

## Chapter XXVII - More Old Soldiers Than One

Mr George has not far to ride with folded arms upon the box, for their destination is Lincoln's Inn Fields. When the driver stops his horses, Mr George alights, and looking in at the window, says, 'What, Mr Tulkinghorn's your man, is he?'

'Yes, my dear friend. Do you know him, Mr George?'

'Why, I have heard of him--seen him too, I think. But I don't know him, and he don't know me.'

There ensues the carrying of Mr Smallweed upstairs, which is done to perfection with the trooper's help. He is borne into Mr Tulkinghorn's great room and deposited on the Turkey rug before the fire. Mr Tulkinghorn is not within at the present moment but will be back directly. The occupant of the pew in the hall, having said thus much, stirs the fire and leaves the triumvirate to warm themselves.

Mr George is mightily curious in respect of the room. He looks up at the painted ceiling, looks round at the old law-books, contemplates the portraits of the great clients, reads aloud the names on the boxes.

'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,' Mr George reads thoughtfully. 'Ha! Manor of Chesney Wold.' Humph!' Mr George stands looking at these boxes a long while--as if they were pictures--and comes back to the fire repeating, 'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and Manor of Chesney Wold, hey?'

'Worth a mint of money, Mr George!' whispers Grandfather Smallweed, rubbing his legs. 'Powerfully rich!'

'Who do you mean? This old gentleman, or the Baronet?'

'This gentleman, this gentleman.'

'So I have heard; and knows a thing or two, I'll hold a wager. Not bad quarters, either,' says Mr George, looking round again. 'See the strong-box yonder!'

This reply is cut short by Mr Tulkinghorn's arrival. There is no change in him, of course. Rustily drest, with his spectacles in his hand, and their very case worn threadbare. In manner, close and dry. In voice, husky and low. In face, watchful behind a blind; habitually not uncensorious and contemptuous perhaps. The peerage may have warmer worshippers and faithfuller believers than Mr Tulkinghorn, after all, if everything were known.

'Good morning, Mr Smallweed, good morning!' he says as he comes in. 'You have brought the sergeant, I see. Sit down, sergeant.'

As Mr Tulkinghorn takes off his gloves and puts them in his hat, he looks with half-closed eyes across the room to where the trooper stands and says within himself perchance, 'You'll do, my friend!'

'Sit down, sergeant,' he repeats as he comes to his table, which is set on one side of the fire, and takes his easy-chair. 'Cold and raw this morning, cold and raw!' Mr Tulkinghorn warms before the bars, alternately, the palms and knuckles of his hands and looks (from behind that blind which is always down) at the trio sitting in a little semicircle before him.

'Now, I can feel what I am about' (as perhaps he can in two senses), 'Mr Smallweed.' The old gentleman is newly shaken up by Judy to bear his part in the conversation. 'You have brought our good friend the sergeant, I see.'

'Yes, sir,' returns Mr Smallweed, very servile to the lawyer's wealth and influence.

'And what does the sergeant say about this business?'

'Mr George,' says Grandfather Smallweed with a tremulous wave of his shrivelled hand, 'this is the gentleman, sir.'

Mr George salutes the gentleman but otherwise sits bolt upright and profoundly silent--very forward in his chair, as if the full complement of regulation appendages for a field-day hung about him.

Mr Tulkinghorn proceeds, 'Well, George--I believe your name is George?'

'It is so, Sir.'

'What do you say, George?'

'I ask your pardon, sir,' returns the trooper, 'but I should wish to know what YOU say?'

'Do you mean in point of reward?'

'I mean in point of everything, sir.'

This is so very trying to Mr Smallweed's temper that he suddenly breaks out with 'You're a brimstone beast!' and as suddenly asks

pardon of Mr Tulkinghorn, excusing himself for this slip of the tongue by saying to Judy, 'I was thinking of your grandmother, my dear.'

'I supposed, sergeant,' Mr Tulkinghorn resumes as he leans on one side of his chair and crosses his legs, 'that Mr Smallweed might have sufficiently explained the matter. It lies in the smallest compass, however. You served under Captain Hawdon at one time, and were his attendant in illness, and rendered him many little services, and were rather in his confidence, I am told. That is so, is it not?'

'Yes, sir, that is so,' says Mr George with military brevity.

'Therefore you may happen to have in your possession something--anything, no matter what; accounts, instructions, orders, a letter, anything--in Captain Hawdon's writing. I wish to compare his writing with some that I have. If you can give me the opportunity, you shall be rewarded for your trouble. Three, four, five, guineas, you would consider handsome, I dare say.'

'Noble, my dear friend!' cries Grandfather Smallweed, screwing up his eyes.

'If not, say how much more, in your conscience as a soldier, you can demand. There is no need for you to part with the writing, against your inclination--though I should prefer to have it.'

Mr George sits squared in exactly the same attitude, looks at the painted ceiling, and says never a word. The irascible Mr Smallweed scratches the air.

'The question is,' says Mr Tulkinghorn in his methodical, subdued, uninterested way, 'first, whether you have any of Captain Hawdon's writing?'

'First, whether I have any of Captain Hawdon's writing, sir,' repeats Mr George.

'Secondly, what will satisfy you for the trouble of producing it?'

'Secondly, what will satisfy me for the trouble of producing it, sir,' repeats Mr George.

'Thirdly, you can judge for yourself whether it is at all like that,' says Mr Tulkinghorn, suddenly handing him some sheets of written paper tied together.

'Whether it is at all like that, sir. Just so,' repeats Mr George.

All three repetitions Mr George pronounces in a mechanical manner, looking straight at Mr Tulkinghorn; nor does he so much as glance at the affidavit in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, that has been given to him for his inspection (though he still holds it in his hand), but continues to look at the lawyer with an air of troubled meditation.

'Well?' says Mr Tulkinghorn. 'What do you say?'

'Well, sir,' replies Mr George, rising erect and looking immense, 'I would rather, if you'll excuse me, have nothing to do with this.'

Mr Tulkinghorn, outwardly quite undisturbed, demands, 'Why not?'

'Why, sir,' returns the trooper. 'Except on military compulsion, I am not a man of business. Among civilians I am what they call in Scotland a ne'er-do-weel. I have no head for papers, sir. I can stand any fire better than a fire of cross questions. I mentioned to Mr Smallweed, only an hour or so ago, that when I come into things of this kind I feel as if I was being smothered. And that is my sensation,' says Mr George, looking round upon the company, 'at the present moment.'

With that, he takes three strides forward to replace the papers on the lawyer's table and three strides backward to resume his former station, where he stands perfectly upright, now looking at the ground and now at the painted ceiling, with his hands behind him as if to prevent himself from accepting any other document whatever.

Under this provocation, Mr Smallweed's favourite adjective of disparagement is so close to his tongue that he begins the words 'my dear friend' with the monosyllable 'brim,' thus converting the possessive pronoun into brimmy and appearing to have an impediment in his speech. Once past this difficulty, however, he exhorts his dear friend in the tenderest manner not to be rash, but to do what so eminent a gentleman requires, and to do it with a good grace, confident that it must be unobjectionable as well as profitable. Mr Tulkinghorn merely utters an occasional sentence, as, 'You are the best judge of your own interest, sergeant.' 'Take care you do no harm by this.' 'Please yourself, please yourself.' 'If you know what you mean, that's quite enough.' These he utters with an appearance of perfect indifference as he looks over the papers on his table and prepares to write a letter.

Mr George looks distrustfully from the painted ceiling to the ground, from the ground to Mr Smallweed, from Mr Smallweed to Mr Tulkinghorn, and from Mr Tulkinghorn to the painted ceiling again, often in his perplexity changing the leg on which he rests.

'I do assure you, sir,' says Mr George, 'not to say it offensively, that between you and Mr Smallweed here, I really am being smothered fifty times over. I really am, sir. I am not a match for you gentlemen. Will you allow me to ask why you want to see the captain's hand, in the case that I could find any specimen of it?'

Mr Tulkinghorn quietly shakes his head. 'No. If you were a man of business, sergeant, you would not need to be informed that there are confidential reasons, very harmless in themselves, for many such wants in the profession to which I belong. But if you are afraid of doing any injury to Captain Hawdon, you may set your mind at rest about that.'

'Aye! He is dead, sir.'

'Is he?' Mr Tulkinghorn quietly sits down to write.

'Well, sir,' says the trooper, looking into his hat after another disconcerted pause, 'I am sorry not to have given you more satisfaction. If it would be any satisfaction to any one that I should be confirmed in my judgment that I would rather have nothing to do with this by a friend of mine who has a better head for business than I have, and who is an old soldier, I am willing to consult with him. I-I really am so completely smothered myself at present,' says Mr George, passing his hand hopelessly across his brow, 'that I don't know but what it might be a satisfaction to me.'

Mr Smallweed, hearing that this authority is an old soldier, so strongly inculcates the expediency of the trooper's taking counsel with him, and particularly informing him of its being a question of five guineas or more, that Mr George engages to go and see him. Mr Tulkinghorn says nothing either way.

'I'll consult my friend, then, by your leave, sir,' says the trooper, 'and I'll take the liberty of looking in again with the final answer in the course of the day. Mr Smallweed, if you wish to be carried downstairs--'

'In a moment, my dear friend, in a moment. Will you first let me speak half a word with this gentleman in private?'

'Certainly, sir. Don't hurry yourself on my account.' The trooper retires to a distant part of the room and resumes his curious inspection of the boxes, strong and otherwise.

'If I wasn't as weak as a brimstone baby, sir,' whispers Grandfather Smallweed, drawing the lawyer down to his level by the lapel of his coat and flashing some half-quenched green fire out of his angry eyes,

'I'd tear the writing away from him. He's got it buttoned in his breast. I saw him put it there. Judy saw him put it there. Speak up, you crabbed image for the sign of a walking-stick shop, and say you saw him put it there!'

This vehement conjuration the old gentleman accompanies with such a thrust at his granddaughter that it is too much for his strength, and he slips away out of his chair, drawing Mr Tulkinghorn with him, until he is arrested by Judy, and well shaken.

'Violence will not do for me, my friend,' Mr Tulkinghorn then remarks coolly.

'No, no, I know, I know, sir. But it's chafing and galling--it's-- it's worse than your smattering chattering magpie of a grandmother,' to the imperturbable Judy, who only looks at the fire, 'to know he has got what's wanted and won't give it up. He, not to give it up! HE! A vagabond! But never mind, sir, never mind. At the most, he has only his own way for a little while. I have him periodically in a vice. I'll twist him, sir. I'll screw him, sir. If he won't do it with a good grace, I'll make him do it with a bad one, sir! Now, my dear Mr George,' says Grandfather Smallweed, winking at the lawyer hideously as he releases him, 'I am ready for your kind assistance, my excellent friend!'

Mr Tulkinghorn, with some shadowy sign of amusement manifesting itself through his self-possession, stands on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, watching the disappearance of Mr Smallweed and acknowledging the trooper's parting salute with one slight nod.

It is more difficult to get rid of the old gentleman, Mr George finds, than to bear a hand in carrying him downstairs, for when he is replaced in his conveyance, he is so loquacious on the subject of the guineas and retains such an affectionate hold of his button --having, in truth, a secret longing to rip his coat open and rob him--that some degree of force is necessary on the trooper's part to effect a separation. It is accomplished at last, and he proceeds alone in quest of his adviser.

By the cloisterly Temple, and by Whitefriars (there, not without a glance at Hanging-Sword Alley, which would seem to be something in his way), and by Blackfriars Bridge, and Blackfriars Road, Mr George sedately marches to a street of little shops lying somewhere in that ganglion of roads from Kent and Surrey, and of streets from the bridges of London, centring in the far-famed elephant who has lost his castle formed of a thousand four-horse coaches to a stronger iron monster than he, ready to chop him into mince-meat any day he dares. To one of the little shops in this street, which is a musician's

shop, having a few fiddles in the window, and some Pan's pipes and a tambourine, and a triangle, and certain elongated scraps of music, Mr George directs his massive tread. And halting at a few paces from it, as he sees a soldierly looking woman, with her outer skirts tucked up, come forth with a small wooden tub, and in that tub commence a-whisking and a-splashing on the margin of the pavement, Mr George says to himself, 'She's as usual, washing greens. I never saw her, except upon a baggage-waggon, when she wasn't washing greens!'

The subject of this reflection is at all events so occupied in washing greens at present that she remains unsuspecting of Mr George's approach until, lifting up herself and her tub together when she has poured the water off into the gutter, she finds him standing near her. Her reception of him is not flattering.

'George, I never see you but I wish you was a hundred mile away!'

The trooper, without remarking on this welcome, follows into the musical-instrument shop, where the lady places her tub of greens upon the counter, and having shaken hands with him, rests her arms upon it.

'I never,' she says, 'George, consider Matthew Bagnet safe a minute when you're near him. You are that restless and that roving--'

'Yes! I know I am, Mrs Bagnet. I know I am.'

'You know you are!' says Mrs Bagnet. 'What's the use of that? WHY are you?'

'The nature of the animal, I suppose,' returns the trooper good-humouredly.

'Ah!' cries Mrs Bagnet, something shrilly. 'But what satisfaction will the nature of the animal be to me when the animal shall have tempted my Mat away from the musical business to New Zealand or Australey?'

Mrs Bagnet is not at all an ill-looking woman. Rather large-boned, a little coarse in the grain, and freckled by the sun and wind which have tanned her hair upon the forehead, but healthy, wholesome, and bright-eyed. A strong, busy, active, honest-faced woman of from forty-five to fifty. Clean, hardy, and so economically dressed (though substantially) that the only article of ornament of which she stands possessed appears to be her wedding-ring, around which her finger has grown to be so large since it was put on that it will never come off again until it shall mingle with Mrs Bagnet's dust.

'Mrs Bagnet,' says the trooper, 'I am on my parole with you. Mat will get no harm from me. You may trust me so far.'

'Well, I think I may. But the very looks of you are unsettling,' Mrs Bagnet rejoins. 'Ah, George, George! If you had only settled down and married Joe Pouch's widow when he died in North America, SHE'D have combed your hair for you.'

'It was a chance for me, certainly,' returns the trooper half laughingly, half seriously, 'but I shall never settle down into a respectable man now. Joe Pouch's widow might have done me good-- there was something in her, and something of her--but I couldn't make up my mind to it. If I had had the luck to meet with such a wife as Mat found!'

Mrs Bagnet, who seems in a virtuous way to be under little reserve with a good sort of fellow, but to be another good sort of fellow herself for that matter, receives this compliment by flicking Mr George in the face with a head of greens and taking her tub into the little room behind the shop.

'Why, Quebec, my poppet,' says George, following, on invitation, into that department. 'And little Malta, too! Come and kiss your Bluffy!'

These young ladies--not supposed to have been actually christened by the names applied to them, though always so called in the family from the places of their birth in barracks--are respectively employed on three-legged stools, the younger (some five or six years old) in learning her letters out of a penny primer, the elder (eight or nine perhaps) in teaching her and sewing with great assiduity. Both hail Mr George with acclamations as an old friend and after some kissing and romping plant their stools beside him.

'And how's young Woolwich?' says Mr George.

'Ah! There now!' cries Mrs Bagnet, turning about from her saucepans (for she is cooking dinner) with a bright flush on her face. 'Would you believe it? Got an engagement at the theayter, with his father, to play the fife in a military piece.'

'Well done, my godson!' cries Mr George, slapping his thigh.

'I believe you!' says Mrs Bagnet. 'He's a Briton. That's what Woolwich is. A Briton!'

'And Mat blows away at his bassoon, and you're respectable civilians one and all,' says Mr George. 'Family people. Children growing up. Mat's old mother in Scotland, and your old father somewhere else,



corresponded with, and helped a little, and--well, well! To be sure, I don't know why I shouldn't be wished a hundred mile away, for I have not much to do with all this!

Mr George is becoming thoughtful, sitting before the fire in the whitewashed room, which has a sanded floor and a barrack smell and contains nothing superfluous and has not a visible speck of dirt or dust in it, from the faces of Quebec and Malta to the bright tin pots and pannikins upon the dresser shelves--Mr George is becoming thoughtful, sitting here while Mrs Bagnet is busy, when Mr Bagnet and young Woolwich opportunely come home. Mr Bagnet is an ex-artilleryman, tall and upright, with shaggy eyebrows and whiskers like the fibres of a coco-nut, not a hair upon his head, and a torrid complexion. His voice, short, deep, and resonant, is not at all unlike the tones of the instrument to which he is devoted. Indeed there may be generally observed in him an unbending, unyielding, brass-bound air, as if he were himself the bassoon of the human orchestra. Young Woolwich is the type and model of a young drummer.

Both father and son salute the trooper heartily. He saying, in due season, that he has come to advise with Mr Bagnet, Mr Bagnet hospitably declares that he will hear of no business until after dinner and that his friend shall not partake of his counsel without first partaking of boiled pork and greens. The trooper yielding to this invitation, he and Mr Bagnet, not to embarrass the domestic preparations, go forth to take a turn up and down the little street, which they promenade with measured tread and folded arms, as if it were a rampart.

'George,' says Mr Bagnet. 'You know me. It's my old girl that advises. She has the head. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained. Wait till the greens is off her mind. Then we'll consult. Whatever the old girl says, do--do it!'

'I intend to, Mat,' replies the other. 'I would sooner take her opinion than that of a college.'

'College,' returns Mr Bagnet in short sentences, bassoon-like. 'What college could you leave--in another quarter of the world-- with nothing but a grey cloak and an umbrella--to make its way home to Europe? The old girl would do it to-morrow. Did it once!'

'You are right,' says Mr George.

'What college,' pursues Bagnet, 'could you set up in life--with two penn'orth of white lime--a penn'orth of fuller's earth--a ha'porth of sand--and the rest of the change out of sixpence in money? That's what the old girl started on. In the present business.'

'I am rejoiced to hear it's thriving, Mat.'

'The old girl,' says Mr Bagnet, acquiescing, 'saves. Has a stocking somewhere. With money in it. I never saw it. But I know she's got it. Wait till the greens is off her mind. Then she'll set you up.'

'She is a treasure!' exclaims Mr George.

'She's more. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained. It was the old girl that brought out my musical abilities. I should have been in the artillery now but for the old girl. Six years I hammered at the fiddle. Ten at the flute. The old girl said it wouldn't do; intention good, but want of flexibility; try the bassoon. The old girl borrowed a bassoon from the bandmaster of the Rifle Regiment. I practised in the trenches. Got on, got another, get a living by it!'

George remarks that she looks as fresh as a rose and as sound as an apple.

'The old girl,' says Mr Bagnet in reply, 'is a thoroughly fine woman. Consequently she is like a thoroughly fine day. Gets finer as she gets on. I never saw the old girl's equal. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained!'

Proceeding to converse on indifferent matters, they walk up and down the little street, keeping step and time, until summoned by Quebec and Malta to do justice to the pork and greens, over which Mrs Bagnet, like a military chaplain, says a short grace. In the distribution of these comestibles, as in every other household duty, Mrs Bagnet developes an exact system, sitting with every dish before her, allotting to every portion of pork its own portion of pot-liquor, greens, potatoes, and even mustard, and serving it out complete. Having likewise served out the beer from a can and thus supplied the mess with all things necessary, Mrs Bagnet proceeds to satisfy her own hunger, which is in a healthy state. The kit of the mess, if the table furniture may be so denominated, is chiefly composed of utensils of horn and tin that have done duty in several parts of the world. Young Woolwich's knife, in particular, which is of the oyster kind, with the additional feature of a strong shutting-up movement which frequently balks the appetite of that young musician, is mentioned as having gone in various hands the complete round of foreign service.

The dinner done, Mrs Bagnet, assisted by the younger branches (who polish their own cups and platters, knives and forks), makes all the dinner garniture shine as brightly as before and puts it all away, first sweeping the hearth, to the end that Mr Bagnet and the visitor may not be retarded in the smoking of their pipes. These household cares involve much pattering and counter-pattering in the backyard and

considerable use of a pail, which is finally so happy as to assist in the ablutions of Mrs Bagnet herself. That old girl reappearing by and by, quite fresh, and sitting down to her needlework, then and only then--the greens being only then to be considered as entirely off her mind--Mr Bagnet requests the trooper to state his case.

This Mr George does with great discretion, appearing to address himself to Mr Bagnet, but having an eye solely on the old girl all the time, as Bagnet has himself. She, equally discreet, busies herself with her needlework. The case fully stated, Mr Bagnet resorts to his standard artifice for the maintenance of discipline.

'That's the whole of it, is it, George?' says he.

'That's the whole of it.'

'You act according to my opinion?'

'I shall be guided,' replies George, 'entirely by it.'

'Old girl,' says Mr Bagnet, 'give him my opinion. You know it. Tell him what it is.'

It is that he cannot have too little to do with people who are too deep for him and cannot be too careful of interference with matters he does not understand--that the plain rule is to do nothing in the dark, to be a party to nothing underhanded or mysterious, and never to put his foot where he cannot see the ground. This, in effect, is Mr Bagnet's opinion, as delivered through the old girl, and it so relieves Mr George's mind by confirming his own opinion and banishing his doubts that he composes himself to smoke another pipe on that exceptional occasion and to have a talk over old times with the whole Bagnet family, according to their various ranges of experience.

Through these means it comes to pass that Mr George does not again rise to his full height in that parlour until the time is drawing on when the bassoon and fife are expected by a British public at the theatre; and as it takes time even then for Mr George, in his domestic character of Bluffy, to take leave of Quebec and Malta and insinuate a sponsorial shilling into the pocket of his godson with felicitations on his success in life, it is dark when Mr George again turns his face towards Lincoln's Inn Fields.

'A family home,' he ruminates as he marches along, 'however small it is, makes a man like me look lonely. But it's well I never made that evolution of matrimony. I shouldn't have been fit for it. I am such a vagabond still, even at my present time of life, that I couldn't hold to the gallery a month together if it was a regular pursuit or if I didn't

camp there, gipsy fashion. Come! I disgrace nobody and cumber nobody; that's something. I have not done that for many a long year!

So he whistles it off and marches on.

Arrived in Lincoln's Inn Fields and mounting Mr Tulkinghorn's stair, he finds the outer door closed and the chambers shut, but the trooper not knowing much about outer doors, and the staircase being dark besides, he is yet fumbling and groping about, hoping to discover a bell-handle or to open the door for himself, when Mr Tulkinghorn comes up the stairs (quietly, of course) and angrily asks, 'Who is that? What are you doing there?'

'I ask your pardon, sir. It's George. The sergeant.'

'And couldn't George, the sergeant, see that my door was locked?'

'Why, no, sir, I couldn't. At any rate, I didn't,' says the trooper, rather nettled.

'Have you changed your mind? Or are you in the same mind?' Mr Tulkinghorn demands. But he knows well enough at a glance.

'In the same mind, sir.'

'I thought so. That's sufficient. You can go. So you are the man,' says Mr Tulkinghorn, opening his door with the key, 'in whose hiding-place Mr Gridley was found?'

'Yes, I AM the man,' says the trooper, stopping two or three stairs down. 'What then, sir?'

'What then? I don't like your associates. You should not have seen the inside of my door this morning if I had thought of your being that man. Gridley? A threatening, murderous, dangerous fellow.'

With these words, spoken in an unusually high tone for him, the lawyer goes into his rooms and shuts the door with a thundering noise.

Mr George takes his dismissal in great dudgeon, the greater because a clerk coming up the stairs has heard the last words of all and evidently applies them to him. 'A pretty character to bear,' the trooper growls with a hasty oath as he strides downstairs. 'A threatening, murderous, dangerous fellow!' And looking up, he sees the clerk looking down at him and marking him as he passes a lamp. This so intensifies his dudgeon that for five minutes he is in an ill humour.

But he whistles that off like the rest of it and marches home to the shooting gallery.