

## Chapter XLVI

When Barnaby returned with the bread, the sight of the pious old pilgrim smoking his pipe and making himself so thoroughly at home, appeared to surprise even him; the more so, as that worthy person, instead of putting up the loaf in his wallet as a scarce and precious article, tossed it carelessly on the table, and producing his bottle, bade him sit down and drink.

'For I carry some comfort, you see,' he said. 'Taste that. Is it good?'

The water stood in Barnaby's eyes as he coughed from the strength of the draught, and answered in the affirmative.

'Drink some more,' said the blind man; 'don't be afraid of it. You don't taste anything like that, often, eh?'

'Often!' cried Barnaby. 'Never!'

'Too poor?' returned the blind man with a sigh. 'Ay. That's bad. Your mother, poor soul, would be happier if she was richer, Barnaby.'

'Why, so I tell her - the very thing I told her just before you came to-night, when all that gold was in the sky,' said Barnaby, drawing his chair nearer to him, and looking eagerly in his face. 'Tell me. Is there any way of being rich, that I could find out?'

'Any way! A hundred ways.'

'Ay, ay?' he returned. 'Do you say so? What are they? - Nay, mother, it's for your sake I ask; not mine; - for yours, indeed. What are they?'

The blind man turned his face, on which there was a smile of triumph, to where the widow stood in great distress; and answered,

'Why, they are not to be found out by stay-at-homes, my good friend.'

'By stay-at-homes!' cried Barnaby, plucking at his sleeve. 'But I am not one. Now, there you mistake. I am often out before the sun, and travel home when he has gone to rest. I am away in the woods before the day has reached the shady places, and am often there when the bright moon is peeping through the boughs, and looking down upon the other moon that lives in the water. As I walk along, I try to find, among the grass and moss, some of that small money for which she works so hard and used to shed so many tears. As I lie asleep in the shade, I dream of it - dream of digging it up in heaps; and spying it out, hidden under bushes; and seeing it sparkle, as the dew-drops do, among the leaves. But I never find it. Tell me where it is. I'd go there,

if the journey were a whole year long, because I know she would be happier when I came home and brought some with me. Speak again. I'll listen to you if you talk all night.'

The blind man passed his hand lightly over the poor fellow's face, and finding that his elbows were planted on the table, that his chin rested on his two hands, that he leaned eagerly forward, and that his whole manner expressed the utmost interest and anxiety, paused for a minute as though he desired the widow to observe this fully, and then made answer:

'It's in the world, bold Barnaby, the merry world; not in solitary places like those you pass your time in, but in crowds, and where there's noise and rattle.'

'Good! good!' cried Barnaby, rubbing his hands. 'Yes! I love that. Grip loves it too. It suits us both. That's brave!'

' - The kind of places,' said the blind man, 'that a young fellow likes, and in which a good son may do more for his mother, and himself to boot, in a month, than he could here in all his life - that is, if he had a friend, you know, and some one to advise with.'

'You hear this, mother?' cried Barnaby, turning to her with delight. 'Never tell me we shouldn't heed it, if it lay shining at our feet. Why do we heed it so much now? Why do you toil from morning until night?'

'Surely,' said the blind man, 'surely. Have you no answer, widow? Is your mind,' he slowly added, 'not made up yet?'

'Let me speak with you,' she answered, 'apart.'

'Lay your hand upon my sleeve,' said Stagg, arising from the table; 'and lead me where you will. Courage, bold Barnaby. We'll talk more of this: I've a fancy for you. Wait there till I come back. Now, widow.'

She led him out at the door, and into the little garden, where they stopped.

'You are a fit agent,' she said, in a half breathless manner, 'and well represent the man who sent you here.'

'I'll tell him that you said so,' Stagg retorted. 'He has a regard for you, and will respect me the more (if possible) for your praise. We must have our rights, widow.'

'Rights! Do you know,' she said, 'that a word from me - '

'Why do you stop?' returned the blind man calmly, after a long pause. 'Do I know that a word from you would place my friend in the last position of the dance of life? Yes, I do. What of that? It will never be spoken, widow.'

'You are sure of that?'

'Quite - so sure, that I don't come here to discuss the question. I say we must have our rights, or we must be bought off. Keep to that point, or let me return to my young friend, for I have an interest in the lad, and desire to put him in the way of making his fortune. Bah! you needn't speak,' he added hastily; 'I know what you would say: you have hinted at it once already. Have I no feeling for you, because I am blind? No, I have not. Why do you expect me, being in darkness, to be better than men who have their sight - why should you? Is the hand of Heaven more manifest in my having no eyes, than in your having two? It's the cant of you folks to be horrified if a blind man robs, or lies, or steals; oh yes, it's far worse in him, who can barely live on the few halfpence that are thrown to him in streets, than in you, who can see, and work, and are not dependent on the mercies of the world. A curse on you! You who have five senses may be wicked at your pleasure; we who have four, and want the most important, are to live and be moral on our affliction. The true charity and justice of rich to poor, all the world over!'

He paused a moment when he had said these words, and caught the sound of money, jingling in her hand.

'Well?' he cried, quickly resuming his former manner. 'That should lead to something. The point, widow?'

'First answer me one question,' she replied. 'You say he is close at hand. Has he left London?'

'Being close at hand, widow, it would seem he has,' returned the blind man.

'I mean, for good? You know that.'

'Yes, for good. The truth is, widow, that his making a longer stay there might have had disagreeable consequences. He has come away for that reason.'

'Listen,' said the widow, telling some money out, upon a bench beside them. 'Count.'

'Six,' said the blind man, listening attentively. 'Any more?'

'They are the savings,' she answered, 'of five years. Six guineas.'

He put out his hand for one of the coins; felt it carefully, put it between his teeth, rung it on the bench; and nodded to her to proceed.

'These have been scraped together and laid by, lest sickness or death should separate my son and me. They have been purchased at the price of much hunger, hard labour, and want of rest. If you CAN take them - do - on condition that you leave this place upon the instant, and enter no more into that room, where he sits now, expecting your return.'

'Six guineas,' said the blind man, shaking his head, 'though of the fullest weight that were ever coined, fall very far short of twenty pounds, widow.'

'For such a sum, as you know, I must write to a distant part of the country. To do that, and receive an answer, I must have time.'

'Two days?' said Stagg.

'More.'

'Four days?'

'A week. Return on this day week, at the same hour, but not to the house. Wait at the corner of the lane.'

'Of course,' said the blind man, with a crafty look, 'I shall find you there?'

'Where else can I take refuge? Is it not enough that you have made a beggar of me, and that I have sacrificed my whole store, so hardly earned, to preserve this home?'

'Humph!' said the blind man, after some consideration. 'Set me with my face towards the point you speak of, and in the middle of the road. Is this the spot?'

'It is.'

'On this day week at sunset. And think of him within doors. - For the present, good night.'

She made him no answer, nor did he stop for any. He went slowly away, turning his head from time to time, and stopping to listen, as if he were curious to know whether he was watched by any one. The shadows of night were closing fast around, and he was soon lost in

the gloom. It was not, however, until she had traversed the lane from end to end, and made sure that he was gone, that she re-entered the cottage, and hurriedly barred the door and window.

'Mother!' said Barnaby. 'What is the matter? Where is the blind man?'

'He is gone.'

'Gone!' he cried, starting up. 'I must have more talk with him. Which way did he take?'

'I don't know,' she answered, folding her arms about him. 'You must not go out to-night. There are ghosts and dreams abroad.'

'Ay?' said Barnaby, in a frightened whisper.

'It is not safe to stir. We must leave this place to-morrow.'

'This place! This cottage - and the little garden, mother!'

'Yes! To-morrow morning at sunrise. We must travel to London; lose ourselves in that wide place - there would be some trace of us in any other town - then travel on again, and find some new abode.'

Little persuasion was required to reconcile Barnaby to anything that promised change. In another minute, he was wild with delight; in another, full of grief at the prospect of parting with his friends the dogs; in another, wild again; then he was fearful of what she had said to prevent his wandering abroad that night, and full of terrors and strange questions. His light-heartedness in the end surmounted all his other feelings, and lying down in his clothes to the end that he might be ready on the morrow, he soon fell fast asleep before the poor turf fire.

His mother did not close her eyes, but sat beside him, watching. Every breath of wind sounded in her ears like that dreaded footstep at the door, or like that hand upon the latch, and made the calm summer night, a night of horror. At length the welcome day appeared. When she had made the little preparations which were needful for their journey, and had prayed upon her knees with many tears, she roused Barnaby, who jumped up gaily at her summons.

His clothes were few enough, and to carry Grip was a labour of love. As the sun shed his earliest beams upon the earth, they closed the door of their deserted home, and turned away. The sky was blue and bright. The air was fresh and filled with a thousand perfumes. Barnaby looked upward, and laughed with all his heart.

But it was a day he usually devoted to a long ramble, and one of the dogs - the ugliest of them all - came bounding up, and jumping round him in the fulness of his joy. He had to bid him go back in a surly tone, and his heart smote him while he did so. The dog retreated; turned with a half-incredulous, half-imploring look; came a little back; and stopped.

It was the last appeal of an old companion and a faithful friend - cast off. Barnaby could bear no more, and as he shook his head and waved his playmate home, he burst into tears.

'Oh mother, mother, how mournful he will be when he scratches at the door, and finds it always shut!'

There was such a sense of home in the thought, that though her own eyes overflowed she would not have obliterated the recollection of it, either from her own mind or from his, for the wealth of the whole wide world.