

Chapter XII - On the Watch

It has left off raining down in Lincolnshire at last, and Chesney Wold has taken heart. Mrs Rouncewell is full of hospitable cares, for Sir Leicester and my Lady are coming home from Paris. The fashionable intelligence has found it out and communicates the glad tidings to benighted England. It has also found out that they will entertain a brilliant and distinguished circle of the ELITE of the BEAU MONDE (the fashionable intelligence is weak in English, but a giant refreshed in French) at the ancient and hospitable family seat in Lincolnshire.

For the greater honour of the brilliant and distinguished circle, and of Chesney Wold into the bargain, the broken arch of the bridge in the park is mended; and the water, now retired within its proper limits and again spanned gracefully, makes a figure in the prospect from the house. The clear, cold sunshine glances into the brittle woods and approvingly beholds the sharp wind scattering the leaves and drying the moss. It glides over the park after the moving shadows of the clouds, and chases them, and never catches them, all day. It looks in at the windows and touches the ancestral portraits with bars and patches of brightness never contemplated by the painters. Athwart the picture of my Lady, over the great chimney-piece, it throws a broad bend-sinister of light that strikes down crookedly into the hearth and seems to rend it.

Through the same cold sunshine and the same sharp wind, my Lady and Sir Leicester, in their travelling chariot (my Lady's woman and Sir Leicester's man affectionate in the rumble), start for home. With a considerable amount of jingling and whip-cracking, and many plunging demonstrations on the part of two bare-backed horses and two centaurs with glazed hats, jack-boots, and flowing manes and tails, they rattle out of the yard of the Hotel Bristol in the Place Vendome and canter between the sun-and-shadow-chequered colonnade of the Rue de Rivoli and the garden of the ill-fated palace of a headless king and queen, off by the Place of Concord, and the Elysian Fields, and the Gate of the Star, out of Paris.

Sooth to say, they cannot go away too fast, for even here my Lady Dedlock has been bored to death. Concert, assembly, opera, theatre, drive, nothing is new to my Lady under the worn-out heavens. Only last Sunday, when poor wretches were gay--within the walls playing with children among the clipped trees and the statues in the Palace Garden; walking, a score abreast, in the Elysian Fields, made more Elysian by performing dogs and wooden horses; between whiles filtering (a few) through the gloomy Cathedral of Our Lady to say a word or two at the base of a pillar within flare of a rusty little gridiron-full of gusty little tapers; without the walls encompassing Paris with dancing, love-making, wine-drinking, tobacco-smoking, tomb-visiting,

billiard card and domino playing, quack-doctoring, and much murderous refuse, animate and inanimate--only last Sunday, my Lady, in the desolation of Boredom and the clutch of Giant Despair, almost hated her own maid for being in spirits.

She cannot, therefore, go too fast from Paris. Weariness of soul lies before her, as it lies behind--her Ariel has put a girdle of it round the whole earth, and it cannot be unclasped--but the imperfect remedy is always to fly from the last place where it has been experienced. Fling Paris back into the distance, then, exchanging it for endless avenues and cross-avenues of wintry trees! And, when next beheld, let it be some leagues away, with the Gate of the Star a white speck glittering in the sun, and the city a mere mound in a plain--two dark square towers rising out of it, and light and shadow descending on it aslant, like the angels in Jacob's dream!

Sir Leicester is generally in a complacent state, and rarely bored. When he has nothing else to do, he can always contemplate his own greatness. It is a considerable advantage to a man to have so inexhaustible a subject. After reading his letters, he leans back in his corner of the carriage and generally reviews his importance to society.

'You have an unusual amount of correspondence this morning?' says my Lady after a long time. She is fatigued with reading. Has almost read a page in twenty miles.

'Nothing in it, though. Nothing whatever.'

'I saw one of Mr Tulkinghorn's long effusions, I think?'

'You see everything,' says Sir Leicester with admiration.

'Ha!' sighs my Lady. 'He is the most tiresome of men!'

'He sends--I really beg your pardon--he sends,' says Sir Leicester, selecting the letter and unfolding it, 'a message to you. Our stopping to change horses as I came to his postscript drove it out of my memory. I beg you'll excuse me. He says--' Sir Leicester is so long in taking out his eye-glass and adjusting it that my Lady looks a little irritated. 'He says 'In the matter of the right of way--' I beg your pardon, that's not the place. He says--yes! Here I have it! He says, 'I beg my respectful compliments to my Lady, who, I hope, has benefited by the change. Will you do me the favour to mention (as it may interest her) that I have something to tell her on her return in reference to the person who copied the affidavit in the Chancery suit, which so powerfully stimulated her curiosity. I have seen him.'"

My Lady, leaning forward, looks out of her window.

'That's the message,' observes Sir Leicester.

'I should like to walk a little,' says my Lady, still looking out of her window.

'Walk?' repeats Sir Leicester in a tone of surprise.

'I should like to walk a little,' says my Lady with unmistakable distinctness. 'Please to stop the carriage.'

The carriage is stopped, the affectionate man alights from the rumble, opens the door, and lets down the steps, obedient to an impatient motion of my Lady's hand. My Lady alights so quickly and walks away so quickly that Sir Leicester, for all his scrupulous politeness, is unable to assist her, and is left behind. A space of a minute or two has elapsed before he comes up with her. She smiles, looks very handsome, takes his arm, lounges with him for a quarter of a mile, is very much bored, and resumes her seat in the carriage.

The rattle and clatter continue through the greater part of three days, with more or less of bell-jingling and whip-cracking, and more or less plunging of centaurs and bare-backed horses. Their courtly politeness to each other at the hotels where they tarry is the theme of general admiration. Though my Lord IS a little aged for my Lady, says Madame, the hostess of the Golden Ape, and though he might be her amiable father, one can see at a glance that they love each other. One observes my Lord with his white hair, standing, hat in hand, to help my Lady to and from the carriage. One observes my Lady, how recognisant of my Lord's politeness, with an inclination of her gracious head and the concession of her so-genteel fingers! It is ravishing!

The sea has no appreciation of great men, but knocks them about like the small fry. It is habitually hard upon Sir Leicester, whose countenance it greenly mottles in the manner of sage-cheese and in whose aristocratic system it effects a dismal revolution. It is the Radical of Nature to him. Nevertheless, his dignity gets over it after stopping to refit, and he goes on with my Lady for Chesney Wold, lying only one night in London on the way to Lincolnshire.

Through the same cold sunlight, colder as the day declines, and through the same sharp wind, sharper as the separate shadows of bare trees gloom together in the woods, and as the Ghost's Walk, touched at the western corner by a pile of fire in the sky, resigns itself to coming night, they drive into the park. The rooks, swinging in their lofty houses in the elm-tree avenue, seem to discuss the question of the occupancy of the carriage as it passes underneath, some agreeing that Sir Leicester and my Lady are come down, some arguing with

malcontents who won't admit it, now all consenting to consider the question disposed of, now all breaking out again in violent debate, incited by one obstinate and drowsy bird who will persist in putting in a last contradictory croak. Leaving them to swing and caw, the travelling chariot rolls on to the house, where fires gleam warmly through some of the windows, though not through so many as to give an inhabited expression to the darkening mass of front. But the brilliant and distinguished circle will soon do that.

Mrs Rouncewell is in attendance and receives Sir Leicester's customary shake of the hand with a profound curtsy.

'How do you do, Mrs Rouncewell? I am glad to see you.'

'I hope I have the honour of welcoming you in good health, Sir Leicester?'

'In excellent health, Mrs Rouncewell.'

'My Lady is looking charmingly well,' says Mrs Rouncewell with another curtsy.

My Lady signifies, without profuse expenditure of words, that she is as wearily well as she can hope to be.

But Rosa is in the distance, behind the housekeeper; and my Lady, who has not subdued the quickness of her observation, whatever else she may have conquered, asks, 'Who is that girl?'

'A young scholar of mine, my Lady. Rosa.'

'Come here, Rosa!' Lady Dedlock beckons her, with even an appearance of interest. 'Why, do you know how pretty you are, child?' she says, touching her shoulder with her two forefingers.

Rosa, very much abashed, says, 'No, if you please, my Lady!' and glances up, and glances down, and don't know where to look, but looks all the prettier.

'How old are you?'

'Nineteen, my Lady.'

'Nineteen,' repeats my Lady thoughtfully. 'Take care they don't spoil you by flattery.'

'Yes, my Lady.'

My Lady taps her dimpled cheek with the same delicate gloved fingers and goes on to the foot of the oak staircase, where Sir Leicester pauses for her as her knightly escort. A staring old Dedlock in a panel, as large as life and as dull, looks as if he didn't know what to make of it, which was probably his general state of mind in the days of Queen Elizabeth.

That evening, in the housekeeper's room, Rosa can do nothing but murmur Lady Dedlock's praises. She is so affable, so graceful, so beautiful, so elegant; has such a sweet voice and such a thrilling touch that Rosa can feel it yet! Mrs Rouncewell confirms all this, not without personal pride, reserving only the one point of affability. Mrs Rouncewell is not quite sure as to that. Heaven forbid that she should say a syllable in dispraise of any member of that excellent family, above all, of my Lady, whom the whole world admires; but if my Lady would only be 'a little more free,' not quite so cold and distant, Mrs Rouncewell thinks she would be more affable.

'Tis almost a pity,' Mrs Rouncewell adds--only 'almost' because it borders on impiety to suppose that anything could be better than it is, in such an express dispensation as the Dedlock affairs--'that my Lady has no family. If she had had a daughter now, a grown young lady, to interest her, I think she would have had the only kind of excellence she wants.'

'Might not that have made her still more proud, grandmother?' says Watt, who has been home and come back again, he is such a good grandson.

'More and most, my dear,' returns the housekeeper with dignity, 'are words it's not my place to use--nor so much as to hear--applied to any drawback on my Lady.'

'I beg your pardon, grandmother. But she is proud, is she not?'

'If she is, she has reason to be. The Dedlock family have always reason to be.'

'Well,' says Watt, 'it's to be hoped they line out of their prayer-books a certain passage for the common people about pride and vainglory. Forgive me, grandmother! Only a joke!'

'Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, my dear, are not fit subjects for joking.'

'Sir Leicester is no joke by any means,' says Watt, 'and I humbly ask his pardon. I suppose, grandmother, that even with the family and

their guests down here, there is no objection to my prolonging my stay at the Dedlock Arms for a day or two, as any other traveller might?’

‘Surely, none in the world, child.’

‘I am glad of that,’ says Watt, ‘because I have an inexpressible desire to extend my knowledge of this beautiful neighbourhood.’

He happens to glance at Rosa, who looks down and is very shy indeed. But according to the old superstition, it should be Rosa's ears that burn, and not her fresh bright cheeks, for my Lady's maid is holding forth about her at this moment with surpassing energy.

My Lady's maid is a Frenchwoman of two and thirty, from somewhere in the southern country about Avignon and Marseilles, a large-eyed brown woman with black hair who would be handsome but for a certain feline mouth and general uncomfortable tightness of face, rendering the jaws too eager and the skull too prominent. There is something indefinably keen and wan about her anatomy, and she has a watchful way of looking out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head which could be pleasantly dispensed with, especially when she is in an ill humour and near knives. Through all the good taste of her dress and little adornments, these objections so express themselves that she seems to go about like a very neat she-wolf imperfectly tamed. Besides being accomplished in all the knowledge appertaining to her post, she is almost an Englishwoman in her acquaintance with the language; consequently, she is in no want of words to shower upon Rosa for having attracted my Lady's attention, and she pours them out with such grim ridicule as she sits at dinner that her companion, the affectionate man, is rather relieved when she arrives at the spoon stage of that performance.

Ha, ha, ha! She, Hortense, been in my Lady's service since five years and always kept at the distance, and this doll, this puppet, caressed--absolutely caressed--by my Lady on the moment of her arriving at the house! Ha, ha, ha! ‘And do you know how pretty you are, child?’ ‘No, my Lady.’ You are right there! ‘And how old are you, child! And take care they do not spoil you by flattery, child!’ Oh, how droll! It is the BEST thing altogether.

In short, it is such an admirable thing that Mademoiselle Hortense can't forget it; but at meals for days afterwards, even among her countrywomen and others attached in like capacity to the troop of visitors, relapses into silent enjoyment of the joke--an enjoyment expressed, in her own convivial manner, by an additional tightness of face, thin elongation of compressed lips, and sidewise look, which intense appreciation of humour is frequently reflected in my Lady's mirrors when my Lady is not among them.

All the mirrors in the house are brought into action now, many of them after a long blank. They reflect handsome faces, simpering faces, youthful faces, faces of threescore and ten that will not submit to be old; the entire collection of faces that have come to pass a January week or two at Chesney Wold, and which the fashionable intelligence, a mighty hunter before the Lord, hunts with a keen scent, from their breaking cover at the Court of St. James's to their being run down to death. The place in Lincolnshire is all alive. By day guns and voices are heard ringing in the woods, horsemen and carriages enliven the park roads, servants and hangers-on pervade the village and the Dedlock Arms. Seen by night from distant openings in the trees, the row of windows in the long drawing-room, where my Lady's picture hangs over the great chimney-piece, is like a row of jewels set in a black frame. On Sunday the chill little church is almost warmed by so much gallant company, and the general flavour of the Dedlock dust is quenched in delicate perfumes.

The brilliant and distinguished circle comprehends within it no contracted amount of education, sense, courage, honour, beauty, and virtue. Yet there is something a little wrong about it in despite of its immense advantages. What can it be?

Dandyism? There is no King George the Fourth now (more the pity) to set the dandy fashion; there are no clear-starched jack-towel neckcloths, no short-waisted coats, no false calves, no stays. There are no caricatures, now, of effeminate exquisites so arrayed, swooning in opera boxes with excess of delight and being revived by other dainty creatures poking long-necked scent-bottles at their noses. There is no beau whom it takes four men at once to shake into his buckskins, or who goes to see all the executions, or who is troubled with the self-reproach of having once consumed a pea. But is there dandyism in the brilliant and distinguished circle notwithstanding, dandyism of a more mischievous sort, that has got below the surface and is doing less harmless things than jack-towelling itself and stopping its own digestion, to which no rational person need particularly object?

Why, yes. It cannot be disguised. There ARE at Chesney Wold this January week some ladies and gentlemen of the newest fashion, who have set up a dandyism--in religion, for instance. Who in mere lackadaisical want of an emotion have agreed upon a little dandy talk about the vulgar wanting faith in things in general, meaning in the things that have been tried and found wanting, as though a low fellow should unaccountably lose faith in a bad shilling after finding it out! Who would make the vulgar very picturesque and faithful by putting back the hands upon the clock of time and cancelling a few hundred years of history.

There are also ladies and gentlemen of another fashion, not so new, but very elegant, who have agreed to put a smooth glaze on the world and to keep down all its realities. For whom everything must be languid and pretty. Who have found out the perpetual stoppage. Who are to rejoice at nothing and be sorry for nothing. Who are not to be disturbed by ideas. On whom even the fine arts, attending in powder and walking backward like the Lord Chamberlain, must array themselves in the milliners' and tailors' patterns of past generations and be particularly careful not to be in earnest or to receive any impress from the moving age.

Then there is my Lord Boodle, of considerable reputation with his party, who has known what office is and who tells Sir Leicester Dedlock with much gravity, after dinner, that he really does not see to what the present age is tending. A debate is not what a debate used to be; the House is not what the House used to be; even a Cabinet is not what it formerly was. He perceives with astonishment that supposing the present government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown, in the formation of a new ministry, would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle--supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle, which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can't offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can't put him in the Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock) because you can't provide for Noodle!

On the other hand, the Right Honourable William Buffy, M.P., contends across the table with some one else that the shipwreck of the country--about which there is no doubt; it is only the manner of it that is in question--is attributable to Cuffy. If you had done with Cuffy what you ought to have done when he first came into Parliament, and had prevented him from going over to Duffy, you would have got him into alliance with Fuffy, you would have had with you the weight attaching as a smart debater to Guffy, you would have brought to bear upon the elections the wealth of Huffy, you would have got in for three counties Juffy, Kuffy, and Luffy, and you would have strengthened your administration by the official knowledge and the business habits of Muffy. All this, instead of being as you now are, dependent on the mere caprice of Puffy!

As to this point, and as to some minor topics, there are differences of opinion; but it is perfectly clear to the brilliant and distinguished

circle, all round, that nobody is in question but Boodle and his retinue, and Buffy and HIS retinue. These are the great actors for whom the stage is reserved. A People there are, no doubt--a certain large number of supernumeraries, who are to be occasionally addressed, and relied upon for shouts and choruses, as on the theatrical stage; but Boodle and Buffy, their followers and families, their heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, are the born first-actors, managers, and leaders, and no others can appear upon the scene for ever and ever.

In this, too, there is perhaps more dandyism at Chesney Wold than the brilliant and distinguished circle will find good for itself in the long run. For it is, even with the stillest and politest circles, as with the circle the necromancer draws around him--very strange appearances may be seen in active motion outside. With this difference, that being realities and not phantoms, there is the greater danger of their breaking in.

Chesney Wold is quite full anyhow, so full that a burning sense of injury arises in the breasts of ill-lodged ladies'-maids, and is not to be extinguished. Only one room is empty. It is a turret chamber of the third order of merit, plainly but comfortably furnished and having an old-fashioned business air. It is Mr Tulkinghorn's room, and is never bestowed on anybody else, for he may come at any time. He is not come yet. It is his quiet habit to walk across the park from the village in fine weather, to drop into this room as if he had never been out of it since he was last seen there, to request a servant to inform Sir Leicester that he is arrived in case he should be wanted, and to appear ten minutes before dinner in the shadow of the library-door. He sleeps in his turret with a complaining flag-staff over his head, and has some leads outside on which, any fine morning when he is down here, his black figure may be seen walking before breakfast like a larger species of rook.

Every day before dinner, my Lady looks for him in the dusk of the library, but he is not there. Every day at dinner, my Lady glances down the table for the vacant place that would be waiting to receive him if he had just arrived, but there is no vacant place. Every night my Lady casually asks her maid, 'Is Mr Tulkinghorn come?'

Every night the answer is, 'No, my Lady, not yet.'

One night, while having her hair undressed, my Lady loses herself in deep thought after this reply until she sees her own brooding face in the opposite glass, and a pair of black eyes curiously observing her.

'Be so good as to attend,' says my Lady then, addressing the reflection of Hortense, 'to your business. You can contemplate your beauty at another time.'

'Pardon! It was your Ladyship's beauty.'

'That,' says my Lady, 'you needn't contemplate at all.'

At length, one afternoon a little before sunset, when the bright groups of figures which have for the last hour or two enlivened the Ghost's Walk are all dispersed and only Sir Leicester and my Lady remain upon the terrace, Mr Tulkinghorn appears. He comes towards them at his usual methodical pace, which is never quickened, never slackened. He wears his usual expressionless mask--if it be a mask -- and carries family secrets in every limb of his body and every crease of his dress. Whether his whole soul is devoted to the great or whether he yields them nothing beyond the services he sells is his personal secret. He keeps it, as he keeps the secrets of his clients; he is his own client in that matter, and will never betray himself.

'How do you do, Mr Tulkinghorn?' says Sir Leicester, giving him his hand.

Mr Tulkinghorn is quite well. Sir Leicester is quite well. My Lady is quite well. All highly satisfactory. The lawyer, with his hands behind him, walks at Sir Leicester's side along the terrace. My Lady walks upon the other side.

'We expected you before,' says Sir Leicester. A gracious observation. As much as to say, 'Mr Tulkinghorn, we remember your existence when you are not here to remind us of it by your presence. We bestow a fragment of our minds upon you, sir, you see!'

Mr Tulkinghorn, comprehending it, inclines his head and says he is much obliged.

'I should have come down sooner,' he explains, 'but that I have been much engaged with those matters in the several suits between yourself and Boythorn.'

'A man of a very ill-regulated mind,' observes Sir Leicester with severity. 'An extremely dangerous person in any community. A man of a very low character of mind.'

'He is obstinate,' says Mr Tulkinghorn.

'It is natural to such a man to be so,' says Sir Leicester, looking most profoundly obstinate himself. 'I am not at all surprised to hear it.'

'The only question is,' pursues the lawyer, 'whether you will give up anything.'

'No, sir,' replies Sir Leicester. 'Nothing. I give up?'

'I don't mean anything of importance. That, of course, I know you would not abandon. I mean any minor point.'

'Mr Tulkinghorn,' returns Sir Leicester, 'there can be no minor point between myself and Mr Boythorn. If I go farther, and observe that I cannot readily conceive how ANY right of mine can be a minor point, I speak not so much in reference to myself as an individual as in reference to the family position I have it in charge to maintain.'

Mr Tulkinghorn inclines his head again. 'I have now my instructions,' he says. 'Mr Boythorn will give us a good deal of trouble--'

'It is the character of such a mind, Mr Tulkinghorn,' Sir Leicester interrupts him, 'TO give trouble. An exceedingly ill-conditioned, levelling person. A person who, fifty years ago, would probably have been tried at the Old Bailey for some demagogue proceeding, and severely punished--if not,' adds Sir Leicester after a moment's pause, 'if not hanged, drawn, and quartered.'

Sir Leicester appears to discharge his stately breast of a burden in passing this capital sentence, as if it were the next satisfactory thing to having the sentence executed.

'But night is coming on,' says he, 'and my Lady will take cold. My dear, let us go in.'

As they turn towards the hall-door, Lady Dedlock addresses Mr Tulkinghorn for the first time.

'You sent me a message respecting the person whose writing I happened to inquire about. It was like you to remember the circumstance; I had quite forgotten it. Your message reminded me of it again. I can't imagine what association I had with a hand like that, but I surely had some.'

'You had some?' Mr Tulkinghorn repeats.

'Oh, yes!' returns my Lady carelessly. 'I think I must have had some. And did you really take the trouble to find out the writer of that actual thing--what is it!--affidavit?'

'Yes.'

'How very odd!'

They pass into a sombre breakfast-room on the ground floor, lighted in the day by two deep windows. It is now twilight. The fire glows brightly on the panelled wall and palely on the window-glass, where, through the cold reflection of the blaze, the colder landscape shudders in the wind and a grey mist creeps along, the only traveller besides the waste of clouds.

My Lady lounges in a great chair in the chimney-corner, and Sir Leicester takes another great chair opposite. The lawyer stands before the fire with his hand out at arm's length, shading his face. He looks across his arm at my Lady.

'Yes,' he says, 'I inquired about the man, and found him. And, what is very strange, I found him--'

'Not to be any out-of-the-way person, I am afraid!' Lady Dedlock languidly anticipates.

'I found him dead.'

'Oh, dear me!' remonstrated Sir Leicester. Not so much shocked by the fact as by the fact of the fact being mentioned.

'I was directed to his lodging--a miserable, poverty-stricken place -- and I found him dead.'

'You will excuse me, Mr Tulkinghorn,' observes Sir Leicester. 'I think the less said--'

'Pray, Sir Leicester, let me hear the story out' (it is my Lady speaking). 'It is quite a story for twilight. How very shocking! Dead?'

Mr Tulkinghorn re-asserts it by another inclination of his head. 'Whether by his own hand--'

'Upon my honour!' cries Sir Leicester. 'Really!'

'Do let me hear the story!' says my Lady.

'Whatever you desire, my dear. But, I must say--'

'No, you mustn't say! Go on, Mr Tulkinghorn.'

Sir Leicester's gallantry concedes the point, though he still feels that to bring this sort of squalor among the upper classes is really--really--

'I was about to say,' resumes the lawyer with undisturbed calmness, 'that whether he had died by his own hand or not, it was beyond my power to tell you. I should amend that phrase, however, by saying that he had unquestionably died of his own act, though whether by his own deliberate intention or by mischance can never certainly be known. The coroner's jury found that he took the poison accidentally.'

'And what kind of man,' my Lady asks, 'was this deplorable creature?'

'Very difficult to say,' returns the lawyer, shaking his head. 'He had lived so wretchedly and was so neglected, with his gipsy colour and his wild black hair and beard, that I should have considered him the commonest of the common. The surgeon had a notion that he had once been something better, both in appearance and condition.'

'What did they call the wretched being?'

'They called him what he had called himself, but no one knew his name.'

'Not even any one who had attended on him?'

'No one had attended on him. He was found dead. In fact, I found him.'

'Without any clue to anything more?'

'Without any; there was,' says the lawyer meditatively, 'an old portmanteau, but--No, there were no papers.'

During the utterance of every word of this short dialogue, Lady Dedlock and Mr Tulkinghorn, without any other alteration in their customary deportment, have looked very steadily at one another--as was natural, perhaps, in the discussion of so unusual a subject. Sir Leicester has looked at the fire, with the general expression of the Dedlock on the staircase. The story being told, he renews his stately protest, saying that as it is quite clear that no association in my Lady's mind can possibly be traceable to this poor wretch (unless he was a begging-letter writer), he trusts to hear no more about a subject so far removed from my Lady's station.

'Certainly, a collection of horrors,' says my Lady, gathering up her mantles and furs, 'but they interest one for the moment! Have the kindness, Mr Tulkinghorn, to open the door for me.'

Mr Tulkinghorn does so with deference and holds it open while she passes out. She passes close to him, with her usual fatigued manner and insolent grace. They meet again at dinner--again, next day--

again, for many days in succession. Lady Dedlock is always the same exhausted deity, surrounded by worshippers, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine. Mr Tulkinghorn is always the same speechless repository of noble confidences, so oddly but of place and yet so perfectly at home. They appear to take as little note of one another as any two people enclosed within the same walls could. But whether each evermore watches and suspects the other, evermore mistrustful of some great reservation; whether each is evermore prepared at all points for the other, and never to be taken unawares; what each would give to know how much the other knows--all this is hidden, for the time, in their own hearts.