glad to see it, he knew, but alas for Kit—they found sweet Nell in the sleep that knows no waking on this our earth.

There, upon her little bed, she lay at rest. The solemn stillness was no marvel now.

She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who had lived and suffered death.

Her couch was dressed with here and there some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a spot she had been used to favor. "When I die, put near me something that has loved the light, and had the sky above it always." Those were her words.



She was dead. Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead. Her little bird—a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage; and the strong heart of its child-mistress was mute and motionless forever.

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Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born—imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose.

And still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change. Yes. The old fireside had smiled upon that same sweet face; it had passed, like a dream, through haunts of misery and care; at the door of the poor schoolmaster on the summer evening, before the furnace fire upon the cold wet night, there had been the same mild lovely look. So shall we know the angels in their majesty, after death.

The old man had the small hand tight folded to his breast for warmth. It was the hand she had stretched out to him with her last smile—the hand that had led him on through all their wanderings. Ever and anon he pressed it to his lips; then hugged it to his breast again, murmuring that it was warmer now; and as he said it, he looked in agony to those who stood around, as if imploring them to help her.

She was dead, and past all help, or need of it. The ancient rooms she had seemed to fill with life, even while her own was waning fast—the garden she had tended—the eyes she had gladdened—the paths she had trodden, as it were, but yesterday—could know her never more.

She had been dead two days. She died soon after daybreak. They had read and talked to her in the earlier portion of the night, but as the hours crept on she sunk to sleep. They could tell, by what she faintly uttered in her dreams, that they were of her journeyings with the old man; they were of no painful scenes but of people who had helped and used them kindly, for she often said, “God bless you!” with great fervor. Waking, she never wandered in her mind but once, and that was of beautiful music which she said was in the air. God knows. It may have been.

Opening her eyes at last, from a very quiet sleep, she begged that they would kiss her once again. That done, she turned to the old man with a lovely smile upon her face—such, they said, as they had never seen, and never could forget—and clung with both arms about his neck. They did not know that she was dead, at first.

She would like to see poor Kit, she had often said of late. She wished there was somebody to take her love to Kit. And even then, she never thought or spoke about him but with something of her old clear merry laugh.

For the rest, she had never murmured or complained, but with a quiet mind, and manner quite unaltered—save that she every day became more earnest and more grateful to them—faded like the light upon a summer’s evening.

They carried her to an old nook, where she had many and many a time sat musing, and laid their burden softly on the pavement. The light streamed on it through the colored

window—a window where the boughs of trees were ever rustling in the summer, and where the birds sang sweetly all day long. With every breath of air that stirred among those branches in the sunshine, some trembling changing light would fall upon her grave.

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One called to mind how he had seen her sitting on that very spot, and how her book had fallen on her lap, and she was gazing with a pensive face upon the sky. Another told how she had loved to linger in the church when all was quiet, and even to climb the tower stair with no more light than that of the moon's rays stealing through the loopholes in the thick old wall. A whisper went about among the oldest that she had seen and talked with angels. Then, when the dusk of evening had come on, with tranquil and submissive hearts they turned away, and left the child with God.

Oh, it is hard to take to heart the lesson that such deaths will teach; but let no man reject it, for it is a mighty, universal Truth. When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations to defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to heaven.

THE INFANT PHENOMENON

[Illustration: *The infant phenomenon*]

THE INFANT PHENOMENON

Mr. Vincent Crummles was manager of a theatrical company, and also the head of a most remarkable family indeed, each member of which was gifted with an extraordinary combination of talent and attractiveness, and most remarkable of all the family was the Infant Phenomenon.

After Nicholas Nickleby, teacher at Dotheboys Hall, quitted that wretched institution in disgrace, because he had resented injuries inflicted upon the scholars in general, and upon the poor half-starved, ill-used drudge, Smike, in particular, Smike stole away from the place where he had been so cruelly used, to follow his defender, and the two journeyed on together towards Portsmouth, resting for the night at a roadside inn some miles from their destination. At the inn they met Mr. Crummles who, upon discovering them to be destitute of money, and desirous of obtaining employment as soon as possible, offered them both engagements in his company, which offer, after a brief deliberation, Nicholas decided to accept, until something more to his liking should be available.

Accordingly they journeyed to Portsmouth, together with Mr. Crummles and the master Crummleses, and accompanied the manager through the town on his way to the theatre.



They passed a great many bills pasted against the wall, and displayed in windows, wherein the names of Mr. Vincent Crummles, Mrs. Vincent Crummles, Master Crummles, Master Peter Crummles, and Miss Crummles, were printed in large letters, and everything else in very small letters; and turning at length into an entry in which was a strong smell of orange-peel and lamp-oil, with an under-current of saw-dust, groping their way through a dark passage, and descending a step or two, emerged upon the stage of the Portsmouth theatre.

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It was not very light, and as Nicholas looked about him, ceiling, pit, boxes, gallery, orchestra, fittings, and decorations of every kind,—all looked coarse, cold, gloomy and wretched.

“Is this a theatre?” whispered SMIKE, in amazement; “I thought it was a blaze of light and finery.”

“Why, so it is,” replied Nicholas, hardly less surprised; “But not by day, SMIKE,—not by day.”

At this moment the manager’s voice was heard, introducing the new-comers, under the stage names of Johnson and Digby, to Mrs. Crummles, a portly lady in a tarnished silk cloak, with her bonnet dangling by the strings, and with a quantity of hair braided in a large festoon over each temple; who greeted them with great cordiality.

While they were chatting with her, there suddenly bounded on to the stage from some mysterious inlet, a little girl in a dirty white frock, with tucks up to the knees, short trousers, sandalled shoes, white spencer, pink gauze bonnet, green veil and curl papers, who turned a pirouette, then looking off in the opposite wing, shrieked, bounded forward to within six inches of the footlights, and fell into a beautiful attitude of terror, as a shabby gentleman in an old pair of buff slippers came in at one powerful slide, and chattering his teeth fiercely, brandished a walking-stick.

“They are going through, ‘The Indian Savage and the Maiden,’” said Mrs. Crummles.

“Oh!” said the manager, “the little ballet interlude. Very good. Go on. A little this way, if you please, Mr. Johnson. That’ll do. Now!”

The manager clapped his hands as a signal to proceed, and the Savage, becoming ferocious, made a slide towards the Maiden; but the Maiden avoided him in six twirls, and came down, at the end of the last one, upon the very points of her toes. This seemed to make some impression upon the Savage, for after a little more ferocity and chasing of the Maiden into corners, he began to relent, and stroked his face several times with his right thumb and forefingers, thereby intimating that he was struck with admiration of the Maiden’s beauty. Acting upon the impulse of this passion, he began to hit himself severe thumps in the chest, and to exhibit other indications of being desperately in love, which, being rather a prosy proceeding, was very likely the cause of the Maiden’s falling asleep; whether it was or no, asleep she did fall, sound as a church, on a sloping bank, and the Savage, perceiving it, leant his left ear on his left hand, and nodded sideways, to intimate to all whom it might concern that she was asleep, and no shamming. Being left to himself, the Savage had a dance all alone. Just as he left off, the Maiden woke up, rubbed her eyes, got off the bank, and had a dance all alone too—such a dance that the Savage looked on in ecstasy all the while, and when it was

done, plucked from a neighboring tree some botanical curiosity, resembling a small pickled cabbage, and

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offered it to the Maiden, who at first wouldn't have it, but on the Savage shedding tears, relented. Then the Savage jumped for joy; then the Maiden jumped for rapture at the sweet smell of the pickled cabbage; then the Savage and the Maiden danced violently together, and finally the Savage dropped down on one knee, and the Maiden stood on one leg upon his other knee; thus concluding the ballet, and leaving the spectators in a state of pleasing uncertainty whether she would ultimately marry the Savage, or return to her friends.

"Bravo!" cried Nicholas, resolved to make the best of everything. "Beautiful!"

"This, sir," said Mr. Vincent Crummles, bringing the Maiden forward, "This is the Infant Phenomenon—Miss Ninetta Crummles."

"Your daughter?" inquired Nicholas.

"My daughter—my daughter," replied Mr. Crummles; "the idol of every place we go into, sir. We have had complimentary letters about this girl, sir, from the nobility and gentry of almost every town in England."

"I am not surprised at that," said Nicholas; "she must be quite a natural genius."

"Quite a—!" Mr. Crummles stopped: language was not powerful enough to describe the Infant Phenomenon. "I'll tell you what, sir," he said; "the talent of this child is not to be imagined. She must be seen, sir—seen—to be ever so faintly appreciated. There; go to your mother, my dear."

"May I ask how old she is?" inquired Nicholas.

"You may, sir," replied Mr. Crummles, "She is ten years of age, sir,"

"Not more?"

"Not a day."

"Dear me," said Nicholas, "it's extraordinary."

It was; for the Infant Phenomenon certainly looked older, and had moreover, been precisely the same age for certainly five years. But she had been kept up late every night, and put upon an unlimited allowance of gin and water from infancy, to prevent her growing tall, and perhaps this system of training had produced in the Infant Phenomenon these additional phenomena.

When this dialogue was concluded, another member of the company, Mr. Folair, joined Nicholas, and confided to him the contempt of the entire troupe for the Infant Phenomenon. "Infant Humbug sir!" he said. "There isn't a female child of common sharpness in a charity school that couldn't do better than that. She may thank her stars she was born a manager's daughter."

"You seem to take it to heart," observed Nicholas with a smile.

"Yes, by Jove, and well I may," said Mr. Folair testily "isn't it enough to make a man crusty, to see the little sprawler put up in the best business every night, and actually keeping money out of the house by being forced down the people's throats while other people are passed over? Why, I know of fifteen-and-sixpence that came to Southampton last month to see me dance the Highland Fling, and what's the consequence? I've never been put up at it since—never once—while the 'Infant Phenomenon' has been grinning through artificial flowers at five people and a baby in the pit, and two boys in the gallery, every night."

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From these bitter remarks, it may be inferred that there were two ways of looking at the performances of the Infant Phenomenon, but as jealousy is well known to be unjust in its criticism, and as the Infant was too highly praised by her own band of admirers to be much affected by such remarks, if any of them reached her ears, there is no evidence that her joy was diminished by reason of the complaints of captious fault-finders.

At the first evening performance which Nicholas witnessed, he found the various members of the company very much changed; by reason of false hair, false color, false calves, false muscles, they had become different beings; the stage also was set in the most elaborate fashion,—in short everything was on a scale of the utmost splendor and preparation.

Nicholas was standing contemplating the first scene when the manager accosted him.

“Been in front to-night?” said Mr. Crummles.

“No,” replied Nicholas, “not yet. I am going to see the play.”

“We’ve had a pretty good Let,” said Mr. Crummles. “Four front places in the centre, and the whole of the stage box.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Nicholas; “a family, I suppose?”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Crummles. “It’s an affecting thing. There are six children, and they never come unless the Phenomenon plays.”

It would have been difficult for any party to have visited the theatre on a night when the Phenomenon did *not* play, inasmuch as she always sustained one, and not uncommonly two or three characters, every night; but Nicholas, sympathizing with the feelings of a father, refrained from hinting at this trifling circumstance, and Mr. Crummies continued:

“Six,—pa and ma eight,—aunt nine,—governess ten,—grandfather and grandmother, twelve. Then, there’s the footman who stands outside with a bag of oranges and a jug of toast-and-water, and sees the play for nothing through the little pane of glass in the box-door—it’s cheap at a guinea; they gain by taking a box.”

“I wonder you allow so many,” observed Nicholas.

“There’s no help for it,” replied Mr. Crummles; “it’s always expected in the country. If there are six children, six people come to hold them in their laps. Ring in the orchestra, Grudden!”

It was Mr. Crummles’ habit to give a benefit performance, commonly called a “bespeak,” to any member of his company fortunate enough to have either a birthday or any other

anniversary of sufficient importance to challenge attention on the posters, and not long after Nicholas entered the company, this honor fell to the lot of one of the prominent actresses, Miss Snevellicci. Mr. Crummles then informed Nicholas that there was some work for him to do before that event took place.

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"There's a little canvassing takes place on these occasions," said Mr. Crummles, "among the patrons, and the fact is, Snevellicci has had so many bespeaks in this place that she wants an attraction. She had one when her stepmother died, and when her uncle died; and Mrs. Crummles and myself have had them on the anniversary of the Phenomenon's birthday, and our wedding-day, and occasions of that description; so that, in fact, it is hard to get a good one. Now, won't you help this poor girl, Mr. Johnson, by calling with her to-morrow morning upon one or two of the principal people?"—asked the manager in a persuasive tone, adding, "The Infant will accompany her. There will not be the smallest impropriety, sir. It would be of material service—the gentleman from London—author of the new piece—actor in the new piece—first appearance on any boards—it would lead to a great bespeak, Mr. Johnson."

The idea was extremely distasteful to Nicholas; but out of kindness to Miss Snevellicci, he reluctantly consented to be one of the canvassing party, and accordingly the next morning, sallied forth with Miss Snevellicci and the Infant Phenomenon.

The Phenomenon was rather a troublesome companion, for first the right sandal came down, and then the left, and these mischances being repaired, one leg of the little white trousers was discovered to be longer than the other; then the little green parasol with a broad fringe border and no handle, which she bore in her hand, was dropped down an iron grating, and only fished up again by dint of much exertion. However, it was impossible to scold her, as she was the manager's daughter, so Nicholas took it all in perfect good humor and walked on, with Miss Snevellicci, arm in arm, on one side, and the offending infant on the other.

At the first house they visited, after having a long conversation concerning the stage, and its relation to life, they at length disposed of two boxes, and retired, glad that the conference was at an end.

At the next house they were in great glory, for there resided the six children who had been enraptured with the Phenomenon, and who, being called down from the nursery to be treated with a private view of that young lady, proceeded to poke their fingers into her eyes, and tread upon her toes, and show her many other little attentions peculiar to their time of life.

"I shall certainly persuade Mr. Borum to take a private box," said the lady of the house, after a most gracious reception; "Augustus, you naughty boy, leave the little girl alone." This was addressed to a young gentleman who was pinching the Phenomenon from behind, apparently with a view to ascertaining whether she was real.

"I am sure you must be very tired," said the mamma, turning to Miss Snevellicci. "I cannot think of allowing you to go without first taking a glass of wine. Fie, Charlotte, I am ashamed of you: Miss Lane, my dear, pray see to the children."

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This entreaty addressed to the governess, was rendered necessary by the behavior of the youngest Miss Borum, who, having filched the Phenomenon's little green parasol, was now carrying it bodily off, while the distracted Infant looked helplessly on, and presently the poor child was really in a fair way to be torn limb from limb, for two strong little boys, one holding on by each of her hands, were dragging her in different directions as a trial of strength. However, at this juncture Miss Lane rescued the unhappy victim, who was presently taken away, after sustaining no more serious damage than a flattening of the pink gauze bonnet, and a rather extensive creasing of the white frock and trousers. Her companions were thankful not only when the call was ended, but when the whole trying morning, with its series of visits, was over.

The benefit performance was a great success, and the new actor made such a decided hit on that night and the succeeding ones, that Mr. Crummies prolonged his stay in Portsmouth for a fortnight beyond the days allotted to it, during which time Nicholas attracted so many people to the theatre that the manager finally decided upon giving him a benefit, calculating that it would be a promising speculation. From it Nicholas realized no less a sum than twenty pounds, which, added to what he had earned before, made him feel quite rich and comfortable.

At that time he received a letter containing news of his sister in London, and a danger that menaced her, which made him prepare to leave Portsmouth without an hour's delay, if he should be summoned.

Accordingly he decided to acquaint his manager with the possibility of his withdrawal from the company, and hastened to the green-room for that purpose, where he found Mrs. Crummies in full regal costume, with the Phenomenon as the Maiden, in her maternal arms. He broke the news to the group as gently as possible, but it was received with great dismay, and there were both protestations and tears, while the Phenomenon, being of an affectionate nature and moreover excitable, raised a loud cry, and was soothed with extreme difficulty, showing that the child's heart was in the right place, notwithstanding the constant strain upon her emotions from being so often obliged to simulate unnatural ones.

Mr. Crummles was no sooner acquainted with the news than he evinced many tokens of grief, but finding Nicholas determined in his purpose, at once suggested a grand farewell performance, to be advertised as a brilliant display of fireworks.

"That would be rather expensive," suggested Nicholas dryly.

"Eighteen-pence would do it," said Mr. Crummles; "You on the top of a pair of steps with the Phenomenon in an attitude; '*farewell*,' on a transparency behind; and nine people at the wings with a squib in each hand—all the dozen and a half going off at once—it would be very grand—awful from the front, quite awful."

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As Nicholas appeared by no means impressed with the idea, but laughed heartily at it, Mr. Crummles abandoned the project, and gloomily observed that they must make up the best bill they could, with combats and hornpipes, and so stick to the legitimate drama.

Next day the posters appeared, and the public were informed that Mr. Johnson would have the honor of making his last appearance that evening, and that an early application for places was requested, in consequence of the extraordinary overflow attendant on his performances.

Upon entering the theatre that night, Nicholas found all the company in a state of extreme excitement, and Mr. Crummles at once informed him in an agitated voice that there was a London manager in one of the boxes.

"It's the Phenomenon, depend upon it, sir," said Crummies. "I have not the smallest doubt it's the fame of the Phenomenon. She shall have ten pound a week, Johnson; she shall not appear on the London boards for a farthing less. They shan't engage her either, unless they engage Mrs. Crummles too; twenty pound a week for the pair, or I'll throw in myself and the two boys, and they shall have the family for thirty. Thirty pound a week. It's too cheap, Johnson. It's dirt cheap."

Every individual member of the company had in the same manner decided that it was his or her attractions that had drawn the great man's attention to the Portsmouth theatre, and each one secretly decided upon the amount of inducement necessary to persuade him or her to make a new engagement. Everybody played to the stranger, everybody sang to him, everything was done for his exclusive benefit, and it was a cruel blow to the general expectations when he was discovered to be asleep, and shortly after that he woke up and went away: in consequence of which, the feelings of the company, collectively and severally, underwent a severe reaction. Nicholas alone, had no feeling whatsoever on the subject, except of amusement. He went through his part as briskly as he could, then took Smike's arm and walked home to bed.

With the post next morning came the letter he had been expecting, calling him instantly to London, and he at once hurried off to say farewell to Mr. Crummles. His news was received with keen regret by that gentleman, who, always mindful of theatrical effects followed Nicholas even to the coach itself. As that vehicle stood in the open street, ready to start, and Nicholas was about to enter it, he was not a little astonished to find himself suddenly clutched in a violent embrace which nearly took him off his legs; while Mr. Crummles' voice exclaimed, "It is he—my friend, my friend!"

"Bless my heart," cried Nicholas, struggling in the manager's arms, "What are you about?"

The manager made no reply, but strained him to his breast again, exclaiming, "Farewell, my noble, my lion-hearted boy!"

In fact Mr. Crummles, who could never lose any opportunity for professional display, had turned out for the express purpose of taking a public farewell of Nicholas, and to render it the more imposing, the elder Master Crummles was going through a similar ceremony with Smike; while Master Percy Crummles, with a second-hand cloak worn theatrically over his left shoulder, stood by, in attitude of an attendant officer waiting to convey two victims to the scaffold.

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The lookers-on laughed very heartily, and as it was well to put a good face upon the matter, Nicholas laughed too, when he had succeeded in disengaging himself; and rescuing the astonished Smike, climbed up to the coach-roof after him, waving farewell, as they rolled away.

Some years later, when Nicholas was residing in London, under very different circumstances from those of his Portsmouth experience, and with a very different occupation; walking home one evening, he stood outside a minor theatre which he had to pass, and found himself poring over a huge play-bill which announced in large letters;

Positively the last appearance of Mr. Vincent Crummles, of Provincial Celebrity!!!

“Nonsense!” said Nicholas, preparing to resume his walk, then turning back again, “It can’t be,”—but adding on second thoughts—“Surely it *must* be the same man. There can’t be two Vincent Crummleses.”

The better to settle the question he referred to the bill again, and finding there was a Baron in the first piece, whose son was enacted by one Master Crummles, and his nephew by one Master Percy Crummles, and that, incidental to the piece was a castanet *pas seul* by the Infant Phenomenon, he no longer entertained any doubt; and presenting himself at the stage door at once, sent in a scrap of paper with “Mr. Johnson” written thereon in pencil, and was presently conducted into the presence of his former manager.

Mr. Crummles was unfeignedly glad to see him, and in the course of a long conversation informed Nicholas that the next morning he and his were to sail for America, that he had made up his mind to settle there permanently, in the hope of acquiring some land of his own, which would support them in their old age, and which they could afterward bequeath to their children. Nicholas, having highly commended this resolution, Mr. Crummles imparted such further intelligence relative to their mutual friends as he thought might prove interesting, and added a hearty invitation to Nicholas to attend that night a farewell supper, to be given in their honor at a neighboring tavern.

This invitation Nicholas instantly accepted, promising to return at the conclusion of the performances, and availed himself of this interval to go out and buy a silver snuff-box as a token of remembrance for Mr. Crummles, also a pair of ear-rings for Mrs. Crummles, a necklace for the Phenomenon, and a flaming shirt-pin for each of the young gentlemen, after making which purchases he returned to the theatre, and repaired to the tavern with Mr. Crummles.

He was received with great cordiality by those of the party whom he knew, and with particular joy by Mrs. Crummles, who at once said: “Here is one whom you know,”—thrusting forward the Phenomenon, in a blue gauze frock, extensively flounced, and trousers of the same.

Nicholas stooped down to salute the Phenomenon, and then, supper being on table, Mrs. Crummles gave her hand to Nicholas and repaired with a stately step to the repast, followed by the other guests.

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The board being at length cleared of food; and punch, wine, and spirits being placed upon it, and handed about, speeches were made, and health drunk to Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Crummles and the young Crummleses, after which ceremony, with many adieus and embraces, the company dispersed.

Nicholas waited until he was alone with the family, to give his little presents, and then with honest warmth of feeling said farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Crummles, the Master Crummleses, and the Infant Phenomenon,—and history has not chronicled their further career, nor recorded to what greater heights of popularity the Infant Phenomenon has since attained.

JENNY WREN

[Illustration: *Jenny Wren*]

JENNY WREN

Her real name was Fanny Cleaver, but she had long ago dropped it, and chosen to bestow upon herself the fanciful appellation of Miss Jenny Wren, by which title she was known to the entire circle of her friends and business acquaintances.

Miss Wren's home was in a certain little street called Church Street, running out from a certain square called Smith Square, at Millbank, and there the little lady plied her trade, early and late, having for companions her father and a lodger, Lizzie Hexam. Her father had once been a good workman at his own trade, but unfortunately for poor little Jenny Wren, was so weak in character and so confirmed in bad habits that she could place no trust in him, and had come to consider herself the head of the family, and to speak of him as "my child," or "my bad boy," ordering him about as if he were in truth, a child.

When Lizzie Hexam's brother and a friend, Bradley Headstone, paid their first visit to the house on Church Street, they knocked at the door, which promptly opened and disclosed a child—a dwarf, a girl—sitting on a little, low, old-fashioned arm-chair, which had a kind of little working-bench before it.

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

"Who else is at home?" asked Charley Hexam, staring?

"Nobody's at home at present," returned the child, with a glib assertion of her dignity, "except the person of the house."



The queer little figure, and the queer, but not ugly little face, with its bright grey eyes, was so sharp that the sharpness of the manner seemed unavoidable.

The person of the house continued the conversation: "Your sister will be in," she said, "in about a quarter of an hour. I'm very fond of your sister. Take a seat. And would you please to shut the street door first? I can't very well do it myself, because my back's so bad and my legs are so queer."

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

"You can't tell me the name of my trade, I'll be bound," she said.

"You make pincushions," said Charley.

"What else do I make?"

"Penwipers," said his friend.

"Ha, ha! What else do I make?"

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

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

"Dinner-mats?"

"Dinner-mats! I'll give you a clue to my trade in a game of forfeits. I love my love with a B because she's beautiful; I hate my love with a B because she is brazen; I took her to the sign of the Blue Boar; and I treated her with Bonnets; her name's Bouncer and she lives in Bedlam—now, what do I make with my straw?"

"Ladies' bonnets?"

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

"I hope it's a good business?"

The person of the house shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. "No. Poorly paid. And I'm often so pressed for time. I had a doll married last week, and was obliged to work all night. And they take no care of their clothes, and they never keep to the same fashions a month. I work for a doll with three daughters. Bless you, she's enough to ruin her husband!" The person of the house gave a weird little laugh, and gave them

another look but of the corners of her eyes. She had an elfin chin that was capable of great expression; and whenever she gave this look, she hitched this chin up, as if her eyes and her chin worked together on the same wires.

“Are you always as busy as you are now?”

“Busier. I’m slack just now. I finished a large mourning order the day before yesterday. Doll I work for lost a canary bird.”

“Are you alone all day?” asked Bradley Headstone. “Don’t any of the neighboring children—?”

“Ah,” cried the person of the house, with a little scream as if the word had pricked her. “Don’t talk of children. I can’t bear children. I know their tricks and their manners!” She said this with an angry little shake of her right fist, adding:

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

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

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

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

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

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

At that moment Lizzie Hexam entered, and the visitors after saying farewell to the dolls’ dressmaker, took Lizzie out with them for a short walk.

The person of the house, dolls’ dressmaker, and manufacturer of ornamental pincushions and penwipers, sat in her quaint little low arm-chair, singing in the dark, until Lizzie came back.

“Well, Lizzie—Mizzie—Wizzie,” said she, breaking off in her song. “What’s the news out of doors?”

“What’s the news indoors?” returned Lizzie playfully, smoothing the bright long fair hair, which grew very luxuriant and beautiful on the head of the dolls’ dressmaker. It being Lizzie’s regular occupation when they were alone of an evening to brush out and smooth the long fair hair, she unfastened a ribbon that kept it back while the little creature was at work, and it fell in a beautiful shower over the poor shoulders that were much in need of such adorning rain.

Lizzie then lighted a candle, put the room door and the house door open, and turned the little low chair and its occupant toward the outer air. It was a sultry night, and this was a fine weather arrangement when the day's work was done. To complete it, she seated herself by the side of the little chair, and protectingly drew under her arm the spare hand that crept up to her.

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"This is what your loving Jenny Wren calls the best time of the day and night," said the person of the house; adding, "I have been thinking to-day what a thing it would be, if I should be able to have your company till I am married, or at least courted. Because when I'm courted, I shall make *him* do some of the things that you do for me. He couldn't brush my hair like you do, or help me up and downstairs like you do, and he couldn't do anything like you do; but he could take my work home, and he could call for orders in his clumsy way. And he shall too. *I'll* trot him about, I can tell him!"

Jenny Wren had her personal vanities—happily for her—and no intentions were stronger in her breast than the various trials and torments that were, in the fulness of time, to be inflicted upon "him."

"Wherever he may happen to be just at present, or whoever he may happen to be," said Miss Wren, "I know his tricks and his manners, and I give him warning to look out."

"Don't you think you're rather hard upon him?" asked her friend smiling, and smoothing her hair.

"Not a bit," replied the sage Miss Wren, with an air of vast experience. "My dear, they don't care for you, those fellows, if you're not hard upon 'em?"

In such light and playful conversation, which was the dear delight of Jenny Wren, they continued until interrupted by Mr. Wrayburn, a friend of Lizzie's, who fell to talking playfully with Jenny Wren.

"I think of setting up a doll, Miss Jenny," he said.

"You had better not," replied the dressmaker.

"Why not?"

"You are sure to break it. All you children do."

"But that makes good for trade, you know, Miss Wren," he returned.

"I don't know about that," Miss Wren retorted; "but you'd better by half set up a pen-wiper, and turn industrious, and use it."

"Why, if we were all as industrious as you, little Busy Body, we should begin to work as soon as we could crawl, and there would be a bad thing!"

"Do you mean," returned the little creature with a flush suffusing her face, "bad for your backs and your legs?"

“No, no,” said the visitor, shocked at the thought of trifling with her infirmity. “Bad for business. If we all set to work as soon as we could use our hands, it would be all over with the dolls’ dressmakers.

“There’s something in that,” replied Miss Wren, “you have a sort of an idea in your noddle sometimes!” Then, resting one arm upon the elbow of her chair, resting her chin upon that hand, and looking vacantly before her, she said in a changed tone: “Talking of ideas, my Lizzie, I wonder how it happens that when I am working here all alone in the summer-time, I smell flowers. This is not a flowery neighborhood. It’s anything but that. And yet as I sit at work, I smell miles of flowers; I smell rose-leaves till I think I see the rose-leaves lying in heaps, bushels, on the floor; I smell fallen leaves, till I put down my hand—so—and expect to make them rustle; I smell the white and the pink May in the hedges, and all sorts of flowers that I never was among. For I have seen very few flowers indeed in my life.”

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"Pleasant fancies to have, Jenny dear!" said her friend with a glance toward their visitor, as if she would have asked him whether they were given the child in compensation for her losses.

"So I think, Lizzie, when they come to me. And the birds I hear! Oh!" cried the little creature, holding out her hand and looking upward, "How they sing!"

There was something in the face and action for the moment quite inspired and beautiful. Then the chin dropped musingly upon the hand again.

"I dare say my birds sing better than other birds, and my flowers smell better than other flowers. For when I was a little child," in a tone as though it were ages ago, "the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others I ever saw. They were not like me; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain. They were not like the children of the neighbors; they never made me tremble all over, by setting up shrill noises; and they never mocked me. Such numbers of them too! All in white dresses, and with something shining on the borders, and on their heads, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long, bright, slanting rows, and say all together, 'Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!' When I told them who it was, they answered, 'Come and play with us!' When I said 'I never play! I can't play,' they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said all together, 'Have patience, and we will come again.' Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together a long way off, 'Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!' And I used to cry out, 'Oh my blessed children, it's poor me. Have pity on me. Take me up and make me light!'"

By degrees as she progressed in this remembrance, the hand was raised, the last ecstatic look returned, and she became quite beautiful again. Having so paused for a moment, silent, with a listening smile upon her face, she looked round and recalled herself.

"What poor fun you think me, don't you," she said to the visitor. "You may well look tired of me. But it's Saturday night, and I won't detain you."

"That is to say, Miss Wren," observed the visitor, rather weary of the person of the house, and quite ready to profit by her hint, "you wish me to go?"

"Well, it's Saturday night," she returned, "and my child's coming home. And my child is a troublesome, bad child, and costs me a world of scolding. I would rather you didn't see my child."

"A doll?" said the visitor, not understanding, and looking for an explanation.

But Lizzie, with her lips only, shaping the two words, "*Her father*," he took his leave immediately, and presently the weak and shambling figure of the child's father stumbled in, to be expostulated with, and scolded, and treated as the person of the house always treated him, when he came home in such a pitiable condition.

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While they ate their supper, Lizzie tried to bring the child round again to that prettier and better state. But the charm was broken. The dolls' dressmaker had become a little quaint shrew, of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthy.

Poor dolls' dressmaker! How often so dragged down by hands that should have raised her up; how often so misdirected when losing her way on the eternal road and asking guidance! Poor, poor little dolls' dressmaker.

One of Miss Jenny's firmest friends was an aged Jew, Mr. Riah, by name; of venerable aspect, and a generous and noble nature. He was supposedly the head of the firm of Pubsey and Co., at Saint-Mary-Axe, but really only the agent of one Mr. Fledgeby, a miserly young dandy who directed all the aged Jew's transactions, and forced him into sharp, unfair dealings with those whom Mr. Riah himself would gladly have befriended; shielding his own meanness and dishonesty behind the venerable figure of the Jew, and keeping his own connection with the firm a profound secret. Mr. Riah suffered himself to remain in such a position only because once when he had had sickness and misfortune, and owed Mr. Fledgeby's father both principal and interest, the son inheriting, had been merciful and placed him there; and little did the guileless old man realize that he had long since, richly repaid the debt; his age and serene respectability, added to the characteristics ascribed to his race, making a valuable screen to hide his employer's misdeeds.

The aged Jew often befriended the dolls' dressmaker, and she called him, in her fanciful way, "godmother."

On his roof-top garden, Jenny Wren and her friend Lizzie were sitting one day, together, when Mr. Fledgeby came up and joined the party, interrupting their conversation. For the girls, perhaps with some old instinct of his race, the gentle Jew had spread a carpet. Seated on it, against no more romantic object than a blackened chimney-stack, over which some humble creeper had been trained, they both pored over one book, while a basket of common fruit, and another basket of strings of beads and tinsel scraps were lying near.

"This, sir," explained the old Jew, "is a little dressmaker for little people. Explain to the master, Jenny."

"Dolls; that's all," said Jenny shortly. "Very difficult to fit too, because their figures are so uncertain. You never know where to expect their waists."

"I made acquaintance with my guests, sir," pursued the old Jew, with an evident purpose of drawing out the dressmaker, "through their coming here to buy our damage and waste for Miss Jenny's millinery. They wear it in their hair, and on their ball-dresses, and even (so she tells me) are presented at court with it."

“Ah!” said Fledgeby, “she’s been buying that basketful to-day, I suppose.”

“I suppose she has,” Miss Jenny interposed, “and paying for it too, most likely,” adding, “we are thankful to come up here for rest, sir; for the quiet and the air, and because it’s so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky, from which the wind comes, and, you feel as if you were dead.”

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"How do you feel when you are dead?" asked the practical Mr. Fledgeby, much perplexed.

"Oh so tranquil!" cried the little creature smiling. "Oh so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people, who are alive, crying and working and calling to one another in the close dark streets and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange, good, sorrowful happiness comes upon you!"

Her eyes fell upon the old man, who, with his hands folded, quietly looked on.

"Why, it was only just now," said the little creature, pointing at him, "that I fancied I saw him come out of his grave! He toiled out at that low door, so bent and worn, and then he took his breath, and stood upright and looked all around him at the sky, and the wind blew upon him, and his life down in the dark was over!—Till he was called back to life," she added, looking round at Fledgeby with that lower look of sharpness, "Why did you call him back? But you are not dead, you know," said Jenny Wren. "Get down to life!"

Mr. Fledgeby seemed to think it a rather good suggestion, and with a nod turned round and took his leave. As Mr. Riah followed him down the stairs, the little creature called out to the Jew in a silvery tone, "Don't be gone long. Come back and be dead!" And still as they went down, they heard the little sweet voice, more and more faintly, half calling and half singing, "Come back and be dead. Come back and be dead!" And as the old man again mounted, the call or song began to sound in his ears again, and looking above, he saw the face of the little creature looking down out of the glory of her long, bright, radiant hair, and musically repeating to him like a vision:

"Come up and be dead! Come up and be dead!"

Not long after this, there came a heavy trial to the dolls' dressmaker in the loss from her home of her friend and lodger, Lizzie Hexam. Lizzie, having disagreed with her brother upon a subject of vital interest to herself, and having an intense desire to escape from persons whom she knew would pursue her so long as she remained in London, felt it wisest to quietly disappear from the city, leaving no trace of her whereabouts. With the help of Mr. Riah she accomplished this, and found occupation in a paper-mill in the country, leaving poor Jenny Wren with only the slight consolation of her letters, and with the aged Jew for her sole counsellor and friend. He was frequently with Jenny Wren, often escorting her upon her necessary trips, in returning her fine ladies to their homes in various parts of the city, and sometimes the little creature accompanied him upon his own business trips, as well.

One foggy evening as usual, he set out for Church Street, and, wading through the fog, waded to the doorstep of the dolls' dressmaker.

Miss Wren expected him. He could see her through the window, by the light of her low fire—carefully banked up with damp cinders, that it might last the longer, and waste the less when she went out—sitting waiting for him, in her bonnet. His tap at the glass roused her from the musing solitude in which she sat, and she opened the door, aiding her steps with a little crutch-stick.

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“Good evening, godmother!” said Miss Jenny Wren.

The old man laughed, and gave her his arm to lean on. “Won’t you come in and warm yourself, godmother?” she asked.

“Not if you are ready, Cinderella, my dear.”

“Well!” exclaimed Miss Wren, delighted. “Now you ARE a clever old boy! If we only gave prizes at this establishment you should have the first silver medal for taking me up so quick.” As she spake thus, Miss Wren removed the key of the house-door from the keyhole, and put it in her pocket. Satisfied that her dwelling was safe, she drew one hand through the old man’s arm, and prepared to ply her crutch-stick with the other. But the key was of such gigantic proportions that before they started, Riah proposed to carry it.

“No, no, no! I’ll carry it myself,” returned Miss Wren. “I’m awfully lop-sided, you know, and stowed down in my pocket, it’ll trim the ship. To let you into a secret, godmother, I wear my pocket on my high side o’ purpose.”

With that they began their plodding through the fog.

“Yes, it was truly sharp of you, godmother,” returned Miss Wren, with great approbation, “to understand me. But, you see, you *are* so like the fairy godmother in the bright little books! You look so unlike the rest of the people, and so much as if you had changed yourself into that shape, just this moment, with some benevolent object. Bah!” cried Miss Jenny, putting her face close to the old man’s, “I can see your features, godmother, behind the beard.”

“Does the fancy go to my changing other objects, too, Jenny?”

“Ah! That it does! If you’d only borrow my stick, and tap this piece of pavement, it would start up a coach and six. I say,—Let’s believe so!”

“With all my heart,” replied the good old man.

“And I’ll tell you what I must ask you to do, godmother. I must ask you to be so kind as to give my child a tap, and change him altogether. Oh, my child has been such a bad, bad child of late! It worries me almost out of my wits. Not done a stroke of work these ten days.”

“What shall be changed after him?” asked Riah, in a compassionately playful voice.

“Upon my word, godmother, I am afraid I must be selfish next, and get you to set me right in the back and legs. It’s a little thing to you with your power, godmother, but it’s a great deal to poor, weak, aching me.”

There was no querulous complaining in the words, but they were not the less touching for that.

“And then?”

“Yes, and then—*you* know, godmother. Well both jump into the coach and six, and go to Lizzie. This reminds me, godmother, to ask you a serious question. You are as wise as wise can be (having been brought up by the fairies), and you can tell me this,—Is it better to have had a good thing and lost it, or never to have had it?”

“Explain, goddaughter.”

“I feel so much more solitary and helpless without Lizzie now than I used to feel before I knew her.” (Tears were in her eyes as she said so.)

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"Some beloved companionship fades out of most lives, my dear," said the Jew, "that of a wife, and a fair daughter, and a son of promise, has faded out of my own life—but the happiness was"

"Ah!" said Miss Wren thoughtfully, by no means convinced. "Then I tell you what change I think you had better begin with, godmother. You had better change Is into Was, and Was into Is, and keep them so."

"Would that suit your case? Would you not be always in pain then?" asked the old man tenderly.

"Right!" exclaimed Miss Wren. "You have changed me wiser, godmother. Not," she added, with a quaint hitch of her chin and eyes, "that you need to be a very wonderful godmother to do that, indeed!"

Thus conversing, they pursued their way over London Bridge, and struck down the river, and held their still foggier course that way. As they were going along, Jennie twisted her venerable friend aside to a brilliantly lighted toy-shop window, and said: "Now, look at 'em! All my work!"

This referred to a dazzling semicircle of dolls in all the colors of the rainbow, who were dressed for all the gay events of life.

"Pretty, pretty, pretty!" said the old man with a clap of his hands. "Most elegant taste!"

"Glad you like 'em," returned Miss Wren loftily. "But the fun is, godmother, how I make the great ladies try my dresses on. Though it's the hardest part of my business, and would be, even if my back were not bad and my legs queer."

He looked at her as not understanding what she said.

"Bless you, godmother," said Miss Wren, "I have to scud about town at all hours. If it was only sitting at my bench, cutting out and sewing, it would be comparatively easy work; but it's the trying-on by the great ladies that takes it out of me."

"How the trying-on?" asked Riah.

"What a moony godmother you are, after all!" returned Miss Wren. "Look here. There's a Drawing-room, or a grand day in the Park, or a show or a fete, or what you like. Very well. I squeeze among the crowd, and I look about me. When I see a great lady very suitable for my business, I say, 'You'll do, my dear!' and I take particular notice of her again, and run home and cut her out, and baste her. Then another day I come scudding back again to try on. Sometimes she plainly seems to say, 'How that little creature *is* staring!' All the time I am only saying to myself, 'I must hollow out a bit here; I must slope away there'; and I am making a perfect slave of her, making her try on my doll's



dress. Evening parties are severer work for me, because there's only a doorway for full view, and what with hobbling among the wheels of the carriages and the legs of the horses, I fully expect to be run over some night. Whenever they go bobbing into the hall from the carriage, and catch a glimpse of my little physiognomy poked out from behind a policeman's cape in the rain,

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I daresay they think I am wondering and admiring with all my eyes and heart, but they little think they're only working for my dolls! There was Lady Belinda Whitrose. I said one night when she came out of the carriage. 'You'll do, my dear!' and I ran straight home, and cut her out, and basted her. Back I came again, and waited behind the men that called the carriages. Very bad night too. At last, 'Lady Belinda's Whitrose's carriage!' Lady Belinda Whitrose coming down! And I made her try on—oh! and take pains about it too—before she got seated. That's Lady Belinda hanging up by the waist, much too near the gas-light for a wax one, with her toes turned in."

When they had plodded on for some time, they reached a certain tavern, where Mr. Riah had some business to transact with its proprietress, Miss Abbey Potterson, to whom he presented himself, and was about to introduce his young companion when Miss Wren interrupted him:

"Stop a bit," she said, "I'll give the lady my card." She produced it from her pocket with an air, and Miss Abbey took the diminutive document, and found it to run thus:

Miss JENNY WREN.

Dolls' Dressmaker..

Dolls attended at their own residences.

So great were her amusement and astonishment, and so interested was she in the odd little creature that she at once asked:

"Did you ever taste shrub, child?"

Miss Wren shook her head.

"Should you like to?"

"Should if it's good," returned Miss Wren.

"You shall try. Put your little feet on the fender. It's a cold, cold night, and the fog clings so." As Miss Abbey helped her to turn her chair, her loosened bonnet fell on the floor. "Why, what lovely hair!" cried Miss Abbey. "And enough to make wigs: for all the dolls in the world. What a quantity!"

"Call *that* a quantity?" returned Miss Wren. "*Poof!* What do you say to the rest of it?" As she spoke, she untied a band, and the golden stream fell over herself, and over the chair, and flowed down to the ground. Miss Abbey's admiration seemed to increase her perplexity. She beckoned the Jew towards her, and whispered:

“Child or woman?”

“Child in years,” was the answer; “woman in self-reliance and trial.”

“You are talking about me, good people,” thought Miss Jenny, sitting in her golden bower, warming her feet. “I can’t hear what you say, but I know your tricks and your manners!”

The shrub, mixed by Miss Potterson’s skilful hands, was perfectly satisfactory to Miss Jenny’s palate, and she sat and sipped it leisurely while the interview between Mr. Riah and Miss Potterson proceeded, keenly regretting when the bottom of the glass was reached, and the interview at an end.

There was at this time much curiosity among Lizzie Hexam’s acquaintances to discover her hiding-place, and many of them paid visits to the dolls’ dressmaker in hopes of obtaining from her the desired address. Among these was Mr. Wrayburn, whom we find calling upon Miss Wren one evening:

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"And so, Miss Jenny," he said, "I cannot persuade you to dress me a doll?"

"No," replied Miss Wren snappishly; "If you want one, go and buy it at the shop."

"And my charming young goddaughter," said Mr. Wrayburn plaintively, "down in Hertfordshire—"

("Humbugshire, you mean, I think," interposed Miss Wren)—"is to be put upon the cold footing of the general public, and is to derive no advantage from my private acquaintance with the Court dressmaker?"

"If it's any advantage to your charming godchild, and oh, a precious godfather she has got!" replied Miss Wren, pricking at him in the air with her needle, "to be informed that the Court dressmaker knows your tricks and your manners, you may tell her so, by post, with my compliments."

Miss Wren was busy with her work, by candlelight, and Mr. Wrayburn, half amused and half vexed, stood by her bench looking on, while her troublesome child was in the corner, in deep disgrace on account of his bad behavior, and as Miss Jenny worked, she rated him severely, accompanying each reproach with a stamp of her foot.

"Pay five shillings for you indeed!" she exclaimed in response to his appeal for money. "How many hours do you suppose it costs me to earn five shillings, you infamous boy? Don't cry like that, or I'll throw a doll at you. Pay five shillings fine for you, indeed! Fine in more ways than one, I think! I'd give the dustman five shillings to carry you off in the dust-cart."

The figure in the corner continuing to whine and whimper, Miss Wren covered her face with her hand. "There!" she said, "I can't bear to look at you. Go upstairs and get me my bonnet and shawl. Make yourself useful in some way, bad boy, and let me have your room instead of your company, for one half minute."

Obedying her, he shambled out, and Mr. Wrayburn, pitying, saw the tears exude between the little creature's fingers, as she kept her hand before her eyes.

"I am going to the Italian Opera to try on," said Miss Wren, taking away her hand, and laughing satirically to hide that she had been crying. "But let me first tell you, Mr. Wrayburn, once for all, that it's no use your paying visits to me. You wouldn't get what you want of me, no, not if you brought pincers with you to tear it out."

With which statement, and a further admonition to her father, who had come back, she blew her candles out, and taking her big door-key in her pocket, and her crutch-stick in her hand, marched off.

Not many months later, one day while Miss Wren was waiting in the office of Pubsey and Co., for Mr. Riah to come in and sell her the waste she was accustomed to buy, she overheard a conversation between Mr. Fledgeby, who had apparently happened in, and a friend who was also waiting for Mr. Riah.

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This conversation led her to infer that her old friend was both a treacherous and dishonest man, and entirely unworthy to be trusted in any capacity. Seemingly the conversation was not meant for her ears, but Mr. Fledgeby had planned that she should hear it, and that it should have the very effect upon her which it had. This was Mr. Fledgeby's retort upon Miss Wren for the over-sharpness with which she always treated him, and also a pleasant instance of his humor as regarded the old Jew. "He has got a bad name as an old Jew, and he is paid for the use of it, and I'll have my money's worth out of him." Thus ran Mr. Fledgeby's reflections on the subject, and Miss Wren sat listening to the conversation with a fallen countenance, until Mr. Riah came in, when Mr. Fledgeby led the old man to make statements which seemed further to emphasize his hard-heartedness and dishonesty.

Then Mr. Riah filled Miss Wren's little basket with such scraps as she could buy, saying:

"There, my Cinderella dear, the basket's full now. Bless you, and get you gone!"

"Don't call me your Cinderella dear," returned Miss Wren, "Oh, you cruel godmother!"

She shook that emphatic little forefinger of hers in his face at parting, and as he did not attempt to vindicate himself, went on her way, to return no more to Saint Mary Axe; chance having disclosed to her (as she supposed) the flinty and hypocritical character of Mr. Riah. She often moralized over her work on the tricks and the manners of that venerable cheat, but made her little purchases elsewhere, and lived a secluded life. But during several interviews which she chanced to have later with Mr. Fledgeby, the clever little creature made him by his own words, disclose his system of treachery and trickery, and prove that the aged Jew had been screening his employer at his own expense. Thereupon Miss Jenny lost no time in once again proceeding to the place of business of Pubsey and Co., where she found the old man sitting at his desk. In less time than it takes to tell it, she had folded her arms about his neck, and kissed him, imploring his forgiveness for her lack of faith in him, adding: "It did look bad, now, didn't it?"

"It looked so bad, Jenny," responded the old man with gravity, "that I was hateful in mine own eyes. I perceived that the obligation was upon me to leave this service. Whereupon I indited a letter to my master to that effect, but he held me to certain months of servitude, which were his lawful term of notice. They expire to-morrow. Upon their expiration—not before—I had meant to set myself right with my Cinderella."

While they were thus conversing, the aged Jew received an angry communication from Mr. Fledgeby, releasing Mr. Riah at once from his service, to the great satisfaction of the old man, who then got his few goods together in a black bag, closed the shutters, pulled down the office blind, and issued forth upon the steps. There, while Miss Jenny held the bag, the old man locked the house door, and handed the key over to the messenger who had brought the note of dismissal.

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"Well, godmother," said Miss Wren, "and so you're thrown upon the world!"

"It would appear so, Jenny, and rather suddenly."

"Where are you going to seek your fortune?" asked Miss Wren. The old man smiled, but gazed about him with a look of having lost his way in life, which did not escape the dolls' dressmaker.

"The best thing you can do," said Jenny, "for the time being, at all events, is to come home with me, godmother. Nobody's there but my bad child, and Lizzie's lodging stands empty."

The old man, when satisfied that no inconvenience could be entailed on any one by this move, readily complied, and the singularly assorted couple once more went through the streets together.

And it was a kindly Providence which placed the child's hand in the aged Jew's protecting one that night. Before they reached home, they met a sad party, bearing in their arms an inanimate form, at which the dolls' dressmaker needed but to take one look.

"Oh gentlemen, gentlemen," she cried, "He belongs to me!" "Belongs to you!" said the head of the party, stopping;—"Oh yes, dear gentlemen, he's my child, out without leave. My poor, bad, bad boy! And he don't know me, he don't know me! Oh, what *shall* I do?" cried the little creature, wildly beating her hands together, "when my own child don't know me!"

The head of the party looked to the old Jew for explanation. He whispered, as the dolls' dressmaker bent over the still form, and vainly tried to extract some sign of recognition from it; "It's her drunken father."

Then the sad party with their lifeless burden went through the streets. After it, went the dolls' dressmaker, hiding her face in the Jewish skirts, and clinging to them with one hand, while with the other she plied her stick, and at last the little home in Church Street was reached.

Many flaunting dolls had to be gaily dressed, before the money was in the dressmaker's pocket to get mourning for her father. As Mr. Riah sat by, helping her in such small ways as he could, he found it difficult to make out whether she realized that the deceased had really been her father.

"If my poor boy," she would say, "had been brought up better, he might have done better. Not that I reproach myself. I hope I have no cause for that."

"None, indeed, Jenny, I am very certain."



“Thank you, godmother. It cheers me to hear you say so. But you see it is so hard to bring up a child well, when you work, work, work, all day. When he was out of employment, I couldn’t always keep him near me. He got fractious and nervous, and I was obliged to let him go into the streets. And he never did well in the streets, he never did well out of sight. How often it happens with children! How can I say what I might have turned out myself, but for my back having been so bad and my legs so queer, when I was young!” the dressmaker would go on. “I had nothing to do but work, so I worked. I couldn’t play. But my poor, unfortunate child could play, and it turned out worse for him.”

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"And not for him alone, Jenny."

"Well, I don't know, godmother. He suffered heavily, did my unfortunate boy. He was very, very ill sometimes. And I called him a quantity of names;" shaking her head over her work, and dropping tears.

"You are a good girl, you are a patient girl."

"As for patience," she would reply with a shrug, "not much of that, godmother. If I had been patient, I should never have called him names. But I hope I did it for his good. And besides, I felt my responsibility as a mother so much. I tried reasoning, and reasoning failed. I tried coaxing, and coaxing failed. I tried scolding, and scolding failed. But I was bound to try everything, with such a charge on my hands. Where would have been my duty to my poor lost boy, if I had not tried everything?"

With such talk, mostly in a cheerful tone on the part of the industrious little creature, the day work and the night work were beguiled, until enough of smart dolls had gone forth to bring in the sombre stuff that the occasion required, and to bring into the house the other sombre preparations. "And now," said Miss Jenny, "having knocked off my rosy-cheeked young friends, I'll knock off my white-cheeked self." This referred to her making her own dress which at last was done, in time for the simple service, the arrangements for which were of her own planning. The service ended, and the solitary dressmaker having returned to her home, she said:

"I must have a very short cry, godmother, before I cheer up for good. Because after all, a child is a child, you know."

It was a longer cry than might have been expected. Howbeit, it wore itself out in a shadowy corner, and then the dressmaker came forth, and washed her face, and made the tea.

"You wouldn't mind my cutting out something while we are at tea, would you?" she asked with a coaxing air.

"Cinderella, dear child," the old man expostulated. "Will you never rest?"

"Oh! It's not work, cutting out a pattern isn't," said Miss Jenny, with her busy little scissors already snipping at some paper; "The truth is, godmother, I want to fix it, while I have it correct in my mind."

"Have you seen it to-day, then?" asked Riah.

"Yes, godmother. Saw it just now. It's a surplice, that's what it is. Thing our clergymen wear, you know," explained Miss Jenny, in consideration of his professing another faith.

“And what have you to do with that, Jenny?”

“Why, godmother,” replied the dressmaker, “you must know that we professors, who live upon our taste and invention, are obliged to keep our eyes always open. And you know already that I have many extra expenses to meet. So it came into my head, while I was weeping at my poor boy’s grave, that something in my way might be done with a clergyman. Not a funeral, never fear;” said Miss Jenny. “The public don’t like to be made melancholy, I know very well. But a doll clergyman, my dear,—glossy black curls and whiskers—uniting two of my young friends in matrimony,” said Miss Jenny shaking her forefinger, “is quite another affair. If you don’t see those three at the altar in Bond Street, in a jiffy, my name’s Jack Robinson!”

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With her expert little ways in sharp action, she had got a doll into whitey-brown paper orders, before the meal was over, and displayed it for the edification of the Jewish mind, and Mr. Riah was lost in admiration for the brave, resolute little soul, who could so put aside her sadness to meet and face her pressing need.

And many times thereafter was he likewise lost in admiration of his little friend, who continued her business as of old, only without the burden of responsibility by which her life had heretofore been clouded, and more able to give her imagination free play along the lines of her interests, without the pressure of home care resting upon her poor shoulders.

Our last glimpse of her, is as usual, before her little workbench, at work upon a full-dressed, large sized doll, when there comes a knock upon the door. When it is opened there is disclosed a young fellow known to his friends and employer, as Sloppy.

Sloppy was full private No 1 in the Awkward Squad of the rank and file of life, and yet had his glimmering notions of standing true to his colors, and in instinctive refinement of feeling was much above others who outranked him in birth and education.

“Come in, sir,” said Miss Wren, “and who may you be?”

Mr. Sloppy introduced himself by name and buttons.

“Oh, indeed,” cried Jenny, “I have heard of you.”

Sloppy, grinning, was so glad to hear it that he threw back his head and laughed.

“Bless us!” exclaimed Miss Wren, with a start, “Don’t open your mouth as wide as that, young man, or it’ll catch so, and not shut again, some day.”

Mr. Sloppy opened it, if possible, wider, and kept it open, until his laugh was out.

“Why, you’re like the giant,” said Miss Wren, “when he came home in the land of Beanstalk, and wanted Jack for supper.”

“Was he good looking, Miss?” asked Sloppy.

“No,” said Miss Wren. “Ugly.”

Her visitor glanced round the room—which had many comforts in it now, that it had not had before—and said:

“This is a pretty place, Miss.

“Glad you think so, sir,” returned Miss Wren. “And what do you think of Me?”

The honesty of Mr. Sloppy being severely taxed by the question, he twisted a button, grinned, and faltered.

“Out with it,” said Miss Wren, with an arch look. “Don’t you think me a queer little comicality?” In shaking her head at him after asking the question, she shook her hair down.

“Oh!” cried Sloppy in a burst of admiration. “What a lot, and what a color!”

Miss Wren with her usual expressive hitch, went on with her work. But left her hair as it was, not displeased by the effect it had made.

“You don’t live here alone, do you, Miss?” asked Sloppy.

“No,” said Miss Wren with a chop. “Live here with my fairy godmother.”

“With;” Mr. Sloppy couldn’t make it out; “with, who did you say, Miss?”

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"Well!" replied Miss Wren more seriously. "With my second father. Or with my first, for that matter." And she shook her head and drew a sigh. "If you had known a poor child I used to have here," she added, "you'd have understood me. But you didn't and you can't. All the better!"

"You must have been taught a long time, Miss," said Sloppy, glancing at the array of dolls on hand, "before you came to work so neatly, Miss, and with such a pretty taste."

"Never was taught a stitch, young man!" returned the dressmaker, tossing her head. "Just gobbled and gobbled, till I found out how to do it. Badly enough at first, but better now."

"And here have I," said Sloppy, in a self-reproachful tone, "been a-learning and a-learning at cabinet-making, ever so long! I'll tell you what, Miss, I should like to make you something."

"Much obliged, but what?"

"I could make you," said Sloppy, surveying the room, "a handy set of nests to lay the dolls in. Or a little set of drawers to keep your silks and threads and scraps in. Or I could turn you a rare handle for that crutch-stick, if it belongs to him you call your father."

"It belongs to me," said the little creature, with a quick flush of her face and neck. "I am lame."

Poor Sloppy flushed too, for there was an instinctive delicacy behind his buttons. He said perhaps, the best thing in the way of amends that could be said. "I am very glad it's yours, because I'd rather ornament it for you than for any one else. Please, may I look at it?"

Miss Wren was in the act of handing it over to him when she paused. "But you had better see me use it," she said sharply. "This is the way. Hoppetty, kicketty, peg-peg-peg. Not pretty, is it?"

"It seems to me that you hardly want it at all," said Sloppy.

The little dressmaker sat down again, and gave it into his hand, saying with that better look upon her, and with a smile:

"Thank you! You are a very kind young man, a really kind young man. I accept your offer—I suppose *He* won't mind," she added as an afterthought, shrugging her shoulders; "and if he does, he may!"

"Meaning him you call your father, Miss?" said Sloppy.

"No, no," replied Miss Wren. "Him, *him*, HIM!"

"*Him*, HIM, HIM?" repeated Sloppy, staring about, as if for him.

"Him who is coming to court and marry me," returned Miss Wren. "Dear me, how slow you are!"

"Oh! HIM!" said Sloppy, "I never thought of him. When is he coming, Miss?"

"What a question!" cried Miss Wren. "How should I know?"

"Where is he coming from, Miss?"

"Why, good gracious, how can I tell! He is coming from somewhere or other, I suppose, and he is coming some day or other, I suppose. I don't know any more about him, at present."

This tickled Mr. Sloppy as an extraordinarily good joke, and he threw back his head and laughed with measureless enjoyment. At the sight of him laughing in that absurd way, the dolls' dressmaker laughed very heartily indeed. So they both laughed till they were tired.

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"There, there, there!" said Miss Wren. "For goodness sake, stop, Giant, or I shall be swallowed up alive, before I know it. And to this minute you haven't said what you've come for?"

"I have come for little Miss Harmonses' doll," said Sloppy.

"I thought as much," remarked Miss Wren, "and here is little Miss Harmonses' doll waiting for you. She's folded up in silver paper, you see, as if she was wrapped from head to foot in new banknotes. Take care of her—and there's my hand—and thank you again."

"I'll take more care of her than if she was a gold image," said Sloppy, "and there's *both* my hands, Miss, and I'll soon come back again!"

Here we leave the little dolls' dressmaker, under the protecting care of her "godmother," the first real guardian she has ever known, and with a new friendship to supply her life with that youthful intercourse which has never been hers. And so in leaving her our hearts are light, for Miss Jenny Wren is brighter now, and happier now, and younger now, than ever before.

SISSY JUPE

[Illustration: SISSY JUPE AND HER FATHER]

SISSY JUPE

"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!"

The scene was a bare, plain, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observation. The emphasis was helped by his square wall of a forehead, by his thin and hardset mouth, by his inflexible and dictatorial voice, and by the hair which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, as if the head had scarcely warehouse room for the hard facts stowed inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders,—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was,—all helped the emphasis.

"In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir! Nothing but Facts!"

The speaker, Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, and the schoolmaster, Mr. M'Choakumchild, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of Facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.

"Girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forefinger, "I don't know that girl. Who is that girl?"

"Sissy Jupe, sir," explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtseying.

"Sissy is not a name," said Mr. Gradgrind. "Call yourself Cecilia."

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"It's father as calls me Sissy, sir," returned the young girl with another curtsy.

"Then he has no business to do it," said Mr. Gradgrind. "Tell him he mustn't. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?"

"He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir."

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

"We don't want to know anything about that here. Your father breaks horses, don't he?"

"If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring."

"You mustn't tell us about the ring here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horse-breaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier and horse-breaker. Give me your definition of a horse."

(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand).

"Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!" said Mr. Gradgrind, for the general behoof of all the little pitchers. "Girl number twenty possessed of no facts in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy's definition of a horse. Bitzer, yours!"

"Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth." Thus (and much more) Bitzer.

"Now, girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind, "you know what a horse is."

She curtsied again, blushed, and sat down, and the third gentleman present stepped forth, briskly smiling and folding his arms. "That's a horse," he said. "Now, let me ask you, boys and girls, would you paper a room with representations of horses?"

After a pause, one-half of the children cried in chorus, "Yes, sir!" Upon which the other half, seeing in the gentleman's face that Yes was wrong, cried out in chorus, "No, sir!"

"Of course, No. Why wouldn't you?"

A pause. One boy ventured the answer, because he wouldn't paper a room at all, but would paint it.

“You must paper it,” said Thomas Gradgrind, “whether you like it or not. Don’t tell us you wouldn’t paper it. What do you mean, boy?”

“I’ll explain to you then,” said the gentleman, after another pause, “why you wouldn’t paper a room with a representation of horses. Do you ever see horses walking up and down the sides of rooms in reality—in fact? Of course, No. Why then, you are not to see anywhere what you don’t see in fact; you are not to have anywhere what you don’t have in fact. This is a new principle, a great discovery,” said the gentleman. “Now I’ll try you again. Would you use a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it?”

“There being a general conviction by this time that, ‘No sir!’ was always the right answer to this gentleman, the chorus of No was very strong. Only a few feeble stragglers said Yes; among them Sissy Jupe.”

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“Girl number twenty,” said the gentleman, “why would you carpet your room with representations of flowers?”

“If you please, sir, I’m very fond of flowers,” returned the girl.

“And is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?”

“It wouldn’t hurt them, sir. They wouldn’t crush and wither, please sir. They would be the pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, sir, and I would fancy—”

“Ay, ay, ay! but you mustn’t fancy,” cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. “You are never to fancy.”

“You are not, Cecilia Jupe,” Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, “to do anything of that kind. You don’t walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don’t find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use,” said the gentleman, “for all these purposes, combinations and modifications in primary colors of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste.”

The girl curtsied and sat down. She was very young, and she looked as if she were frightened by the matter-of-fact prospect the world afforded; while the teacher proceeded to give a lesson based upon hard Fact for the benefit of his visitors.

Mr. Gradgrind walked homeward from the school, in a state of considerable satisfaction. It was his school, and he intended it to be a model. He intended every child in it to be a model, just as the five young Gradgrinds were all models.

No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon; no little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are”; each little Gradgrind having at five years old dissected the Great Bear, and driven Charles’s Wain like a locomotive engine-driver. No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with a crumpled horn who tossed the dog, who worried the cat, who killed the rat, who ate the malt, or with that more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb. It had never heard of those celebrities, and had only been introduced to a cow as a gaminivorous, ruminating quadruped with several stomachs.

To his matter-of-fact home, which was called Stone Lodge, Mr. Gradgrind directed his steps, walking on in a hopeful and satisfied frame of mind. He was an affectionate

father, after his manner; but allowed no foolish sentiment to interfere with the practical basis of his childrens' education and bringing-up.

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He had reached the outskirts of the town, when his ears were invaded by the sound of the band attached to the horse-riding establishment, which had there set up its rest in a wooden pavilion. A flag floating from the summit of the temple, proclaimed to mankind that it was Sleary's Horse-Riding which claimed their suffrages. Among the many pleasing wonders which must be seen to be believed, Signor Jupe was that afternoon to "elucidate the diverting accomplishments of his highly trained performing dog, Merrylegs," He was also to exhibit "his astounding feat of throwing seventy-five hundred weight in rapid succession back-handed over his head, thus forming a fountain of solid iron in midair, a feat never before attempted in this or any other country, and which having elicited such rapturous plaudits from enthusiastic throngs it cannot be withdrawn." The same Signor Jupe was to "enliven the varied performances at frequent intervals with his chaste Shakesperean quips and retorts." Lastly, he was to wind them up by appearing in his favorite character of Mr. William Button, of Tooley Street, in "the highly novel and laughable Hippo Comedietta of The Tailor's Journey to Brentford."

Thomas Gradgrind took no heed of these trivialities, but passed on, as a practical man ought to pass on. But, at the back of the booth he saw a number of children congregated in a number of stealthy attitudes, striving to peep in at the hidden glories of the place. What did he then behold but his own Louisa peeping with all her might through a hole in a deal board, and his own Thomas abasing himself on the ground to catch but a hoof of the graceful Tyrolean Flower-act!

Dumb with amazement, Mr. Gradgrind crossed to the spot where his family was thus disgraced, laid his hand upon each erring child, and said:

"Louisa!! Thomas!!"

Both rose, red and disconcerted.

"In the name of wonder, idleness, and folly!" said Mr. Gradgrind, leading each away by a hand; "what do you do here?"

"Wanted to see what it was like," returned Louisa shortly.

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Gradgrind. "Thomas and you, to whom the circle of the sciences is open; who may be said to be replete with Fact; who have been trained to mathematical exactness; Thomas and you, here! In this degraded position! I am amazed."

"I was tired, father," said Louisa.

"Tired? Of what?" asked the astonished father.

"I don't know of what—of everything, I think."

“Say not another word,” returned Mr. Gradgrind. “You are childish. I will hear no more.” With which remark he led the culprits to their home in silence, into the presence of their fretful invalid mother, who was much annoyed at the disturbance they had created. While she was peevishly expressing her mind on the subject, Mr. Gradgrind was gravely pondering upon the matter.

“Whether,” he said, “whether any instructor or servant can have suggested anything? Whether, in spite of all precautions, any idle story-book can have got into the house for Louisa or Thomas to read? Because in minds that have been practically formed by rule and line, from the cradle upwards, this is incomprehensible.”

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"Stop a bit!" cried his friend Bounderby. "You have one of those Stroller's children in the school, Cecilia Jupe by name! I tell you what, Gradgrind, turn this girl to the right-about, and there is an end of it."

"I am much of your opinion."

"Do it at once," said Bounderby, "has always been my motto. Do you the same. Do this at once!"

"I have the father's address," said his friend. "Perhaps you would not mind walking to town with me?"

"Not the least in the world," said Mr. Bounderby, "as long as you do it at once!"

So Mr. Gradgrind and his friend immediately set out to find Cecilia Jupe, and to order her from henceforth to remain away from school. On the way there they met her. "Now, girl," said Mr. Gradgrind, "take this gentleman and me to your father's; we are going there. What have you got in that bottle you are carrying?"

"It's the nine oils."

"The what?" cried Mr. Bounderby.

"The nine oils, sir, to rub father with. It is what our people always use, sir, when they get any hurts in the ring," replied the girl, "they bruise themselves very bad sometimes."

"Serves them right," said Mr. Bounderby, "for being idle." The girl glanced up at his face with mingled astonishment and dread as he said this, but she led them on down a narrow road, until they stopped at the door of a little public house.

"This is it, sir," she said. "It's only crossing the bar, sir, and up the stairs, if you wouldn't mind; and waiting there for a moment till I get a candle. If you should hear a dog, sir, it's only Merrylegs, and he only barks."

They followed the girl up some steep stairs, and stopped while she went on for a candle. Reappearing, with a face of great surprise, she said, "Father is not in our room, sir. If you wouldn't mind walking in, sir? I'll find him directly."

They walked in; and Sissy having set two chairs for them, sped away with a quick, light step. They heard the doors of rooms above opening and shutting, as Sissy went from one to another in quest of her father. She came bounding down again in a great hurry, opened an old hair trunk, found it empty, and looked around with her face full of terror.

"Father must have gone down to the Booth, sir. I'll bring him in a minute!" She was gone directly, without her bonnet; with her long, dark, childish hair streaming behind her.

“What does she mean!” said Mr. Gradgrind. “Back in a minute? It’s more than a mile off.”

Before Mr. Bounderby could reply, a young man mentioned in the bills of the day as Mr. E.W.B. Childers,—justly celebrated for his daring vaulting act as the wild huntsman of the North American prairies, appeared. Upon entering into conversation with Mr. Gradgrind he informed that gentleman of his opinion that Jupe was off.

“Do you mean that he has deserted his daughter?” asked Mr. Gradgrind.

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"I mean," said Mr. Childers with a nod, "that he has cut. He has been short in his leaps and bad in his tumbling lately, missed his tip several times, too. He was goosed last night, he was goosed the night before last, he was goosed to-day. He has lately got in the way of being always goosed, and he can't stand it."

"Why has he been—so very much—goosed?" asked Mr. Gradgrind, forcing the word out of himself, with great solemnity and reluctance.

"His joints are turning stiff, and he is getting used up," said Childers. "He has his points as a Cackler still, a speaker, if the gentleman likes it better—but he can't get a living out of *that*. Now it's a remarkable fact, sir, that it cut that man deeper to know that his daughter knew of his being goosed than to go through with it. Jupe sent her out on an errand not an hour ago, and then was seen to slip out himself, with his dog behind him and a bundle under his arm. She will never believe it of her father, but he has cut away and left her.

"Poor Sissy! he had better have apprenticed her," added Mr. Childers, "Now, he leaves her without anything to take to. Her father always had it in his head, that she was to be taught the deuce-and-all of education. He has been picking up a bit of reading for her, here—and a bit of writing for her, there—and a bit of ciphering for her, somewhere else—these seven years. When Sissy got into the school here," he pursued, "he was as pleased as Punch. I suppose he had this move in his mind—he was always half cracked—and then considered her provided for. If you should have happened to have looked in to-night to tell him that you were going to do her any little service," added Mr. Childers, "it would be very fortunate and well-timed."

"On the contrary," returned Mr. Gradgrind, "I came to tell her that she could not attend our school any more. Still, if her father really has left her without any connivance on her part!—Boulderby, let me have a word with you."

Upon this, Mr. Childers politely betook himself outside the door, and there stood while the two gentlemen were engaged in conversation.

Meanwhile the various members of Sleary's company gathered together in the room. Last of all appeared Mr. Sleary himself, who was stout, and troubled with asthma, and whose breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter s. Bowing to Mr. Gradgrind, he asked:

"Ith it your intention to do anything for the poor girl, Thquire?"

"I shall have something to propose to her when she comes back," said Mr. Gradgrind.

"Glad to hear it, Thquire. Not that I want to get rid of the child, any more than I want to thtand in her way. I'm willing to take her prenthith, though at her age ith late."

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Here his daughter Josephine—a pretty, fair-haired girl of eighteen, who had been tied on a horse at two years old, and had made a will at twelve, which she always carried about with her, expressive of her dying desire to be drawn to the grave by two piebald ponies—cried “Father, hush! she has come back!” Then came Sissy Jupe, running into the room as she had run out of it. And when she saw them all assembled, and saw their looks, and saw no father there, she broke into a most deplorable cry, and took refuge on the bosom of the most accomplished tight-rope lady, who knelt down on the floor to nurse her, and to weep over her.

“Ith an infernal shame, upon my thoul it ith,” said Sleary.

“O my dear father, my good, kind father, where are you gone? You are gone to try to do me some good, I know! You are gone away for my sake, I am sure. And how miserable and helpless you will be without me, poor, poor father, until you come back!” It was so pathetic to hear her saying many things of this kind, with her face turned upward, and her arms stretched out as if she were trying to stop his departing shadow and embrace it, that no one spoke a word until Mr. Bounderby (growing impatient) took the case in hand.

“Now, good people all,” said he, “this is wanton waste of time. Let the girl understand the fact. Here, what’s your name! Your father has absconded, deserted you—and you mustn’t expect to see him again as long as you live.”

They cared so little for plain fact, these people, that instead of being impressed by the speaker’s strong common sense, they took it in extraordinary dudgeon. The men muttered “Shame!” and the women, “Brute!” Whereupon Mr. Gradgrind found an opening for his eminently practical exposition of the subject.

“It is of no moment,” said he, “whether this person is to be expected back at any time, or the contrary. He is gone away, and there is no present expectation of his return. That, I believe, is agreed on all hands.”

“Thath agreed, Thquire. Thtick to that!” from Sleary.

“Well, then. I, who came here to inform the father of the poor girl, Jupe, that she could not be received at the school any more, in consequence of there being practical objections, into which I need not enter, to the reception there of the children of persons so employed, am prepared in these altered circumstances to make a proposal. I am willing to take charge of you, Jupe, and to educate you, and provide for you. The only condition (over and above your good behavior) I make is, that you decide now, at once, whether to accompany me or remain here. Also, that if you accompany me now, it is understood that you communicate no more with any of your friends who are here present. These observations comprise the whole of the case.”

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"At the thame time," said Sleary, "I muth put in my word, Thquire, tho that both thides of the banner may be equally theen. If you like, Thethillia, to be prentitht, you know the natur' of the work, and you know your companionth. Emma Gordon, in whothe lap you're a lying at prethent, would be a mother to you, and Joth'phine would be a thithther to you. I don't pretend to be of the angel breed myself, and I don't thay but what, when you mith'd your tip, you'd find me cut up rough, and thwear a oath or two at you. But what I thay, Thquire, ith, that good tempered or bad tempered, I never did a hortha a injury yet, no more than thwearing at him went, and that I don't expect I thall begin otherwithe at my time of life, with a rider. I never wath much of a cackler, Thquire, and I have thed my thay."

The latter part of this speech was addressed to Mr. Gradgrind, who received it with a grave inclination of his head, and then remarked:

"The only observation I will make to you, Jupe, in the way of influencing your decision, is, that it is highly desirable to have a sound practical education, and that even your father himself (from what I understand) appears, on your behalf, to have known and felt that much."

The last words had a visible effect upon her. She stopped in her wild crying, and turned her face full upon her patron. The whole company perceived the force of the change, and drew a long breath, together, that plainly said, "She will go!"

"Be sure you know your own mind, Jupe," Mr. Gradgrind cautioned her; "I say no more. Be sure you know your own mind!"

"When father comes back," cried the girl, bursting into tears again after a minute's silence, "how will he ever find me if I go away!"

"You may be quite at ease," said Mr. Gradgrind calmly; he worked out the whole matter like a sum; "you may be quite at ease, Jupe, on that score. In such a case, your father, I apprehend, must find out Mr. Sleary, who would then let him know where you went. I should have no power of keeping you against his wish."

There was another silence; and then Sissy exclaimed sobbing, "Oh, give me my clothes, give me my clothes, and let me go away before I break my heart!"

The women sadly bestirred themselves to get the clothes together, and to pack them. They then brought Sissy's bonnet to her and put it on. Then they pressed about her, kissing and embracing her: and brought the children to take leave of her; and were a tender-hearted, simple, foolish, set of women altogether. Then she had to take her farewell of the male part of the company, and last of all of Mr. Sleary.



“Farewell, Thethilia!” he said, “my latht wordth to you ith thith: Thtick to the termth of your engagement, be obedient to the Thquire, and forget uth. But if, when you’re grown up and married and well off, you come upon any horthе-riding ever, don’t be hard upon it, don’t be croth with it, give it a Bethpeak if you can, and think you might do worth. People must be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow,” continued Sleary, “they can’t be alwayth a working, nor yet they can’t be alwayth a learning. Make the betht of uth; not the wurtht. I’ve got my living out of horthе-riding all my life, I know, but I conthider that I lay down the philothophy of the thubject when I thay to you, Thquire, make the betht of uth; not the wurtht!”

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The Sleary philosophy was propounded as they went downstairs; and the fixed eye of Philosophy—and its rolling eye, too,—soon lost the three figures, and the basket in the darkness of the street.

To Mr. Bounderby's house the weeping Sissy was conducted, and remained there while Mr. Gradgrind returned to Stone Lodge to mature his plans for the clown's daughter. He soon came back to Mr. Bounderby's, bringing his daughter Louisa with him, and Sissy Jupe stood before them, with downcast eyes, while Mr. Gradgrind thus addressed her:

"Jupe, I have made up my mind to take you into my house; and when you are not at school, to employ you about Mrs. Gradgrind, who is rather an invalid. I have explained to Miss Louisa—this is Miss Louisa—the miserable but natural end of your late career; and you are to understand that the subject is not to be referred to any more. From this time you begin your history. You are at present ignorant, I know."

"Yes, sir, very," she answered curtseying.

"I shall have the satisfaction of causing you to be strictly educated; and you will be a living proof of the advantages of the training you will receive. You will be reclaimed and formed. You have been in the habit now of reading to your father, and those people I found you among, I dare say?" said Mr. Gradgrind.

"Only to father and to Merrylegs, sir. At least I mean to father, when Merrylegs was always there."

"Never mind Merrylegs, Jupe," said Mr. Gradgrind with a frown. "I don't ask about him. I understand you have been in the habit of reading to your father, and what did you read to him, Jupe?"

"About the fairies, sir, and the Dwarf, and the Hunchback, and the Genies," she sobbed out: "And about—"

"Hush!" exclaimed Mr. Gradgrind, "that is enough. Never breathe a word of such destructive nonsense any more."

Then Mr. Gradgrind and his daughter took Cecilia Jupe off with them to Stone Lodge, where she speedily grew as pale as wax, and as heavy-eyed as all the other victims of Mr. Gradgrind's practical system of training. She had not an easy time of it, between Mr. M'Choakumchild and Mrs. Gradgrind, and was not without strong impulses, in the first months of her probation, to run away. It hailed facts all day long, so very hard, and life in general was opened to her as such a closely ruled ciphering book, that assuredly she would have run away, but for only one restraint. She believed that her father had not deserted her; she lived in the hope that he would come back, and in the faith that he would be made the happier by her remaining where she was.

The wretched ignorance with which Jupe clung to this consolation, rejecting the superior comfort of knowing on a sound arithmetical basis that her father was an unnatural vagabond, filled Mr. Gradgrind with pity. Yet, what was to be done? Mr.

M'Choakumchild reported that she had a very dense head for figures; that, once possessed with a general idea of the globe, she took the smallest conceivable interest in its exact measurements; that after eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday returned to the question, "What is the first principle of this science?" the absurd answer, "To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me."

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Mr. Gradgrind observed, shaking his head, that all this was very bad; that it showed the necessity of infinite grinding at the mill of knowledge, and that Jupe must be “kept to it.” So Jupe was kept to it, and became low spirited, but no wiser.

“It would be a fine thing to be you, Miss Louisa!” She said one night, when Louisa had endeavored to make her perplexities for next day something clearer to her, to which Louisa answered, “I don’t know that, Sissy. You are more useful to my mother. You are pleasanter to yourself, than *I* am to *myself*.”

“But, if you please, Miss Louisa,” Sissy pleaded, “I am—Oh so stupid! All through school hours I make mistakes. To-day for instance, Mr. M’Choakumchild was explaining to us about Natural Prosperity.”

“National, I think it must have been,” observed Louisa.

“National Prosperity,” corrected Sissy, “and he said, Now, this schoolroom is a Nation, and in this nation there are fifty millions of money. Isn’t this a prosperous nation? Girl number twenty. Isn’t this a prosperous nation, and a’n’t you in a thriving state? Miss Louisa, I said I didn’t know. I thought I couldn’t know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine. But that had nothing to do with it. It was not in the figures at all,” said Sissy, wiping her eyes.

“That was a great mistake of yours,” observed Louisa.

“Yes, Miss Louisa, I know it was now. Then Mr. M’Choakumchild said he would try me again. And he said, This Schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets, in the course of a year. What is your remark on that proportion? And my remark was, that I thought it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million or a million million. And that was wrong too. Then Mr. M’Choakumchild said he would try me once more. And he said That in a given time a hundred thousand persons went to sea on long voyages, and only five hundred of them were drowned or burned to death. What is the percentage? And I said, Miss;” here Sissy fairly sobbed in confessing to her great error; “I said it was nothing, Miss—to the relations and friends of the people who were killed—I shall never learn,” said Sissy. “And the worst of all is, that although my poor father wished me so much to learn, and although I am so anxious to learn, because he wished me to, I am afraid I don’t like it.”

Louisa stood looking at the pretty, modest head, as it drooped abashed before her, until it was raised again to glance at her face. Then she asked:

“Did your father know so much himself, that he wished you to be well taught too?”

Sissy hesitated before replying, for this was forbidden ground, but Louisa insisted upon continuing the conversation.

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"No, Miss Louisa," answered Sissy, "father knows very little indeed. But he said mother was quite a scholar. She died when I was born. She was"—Sissy made the terrible communication, nervously—"she was a dancer. We travelled about the country. Father's a"—Sissy whispered the awful word—"a clown."

"To make the people laugh?" said Louisa with a nod of intelligence.

"Yes." But they wouldn't laugh sometimes. Lately they very often wouldn't, and he used to come home despairing.

I tried to comfort him the best I could, and father said I did. I used to read to him to cheer up his courage, and he was very fond of that. Often and often of a night, he used to forget all his troubles in wondering whether the Sultan would let the lady go on with her story, or would have her head cut off before it was finished."

"And your father was always kind?" asked Louisa.

"Always, always!" returned Sissy, clasping her hands. "Kinder and kinder than I can tell. He was angry only one night, and that was not at me, but Merrylegs, his performing dog. After he beat the dog, he lay down crying on the floor with him in his arms, and the dog licked his face."

Louisa saw that she was sobbing, and going to her, kissed her, took her hand, and sat down beside her.

"Finish by telling me how your father left you, Sissy. The blame of telling the story, if there is any blame, is mine, not yours."

"Dear Miss Louisa," said Sissy, sobbing yet; "I came home from the school that afternoon, and found poor father just come home too, from the booth. And he sat rocking himself over the fire, as if he was in pain. And I said, 'have you hurt yourself father?' and he said, 'A little, my darling.' Then I saw that he was crying. The more I spoke to him, the more he hid his face; and shook all over, and said nothing but 'My darling'; and 'My love!' Then he said he never gave any satisfaction now, that he was a shame and disgrace, and I should have done better without him all along. I said all the affectionate things to him that came into my heart, and presently he was quiet, and put his arms around my neck, and kissed me a great many times. Then he asked me to fetch some of the stuff he used, for the little hurt he had had, and to get it at the best place, which was at the other end of town. Then after kissing me again, he let me go. There is no more to tell, Miss Louisa. I keep the nine oils ready for him, and I know he will come back. Every letter that I see in Mr. Gradgrind's hand takes my breath away, and blinds my eyes, for I think it comes from father, or from Mr. Sleary about father."

After this whenever Sissy dropped a curtsey to Mr. Gradgrind in the presence of his family, and asked if he had had any letter yet about her, Louisa would suspend the occupation of the moment, and look for the reply as earnestly as Sissy did. And when Mr. Gradgrind answered, "No, Jupe, nothing of the sort," the trembling of Sissy's lips would be repeated in Louisa's face, and her eyes would follow Sissy with compassion to the door. Thus a warm friendship sprang up between the girls, and a similar one between the mathematical Thomas and the clown's daughter.

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Time with his innumerable horse-power presently turned out young Thomas Gradgrind a young man and Louisa a young woman. The same great manufacturer passed Sissy onward in his mill, and worked her up into a very pretty article, indeed.

"I fear, Jupe," said Mr. Gradgrind, "that your continuance at the school any longer would be useless."

"I am afraid it would, sir," Sissy answered with a curtsey.

"I cannot disguise from you, Jupe," said Mr. Gradgrind, "that the result of your probation there has greatly disappointed me. You are extremely deficient in your facts. Your acquaintance with figures is very limited. You are altogether backward, and below the mark, yet I believe you have tried hard. I have observed you, and I can find no fault with you in that respect."

"Thank you, sir. I have thought sometimes;" Sissy faltered, "that perhaps I tried to learn too much, and that if I had asked to be allowed to try a little less, I might have—"

"No, Jupe, no," said Mr. Gradgrind, shaking his head. "No. The course you pursued, you pursued according to the system, and there is no more to be said about it. I can only suppose that the circumstances of your early life were too unfavorable to the development of your reasoning powers, and that we began too late. Still, as I have said already, I am disappointed."

"I wish I could have made a better acknowledgment, sir, of your kindness to a poor forlorn girl who had no claim upon you, and of your protection of her," said Sissy, weeping.

"Don't shed tears," added Mr. Gradgrind, "I don't complain of you. You are an affectionate, earnest, good young woman, and we must make that do."

"Thank you, sir, very much," said Sissy, with a grateful curtsey.

"You are useful to Mrs. Gradgrind, and you are serviceable in the family also; so I understand from Miss Louisa, and indeed, so I have observed myself. I therefore hope," said Mr. Gradgrind, "that you can make yourself happy in those relations."

"I should have nothing to wish, sir, if—"

"I understand you," said Mr. Gradgrind; "you refer to your father. I have heard from Miss Louisa that you still preserve that bottle. Well! If your training in the science of arriving at exact results had been more successful, you would have been wiser on these points. I will say no more."

He really liked Sissy too well to have contempt for her. Somehow or other, he had become possessed by an idea that there was something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in a tabular form; that there was something in her composition which defied the cold analysis of Fact; that there was some great virtue in her loving-kindness which more than compensated for her deficiencies of mind.

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From that time Sissy lived at Stone Lodge on equal terms with the rest of the family, and after Louisa's marriage, cared for fretful Mrs. Gradgrind in her invalidism, with a sweet patience that endeared her to the poor woman. Indeed the entire household were deeply attached to Sissy, and, seeing the unselfishness of her daily life, even Mr. Gradgrind himself was forced to acknowledge that there was a greater Teacher than M'Choakumchild, with a system of education superior to the Gradgrind system, and that the same great Teacher had educated the clown's daughter to a higher degree of usefulness and courage than the Gradgrind system had yet been able to produce.

In fact, as time went on, Mr. Gradgrind was slowly discovering the flaws in his mathematical theories; finding out that laws and logic can never take the place of love in the development of a nature, and the discovery was a bitter one to him.

Despite their careful bringing-up by rule and measure, neither Louisa nor Thomas Gradgrind, in their maturity, did any credit to their father's system, and when his mistakes with them became evident to the cold, proud man, and he realized how nearly he had wrecked their lives by those errors, the weight of his suffering was heavy upon him. Then, realizing that all the Facts in his storehouse of learning, could not teach him how to save his children, and win their love, it was to Sissy that he turned for the information that he needed.

When young Thomas Gradgrind robbed the Bank with which he was connected, and was obliged to flee from justice, it was Sissy who saved him from ruin. She sent him, with a note of explanation, to her old friend, Mr. Sleary,—whose whereabouts she happened to know at the time, and asked him to hide young Thomas until he should have further advice from her. Then she and Louisa and Mr. Gradgrind journeyed hurriedly to the town, where they found the Circus. A performance was just beginning when they arrived, and they found the culprit in the ring, disguised as a black servant.

When the performance was over, Mr. Sleary came out and greeted them with great heartiness, exclaiming; "Thethilia, it doth me good to thee you. You wath always a favorite with uth, and you've done uth credit thinth the old timeth, I'm thure."

He then suggested that such members of his troupe as would remember her be called to see her, and presently Sissy found herself amid the familiar scenes of her childhood, surrounded by an eager and affectionate group of her old comrades. While she was busily talking with them, Mr. Sleary entered into a consultation with Mr. Gradgrind upon the subject of his erring son's future. He then told the poor, distressed father that for Sissy's sake, and because Mr. Gradgrind had been so kind to her, he would help the culprit to escape from the country, secretly, by night. Then, growing confidential, he added:

"Thquire, you don't need to be told that dogth ith wonderful animalth."

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"Their instinct," said Mr. Gradgrind, "is surprising."

"Whatever you call it—and I'm bletht if I know what to call it"—said Sleary, "it ith athtonithing. Ith fourteen month ago, Thquire, thinthe we wath at Chethter. One morning there cometh into our Ring, by the thage door, a dog. He had travelled a long way, he wath in very bad condition, he wath lame and pretty well blind. He went round as if he wath a theeking for a child he know'd; and then he comed to me, and thood on hith two fore-legth, weak ath he wath, and then he wagged hith tail and died. Thquire, that dog wath Merrylegth."

"Sissy's father's dog!"

"Thethilia's fatherth old dog. Now, Thquire, I can take my oath, from my knowledge of that dog, that that man wath dead—and buried—afore that dog came back to me. We talked it over a long time, whether I thould write or not, but we agreed, No. There'th nothing comfortable to tell; why unthettle her mind, and make her unhappy? Tho, whether her father bathely detherted her; or whether he broke his own heart alone, rather than pull her down along with him, never will be known, now, Thquire, till we know how the dogth findth uth out!"

"She keeps the bottle that he sent her for, to this hour, and she will believe in his affection to the last moment of her life," said Mr. Gradgrind.

"It theemth to prethent two things to a perthon, don't it?" said Mr. Sleary musingly, "one, that there ith a love in the world, not all thelf-interest, after all, but thomething very different; t'other, that it hath a way of its own of calculating with ith as hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dogth ith!"

Mr. Gradgrind looked out of the window, and made no reply. He was deep in thought, and the result of his meditation became evident from that day in a gradual broadening of his nature and purposes. He never again attempted to replace nature's instincts and affections by his own system of education, and as the years went by he made no further attempt to destroy Sissy's loving faith in that father who had left her long ago; he only tried to compensate her for that loss as best he could;—and for the education which led to the softening of his hard, cold nature, the credit belongs to the daughter of a clown, to whom love meant more than logic.

FLORENCE DOMBEY

[Illustration: FLORENCE DOMBEY]

FLORENCE DOMBEY

There never was a child more loving or more lovable than Florence Dombey. There never was a child more ready to respond to loving ministrations than she, more eager to yield herself in docile obedience to a parent's wish; and to her mother she clung with a desperate affection at variance with her years.

But the sad day came when, clasped in her mother's arms, the little creature, with her perfectly colorless face, and deep, dark eyes, never moved her soft cheek from her mother's face, nor looked on those who stood around, nor shed a tear, understanding that soon she would be bereft of that mother's care and love.

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“Mamma!” cried the child at last, sobbing aloud; “Oh, dear mamma! oh, dear mamma!”

Then, clinging fast to that slight spar within her arms, the mother drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world, leaving Florence and the new-born baby brother in the father’s care.

Alas for Florence! To that father,—the pompous head of the great firm of Dombey and Son—girls never showed a sufficient justification for their existence, and this one of his own was an object of supreme indifference to him; while upon the tiny boy, his heir and future partner in the firm, he lavished all his interest, centred all his hopes and affection.

After her mother’s death, Florence was taken away by an aunt; and a nurse, named Polly Richards, was secured for baby Paul. A few weeks later, as Polly was sitting in her own room with her young charge, the door was quietly opened, and a dark-eyed little girl looked in.

“It’s Miss Florence, come home from her aunt’s, no doubt,” thought Richards, who had never seen the child before. “Hope I see you well, miss.”

“Is that my brother?” asked the child, pointing to the baby.

“Yes, my pretty,” answered Richards, “come and kiss him.”

But the child, instead of advancing, looked her earnestly in the face, and said:

“What have you done with my mamma?”

“Lord bless the little creetur!” cried Richards. “What a sad question! / done? Nothing, miss.”

“What have they done with my mamma?” cried the child.

“I never saw such a melting thing in all my life!” said Richards. “Come nearer here; come, my dear miss! Don’t be afraid of me.”

“I’m not afraid of you,” said the child, drawing nearer, “but I want to know what they have done with my mamma.”

“My darling,” said Richards, “come and sit down by me, and I’ll tell you a story.”

With a quick perception that it was intended to relate to what she had asked, little Florence sat down on a stool at the nurse’s feet, looking up into her face.

“Once upon a time,” said Richards, “there was a lady—a very good lady, and her little daughter dearly loved her—who, when God thought it right that it should be so, was

taken ill, and died. Died, never to be seen again by anyone on earth, and was buried in the ground where the trees grow.”

“The cold ground,” said the child, shuddering.

“No, the warm ground,” returned Polly, seizing her advantage, “where the ugly little seeds turn into beautiful flowers, and into grass, and into corn, and I don’t know what all besides. Where good people turn into bright angels, and fly away to heaven!”

The child who had drooped her head, raised it again, and sat looking at her intently.

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"So; let me see," said Polly, not a little flurried between this earnest scrutiny, her desire to comfort the child, her sudden success, and her very slight confidence in her own powers. "So, when this lady died, she went to God! and she prayed to Him, this lady did," said Polly, affecting herself beyond measure, being heartily in earnest, "to teach her little daughter to be sure of that in her heart; and to know that she was happy there, and loved her still; and to hope and try—oh, all her life—to meet her there one day, never, never, never to part any more."

"It was my mamma!" exclaimed the child, springing up, and clasping her around the neck.

"And the child's heart," said Polly, drawing her to her breast, "the little daughter's heart was so full of the truth of this, that even when she heard it from a strange nurse that couldn't tell it right, but was a poor mother herself, and that was all, she found a comfort in it—didn't feel so lonely—sobbed and cried upon her bosom—took kindly to the baby lying in her lap—and—there, there, there!" said Polly, smoothing the child's curls, and dropping tears upon her. "There, poor dear!"

"Oh, well, Miss Floy! and won't your pa be angry neither?" cried a quick voice at the door, proceeding from a short, brown womanly girl of fourteen, with little snub nose, and black eyes like jet beads, "when it was tickerlerly given out that you wasn't to go and worrit the nurse."

"She don't worry me," was the surprised rejoinder of Polly. "I'm very fond of children. Miss Florence has just come home, hasn't she?"

"Yes, Mrs. Richards, and here, Miss Floy, before you've been in the house a quarter of an hour, you go a-smearing your wet face against the expensive mourning that Mrs. Richards is a-wearing for your ma!" With this remonstrance, young Spitfire, whose real name was Susan Nipper, detached the child from her new friend by a wrench—as if she were a tooth. But she seemed to do it more in the sharp exercise of her official functions, than with any deliberate unkindness.

"She'll be quite happy, now that she's come home again," said Polly, nodding to her with a smile, "and will be so pleased to see her dear papa to-night."

"Lork, Mrs. Richards!" cried Miss Nipper, taking up her words with a jerk, "Don't! See her dear papa, indeed! I should like to see her do it! Her pa's a deal too wrapped up in somebody else; and before there was somebody else to be wrapped up in, she never was a favorite. Girls are thrown away in this house, I assure you."

"You surprise me," cried Polly. "Hasn't Mr. Dombey seen her since—"

"No," interrupted Miss Nipper. "Not once since. And he hadn't hardly set his eyes upon her before that, for months and months, and I don't think he would know her for his own child if he was to meet her in the streets to-morrow. Oh, there's a Tartar within a hundred miles of here, I can tell you, Mrs. Richards!" said Susan Nipper; "Wish you good morning, Mrs. Richards. Now Miss Floy, you come along with me, and don't go hanging back like a naughty wicked child, that judgments is no example to, don't."

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In spite of being thus adjured, and in spite also of some hauling on the part of Susan Nipper, little Florence broke away, and kissed her new friend affectionately, but Susan Nipper made a charge at her, and swept her out of the room.

When Polly Richards was left alone, her heart was sore for the motherless little girl, and she determined to devise some means of having Florence beside her lawfully and without rebellion. An opening happened to present itself that very night.

She had been rung down into the conservatory, as usual, and was walking about with the baby in her arms, when Mr. Dombey came up and stopped her.

“He looks thriving,” said Mr. Dombey, glancing with great interest at Paul’s tiny face, which she uncovered for his observation. “They give you everything that you want, I hope?”

“Oh, yes, thank you, sir;”

She hesitated so, however, that Mr. Dombey stopped again and looked at her inquiringly.

“I believe nothing is so good for making children lively, sir, as seeing other children playing about them,” observed Polly, taking courage.

“I think I mentioned to you, Richards, when you came here,” said Mr. Dombey, with a frown; “that I wished you to see as little of your family as possible. You can continue your walk, if you please.”

With that he disappeared into an inner room, and Polly felt that she had fallen into disgrace without the least advancement of her purpose; but next night when she came down, he called her to him. “If you really think that kind of society is good for the child,” he said sharply, as if there had been no interval since she proposed it, “where’s Miss Florence?”

“Nothing could be better than Miss Florence, sir,” said Polly eagerly, “but I understood from her little maid that they were not to—” But Mr. Dombey rang the bell, and gave his orders before she had a chance to finish the sentence.

“Tell them always to let Miss Florence be with Richards when she chooses,” he commanded; and, the iron being hot, Richards striking on it boldly, requested that the child might be sent down at once to make friends with her little brother.

When Florence timidly presented herself, had Mr. Dombey looked towards her with a father’s eye, he might have read in her keen glance the passionate desire to run to him, crying, “Oh, father, try to love me,—there is no one else”; the dread of a repulse; the

fear of being too bold and of offending him. But he saw nothing of this. He saw her pause at the door and look towards him, and he saw no more.

“Come here, Florence,” said her father coldly. “Have you nothing to say to me?”

The tears that stood in her eyes as she raised them quickly to his face, were frozen by the expression it wore. She looked down again, and put out her trembling hand, which Mr. Dombey took loosely in his own.

“There! be a good girl,” he said, patting her on the head, and regarding her with a disturbed and doubtful look, “go to Richards! go!”

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His little daughter hesitated for another instant, as though she would have clung about him still, or had some lingering hope that he might raise her in his arms and kiss her. But he dropped her hand and turned away. Still Polly persevered, and managed so well with little Paul as to make it very plain that he was all the livelier for his sister's company. When it was time for Florence to go to bed, the nurse urged her to say good night to her father, but the child hesitated, and Mr. Dombey called from the inner room; "It doesn't matter. You can let her come and go without regarding me."

The child shrunk as she listened, and was gone before her humble friend looked around again.

* * * * *

Just around the corner from Mr. Dombey's office was the little shop of a nautical-instrument maker whose name was Solomon Gills. The stock-in-trade of this old gentleman comprised chronometers, barometers, telescopes, compasses, charts, maps, and every kind of an instrument used in the working of a ship's course, or the keeping of a ship's reckoning, or the prosecuting of a ship's discovery. Old prints of ships hung in frames upon the walls; outlandish shells, seaweeds and mosses decorated the chimney-piece; the little wainscoted parlor was lighted by a skylight, like a cabin. The shop itself seemed almost to become a sea-going ship-shape concern, wanting only good sea room, in the event of an unexpected launch, to work its way securely to any desert island in the world.

Here Solomon Gills lived, in skipper-like state, all alone with his nephew, Walter; a boy of fourteen, who looked quite enough like a midshipman to carry out the prevailing idea.

It is half past five o'clock, and an autumn afternoon. Solomon Gills is wondering where Walter is, when a voice exclaims, "Halloa, Uncle Sol!" and the instrument-maker, turning briskly around, sees a cheerful-looking, merry boy fresh with running home in the rain; fair-faced, bright-eyed and curly-haired.

"Well, uncle, how have you got on without me all day? Is dinner ready? I'm so hungry."

"As to getting on," said Solomon, good-naturedly, "It would be odd if I couldn't get on without a young dog like you a great deal better than with you. As to dinner being ready, it's been waiting for you this half-hour. As to being hungry, I am!"

"Come along, then, uncle!" cried the boy, and Uncle Sol and his nephew were speedily engaged on a fried sole, with a prospect of steak to follow.

"Now," said the old man eagerly, "Let's hear something about the Firm."

"Oh! there's not much to be told, uncle," said the boy, plying his knife and fork. "When Mr. Dombey came in, he walked up to my seat—I wish he wasn't so solemn and stiff,

uncle—and told me you had spoken to him about me, and that he had found me employment in the House accordingly, and that I was expected to be attentive and punctual, and then he went away. I thought he didn't seem to like me much."

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"You mean, I suppose," observed the instrument-maker, "that you didn't seem to like him much."

"Well, uncle," returned the boy laughing, "perhaps so; I never thought of that."

Solomon looked a little graver as he finished his dinner, and glanced from time to time at the boy's bright face. When dinner was done, he went down into a little cellar, and returned with a bottle covered with dust and dirt.

"Why, uncle Sol!" said the boy, "What are you about? that's the wonderful Madeira—there's only one more bottle!"

Uncle Sol nodded his head, and having drawn the cork in solemn silence, filled two glasses, and set the bottle and a third clean glass on the table.

"You shall drink the other bottle, Wally," he said, "When you come to good fortune; when you are a thriving, respected, happy man; when the start in life you have made to-day shall have brought you—as I pray Heaven it may!—to a smooth part of the course you have to run, my child. My love to you!"

They clinked their glasses together, and were deep in conversation, when an addition to the little party made its appearance, in the shape of a gentleman with a hook instead of a hand attached to his right wrist; very bushy black eyebrows; and a thick stick in his left hand, covered all over (like his nose) with knobs. He wore a loose black silk handkerchief round his neck, and such a very large shirt-collar that it looked like a small sail over his wide suit of blue. He was evidently the person for whom the spare wineglass was intended, and evidently knew it; for having taken off his coat, and hung up his hard glazed hat, he brought a chair to where the clean glass was, and sat himself down behind it. He was usually addressed as Captain, this visitor; and had been a pilot, or a skipper, or a privateer's man, or all three perhaps; and was a very salt looking man indeed. His face brightened as he shook hands with uncle and nephew; but he seemed to be of a laconic disposition, and merely said: "How goes it?"

"All well," said Mr. Gills, pushing the bottle towards the new-comer, Captain Cuttle, who thereupon proceeded to fill his glass, and the wonderful Madeira loosened his tongue to the extent of giving utterance to a prodigious oration for Walter's benefit.

"Come," cried Solomon Gills, "we must finish the bottle."

"Stand by!" said Captain Cuttle, filling his glass again. "Give the boy some more."

"Yes," said Sol, "a little more. We'll finish the bottle to the House,—Walter's house. Why, it may be his house one of these days, in part. Who knows? Sir Richard Whittington married his master's daughter."

“Turn again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and when you are old, you will never depart from it,” interposed the Captain. “Wal’r, overhaul the book, my lad!”

“And although Mr. Dombey hasn’t a daughter—” Sol began.

“Yes, yes, he has, uncle,” said the boy, reddening and laughing. “I know he has. Some of them were talking about it in the office to-day. And they do say that he’s taken a dislike to her, and that she’s left unnoticed among the servants, while he thinks of no one but his son. That’s what they say. Of course I don’t know.”

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"He knows all about her already, you see," said the instrument-maker.

"Nonsense, uncle," cried the boy reddening again; "how can I help hearing what they tell me?"

"The son's a little in our way at present, I'm afraid," added the old man, humoring the joke. "Nevertheless, we'll drink to him," pursued Sol. "So, here's to Dombey and Son."

"Oh, very well, uncle," said the boy merrily. "Since you have introduced the mention of her, and have said that I know all about her, I shall make bold to amend the toast. So, —here's to Dombey—and Son—and Daughter!"

Meanwhile, in Mr. Dombey's mansion, baby Paul was thriving under the watchful care of Polly Richards, Mr. Dombey, and Mr. Dombey's friends, and the day of his christening arrived. On that important occasion, the baby's excitement was so great that no one could soothe him until Florence was summoned. As she hid behind her nurse, he followed her with his eyes; and when she peeped out with a merry cry to him, he sprang up and crowed lustily—laughing outright when she ran in upon him, and seeming to fondle her curls with his tiny hands while she smothered him with kisses.

Was Mr. Dombey pleased to see this? He did not show it. If any sunbeam stole into the room to light the children at their play, it never reached his face. He looked on so coldly that the warm light vanished, even from the laughing eyes of little Florence when, at last, they happened to meet his.

The contemplation of Paul in his christening robe made his nurse yearn for a sight of her own first-born, although this was a pleasure strictly forbidden by Mr. Dombey's orders. But the longing so overpowered her that she consulted Miss Nipper as to the possibility of gratifying it, and that young woman, eager herself for an expedition, urged Polly to visit her home. So, the next morning the two nurses set out together: Richards carrying Paul, and Susan leading little Florence by the hand, and giving her such jerks and pokes as she considered it wholesome to administer. Then for a brief half-hour, Polly enjoyed the longed-for pleasure of being again in the bosom of her family, but the visit had a sad ending, for on the way back, passing through a crowded thoroughfare the little party became separated. A thundering alarm of Mad Bull! was raised. With a wild confusion of people running up and down, and shouting, and wheels running over them, and boys fighting, and mad bulls coming up, and the nurse in the midst of all these dangers, being torn to pieces, Florence screamed and ran. She ran until she was exhausted, then found with a sensation of terror not to be described, that she was quite alone.

"Susan! Susan!" cried Florence. "Oh, where are they?"

"Where are they?" said an old woman, hobbling across from the opposite side of the road. "Why did you run away from 'em?"

"I was frightened," answered Florence. "I didn't know what I did. I thought they were with me. Where are they?"

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The old woman took her by the wrist, and said, "I'll show you."

She was a very ugly old woman indeed, miserably dressed, and carried some skins over her arm. Florence was afraid of her, and looked, hesitating, up the street. It was a solitary place, and there was no one in it but herself and the old woman.

"You needn't be frightened now," said the old woman, still holding her tight "Come along with me."

"I—don't know you. What's your name?" asked Florence.

"Mrs. Brown," said the old woman, "Good Mrs. Brown. Susan ain't far off," said Good Mrs. Brown, "and the others are close to her, and nobody's hurt."

The child shed tears of delight on hearing this, and accompanied the old woman willingly. They had not gone far, when they stopped before a shabby little house in a dirty little lane. Opening the door with a key she took out of her pocket, Mrs. Brown pushed the child into a back room, where there was a great heap of rags lying on the floor, a heap of bones, and a heap of sifted dust. But there was no furniture at all, and the walls and ceiling were quite black.

The child became so terrified, that she was stricken speechless, and looked as though about to swoon.

"Now, don't be a young mule," said Good Mrs. Brown, reviving her with a shake. "I'm not a' going to keep you, even above an hour. Don't vex me. If you don't, I tell you, I won't hurt you. But if you do, I'll kill you. I could have you killed at any time—even if you was in your own bed at home. Now let's know who you are, and what you are, and all about it."

The old woman's threats and promises, and Florence's habit of being quiet, and repressing what she felt, enabled her to tell her little history. Mrs. Brown listened attentively until she had finished.

"I want that pretty frock, Miss Dombey," said Good Mrs. Brown, "and that little bonnet, and a petticoat or two, and those shoes, Miss Dombey, and anything else you can spare. Come! take 'em off."

Florence obeyed as fast as her trembling hands could allow, keeping all the while, a frightened eye on Mrs. Brown, who examined each article of apparel at leisure, and seemed tolerably well satisfied with their quality and value; she then produced a worn-out girl's cloak, and the crushed remnants of a girl's bonnet, as well as other tattered things. In this dainty raiment she instructed Florence to dress herself, and as this seemed a prelude to her release, the child complied as fast as possible. Mrs. Brown then resumed her seat on the bones, and smoked a very short, black pipe, after which

she gave the child a rabbit-skin to carry, that she might appear like her ordinary companion, and led her forth into the streets; but she cautioned her, with threats of deadly vengeance in case of disobedience, to go directly to her father's office in the city, also to wait at the street corner where she would be left, until the clock struck three, and these directions Florence promised faithfully to observe.

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At length Mrs. Brown left her changed and ragged little friend at a corner, where, true to her promise, she remained until the steeple rang out three o'clock, when after often looking over her shoulder, lest the all-powerful spies of Mrs. Brown should take offence at that, she hurried off as fast as she could in her slipshod shoes, holding the rabbit-skin tight in her hand.

Tired of walking, stunned by the noise and confusion, anxious for her brother and the nurses, terrified by what she had undergone, and what was yet before her, Florence once or twice could not help stopping and crying bitterly, but few people noticed her, in the garb she wore, or if they did, believed that she was tutored to excite compassion, and passed on. It was late in the afternoon when she peeped into a kind of wharf, and asked a stout man there if he could tell her the way to Dombey & Son's.

The man looked attentively at her, then called another man, who ran up an archway, and very soon returned with a blithe-looking boy who he said was in Mr. Dombey's employ.

Hearing this, Florence felt re-assured; ran eagerly up to him, and caught his hand in both of hers.

"I'm lost, if you please!" said Florence. "I was lost this morning, a long way from here—and I have had my own clothes taken away since—and my name is Florence Dombey, and, oh dear, take care of me, if you please!" sobbed Florence, giving full vent to her childish feelings.

"Don't cry, Miss Dombey," said young Walter Gay, the nephew of Solomon Gills, in a transport of enthusiasm. "What a wonderful thing for me that I am here. You are as safe now as if you were guarded by a whole boat's crew of picked men from a man-of-war. Oh, don't cry!"

"I won't cry any more," said Florence. "I'm only crying for joy."

"Crying for joy!" thought Walter, "and I'm the cause of it. Come along, Miss Dombey, let me see the villain who will molest you now!"

So Walter, looking immensely fierce, led off Florence looking very happy; and as Mr. Dombey's office was closed for the night, he led her to his uncle's, to leave her there while he should go and tell Mr. Dombey that she was safe, and bring her back some clothes.

"Halloa, Uncle Sol," cried Walter, bursting into the shop; "Here's a wonderful adventure! Here's Mr. Dombey's daughter lost in the streets, and robbed of her clothes by an old witch of a woman—found by me—brought home to our parlor to rest—Here—just help me lift the little sofa near the fire, will you, uncle Sol?—Cut some dinner for her, will you,

uncle; throw those shoes under the grate, Miss Florence—put your feet on the fender to dry—how damp they are!—Here’s an adventure, uncle, eh?—God bless my soul, how hot I am!”

Solomon Gills was quite as hot, by sympathy; and in excessive bewilderment, he patted Florence’s head, pressed her to eat, pressed her to drink, rubbed the soles of her feet with his pocket-handkerchief, heated at the fire, followed his locomotive nephew with his eyes and ears, and had no clear perception of anything except that he was being constantly knocked against, and tumbled over by that excited young gentleman, as he darted about the room, attempting to accomplish twenty things at once, and doing nothing at all.

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"Here, wait a minute, uncle," he continued, "till I run upstairs and get another jacket on, and then I'll be off. I say, uncle, isn't this an adventure?"

"My dear boy," said Solomon, "it is the most extraordinary—"

"No, but do, uncle, please—do, Miss Florence—dinner, you know, uncle."

"Yes, yes, yes," cutting instantly into a leg of mutton, as if he were catering for a giant. "I'll take care of her, Wally! Pretty dear! Famished, of course. You go and get ready. Lord bless me! Sir Richard Whittington, thrice Mayor of London!"

While Walter was preparing to leave, Florence, overcome by fatigue, had sunk into a doze before the fire and when the boy returned, she was sleeping peacefully.

"That's capital!" he whispered, "Don't wake her, uncle Sol!"

"No, no," answered Solomon, "Pretty child!"

"*Pretty*, indeed!" cried Walter, "I never saw such a face! Now I'm off."

Arriving at Mr. Dombey's house, and breathlessly announcing his errand to the servant, Walter was shown into the library, where he confronted Mr. Dombey.

"Oh! beg your pardon, sir," said Walter, rushing up to him; "but I'm happy to say, it's all right, sir. Miss Dombey's found!"

"I told you she would certainly be found," said Mr. Dombey calmly, to the others in the room. "Let the servants know that no further steps are necessary. This boy who brings the information is young Gay from the office. How was my daughter found, sir? I know how she was lost." Here he looked majestically at Richards. "But how was she found? Who found her?"

It was quite out of Walter's power to be coherent, but he rendered himself as explanatory as he could, in his breathless state, and told why he had come alone.

"You hear this, girl?" said Mr. Dombey sternly, to Susan Nipper. "Take what is necessary and return immediately with this young man to fetch Miss Florence home. Gay, you will be rewarded to-morrow."

"Oh! thank you, sir," said Walter. "You are very kind. I'm sure I was not thinking of any reward sir."

"You are a boy," said Mr. Dombey, almost fiercely; "and what you think of, or what you affect to think of, is of little consequence. You have done well, sir. Don't undo it."

Returning to his uncle's with Miss Nipper, Walter found that Florence, much refreshed by sleep, had dined and come to be on terms of perfect confidence and ease with old Sol. Miss Nipper caught her in her arms, and made a very hysterical meeting of it. Then, converting the parlor into a private tiring-room, she dressed her in proper clothes, and presently led her forth to say farewell.

"Good-night," said Florence to the elder man, "you have been very good to me."

Uncle Sol was quite delighted, and kissed her like her grandfather.

"Good-night, Walter," she said, "I'll never forget you, No! Indeed I never will. Good-by!"

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The entrance of the lost child at home made a slight sensation, but not much. Mr. Dombey kissed her once upon the forehead, and cautioned her not to wander anywhere again with treacherous attendants. He then dismissed the culprit Polly Richards, from his service, telling her to leave immediately, and it was a dagger in the haughty father's heart to see Florence holding to her dress, and crying to her not to go. Not that he cared to whom his daughter turned, or from whom turned away. The swift, sharp agony struck through him as he thought of what his son might do.

His son cried lustily that night, at all events; and the next day a new nurse, Wickam by name, took Polly's place.

She lavished every care upon little Paul, yet all her vigilance could not make him a thriving boy. When he was nearly five years old, he was a pretty little fellow, but so very delicate that Mr. Dombey became alarmed about him, and decided to send him at once to the seashore.

So to Brighton, Paul and Florence and nurse Wickam went, and boarded with a certain Mrs. Pipchin there. On Saturdays Mr. Dombey came down to a hotel near by, and Paul and Florence would go and have tea with him, and every day they spent their time upon the sands, and Florence was always content when Paul was happy.

While the children were thus living at Brighton, a warrant was served upon old Solomon Gills, by a broker, because of a payment overdue upon a bond debt. Old Sol was overcome by the extent of this calamity, which he could not avert, and Walter hurried out to fetch Captain Cuttle to discuss the situation. To the lad's dismay, the Captain insisted upon applying to Mr. Dombey at once for the necessary loan which would help old Sol out of his difficulty. So Walter proceeded with him to Brighton as fast as coach horses could carry them, and on a Sunday morning while Mr. Dombey was at breakfast, Florence came running in, her face suffused with a bright color, and her eyes sparkling joyfully, and cried:

"Papa! Papa! here's Walter, and he won't come in!"

"Who?" cried Mr. Dombey, "What does she mean,—what is this?"

"Walter, Papa," said Florence timidly; "who found me when I was lost!"

"Tell the boy to come in," said Mr. Dombey. "Now, Gay, what is the matter?"

Tremblingly Walter Gay stood in the presence of his proud employer, and made known his uncle's distress, and when he ceased speaking, Captain Cuttle stepped forward, and clearing a space among the breakfast cups at Mr. Dombey's elbow, produced a silver watch, ready money to the amount of thirteen pounds and half a crown, two



teaspoons and a pair of battered sugar-tongs, and piling them up into a heap, that they might look as precious as possible, said:

“Half a loaf is better than no bread, and the same remark holds good with crumbs. There’s a few. Annuity of one hundred pounds p’r annum also ready to be made over!”

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Florence had listened tearfully to Walter's sad tale and to the captain's offer of his valuables, and little Paul now tried to comfort her; but Mr. Dombey, watching them, saw only his son's wistful expression, thought only of his pleasure, and after taking the child on his knee, and having a brief consolation with him, he announced pompously that Master Paul would lend the money to Walter's uncle. Young Gay tried to express his gratitude for this favor, but Mr. Dombey stopped him short. Then, sweeping the captain's property from him, he added, "Have the goodness to take these things away, sir!"

Captain Cuttle was so much struck by the magnanimity of Mr. Dombey, in refusing treasures lying heaped up to his hand, that when he had deposited them in his pockets again, he could not refrain from grasping that gentleman's right hand in his own solitary left, before following Walter out of the room, and Mr. Dombey shivered at his touch.

Florence was running after them, to send some message to old Sol, when Mr. Dombey called her back, bidding her stay where she was, and so the episode ended.

When the children had been nearly twelve months at Mrs. Pipchin's, Mr. Dombey decided to send Paul to Dr. Blimber's boarding-school where his education would be properly begun. Accordingly, Paul began his studies in that hot-bed of learning, where the dreamy, delicate child with his quaint ways soon became a favorite with teachers and pupils. The process of being educated was difficult for one so young and frail, and he might have sunk beneath the burden of his tasks but for looking forward to the weekly visit to his sister at Mrs. Pipchin's.

Oh, Saturdays! Oh, happy Saturdays! When Florence always came for him at noon, and never would in any weather stay away: these Saturdays were Sabbaths for at least two little Christians among all the Jews, and did the holy Sabbath work of strengthening and knitting up a brother's and a sister's love.

Seeing her brother's difficulty with his lessons, Florence procured books similar to his, and sat down at night to track his footsteps through the thorny ways of learning; and being naturally quick, and taught by that most wonderful of masters, Love, it was not long before she gained upon Paul's heels, and caught, and passed him.

And high was her reward, when one Saturday evening she sat down by his side and made all that was so dark, clear and plain before him. It was nothing but a startled look in Paul's wan face—a flush—a smile—and then a close embrace—but God knows how her heart leaped up at this rich payment for her trouble.

"Oh, Floy!" he cried, "how I love you!"

He said no more about it, but all that evening sat close by her, very quiet; and in the night he called out from his little room, three or four times, that he loved her. Regularly

after that Florence sat down with him on Saturday night, and assisted him through so much as they could anticipate together of his next week's work.

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And so the months went by, until the midsummer vacation was near at hand, and the great party which was to celebrate the breaking up of school, was about to come off. Some weeks before this, Paul had had a fainting turn, and had not recovered his strength, in consequence of which, he was enjoying complete rest from lessons, and it was clear to every one, that, once at home, he would never come back to Dr. Blimber's or to any school again, and to no one was the sad truth more evident than to Florence.

On the evening of the great party Florence came, looking so beautiful in her simple ball dress, with her fresh flowers in her hand, that she was the admiration of all the young gentlemen of the school, and particularly of Mr. Toots, the head boy; a simple youth with an engaging manner, and the habit of blushing and chuckling when addressed. Mr. Toots had made Paul his especial favorite and charge, and was well repaid for his devotion to the boy by the gracious appreciation which Florence showed him for it, and it was to the care of Mr. Toots that Paul, when leaving, intrusted the dog Diogenes, who had never received a friend into his confidence before Paul had become his companion.

The brother and sister remained together for a time at Mrs. Pipchin's, then went back to their home in London, where little Paul's life ebbed away, and his father's hopes were crushed by the blow.

There was a hush through Mr. Dombey's great mansion when the child was gone, and Florence;—was she so alone in the bleak world that nothing else remained to her except her little maid? Nothing.

At first, when the house subsided into its accustomed course she could do nothing but weep, and wander up and down, and sometimes, in a sudden pang of desolate remembrance, fly to her own chamber, lay her face down on her bed, and know no consolation. But it is not in the nature of pure love to burn so fiercely and unkindly long. Soon, in the midst of the dismal house, her low voice in the twilight slowly touched an old air to which she had so often listened with Paul's head upon her arm. And after that, and when it was quite dark, a little strain of music trembled in the room, repeated often, in the shadowy solitude; and broken murmurs of the strain still trembled on the keys when the sweet voice was hushed in tears.

One day Florence was amazed at receiving a visit from Mr. Toots, who entered the room with much hesitation, and, with a series of chuckles, laughs, and blushes, informed her that he had brought her little Paul's pet, the dog Diogenes, as a companion in her loneliness.

"He ain't a lady's dog, you know," said Mr. Toots, "but I hope you won't mind that. If you would like to have him, he's at the door."

In fact, Diogenes was at that moment staring through the window of a hackney cabriolet, into which he had been ensnared on a false pretence of rats among the

straw. Sooth to say, he was as unlike a lady's dog as dog might be; and in his gruff anxiety to get out, gave short yelps, and overbalancing himself by the intensity of his efforts, tumbled down into the straw, and then sprung up panting again, putting out his tongue, as if he had come express to a Dispensary to be examined for his health.

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But though Diogenes was as ridiculous a dog as one would meet with on a summer's day; a blundering, ill-favored, clumsy, bullet-headed dog, continually acting on the wrong idea that there was an enemy in the neighborhood whom it was meritorious to bark at; and though he was far from good-tempered, and certainly was not clever, and had hair all over his eyes, and a comical nose, and an inconsistent tail, and a gruff voice,—he was dearer to Florence, in virtue of Paul's parting remembrance of him, and that request that he might be taken care of, than the most valuable and beautiful of his kind. So dear, indeed, was this same ugly Diogenes, and so welcome to her, that she kissed the hand of Mr. Toots in her gratitude. And when Diogenes, released, came tearing up the stairs and, bouncing into the room, dived under all the furniture, and wound a long iron chain that dangled from his neck round legs of chairs and tables, and then tugged at it until his eyes nearly started out of his head; and when he growled at Mr. Toots, who affected familiarity, Florence was as pleased with him as if he had been a miracle of discretion.

Mr. Toots was so overjoyed by the success of his present, and so delighted to see Florence bending over Diogenes, smoothing his coarse back with her little delicate hand—Diogenes graciously allowing it from the first moment of their acquaintance—that he felt it difficult to take leave, and would, no doubt have been a much longer time in making up his mind to do so, if he had not been assisted by Diogenes himself, who suddenly took it into his head to bay at Mr. Toots, and to make short runs at him with his mouth open. Not exactly seeing his way to the end of these demonstrations, Mr. Toot with chuckles, lapsed out of the door, and got away.

“Come, then, Di! Dear Di! Make friends with your new mistress. Let us love each other, Di!” said Florence, fondling his shaggy head. And Di, the rough and gruff, as if his hairy hide were pervious to the tear that dropped upon it, and his dog's heart melted as it fell, put his nose up to her face and swore fidelity.

A banquet was immediately provided for him, and when he had eaten and drunk his fill, he went to Florence, rose up on his hind legs, with his awkward fore-paws on her shoulders, licked her face and hands, nestled his great head against her heart, and wagged his tail till he was tired. Finally, he coiled himself up at her feet, and went to sleep.

That same night Susan Nipper told her mistress that Mr. Dombey was to leave home the next day for a trip,—which piece of news filled Florence with dismay, and she sat musing sadly until midnight.

She was little more than a child in years,—not yet fourteen—and the loneliness and gloom of such an hour in the great house might have set an older fancy brooding on vague terrors. But her innocent imagination was too full of one theme to admit them. Nothing wandered in her thought but love; a wandering love indeed, and cast away, but turning always to her father.

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She could not go to bed, without making her nightly pilgrimage to his door. The moment she touched it she found that it was open, and there was a light within. The first impulse of the timid child—and she yielded to it—was to retire swiftly. A next, to go back, and to enter. She turned back, urged on by the love within her, and glided in.

Her father sat at his old table, in the middle of the room. His face was turned towards her. It looked worn and dejected, and in the loneliness surrounding him, there was an appeal to Florence that struck home, but when she spoke to him, the sternness of his glance and words so overcame her that she shrank away,—and sobbing, silently ascended to her room again.

Diogenes was broad awake, and waiting for his little mistress.

“Oh, Di! Oh, dear Di! Love me for his sake!”

Diogenes already loved her for his own, and did not care how much he showed it. So he made himself vastly ridiculous by performing a variety of uncouth bounces, and concluded, when poor Florence was at last asleep, by scratching open her bedroom door; rolling up his bed into a pillow; lying down on the boards at the full length of his tether with his head toward her; and looking lazily at her, upside down, out of the tops of his eyes, until, from winking and blinking, he fell asleep himself, and dreamed with gruff barks, of his enemy.

About this time Walter Gay was informed by Mr. Dombey of his appointment to a junior position in the firm’s counting house in the Barbadoes. The boy ever since he first saw Florence had thought of her with admiration and compassion, pitying her loneliness; and now when he was about to cross the ocean, his first thought was to seek audience with her little maid, to tell her of his going, to say to her that his uncle had had an interest in Miss Dombey ever since the night when she was lost, and always wished her well and happy, and always would be proud and glad to serve her, if she should need that service.

Upon receiving the message, Florence hastened with Susan Nipper to the old Instrument-maker’s Shop, and they passed into the parlor so suddenly that Uncle Sol, in surprise at seeing them, sprang out of his own chair and nearly tumbled over another, as he exclaimed, “Miss Dombey!”

“Is it possible!” cried Walter, starting up in his turn. “Here!”

“Yes,” said Florence, advancing to him. “I was afraid you might be going away, and hardly thinking of me. And, Walter, there is something I wish to say to you before you go, and you must call me Florence, if you please, and not speak like a stranger. My dear brother before he died said that he was very fond of you, and said, ‘remember

Walter'; and if you will be a brother to me, Walter, now that I have none on earth, I'll be your sister all my life, and think of you like one, wherever we may be!"

In her sweet simplicity, she held out both her hands, and Walter, taking them, stooped down and touched the tearful face; and it seemed to him in doing so, that he responded to her innocent appeal beside the dead child's bed.

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After Walter's departure, Florence lived alone as before, in the great dreary house, and the blank walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

No magic dwelling-place in magic story, shut up in the heart of a thick wood, was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy than was her father's mansion in its grim reality. The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell which used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired. But Florence bloomed there, like the King's fair daughter in the story. Her books, her music, and her daily teachers were her only real companions, except Susan Nipper and Diogenes, and she lived within the circle of her innocent pursuits and thoughts, and nothing harmed her. She could go down to her father's rooms now without fear of repulse. She could put everything in order for him, binding little nosegays for his table, changing them as they withered, and he did not come back, preparing something for him every day, and leaving some timid mark of her presence near his usual seat. Waking in the night, perhaps, she would tremble at the thought of his coming home and angrily rejecting it, and would hurry down and bring it away. At another time she would only lay her face upon his desk, and leave a kiss there, and a tear.

Still no one knew of this. Her father did not know—she held it from that time—how much she loved him. She was very young, and had no mother, and had never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to him that she loved him. She would try to gain that art in time, and win him to a better knowledge of his only child.

Thus Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day in a monotony of loneliness until yielding to Susan Nipper's constant request Florence consented to pay a visit to some friends who lived at Fulham on the Thames.

Just at this time she learned that Walter's ship was overdue, and no news had been received of her, and, her mind filled with sad forebodings, she went to see old Sol. She found him tearful and desolate, broken down by the weight of his anxiety, refusing to be comforted even by the hopeful words of Captain Cuttle. So it was with a heavy heart that she went to pay her visit, accompanied by her little maid.

There were some other children staying at the Skettleses. Children who were frank and happy, with fathers and mothers. Children who had no restraint upon their love, and showed it freely. Florence thoughtfully observed them, sought to find out from them what simple art they knew, and she knew not; how she could be taught by them to show her father how she loved him, and to win his love again. But all her efforts failed to give her the secret of the nameless grace she sought, among the youthful company who were assembled in the house, or among the children of the poor, whom she often visited.

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Of Walter she thought constantly. Her tears fell often for his sufferings, but rarely for his supposed death, and never long. Thus matters stood with Florence on the day she went home, gladly, to her old secluded life.

"You'll be glad to go through the old rooms, won't you, Susan," said Florence as they turned into the familiar street.

"Well, Miss," returned the Nipper, "I wont deny but what I shall, though I shall hate them again to-morrow, very likely!"—adding breathlessly—"Why gracious me, *where's our house?*"—

There was a labyrinth of scaffolding raised all around the house. Loads of bricks and stones, and heaps of mortar, and piles of wood, blocked up half of the broad street. Ladders were raised against the walls; men were at work upon the scaffolding; painters and decorators were busy inside; great rolls of paper were being delivered from a cart at the door; an upholsterer's wagon also stopped the way; nothing was to be seen but workmen, swarming from the kitchens to the garret. Inside and outside alike; bricklayers, painters, carpenters, masons; hammer, hod, brush, pickaxe, saw, trowel: all at work together, in full chorus.

Florence descended from the coach, half doubting if it could be the right house, until she recognized Towlinson, the butler, standing at the door to receive her. She passed him as if she were in a dream, and hurried upstairs. Her own room was not yet touched within, but there were beams and boards raised against it without. She went up swiftly to that other bedroom, where her brother's little bed was; and a dark giant of a man, with a pipe in his mouth, and his head tied up in a pocket handkerchief, was staring in at the window.

It was here that Susan Nipper found her, and said would she go downstairs to her papa, who wished to speak to her?

"At home! and wishing to speak to me!" cried Florence, pale and agitated, hurrying down without a moment's hesitation. She thought upon the way down, would she dare to kiss him? Her father might have heard her heart beat when she came into his presence. He was not alone. There were two ladies there. One was old, and the other was young and very beautiful, and of an elegant figure.

"Edith," said Mr. Dombey, "this is my daughter. Florence, this lady will soon be your mamma."

The girl started, and looked up at the beautiful face in a conflict of emotions, among which the tears that name awakened struggled for a moment with surprise, interest, admiration, and an indefinable sort of fear. Then she cried out, "Oh, papa, may you be

happy! May you be very, very happy all your life!" then fell weeping on the lady's bosom.

The beautiful lady held her to her breast, and pressed the hand with which she clasped her, as if to reassure and comfort her, and bent her head down over Florence and kissed her on the cheek.

And now Florence began to hope that she would learn from her new and beautiful mamma how to gain her father's love. And in her sleep that night her own mother smiled radiantly upon the hope, and blessed it.

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Even in the busy weeks before the wedding-day, the bride-elect had time to win the heart of the lonely girl, and Florence responded to her advances with trustful love, and was happy and hopeful, while the new mother's affection deepened daily. But it soon became evident that the affection aroused Mr. Dombey's keen jealousy, and his wife thought it best to repress her feelings for Florence.

The girl soon became aware that there was no real sympathy between her father and his second wife, and that the happiness in their home, of which she had dreamed, would never be a reality. In truth the cold, proud man with all his wealth and power, could not win from his wife one smile such as she had often bestowed upon Florence in his presence, and this added to his dislike for the girl.

Once only, as Mr. Dombey sat and watched his daughter, the sight of her in her beauty, now almost changed into a woman, roused within him a fleeting feeling of regret at having had a household spirit bending at his feet, and of having overlooked it in his stiff-necked pride. He felt inclined to call her to him; the words were rising to his lips, when they were checked by the entrance of his wife, whose haughty bearing and indifference to him caused the gentle impulse to flee from him, and it never returned.

The breach between husband and wife was daily growing wider, when one morning, riding to the city, Mr. Dombey was thrown from his horse, and being brought home, he gloomily retired to his own rooms, where he was attended by servants, not approached by his wife. Late that night there arose in Florence's mind the image of her father, wounded and in pain, alone, in his own home.

With the same child's heart within her as of old, even as with the child's sweet, timid eyes and clustering hair, Florence, as strange to her father in her early maiden bloom as in her nursery days, crept down to his room and looked in. The housekeeper was fast asleep in an easy-chair before the fire. All was so very still that she knew he was asleep. There was a cut upon his forehead. One of his arms, resting outside of the bed, was bandaged up, and he was very white. After the first assurance of his sleeping quietly, Florence stole close to the bed, and softly kissed him and put the arm with which she dared not touch him, waking, round about him on the pillow, praying to God to bless her father, and to soften him towards her, if it might be so.

On the following day Susan Nipper braced herself for a great feat which she had long been contemplating; forced an entrance into Mr. Dombey's room, and told him in most emphatic language what she thought of his treatment of the motherless little girl who had so long been her charge. Speechless with rage and amazement, Mr. Dombey attempted to summon some one to protect him from her flow of language, but there was no bell-rope near, and he could not move, so he was forced to listen to her tirade until the entrance of the housekeeper cut it short. Susan Nipper was then instantly discharged, and bestirred herself to get her trunks in order, sobbing heartily as she thought of Florence, but exulting at the memory of Mr. Dombey's discomfiture. Florence

dared not interfere with her father's commands, and took a sad farewell of the faithful little maid, who had for so long been her companion.

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Now Florence was quite alone. She had grown to be seventeen; timid and retiring as her solitary life had made her, it had not embittered her. A child in innocent simplicity: a woman in her modest self-reliance and her deep intensity of feeling, both child and woman seemed at once expressed in her fair face and fragile delicacy of shape; in her thrilling voice, her calm eyes, and sometimes in a strange ethereal light that seemed to rest upon her head.

Mrs. Dombey she seldom saw, and the day soon came when she lost her entirely. The wife's supreme indifference to himself and his wishes, stung Mr. Dombey more than any other kind of treatment could have done, and he determined to bend her to his will. She was the first person who had ever ventured to oppose him in the slightest particular;—their pride, however different in kind, was equal in degree, and their flinty opposition struck out fire which consumed the tie between them—and soon the final separation came.

One evening after a dispute with her husband, Mrs. Dombey went out to dinner, and did not return. In the confusion of that dreadful night, compassion for her father was the first distinct emotion that overwhelmed Florence. At daybreak she hastened to him with her arms stretched out, crying, "Oh, dear, dear papa!" as if she would have clasped him around the neck. But in his frenzy he answered her with brutal words, and lifted up his cruel arm and struck her, with that heaviness, that she tottered on the marble floor. She did not sink down at his feet; she did not shut out the sight of him with her trembling hands; she did not utter one word of reproach. But she looked at him, and a cry of desolation issued from her heart. She saw she had no father upon earth, and ran out, orphaned, from his house. Another moment and Florence, with her head bent down to hide her agony of tears, was in the street.

In the wildness of her sorrow, shame, and terror, the forlorn girl hurried through the sunshine of a bright morning as if it were the darkness of a winter night. Wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, she fled without a thought, without a hope, without a purpose, but to fly somewhere—anywhere. Suddenly she thought of the only other time she had been lost in the wide wilderness of London—and went that way. To the home of Walter's uncle.

Checking her sobs and endeavoring to calm the agitation of her manner, so as to avoid attracting notice, Florence was going more quietly when Diogenes, panting for breath, and making the street ring with his glad bark, was at her feet.

She bent down on the pavement, and laid his rough loving foolish head against her breast, and they went on together.

At length the little shop came into view. She ran in and found Captain Cuttle, in his glazed hat, standing over the fire, making his morning's cocoa. Hearing a footstep and

the rustle of a dress, the captain turned at the instant when Florence reeled and fell upon the floor.

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The captain, pale as Florence, calling her by his childhood's name for her, raised her like a baby, and laid her upon the same old sofa upon which she had slumbered long ago.

"It's Heart's Delight!" he exclaimed; "It's the sweet creetur grow'd a woman!"

But Florence did not stir, and the captain moistened her lips and forehead, put back her hair, covered her feet with his own coat, patted her hand—so small in his, that he was struck with wonder when he touched it—and seeing that her eyelids quivered and that her lips began to move, continued these restorative applications with a better heart.

At last she opened her eyes, and spoke: "Captain Cuttle! Is it you? Is Walter's uncle here?"

"Here, Pretty?" returned the captain. "He a'n't been here this many a long day. He a'n't been heer'd on since he sheered off arter poor Wal'r. But," said the captain, as a quotation, "Though lost to sight, to memory dear, and England, home, and beauty!"

"Do you live here?" asked Florence.

"Yes, my Lady Lass," returned the captain.

"Oh, Captain Cuttle!" cried Florence, "Save me! Keep me here! Let no one know where I am! I will tell you what has happened by and by, when I can. I have no one in the world to go to. Do not send me away!"

"Send you away, my Lady Lass!" exclaimed the captain; "you, my Heart's Delight!—Stay a bit! We'll put up this dead-light, and take a double turn on the key."

With these words the captain got out the shutter of the door, put it up, made it all fast, and locked the door itself.

"And now," said he, "You must take some breakfast, Lady Lass, and the dog shall have some too, and after that you shall go aloft to old Sol Gill's room, and fall asleep there, like an angel."

The room to which the captain presently carried Florence was very clean, and being an orderly man, and accustomed to make things ship-shape, he converted the bed into a couch by covering it with a clean white drapery. By a similar contrivance he converted the little dressing-table into a species of altar, on which he set forth two silver teaspoons, a flower-pot, a telescope, his celebrated watch, a pocket-comb and a song-book, as a small collection of rareties that made a choice appearance.

Having darkened the window, the captain walked on tiptoe out of the room, and from sheer exhaustion Florence soon fell asleep.

When she awoke the sun was getting low in the West, and after cooling her aching head and burning face in fresh water, she made ready to go downstairs again. What to do or where to live, she—poor, inexperienced girl!—could not yet consider. All was dim and clouded to her mind. She only knew that she had no father upon earth, and she said so many times, with her suppliant head hidden from all but her Father who was in Heaven. Then she tried to calm her thoughts and stay her tears, and went down to her kind protector.

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The captain had cooked the evening meal and spread the cloth with great care, and when Florence appeared he dressed for dinner, by taking off his glazed hat and putting on his coat. That done, he wheeled the table against her on the sofa, said Grace, and did the honors of the table.

"My Lady Lass," said he, "Cheer up, and try to eat a bit. Stand by, dearie! Liver wing it is. Sarse it is. Sassage it is. And potato!"

All of these delicacies the captain ranged symetrically on the plate, pouring hot gravy on the whole and adding: "Try and pick a bit, my Pretty. If Wal'r was here—"

"Ah! If I had him for my brother now!" cried Florence.

"Don't take on, my Pretty," said the captain: "awast, to obleege me. He was your nat'r'l born friend like, wa'n't he, Pet? Well, well! If our poor Wal'r was here, my Lady Lass—or if he could be—for he's drowned, a'n't he?—As I was saying, if he could be here, he'd beg and pray of you, my precious, to pick a leetle bit, with a look-out for your own sweet health. Whereby, hold your own, my Lady Lass, as if it was for Wal'r's sake, and lay your pretty head to the wind!"

Florence essayed to eat a morsel for the captain's pleasure, but she was so tired and so sad that she could do scant justice to the meal, and was glad indeed when the time came to retire.

She slept that night in the same little room, and the next day sat in the small parlor, busy with her needle, and more calm and tranquil than she had been on the day preceding. The captain, looking at her, often hitched his arm chair close to her, as if he were going to say something very confidential, and hitched it away again, as not being able to make up his mind how to begin. In the course of the day he cruised completely around the parlor in that frail bark, and more than once went ashore against the wainscot, or the closet door, in a very distressed condition.

It was not until deep twilight that he fairly dropped anchor at last by the side of Florence, and began to talk connectedly. He spoke in such a trembling voice, and looked at Florence with a face so pale and agitated that she clung to his hand in affright, and her color came and went as she listened.

"There's perils and dangers on the deep, my Beauty," said the captain; "and over many a brave ship, and many and many a bold heart the secret waters has closed up, and never told no tales. But there's escapes upon the deep, too, and sometimes one man out of a score—ah! maybe out of a hundred, Pretty, has been saved by the mercy of God, and come home, after being given over for dead, and told of all hands lost, I—I know a story, Heart's Delight," stammered the captain, "o' this natur', as was told to me

once; and being on this here tack, and you and me sitting by the fire, maybe you'd like to hear me tell it. Would you, deary?"

Florence, trembling with an agitation which she could not control or understand, involuntarily followed his glance, which went behind her into the shop where a lamp was burning. The instant that she turned her head, the captain sprung out of his chair, and interposed his hand.

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"There's nothing there, my Beauty," said the captain. "Don't look there!"

Then he murmured something about its being dull that way, and about the fire being cheerful. He drew the door ajar, which had been standing open until now, and resumed his seat. Florence looked intently in his face.

"The story was about a ship, my Lady Lass," began the captain, "as sailed out of the port of London, with a fair wind and in fair weather, bound for—Don't be took aback my Lady Lass, she was only out'ard. Pretty, only out'ard bound!"

The expression on Florence's face alarmed the captain, who was himself very hot and flurried, and showed scarcely less agitation than she did.

"Shall I go on, Beauty?" said the captain.

"Yes, yes, pray!" cried Florence.

The captain made a gulp as if to get down something that was stuck in his throat, and nervously proceeded:

"That there unfortunate ship met with such foul weather, out at sea, as don't blow once in twenty year, my darling. There was hurricanes ashore as tore up forests and blowed down towns, and there was gales at sea, even in them latitudes, as not the stoutest wessel ever launched could live in. Day arter day, that there unfort'nate ship behaved noble, I'm told, and did her duty brave, my Pretty, but at one blow a'most her bulwarks was stove in, her masts and rudder carried away, her best men swept overboard, and she left in the mercy of the storm as had no mercy, but blowed harder and harder yet, while the waves dashed over her, and beat her in, and every time they come a thundering at her, broke her like a shell. Every black spot in every mountain of water that rolled away was a bit of the ship's life, or a living man, and so she went to pieces, Beauty, and no grass will never grow upon the graves of them as manned that ship."

"They were not all lost!" cried Florence. "Some were saved! Was one?"

"Aboard o' that there unfortunate wessel," said the captain, rising from his chair, and clenching his hand with prodigious energy and exultation, "was a lad, a gallant lad—as I've heard tell—that had loved when he was a boy to read and talk about brave actions in shipwrecks—I've heerd him!—I've heerd him!—and he remembered of 'em in his hour of need; for when the stoutest hearts and oldest hands was hove down, he was firm and cheery. It wa'n't the want of objects to like and love ashore that gave him courage; it was his nat'ral mind. I've seen it in his face when he was no more than a child—ah, many a time!—and when I thought it nothing but his good looks, bless him!"

"And was he saved?" cried Florence. "Was he saved?"

“That brave lad,” said the captain,—“look at me, pretty! Don’t look round—”

Florence had hardly power to repeat, “Why not?”

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"Because there's nothing there, my deary," said the captain. "Don't be took aback, pretty creetur! Don't for the sake of Wal'r as was dear to all on us! That there lad," said the captain, "arter working with the best, and standing by the fainthearted, and never making no complaint nor sign of fear, and keeping up a spirit in all hands that made 'em honor him as if he'd been a admiral—that lad, alone with the second mate and one seaman, was left, of all the beatin' hearts that went aboard that ship, the only living creeturs—lashed to a fragment of the wreck, and drifting on the stormy sea."

"Were they saved?" cried Florence.

"Days and nights they drifted on them endless waters," said the captain, "until at last—no! don't look that way, Pretty!—a sail bore down upon 'em, and they was, by the Lord's mercy, took aboard, two living, and one dead."

"Which of them was dead?" cried Florence.

"Not the lad I speak on," said the captain.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!"

"Amen!" returned the captain hurriedly. "Don't be took aback! A minute more, my Lady Lass! with a good heart!—Aboard that ship, they went a long voyage, right away across the chart (for there wa'n't no touching nowhere), and on that voyage the seaman as was picked up with him died. But he was spared, and—."

The captain, without knowing what he did, had cut a slice of bread from the loaf, and put it on his hook (which was his usual toasting fork), on which he now held it to the fire; looking behind Florence with great emotions in his face, and suffering the bread to blaze and burn like fuel.

"Was spared," repeated Florence, "and—"

"And come home in that ship," said the captain, still looking in the same direction, "and—don't be frightened, Pretty!—and landed; and one morning come cautiously to his own door to take a observation, knowing that his friends would think him drowned, when he sheered off at the unexpected—"

"At the unexpected barking of a dog?" cried Florence quickly.

"Yes!" roared the captain. "Steady, darling! courage! Don't look round yet. See there! upon the wall!"

There was the shadow of a man upon the wall close to her. She started up, looked round, and, with a piercing cry, saw Walter Gay behind her!

She had no thought of him but as a brother, a brother rescued from the grave; a shipwrecked brother, saved, and at her side,—and rushed into his arms. In all the world he seemed to be her hope, her comfort, refuge, natural protector. In his home-coming,—her champion and knight-errant from childhood's early days,—there came to Florence a compensation for all that she had suffered.

On that night within the little Shop a light arose for her that never ceased to shed its brilliance on her path. Young, strong, and powerful, Walter Gay in his chivalrous reverence and love for her, would henceforth protect her life from sadness.

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Except from that one great sorrow that he could not lift;—she was estranged from her father’s love and care;—but in sweet submission she bent her shoulders to the burden of that loss, and accepted the new joy of Walter’s return with a lightened heart.

Years later, when Mr. Dombey by a turn of fortune’s wheel, was left alone in his dreary mansion, broken in mind and body, bereft of all his wealth; deserted alike by friends and servants;—it was Florence, the neglected, spurned, exiled daughter, who came like a good household angel and clung to him, caressing him, forgetting all but love, and love that outlasts injuries.

As she clung close to him, he kissed her on the lips and lifting up his eyes, said, “Oh, my God, *forgive me*, for I need it very much!”

With that he dropped his head again, lamenting over her and caressing her, and there was not a sound in all the house for a long, long, time; they remaining clasped in one another’s arms, in the glorious sunshine that had crept in with Florence. And so we leave them—Father and Daughter—united at last in an undying affection.

CHARLEY

[Illustration: CHARLEY]

CHARLEY

When I, Esther Summerson, was taken from the school where the early years of my childhood had been spent; having no home or parents, as had the other girls in the school, my guardian, Mr. Jarndyce, gave me a home with him, where I was companion to his young and lovely ward, Ada Clare. I soon grew deeply attached to Ada, the dearest girl in the world; to my guardian, the kindest and most thoughtful of men; and to Bleak House, my happy home.

One day, upon hearing of the death of a poor man whom we had known, and learning that he had left three motherless children in great poverty, my guardian and I set out to discover for ourselves the extent of their need. We were directed to a chandler’s shop in Bell Yard, a narrow, dark alley, where we found an old woman, who replied to my inquiry for Neckett’s children: “Yes, surely, Miss. Three pair, if you please. Door right opposite the stairs.” And she handed me a key across the counter. As she seemed to take it for granted I knew what to do with the key, I inferred it must be intended for the children’s door, so without any more questions I led the way up a dark stair.

Reaching the top room designated, I tapped at the door, and a little shrill voice inside said, “We are locked in. Mrs. Blinder’s got the key!”



I applied the key, and opened the door. In a poor room, with a sloping ceiling, and containing very little furniture, was a mite of a boy, some five or six years old, nursing and hushing a heavy child of eighteen months. There was no fire, though the weather was cold; both children were wrapped in some poor shawls and tippets, as a substitute. Their clothing was not so warm, however, but that their noses looked red and pinched, and their small figures shrunken, as the boy walked up and down, nursing and hushing the child with its head on his shoulder.

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"Who has locked you up here alone?" we naturally asked.

"Charley," said the boy.

"Is Charley your brother?"

"No, she's my sister, Charlotte. Father called her Charley."

"Are there any more of you besides Charley?"

"Me," said the boy, "and Emma," patting the child he was nursing, "and Charley."

"Where is Charley now?"

"Out a-washing," said the boy, beginning to walk up and down again, and even as he spoke there came into the room a very little girl, childish in figure, but shrewd and older looking in the face—pretty faced, too—wearing a womanly sort of a bonnet, much too large for her, and drying her bare arms on a womanly sort of apron. Her fingers were white and wrinkled with washing, and the soap-suds were yet smoking, which she wiped off her arms. But for this, she might have been a child, playing at washing, and imitating a poor working woman with a quick observation of the truth.

She had come running from some place in the neighborhood. Consequently, though she was very light, she was out of breath, and could not speak at first, as she stood panting and wiping her arms. "O, here's Charley!" said the boy.

The child he was nursing stretched forward its arms and cried out to be taken by Charley. The little girl took it, in a womanly sort of manner belonging to the apron and the bonnet, and stood looking at us over the burden that clung to her most affectionately.

"Is it possible," whispered my guardian, as he put a chair for the little creature, and got her to sit down with her load, the boy holding to her apron, "that this child works for the rest?"

"Charley, Charley!" he questioned. "How old are you?"

"Over thirteen, sir," replied the child.

"O, what a great age!" said my guardian. "And do you live here alone with these babies, Charley?"

"Yes, sir," returned the child, looking up into his face with perfect confidence, "since father died."

“And how do you live, Charley,” said my guardian, “how do you live?”

“Since father died, sir, I’ve gone out to work. I’m out washing to-day.”

“God help you, Charley!” said my guardian. “You’re not tall enough to reach the tub!”

“In pattens I am, sir,” she said quickly. “I’ve got a high pair as belonged to mother. Mother died just after Emma was born,” said the child, glancing at the face upon her bosom. “Then father said I was to be as good a mother to her as I could. And so I tried. And so I worked at home, and did cleaning, and nursing, and washing, for a long time before I began to go out. And that’s how I know how, don’t you see, sir?”

“And do you often go out?”

“As often as I can, sir,” said Charley, opening her eyes and smiling, “because of earning sixpences and shillings!”

“And do you always lock the babies up when you go out?”

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"To keep 'em safe, sir, don't you see?" said Charley. "Mrs. Blinder comes up now and then, and Mr. Gridley comes up sometimes, and perhaps I can run in sometimes, and they can play you know, and Tom ain't afraid of being locked up, are you, Tom?"

"No—o," said Tom stoutly.

"When it comes on dark, the lamps are lighted down in the courts, and they show up here quite bright—almost quite bright. Don't they, Tom?"

"Yes, Charley," said Tom, "almost quite bright."

"Then he's as good as gold," said the little creature, oh, in such a motherly, womanly way. "And when Emma's tired, he puts her to bed. And when he's tired he goes to bed himself. And when I come home and light the candle, and has a bit of supper, he sits up again and has it with me. Don't you, Tom?"

"O yes, Charley!" said Tom. "That I do!" and either in this glimpse of the great pleasure of his life, or in gratitude and love for Charley, he laid his face among the scanty folds of her frock, and passed from laughing into crying.

It was the first time since our entry, that a tear had been shed among these children. The little orphan girl had spoken of their father and their mother, as if all that sorrow was subdued by the necessity of taking courage, and by her childish importance in being able to work, and by her bustling busy way. But now, when Tom cried; although she sat quite tranquil, looking quietly at us, and did not by any movement disturb a hair of the head of either of her little charges, I saw two silent tears fall down her face.

I stood at the window pretending to look out, when I found that Mrs. Blinder, from the shop below, had come in, and was talking to my guardian.

"It's not much to forgive 'em the rent, sir,—who could take it from them!"

"Well, well!" said my guardian to us two. "It is enough that the time will come when this good woman will find that it was much, and that forasmuch as she did it to one of the least of these—! This child," he added after a few moments, "Could she possibly continue this?"

"Really, sir, I think she might," said Mrs. Blinder. "She's as handy as it's possible to be. Bless you sir, the way she tended them two children, after the mother died, was the talk of the yard! And it was a wonder to see her with him, after he was took ill, it really was! —'Mrs. Blinder,' he said to me, the very last he spoke—'Mrs. Blinder, whatever my calling may have been, I see a Angel sitting in this room last night along with my child, and I trust her to our Father!'"

From all that we had heard and seen, we felt a deep interest in the bright, self-reliant little creature, with her womanly ways and burden of family cares, and my thoughts turned towards her many times, after we had kissed her, and taken her downstairs with us, and stopped to see her run away to her work. We saw her run, such a little, little creature, in her womanly bonnet and apron, through a covered way at the bottom of the court, and melt into the city's strife and sound, like a dewdrop in an ocean.

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Some weeks later, at the close of a happy evening spent at Bleak House with my guardian and my dearest girl, I went at last to my own room, and presently heard a soft tap at the door, so I said, "Come in!" and there came in a pretty little girl, neatly dressed in mourning, who dropped a curtsy.

"If you please, miss," said the little girl in a soft voice, "I am Charley."

"Why so you are," said I, stooping down in astonishment, and giving her a kiss. "How glad am I to see you, Charley!"

"If you please, miss," pursued Charley, "I'm your maid!"

"Charley?"

"If you please, miss, I'm a present to you, with Mr. Jarndyce's love. And O, miss," says Charley, clapping her hands, with the tears starting down her dimpled cheeks, "Tom's at school, if you please, and learning so good, and little Emma, she's with Mrs. Blinder, miss, a-being took such care of! and Tom, he would have been at school—and Emma she would have been left with Mrs. Blinder—and me, I should have been here—all a deal sooner, miss; only Mr. Jarndyce thought Tom and Emma and me had better get a little used to parting, we was so small. Don't cry, if you please, miss."

"I can't help it, Charley."

"No, miss, nor I can't help it," said Charley. "And if you please, miss," said Charley, "Mr. Jarndyce's love, and he thinks you'll like to teach me now and then. And if you please, Tom and Emma and me is to see each other once a month. And I'm so happy and so thankful, miss," cried Charley with a heaving heart,—“and I'll try to be such a good maid!"

Charley dried her eyes, and entered on her functions: going in her matronly little way about and about the room, and folding up everything she could lay her hands upon. Presently she came creeping back to my side, and said:

"O don't cry, if you please, miss."

And I said again, "I can't help it."

And Charley said again, "No, miss, nor I can't help it." And so, after all, I did cry for joy indeed, and so did she—and from that night my little maid shared in all the cares and duties, joys and sorrows of her mistress, and I grew to lean heavily upon the womanly, loving, little creature.

According to my guardian's suggestion, I gave considerable time to Charley's education, but I regret to say the results never reflected much credit upon my educational powers.



As for writing—it was a trying business to Charley, in whose hand every pen appeared to become perversely animated, and to go wrong and crooked, and to stop and splash, and sidle into corners, like a saddle donkey. It was very odd to see what old letters Charley's young hands had made. They, so shrivelled and tottering; it, so plump and round. Yet Charley was uncommonly expert at other things, and had as nimble little fingers as I ever watched.

“Well, Charley,” said I, looking over a copy of the letter O in which it was represented as square, triangular, pear-shaped, and collapsed in all kinds of ways, “We are improving. If we only get to make it round, we shall be perfect, Charley.”

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Then I made one, and Charley made one, and the pen wouldn't join Charley's neatly, but twisted it up into a knot.

"Never mind, Charley. We shall do it in time."

Charley laid down her pen, opened and shut her cramped little hand; and thanking me, got up and dropped me a curtsy, asking me if I knew a poor person by the name of Jenny. I answered that I did, but thought she had left the neighborhood altogether, "So she had, miss," said Charley, "but she's come back again, and she came about the house three or four days, hoping to get a glimpse of you, miss, but you were away. She saw me a-goin' about, miss," said Charley, with a short laugh of the greatest delight and pride, "and she thought I looked like your maid!"

"Did she though, really, Charley?"

"Yes, miss!" said Charley, "really and truly." And Charley, with another short laugh of the purest glee, made her eyes very round again, and looked as serious as became my maid. I was never tired of seeing Charley in the full enjoyment of that great dignity, standing before me with her youthful face and figure, and her steady manner, and her childish exultation breaking through it now and then in the pleasantest way. And so long as she lived, the dignity of having been in my service was the greatest crown of glory to my little maid.

Although my efforts to make a scholar of Charley were never crowned with success, she had her own tastes and accomplishments, and dearly loved to bustle about the house, in her own particularly womanly way. To surround herself with great heaps of needlework—baskets-full and tables full—and do a little,—and spend a great deal of time in staring with her round eyes at what there was to do, and persuade herself that she was going to do it, were Charley's great dignities and delights.

When we went to see the woman, Jenny, we found her in her poor little cottage, nursing a vagrant boy called Jo, a crossing-sweeper, who had tramped down from London, and was tramping he didn't know where. Jenny, who had known him in London, had found him in a corner of the town, burning with fever, and taken him home to care for. Seeing that he was very ill, and fearing her husband's anger at her having harbored him, when it was time for her husband to return home, she put a few half-pence together in his hand, and thrust him out of the house. We followed the wretched boy, and pitying his forlorn condition led him home with us, where he was made comfortable for the night in a loft-room by the stable. Charley's last report was, that the boy was quiet. I went to bed very happy to think that he was sheltered, and was much shocked and grieved the next morning, when upon visiting his room we found him gone. At what time he had left, or how, or why, it seemed hopeless ever to divine, and after a thorough search of the country around, which lasted for five days, we abandoned all thought of ever clearing up

the mystery surrounding the boy's departure, nor was it until some time later that the secret was discovered.

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Meanwhile, poor Jo left behind him a dread and infectious disease which Charley caught from him, and in twelve hours after his escape she was very, very ill. I nursed her myself, with tenderest care, bringing her back to her old childish likeness again. Then the disease came upon me, and in my weeks of mortal sickness, it was Charley's love and care, and unending devotion that saved my life. It was Charley's hand which removed every looking-glass from my rooms, that in my convalescence I might not be shocked by the alteration which the disease had wrought in the face she loved so dearly.

When I was able, Charley and I went away together, to the most friendly of villages, and in the home which my guardian's care had provided, we enjoyed the hours of returning strength. There was a kindly housekeeper to trot after me with restoratives and strengthening delicacies, and a pony expressly for my use, and soon there were friendly faces of greeting in every cottage as we passed by. Thus with being much in the open air, playing with the village children, gossiping in many cottages, going on with Charley's education, and writing long letters to my dearest girl, time slipped away, and I found myself quite strong again.

And to Charley,—now as well, and rosy, and pretty as one of Flora's attendants, I give due credit, and the bond which binds me to my little maid is one which will only be severed when the days of Charley's happy life are over.

TILLY SLOWBOY

[Illustration: TILLY SLOWBOY]

TILLY SLOWBOY

Although still in her earliest teens, Tilly Slowboy was a nursery-maid for little Mrs. Peerybingle's baby, and despite her extreme youth, was a most enthusiastic and unusual nursery-maid indeed.

It may be noted of Miss Slowboy that she had a rare and surprising talent for getting the baby into difficulties; and had several times imperilled its short life, in a quiet way peculiarly her own.

She was of a spare and straight shape, this young lady, insomuch that her garments appeared to be in constant danger of sliding off those sharp pegs, her shoulders, on which they were loosely hung. Her costume was remarkable for the partial development on all possible occasions, of some flannel vestment of a singular structure; also affording glimpses, in the region of the back, of a pair of stays, in color a dead green.

Being always in a state of gaping admiration at everything, and absorbed besides, in the perpetual contemplation of her mistress's perfections, and the baby's, Miss Slowboy, in her little errors of judgment may be said to have done equal honor to her head and to her heart; and though these did less honor to the baby's head, which they were the occasional means of bringing into contact with deal doors, dressers, stair-rails, bed-posts, and other foreign substances, still they were the honest results of Tilly Slowboy's constant astonishment at finding herself so kindly treated and installed in such a comfortable home. For the maternal and paternal Slowboy were alike unknown to Fame, and Tilly had been bred by public charity, a foundling; which word, though only differing from fondling by one vowel's length, is very different in meaning, and expresses quite another thing.

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It was a singularly happy and united family in which Tilly's lot was cast. Honest John Peerybingle, Carrier; his pretty little wife, whom he called Dot; the very remarkable doll of a baby; the dog Boxer; and the Cricket on the Hearth, whose cheerful chirp, chirp, chirp, was a continual family blessing and good-omen;—were collectively and severally the objects of Tilly's unbounded admiration.

If ever a person or thing alarmed Tilly, she would hastily seek protection near the skirts of her pretty little mistress; or, failing that, would make a charge or butt at the object of her fright with the only offensive instrument within her reach—which usually happened to be the baby. Tilly's bump of good fortune being extraordinarily well developed, the baby usually managed to come out from the siege unharmed, to be soothed and comforted in Tilly's own peculiar fashion; her most common method of amusement being to reproduce for its entertainment scraps of conversation current in the house, with all the sense left out of them, and all the nouns changed to the plural number, as—“Did its mothers make it up a beds then! And did its hair grow brown and curly when its cap was lifted off, and frighten it, a precious Pets, a-sitting by the fire!”

It was a notable and exciting event to Miss Slowboy when she set out one day in the Carrier's cart, with her little mistress and the remarkable baby, to have dinner with Caleb Plummer's blind daughter, Bertha, who was Mrs. Dot's devoted friend.

In consequence of the departure, there was a pretty sharp commotion at John Peerybingle's, for to get the baby under weigh took time. Not that there was much of the baby, speaking of it as a thing of weight and measure, but there was a vast deal to do about it, and all had to be done by easy stages. When the baby was got, by hook and by crook, to a certain point of dressing, and you might have supposed that another touch or two would finish him off, he was unexpectedly extinguished, and hustled off to bed; where he simmered (so to speak) between two blankets for the best part of an hour, while Mrs. Peerybingle took advantage of the interval to make herself smart for the trip, and during the same short truce, Miss Slowboy insinuated herself into a spencer, of a fashion so surprising and ingenious, that it had no connection with herself, or anything else in the universe, but was a shrunken, dog's-eared, independent fact, pursuing its lonely course without the least regard to anybody. By this time, the baby, being all alive again, was invested by the united efforts of Mrs. Peerybingle and Miss Slowboy, with a cream-colored mantle for its body, and a sort of nankeen raised-pie for its head, and in course of time they all three got down to the door, where the old horse was waiting to convey them on their trip.

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In reference to Miss Slowboy's ascent into the cart, if I might be allowed to mention a young lady's legs, on any terms, I would observe of her that there was a fatality about hers which rendered them singularly liable to be grazed; and that she never effected the smallest ascent or descent without recording the circumstance upon them with a notch, as Robinson Crusoe marked the days upon his wooden calendar. But as this might be considered ungentle, I'll think of it—merely observing that when the three were all safely settled in the cart, and the basket containing the Veal-and-Ham Pie and other delicacies, which Mrs. Peerybingle always carried when she visited the blind girl, was stowed away, they jogged on for some little time in silence.

But not for long, for everybody on the road had something to say to the occupants of John Peerybingle's cart, and sometimes passengers on foot, or horseback, plodded on a little way beside the cart, for the express purpose of having a chat. Then, too, the packages and parcels for the errand cart were numerous, and there were many stoppages to take them in and give them out, which was not the least interesting part of the journey.

Of all the little incidents of the day, Dot was the amused and open-eyed spectatress from her chair in the cart; making a charming little portrait as she sat there, looking on. And this delighted John the Carrier beyond measure.

The trip was a little foggy, to be sure, in the January weather, and was raw and cold. But who cared for such trifles! Not Dot, decidedly. Not Tilly Slowboy, for she deemed sitting in a cart on any terms, to be the highest point of human joy; the crowning circumstance of earthly hopes. Not the baby, I'll be sworn; for it's not in baby nature to be warmer or more sound asleep than that blessed young Peerybingle was all the way.

In one place there was a mound of weeds burning, and they watched the fire until, in consequence, as she observed, of the smoke "getting up her nose," Miss Slowboy choked—she could do anything of that sort on the smallest provocation—and woke the baby, who wouldn't go to sleep again.

But, at that moment they came in sight of the blind girl's home, where she was waiting with keen anticipation to receive them.

Bertha had other visitors as well that day, and the picnic dinner proceeded in a very stately and dignified manner. Miss Slowboy was isolated, for the time being, from every article of furniture but the chair she sat on, that she might have nothing else to knock the baby's head against, and sat staring about her in unspeakable delight. To her the day was all too short, and when that evening John Peerybingle making his return trip, called to take them home, Miss Slowboy's regret was intense.

As long as her little mistress smiled, Tilly's face too was wreathed in smiles; but when a hidden shadow darkened the Perrybingle sky, overclouding the happiness of the little home, and Dot cried all night, Tilly's eyes were red and swollen too, the next morning.

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It happened in this way. Pretty little Dot gave good John Perrybingle cause for anxiety by her actions, and the honest carrier, disturbed and misled, felt that he had reason to doubt her love for him, which almost broke his honest, faithful heart. While he was worrying over this, and over her, his little wife was merely shielding a secret belonging to Edward Plummer, Bertha's brother, who had just come back, after many year's absence in the golden South Americas.

So unaccustomed was Dot to keeping a secret that it caused her to act very strangely, and give her husband reason to misjudge her, which almost broke her loving little heart. All of which trouble Tilly Slowboy did not understand, but was deeply affected by it, and when she found her mistress alone, sobbing piteously, was quite horrified, exclaiming:

"Ow, if you please, don't! It's enough to dead and bury the baby, so it is, if you please!"

"Will you bring him sometimes, to see his father, Tilly?" inquired her mistress, drying her eyes; "when I can't live here, and have gone to my old home?"

"Ow, if you please, *don't!*" cried Tilly, throwing back her head and bursting out into a howl—she looked at the moment uncommonly like Boxer—"Ow, if you please, don't! Ow, what has everybody been and gone and done with everybody, making everybody else so wretched. Ow-w-w-w!"

The soft-hearted Slowboy trailed off at this juncture, into such a deplorable howl, the more tremendous from its long suppression, that she must infallibly have wakened the baby and frightened him into something serious (probably convulsions) if her attention had not been forcibly diverted from her misery for a moment, after which she stood for some time silent, with her mouth wide open; and then, posting off to the bed on which the baby lay asleep, danced in a weird, Saint Vitus manner, on the floor, and at the same time rummaged with her face and head among the bedclothes, apparently deriving much relief from those extraordinary operations.

Fortunately for all concerned in the little domestic drama, before a crisis had been reached, Edward Plummer revealed his secret, and his reasons for having been obliged to keep it. This cleared up the mystery concerning Mrs. Dot's conduct, proving her to be the same loyal, loving little wife she always was: to the exquisite satisfaction of the honest carrier, his family and friends, and last but not least, Miss Slowboy, who wept copiously for joy, and wishing to include her young charge in the general interchange of congratulations, handed round the baby to everybody in succession, as if it were something to eat or drink.

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Of course it became a serious duty now, to make such a day of it as should mark these events for a high feast and festival in the Peerybingle Calendar forevermore.

Accordingly, Dot went to work to produce such an entertainment as should reflect undying honor on the house and on every one concerned, and in a very short space of time everybody in the house was in a state of flutter and domestic turmoil and during the flurry of preparation, everybody tumbled over Tilly Slowboy and the baby everywhere. Tilly never came out in such force before. Her ubiquity was the theme of universal admiration. She was a stumbling-block in the passage at five-and-twenty minutes past two; a man-trap in the kitchen at half-past two precisely; and a pitfall in the garret at five-and-twenty minutes to three. The baby's head was, as it were, a test and touchstone for every description of matter,—animal, vegetable, and mineral. Nothing was in use that day that didn't come, at some time or other, into close acquaintance with it.

That was a great celebration indeed, with Dot doing the honors in her wedding-gown, her eyes sparkling with happiness, and the good carrier, so jovial and so ruddy at the bottom of the table, and all their guests aiding to make the occasion a memorable and happy one.

There was a dance in the evening, for which Bertha played her liveliest tune. Inspired by infectious joy, old and young get up and join the whirling throng. Suddenly Caleb Plummer clutches Tilly Slowboy by both hands and goes off at score, Miss Slowboy firm in the belief that diving hotly in among the couples, and effecting any number of concussions with them, is your only principle of footing it, and ecstatically glad to abandon herself to the delights of the occasion, so long as she sees joy written again on the pretty face of her beloved little mistress, and feels that happiness has been restored to honest John Peerybingle and his family.

Hark! How the Cricket on the Hearth joins in the music, with its Chirp, Chirp, Chirp, and how the kettle hums!

AGNES WICKFIELD

[Illustration: AGNES WICKFIELD]

AGNES WICKFIELD

When I became the adopted son of my aunt, Miss Betsy Trotwood, my new clothes were marked Trotwood Copperfield, instead of the old familiar David of my childhood; and I began my new life, not only in the new name, but with everything new about me, and felt for many days like one in a dream, until I had proved the happy reality to be a fact.

My aunt's first desire was to place me in a good school at Canterbury, and, lack of education having been my chief source of anxiety, this resolve gave me unbounded delight. So it was with a flutter of joyful anticipation that I accompanied her to Canterbury to call upon her agent and friend Mr. Wickfield, and to confer with him upon the all-important subject of schools and boarding places.

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Arriving at Canterbury, we stopped before a very old house, bulging out over the road, with long low latticed windows bulging out still further, and beams with carved heads on the ends bulging out too; so that I fancied the whole house was leaning forward, trying to see who was passing on the pavement below. It was quite spotless in its cleanliness. The old-fashioned brass knocker on the low arched door, ornamented with carved garlands of fruit and flowers, twinkled like a star; the two stone steps descending to the door were as white as if they had been covered with fair linen, and all the angles, and corners, and carvings, and mouldings, and quaint little panes of glass, and quainter little windows, were as pure as any snow that ever fell upon the hills.

When the pony chaise stopped at the door, we alighted and had a long conference with Mr. Wickfield, an elderly gentleman with grey hair and black eyebrows. He approved of my aunt's selection of Dr. Strong's school, and in regard to a home for me, made the following proposal:

"Leave your nephew here for the present. He's a quiet fellow. He won't disturb me at all. It's a capital house for study. As quiet as a monastery, and almost as roomy. Leave him here."

My aunt evidently liked the offer, but was delicate of accepting it, until Mr. Wickfield cried, "Come! I know how you feel, you shall not be oppressed by the receipt of favors, Miss Trotwood. You may pay for him if you like."

"On that understanding," said my aunt, "though it doesn't lessen the real obligation, I shall be very glad to leave him."

"Then come and see my little housekeeper," said Mr. Wickfield.

We accordingly went up a wonderful old staircase, with a balustrade so broad that we might have gone up that, almost as easily, and into a shady old drawing-room, lighted by three or four quaint windows which had old oak seats in them, that seemed to have come of the same trees as the shining oak floor, and the great beams in the ceiling. It was a prettily furnished room, with a piano, and some lively furniture in red and green, and some flowers. It seemed to be all odd nooks and corners; and in every nook and corner there was some queer little table, or cupboard, or bookcase, or seat, or something or other, that made me think there was not such another corner in the room, until I looked at the next one and found it equal to it if not better. On everything there was the same air of refinement and cleanliness that marked the house outside.

Mr. Wickfield tapped at a door in a corner of the panelled wall, and a girl of about my own age came quickly out and kissed him. On her face, I saw immediately the placid and sweet expression of a lady whose portrait I had seen downstairs. It seemed to my imagination as if the portrait had grown womanly, and the original had remained a child. Although her face was quite bright and happy, there was a tranquillity about it, and

about her—a quiet, good, calm, spirit—that I never have forgotten; that I never shall forget.

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This was his little housekeeper, his daughter Agnes, Mr. Wickfield said. When I heard how he said it, and saw how he held her hand, I guessed what the one motive of his life was.

She had a little basket-trifle hanging at her side with keys in it; and she looked as staid and discreet a housekeeper as the old house could have. She listened to her father as he told her about me, with a pleasant face; and when he had concluded, proposed to my aunt that we should go upstairs, and see my room. We all went together, she before us. A glorious old room it was, with more oak beams, and diamond panes; and the broad balustrade going all the way up to it.

I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained-glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us above, I thought of that window; and I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards.

My aunt was as happy as I was, in the arrangement made for me, and we went down to the drawing-room again, well pleased and gratified, and shortly after this my aunt took her departure, in consequence of which for some hours I was very much dejected. But by five o'clock, which was Mr. Wickfield's dinner hour, I had mustered up my spirits again, and was ready for my knife and fork. The cloth was only laid for us two; but Agnes was waiting in the drawing-room before dinner, and went down with her father, and sat opposite to him at table. I doubted whether he could have dined without her.

We did not stay there after dinner, but came upstairs into the drawing-room again, in one snug corner of which Agnes set glasses for her father, and a decanter of port wine. There he sat, taking his wine, while Agnes played on the piano, worked, and talked to him and me. Later Agnes made the tea, and presided over it; and the time passed away after it as after dinner, until she went to bed; when her father took her in his arms and kissed her, and, she being gone, ordered candles in his office. Then I went to bed too.

Next morning I entered on my new school life at Dr. Strong's, and began a happy existence in an excellent establishment, the character and dignity of which we each felt it our duty to maintain. We felt that we had a part in the management of the school, and learned with a good will, desiring to do it credit. We had noble games out of hours, and plenty of liberty; but were well spoken of in the town, and rarely did any disgrace by our appearance or manner, to the reputation of Dr. Strong or Dr. Strong's boys, and the Doctor himself was the idol of the whole school.

On that first day when I returned home from school, Agnes was in the drawing-room, waiting for her father. She met me with her pleasant smile, and asked me how I liked

the school. I told her I should like it very much, I hoped; but I was a little strange to it at first.

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"You have never been to school," I said, "have you?"

"Oh yes! every day."

"Ah, but you mean here, at your own home?"

"Papa couldn't spare me to go anywhere else," she answered smiling and shaking her head, "His housekeeper must be in his house, you know."

"He's very fond of you, I am sure," I said.

She nodded, "Yes," and went to the door to listen for his coming up, that she might meet him on the stairs. But as he was not there, she came back again.

"Mamma has been dead ever since I was born," she said in her quiet way. "I only know her picture, downstairs. I saw you looking at it yesterday. Did you think whose it was?"

I told her yes, because it was so like herself.

"Papa says so, too," said Agnes, pleased. "Hark! that's Papa now!"

Her bright calm face lighted up with pleasure as she went to meet him, and as they came in, hand in hand; and from that time as I watched her day by day, I saw no trace in Agnes of anything but single-hearted devotion to that father, whose wants she cared for so untiringly in her beautiful quiet way.

When we had dined that night, we went upstairs again, where everything went on exactly as on the previous day. Agnes set the glasses and decanters in the same corner, and Mr. Wickfield sat down to drink. Agnes played the piano to him, sat by him, and worked and talked, and played some games at dominoes with me. In good time she made tea; and afterwards, when I brought down my books, looked into them, and showed me what she knew of them (which was no slight matter, though she said it was), and what was the best way to learn and understand them. I see her, with her modest, orderly, placid, manner, and I hear her beautiful, calm voice, as I write these words. The influence for all good, which she came to exercise over me at a later time begins already to descend upon my breast. I love little Emily, and I don't love Agnes—no, not at all in that way—but I feel that there are goodness, peace, and truth wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the colored window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on everything around.

The time having come for her withdrawal for the night, as I gave Mr. Wickfield my hand, preparatory to going away myself, he checked me and said; "Should you like to stay with us, Trotwood, or go elsewhere?"

"To stay," I answered quickly.

“You are sure?”

“If you please. If I may.”

“Why, it’s but a dull life that we lead here, boy, I’m afraid,” he said.

“Not more dull for me than Agnes, sir. Not dull at all!”

“Than Agnes,” he repeated, walking slowly to the great chimney-piece, and leaning against it. “Than Agnes! Now I wonder,” he muttered, “whether my Agnes tires of me. When should I ever tire of her? But that’s different, that’s quite different.”

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He was musing, not speaking to me; so I remained quiet.

“A dull, old house,” he said, “and a monotonous life, Stay with us, Trotwood, eh?” he added in his usual manner, and as if he were answering something I had just said. “I’m glad of it. You are company to us both. It is wholesome to have you here. Wholesome for me, wholesome for Agnes wholesome perhaps for all of us.”

“I’m sure it is for me, sir,” I said, “I’m so glad to be here.”

“That’s a fine fellow!” said Mr. Wickfield. “As long as you are glad to be here, you shall stay here.”

And so I lived at Mr. Wickfield’s through the remainder of my schooldays, and to Agnes, as the months went by, I turned more and more often for advice and counsel.

We saw a good deal of Dr. Strong’s wife, both because she had taken a liking to me, and because she was very fond of Agnes, and was often backwards and forwards at our house, and we had pleasant evenings at the doctor’s too, with other guests, when we had merry round games of cards, or music—for both Mrs. Strong and Agnes sang sweetly—and so, with weekly visits from my aunt, and walks and talks with Agnes, and the events and phases of feeling too numerous to chronicle, which make up a boy’s existence, my schooldays glided all too swiftly by.

Time has stolen on unobserved. I am higher in the school and no one breaks my peace. Dr. Strong refers to me in public as a promising young scholar, and my aunt remits me a guinea by next post. And what comes now? I am the head boy! I look down on the line of boys below me, with a condescending interest in such of them as bring to my mind the boy I was myself, when I first came there. That little fellow seems to be no part of me; I remember him as something left behind upon the road of life—and almost think of him as of some one else.

What other changes have come upon me, beside the changes in my growth and looks, and in the knowledge I have garnered all this while? I wear a gold watch and chain, a ring upon my little finger, and a long-tailed coat; and twice have I been desperately in love with a fair damsel, and have twice recovered.

And the little girl I saw on that first day at Mr. Wickfield’s, where is she? Gone also. In her stead, the perfect likeness of the picture, a child’s likeness no more, moves about the house; and Agnes, my sweet sister, as I call her in my thoughts, my counsellor and friend, the better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good, self-denying influence—is quite a woman.

When the time came to take leave of Agnes and her father, though it saddened me, my mind was so filled with thoughts of self that I paid little heed to Agnes and her brave

farewell, nor did I realize what her loneliness would be when the old and silent house was made doubly silent by the removal of a boy's presence. I did not then understand what her devotion to the elderly father and his interests held of sacrifice for one so young, nor of what fine clay the girl was moulded. But in later years I realized it fully, and looking back, I always saw her as when on that first day, in the grave light of the old staircase, I thought of the stained-glass window, associating something of its tranquil brightness with her ever afterwards.

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With Agnes the woman, and the influence for all good which she came to exercise over me at a later time, this story does not deal. It need only record the simple details of the girl's quiet life,—of the girl's calm strong nature,—that there were goodness, peace and truth wherever Agnes was,—Agnes, my boyhood's sister, counsellor and friend.