

## **CHAPTER XLIX - Dutiful Friendship**

A great annual occasion has come round in the establishment of Mr Matthew Bagnet, otherwise Lignum Vitae, ex-artilleryman and present bassoon-player. An occasion of feasting and festival. The celebration of a birthday in the family.

It is not Mr Bagnet's birthday. Mr Bagnet merely distinguishes that epoch in the musical instrument business by kissing the children with an extra smack before breakfast, smoking an additional pipe after dinner, and wondering towards evening what his poor old mother is thinking about it--a subject of infinite speculation, and rendered so by his mother having departed this life twenty years. Some men rarely revert to their father, but seem, in the bank-books of their remembrance, to have transferred all the stock of filial affection into their mother's name. Mr Bagnet is one of like his trade the better for that. If I had kept clear of his old girl causes him usually to make the noun- substantive 'goodness' of the feminine gender.

It is not the birthday of one of the three children. Those occasions are kept with some marks of distinction, but they rarely overleap the bounds of happy returns and a pudding. On young Woolwich's last birthday, Mr Bagnet certainly did, after observing on his growth and general advancement, proceed, in a moment of profound reflection on the changes wrought by time, to examine him in the catechism, accomplishing with extreme accuracy the questions number one and two, 'What is your name?' and 'Who gave you that name?' but there failing in the exact precision of his memory and substituting for number three the question 'And how do you like that name?' which he propounded with a sense of its importance, in itself so edifying and improving as to give it quite an orthodox air. This, however, was a speciality on that particular birthday, and not a general solemnity.

It is the old girl's birthday, and that is the greatest holiday and reddest-letter day in Mr Bagnet's calendar. The auspicious event is always commemorated according to certain forms settled and prescribed by Mr Bagnet some years since. Mr Bagnet, being deeply convinced that to have a pair of fowls for dinner is to attain the highest pitch of imperial luxury, invariably goes forth himself very early in the morning of this day to buy a pair; he is, as invariably, taken in by the vendor and installed in the possession of the oldest inhabitants of any coop in Europe. Returning with these triumphs of toughness tied up in a clean blue and white cotton handkerchief (essential to the arrangements), he in a casual manner invites Mrs Bagnet to declare at breakfast what she would like for dinner. Mrs Bagnet, by a coincidence never known to fail, replying fowls, Mr Bagnet instantly produces his bundle from a place of concealment amidst general amazement and rejoicing. He further requires that the

old girl shall do nothing all day long but sit in her very best gown and be served by himself and the young people. As he is not illustrious for his cookery, this may be supposed to be a matter of state rather than enjoyment on the old girl's part, but she keeps her state with all imaginable cheerfulness.

On this present birthday, Mr Bagnet has accomplished the usual preliminaries. He has bought two specimens of poultry, which, if there be any truth in adages, were certainly not caught with chaff, to be prepared for the spit; he has amazed and rejoiced the family by their unlooked-for production; he is himself directing the roasting of the poultry; and Mrs Bagnet, with her wholesome brown fingers itching to prevent what she sees going wrong, sits in her gown of ceremony, an honoured guest.

Quebec and Malta lay the cloth for dinner, while Woolwich, serving, as beseems him, under his father, keeps the fowls revolving. To these young scullions Mrs Bagnet occasionally imparts a wink, or a shake of the head, or a crooked face, as they made mistakes.

'At half after one.' Says Mr Bagnet. 'To the minute. They'll be done.'

Mrs Bagnet, with anguish, beholds one of them at a standstill before the fire and beginning to burn.

'You shall have a dinner, old girl,' says Mr Bagnet. 'Fit for a queen.'

Mrs Bagnet shows her white teeth cheerfully, but to the perception of her son, betrays so much uneasiness of spirit that he is impelled by the dictates of affection to ask her, with his eyes, what is the matter, thus standing, with his eyes wide open, more oblivious of the fowls than before, and not affording the least hope of a return to consciousness. Fortunately his elder sister perceives the cause of the agitation in Mrs Bagnet's breast and with an admonitory poke recalls him. The stopped fowls going round again, Mrs Bagnet closes her eyes in the intensity of her relief.

'George will look us up,' says Mr Bagnet. 'At half after four. To the moment. How many years, old girl. Has George looked us up. This afternoon?'

'Ah, Lignum, Lignum, as many as make an old woman of a young one, I begin to think. Just about that, and no less,' returns Mrs Bagnet, laughing and shaking her head.

'Old girl,' says Mr Bagnet, 'never mind. You'd be as young as ever you was. If you wasn't younger. Which you are. As everybody knows.'

Quebec and Malta here exclaim, with clapping of hands, that Bluffy is sure to bring mother something, and begin to speculate on what it will be.

'Do you know, Lignum,' says Mrs Bagnet, casting a glance on the table-cloth, and winking 'salt!' at Malta with her right eye, and shaking the pepper away from Quebec with her head, 'I begin to think George is in the roving way again.'

'George,' returns Mr Bagnet, 'will never desert. And leave his old comrade. In the lurch. Don't be afraid of it.'

'No, Lignum. No. I don't say he will. I don't think he will. But if he could get over this money trouble of his, I believe he would be off.'

Mr Bagnet asks why.

'Well,' returns his wife, considering, 'George seems to me to be getting not a little impatient and restless. I don't say but what he's as free as ever. Of course he must be free or he wouldn't be George, but he smarts and seems put out.'

'He's extra-drilled,' says Mr Bagnet. 'By a lawyer. Who would put the devil out.'

'There's something in that,' his wife assents; 'but so it is, Lignum.'

Further conversation is prevented, for the time, by the necessity under which Mr Bagnet finds himself of directing the whole force of his mind to the dinner, which is a little endangered by the dry humour of the fowls in not yielding any gravy, and also by the made gravy acquiring no flavour and turning out of a flaxen complexion. With a similar perverseness, the potatoes crumble off forks in the process of peeling, upheaving from their centres in every direction, as if they were subject to earthquakes. The legs of the fowls, too, are longer than could be desired, and extremely scaly. Overcoming these disadvantages to the best of his ability, Mr Bagnet at last dishes and they sit down at table, Mrs Bagnet occupying the guest's place at his right hand.

It is well for the old girl that she has but one birthday in a year, for two such indulgences in poultry might be injurious. Every kind of finer tendon and ligament that is in the nature of poultry to possess is developed in these specimens in the singular form of guitar-strings. Their limbs appear to have struck roots into their breasts and bodies, as aged trees strike roots into the earth. Their legs are so hard as to encourage the idea that they must have devoted the greater part of their long and arduous lives to pedestrian exercises and the walking of matches. But Mr Bagnet, unconscious of these little defects, sets his

heart on Mrs Bagnet eating a most severe quantity of the delicacies before her; and as that good old girl would not cause him a moment's disappointment on any day, least of all on such a day, for any consideration, she imperils her digestion fearfully. How young Woolwich cleans the drum-sticks without being of ostrich descent, his anxious mother is at a loss to understand.

The old girl has another trial to undergo after the conclusion of the repast in sitting in state to see the room cleared, the hearth swept, and the dinner-service washed up and polished in the backyard. The great delight and energy with which the two young ladies apply themselves to these duties, turning up their skirts in imitation of their mother and skating in and out on little scaffolds of pattens, inspire the highest hopes for the future, but some anxiety for the present. The same causes lead to confusion of tongues, a clattering of crockery, a rattling of tin mugs, a whisking of brooms, and an expenditure of water, all in excess, while the saturation of the young ladies themselves is almost too moving a spectacle for Mrs Bagnet to look upon with the calmness proper to her position. At last the various cleansing processes are triumphantly completed; Quebec and Malta appear in fresh attire, smiling and dry; pipes, tobacco, and something to drink are placed upon the table; and the old girl enjoys the first peace of mind she ever knows on the day of this delightful entertainment.

When Mr Bagnet takes his usual seat, the hands of the clock are very near to half-past four; as they mark it accurately, Mr Bagnet announces, 'George! Military time.'

It is George, and he has hearty congratulations for the old girl (whom he kisses on the great occasion), and for the children, and for Mr Bagnet. 'Happy returns to all!' says Mr George.

'But, George, old man!' cries Mrs Bagnet, looking at him curiously. 'What's come to you?'

'Come to me?'

'Ah! You are so white, George--for you--and look so shocked. Now don't he, Lignum?'

'George,' says Mr Bagnet, 'tell the old girl. What's the matter.'

'I didn't know I looked white,' says the trooper, passing his hand over his brow, 'and I didn't know I looked shocked, and I'm sorry I do. But the truth is, that boy who was taken in at my place died yesterday afternoon, and it has rather knocked me over.'

'Poor creetur!' says Mrs Bagnet with a mother's pity. 'Is he gone? Dear, dear!'

'I didn't mean to say anything about it, for it's not birthday talk, but you have got it out of me, you see, before I sit down. I should have roused up in a minute,' says the trooper, making himself speak more gaily, 'but you're so quick, Mrs Bagnet.'

'You're right. The old girl,' says Mr Bagnet. 'Is as quick. As powder.'

'And what's more, she's the subject of the day, and we'll stick to her,' cries Mr George. 'See here, I have brought a little brooch along with me. It's a poor thing, you know, but it's a keepsake. That's all the good it is, Mrs Bagnet.'

Mr George produces his present, which is greeted with admiring leapings and clappings by the young family, and with a species of reverential admiration by Mr Bagnet. 'Old girl,' says Mr Bagnet. 'Tell him my opinion of it.'

'Why, it's a wonder, George!' Mrs Bagnet exclaims. 'It's the beautifullest thing that ever was seen!'

'Good!' says Mr Bagnet. 'My opinion.'

'It's so pretty, George,' cries Mrs Bagnet, turning it on all sides and holding it out at arm's length, 'that it seems too choice for me.'

'Bad!' says Mr Bagnet. 'Not my opinion.'

'But whatever it is, a hundred thousand thanks, old fellow,' says Mrs Bagnet, her eyes sparkling with pleasure and her hand stretched out to him; 'and though I have been a crossgrained soldier's wife to you sometimes, George, we are as strong friends, I am sure, in reality, as ever can be. Now you shall fasten it on yourself, for good luck, if you will, George.'

The children close up to see it done, and Mr Bagnet looks over young Woolwich's head to see it done with an interest so maturely wooden, yet pleasantly childish, that Mrs Bagnet cannot help laughing in her airy way and saying, 'Oh, Lignum, Lignum, what a precious old chap you are!' But the trooper fails to fasten the brooch. His hand shakes, he is nervous, and it falls off. 'Would any one believe this?' says he, catching it as it drops and looking round. 'I am so out of sorts that I bungle at an easy job like this!'

Mrs Bagnet concludes that for such a case there is no remedy like a pipe, and fastening the brooch herself in a twinkling, causes the

trooper to be inducted into his usual snug place and the pipes to be got into action. 'If that don't bring you round, George,' says she, 'just throw your eye across here at your present now and then, and the two together MUST do it.'

'You ought to do it of yourself,' George answers; 'I know that very well, Mrs Bagnet. I'll tell you how, one way and another, the blues have got to be too many for me. Here was this poor lad. 'Twas dull work to see him dying as he did, and not be able to help him.'

'What do you mean, George? You did help him. You took him under your roof.'

'I helped him so far, but that's little. I mean, Mrs Bagnet, there he was, dying without ever having been taught much more than to know his right hand from his left. And he was too far gone to be helped out of that.'

'Ah, poor creetur!' says Mrs Bagnet.

'Then,' says the trooper, not yet lighting his pipe, and passing his heavy hand over his hair, 'that brought up Gridley in a man's mind. His was a bad case too, in a different way. Then the two got mixed up in a man's mind with a flinty old rascal who had to do with both. And to think of that rusty carbine, stock and barrel, standing up on end in his corner, hard, indifferent, taking everything so evenly--it made flesh and blood tingle, I do assure you.'

'My advice to you,' returns Mrs Bagnet, 'is to light your pipe and tingle that way. It's wholesomer and comfortabler, and better for the health altogether.'

'You're right,' says the trooper, 'and I'll do it.'

So he does it, though still with an indignant gravity that impresses the young Bagnets, and even causes Mr Bagnet to defer the ceremony of drinking Mrs Bagnet's health, always given by himself on these occasions in a speech of exemplary terseness. But the young ladies having composed what Mr Bagnet is in the habit of calling 'the mixtur,' and George's pipe being now in a glow, Mr Bagnet considers it his duty to proceed to the toast of the evening. He addresses the assembled company in the following terms.

'George. Woolwich. Quebec. Malta. This is her birthday. Take a day's march. And you won't find such another. Here's towards her!'

The toast having been drunk with enthusiasm, Mrs Bagnet returns thanks in a neat address of corresponding brevity. This model

composition is limited to the three words 'And wishing yours!' which the old girl follows up with a nod at everybody in succession and a well-regulated swig of the mixture. This she again follows up, on the present occasion, by the wholly unexpected exclamation, 'Here's a man!'

Here IS a man, much to the astonishment of the little company, looking in at the parlour-door. He is a sharp-eyed man--a quick keen man--and he takes in everybody's look at him, all at once, individually and collectively, in a manner that stamps him a remarkable man.

'George,' says the man, nodding, 'how do you find yourself?'

'Why, it's Bucket!' cries Mr George.

'Yes,' says the man, coming in and closing the door. 'I was going down the street here when I happened to stop and look in at the musical instruments in the shop-window--a friend of mine is in want of a second-hand violinceller of a good tone--and I saw a party enjoying themselves, and I thought it was you in the corner; I thought I couldn't be mistaken. How goes the world with you, George, at the present moment? Pretty smooth? And with you, ma'am? And with you, governor? And Lord,' says Mr Bucket, opening his arms, 'here's children too! You may do anything with me if you only show me children. Give us a kiss, my pets. No occasion to inquire who YOUR father and mother is. Never saw such a likeness in my life!'

Mr Bucket, not unwelcome, has sat himself down next to Mr George and taken Quebec and Malta on his knees. 'You pretty dears,' says Mr Bucket, 'give us another kiss; it's the only thing I'm greedy in. Lord bless you, how healthy you look! And what may be the ages of these two, ma'am? I should put 'em down at the figures of about eight and ten.'

'You're very near, sir,' says Mrs Bagnet.

'I generally am near,' returns Mr Bucket, 'being so fond of children. A friend of mine has had nineteen of 'em, ma'am, all by one mother, and she's still as fresh and rosy as the morning. Not so much so as yourself, but, upon my soul, she comes near you! And what do you call these, my darling?' pursues Mr Bucket, pinching Malta's cheeks. 'These are peaches, these are. Bless your heart! And what do you think about father? Do you think father could recommend a second-hand violinceller of a good tone for Mr Bucket's friend, my dear? My name's Bucket. Ain't that a funny name?'

These blandishments have entirely won the family heart. Mrs Bagnet forgets the day to the extent of filling a pipe and a glass for Mr Bucket

and waiting upon him hospitably. She would be glad to receive so pleasant a character under any circumstances, but she tells him that as a friend of George's she is particularly glad to see him this evening, for George has not been in his usual spirits.

'Not in his usual spirits?' exclaims Mr Bucket. 'Why, I never heard of such a thing! What's the matter, George? You don't intend to tell me you've been out of spirits. What should you be out of spirits for? You haven't got anything on your mind, you know.'

'Nothing particular,' returns the trooper.

'I should think not,' rejoins Mr Bucket. 'What could you have on your mind, you know! And have these pets got anything on THEIR minds, eh? Not they, but they'll be upon the minds of some of the young fellows, some of these days, and make 'em precious low-spirited. I ain't much of a prophet, but I can tell you that, ma'am.'

Mrs Bagnet, quite charmed, hopes Mr Bucket has a family of his own.

'There, ma'am!' says Mr Bucket. 'Would you believe it? No, I haven't. My wife and a lodger constitute my family. Mrs Bucket is as fond of children as myself and as wishful to have 'em, but no. So it is. Worldly goods are divided unequally, and man must not repine. What a very nice backyard, ma'am! Any way out of that yard, now?'

There is no way out of that yard.

'Ain't there really?' says Mr Bucket. 'I should have thought there might have been. Well, I don't know as I ever saw a backyard that took my fancy more. Would you allow me to look at it? Thank you. No, I see there's no way out. But what a very good-proportioned yard it is!'

Having cast his sharp eye all about it, Mr Bucket returns to his chair next his friend Mr George and pats Mr George affectionately on the shoulder.

'How are your spirits now, George?'

'All right now,' returns the trooper.

'That's your sort!' says Mr Bucket. 'Why should you ever have been otherwise? A man of your fine figure and constitution has no right to be out of spirits. That ain't a chest to be out of spirits, is it, ma'am? And you haven't got anything on your mind, you know, George; what could you have on your mind!'



Somewhat harping on this phrase, considering the extent and variety of his conversational powers, Mr Bucket twice or thrice repeats it to the pipe he lights, and with a listening face that is particularly his own. But the sun of his sociality soon recovers from this brief eclipse and shines again.

'And this is brother, is it, my dears?' says Mr Bucket, referring to Quebec and Malta for information on the subject of young Woolwich. 'And a nice brother he is--half-brother I mean to say. For he's too old to be your boy, ma'am.'

'I can certify at all events that he is not anybody else's,' returns Mrs Bagnet, laughing.

'Well, you do surprise me! Yet he's like you, there's no denying. Lord, he's wonderfully like you! But about what you may call the brow, you know, THERE his father comes out!' Mr Bucket compares the faces with one eye shut up, while Mr Bagnet smokes in stolid satisfaction.

This is an opportunity for Mrs Bagnet to inform him that the boy is George's godson.

'George's godson, is he?' rejoins Mr Bucket with extreme cordiality. 'I must shake hands over again with George's godson. Godfather and godson do credit to one another. And what do you intend to make of him, ma'am? Does he show any turn for any musical instrument?'

Mr Bagnet suddenly interposes, 'Plays the fife. Beautiful.'

'Would you believe it, governor,' says Mr Bucket, struck by the coincidence, 'that when I was a boy I played the fife myself? Not in a scientific way, as I expect he does, but by ear. Lord bless you! 'British Grenadiers'--there's a tune to warm an Englishman up! COULD you give us 'British Grenadiers,' my fine fellow?'

Nothing could be more acceptable to the little circle than this call upon young Woolwich, who immediately fetches his fife and performs the stirring melody, during which performance Mr Bucket, much enlivened, beats time and never falls to come in sharp with the burden, 'British Gra-a-anadeers!' In short, he shows so much musical taste that Mr Bagnet actually takes his pipe from his lips to express his conviction that he is a singer. Mr Bucket receives the harmonious impeachment so modestly, confessing how that he did once chaunt a little, for the expression of the feelings of his own bosom, and with no presumptuous idea of entertaining his friends, that he is asked to sing. Not to be behindhand in the sociality of the evening, he complies and gives them 'Believe Me, if All Those Endearing Young Charms.' This ballad, he informs Mrs Bagnet, he considers to have been his

most powerful ally in moving the heart of Mrs Bucket when a maiden, and inducing her to approach the altar--Mr Bucket's own words are 'to come up to the scratch.'

This sparkling stranger is such a new and agreeable feature in the evening that Mr George, who testified no great emotions of pleasure on his entrance, begins, in spite of himself, to be rather proud of him. He is so friendly, is a man of so many resources, and so easy to get on with, that it is something to have made him known there. Mr Bagnet becomes, after another pipe, so sensible of the value of his acquaintance that he solicits the honour of his company on the old girl's next birthday. If anything can more closely cement and consolidate the esteem which Mr Bucket has formed for the family, it is the discovery of the nature of the occasion. He drinks to Mrs Bagnet with a warmth approaching to rapture, engages himself for that day twelvemonth more than thankfully, makes a memorandum of the day in a large black pocket-book with a girdle to it, and breathes a hope that Mrs Bucket and Mrs Bagnet may before then become, in a manner, sisters. As he says himself, what is public life without private ties? He is in his humble way a public man, but it is not in that sphere that he finds happiness. No, it must be sought within the confines of domestic bliss.

It is natural, under these circumstances, that he, in his turn, should remember the friend to whom he is indebted for so promising an acquaintance. And he does. He keeps very close to him. Whatever the subject of the conversation, he keeps a tender eye upon him. He waits to walk home with him. He is interested in his very boots and observes even them attentively as Mr George sits smoking cross-legged in the chimney-corner.

At length Mr George rises to depart. At the same moment Mr Bucket, with the secret sympathy of friendship, also rises. He dotes upon the children to the last and remembers the commission he has undertaken for an absent friend.

'Respecting that second-hand violinceller, governor--could you recommend me such a thing?'

'Scores,' says Mr Bagnet.

'I am obliged to you,' returns Mr Bucket, squeezing his hand. 'You're a friend in need. A good tone, mind you! My friend is a regular dab at it. Ecod, he saws away at Mozart and Handel and the rest of the big-wigs like a thorough workman. And you needn't,' says Mr Bucket in a considerate and private voice, 'you needn't commit yourself to too low a figure, governor. I don't want to pay too large a price for my friend, but I want you to have your proper percentage and be remunerated for

your loss of time. That is but fair. Every man must live, and ought to it.'

Mr Bagnet shakes his head at the old girl to the effect that they have found a jewel of price.

'Suppose I was to give you a look in, say, at half arter ten to-morrow morning. Perhaps you could name the figures of a few violincellers of a good tone?' says Mr Bucket.

Nothing easier. Mr and Mrs Bagnet both engage to have the requisite information ready and even hint to each other at the practicability of having a small stock collected there for approval.

'Thank you,' says Mr Bucket, 'thank you. Good night, ma'am. Good night, governor. Good night, darlings. I am much obliged to you for one of the pleasantest evenings I ever spent in my life.'

They, on the contrary, are much obliged to him for the pleasure he has given them in his company; and so they part with many expressions of goodwill on both sides. 'Now George, old boy,' says Mr Bucket, taking his arm at the shop-door, 'come along!' As they go down the little street and the Bagnets pause for a minute looking after them, Mrs Bagnet remarks to the worthy Lignum that Mr Bucket 'almost clings to George like, and seems to be really fond of him.'

The neighbouring streets being narrow and ill-paved, it is a little inconvenient to walk there two abreast and arm in arm. Mr George therefore soon proposes to walk singly. But Mr Bucket, who cannot make up his mind to relinquish his friendly hold, replies, 'Wait half a minute, George. I should wish to speak to you first.' Immediately afterwards, he twists him into a public-house and into a parlour, where he confronts him and claps his own back against the door.

'Now, George,' says Mr Bucket, 'duty is duty, and friendship is friendship. I never want the two to clash if I can help it. I have endeavoured to make things pleasant to-night, and I put it to you whether I have done it or not. You must consider yourself in custody, George.'

'Custody? What for?' returns the trooper, thunderstruck.

'Now, George,' says Mr Bucket, urging a sensible view of the case upon him with his fat forefinger, 'duty, as you know very well, is one thing, and conversation is another. It's my duty to inform you that any observations you may make will be liable to be used against you. Therefore, George, be careful what you say. You don't happen to have heard of a murder?'

'Murder!'

'Now, George,' says Mr Bucket, keeping his forefinger in an impressive state of action, 'bear in mind what I've said to you. I ask you nothing. You've been in low spirits this afternoon. I say, you don't happen to have heard of a murder?'

'No. Where has there been a murder?'

'Now, George,' says Mr Bucket, 'don't you go and commit yourself. I'm a-going to tell you what I want you for. There has been a murder in Lincoln's Inn Fields--gentleman of the name of Tulkinghorn. He was shot last night. I want you for that.'

The trooper sinks upon a seat behind him, and great drops start out upon his forehead, and a deadly pallor overspreads his face.

'Bucket! It's not possible that Mr Tulkinghorn has been killed and that you suspect ME?'

'George,' returns Mr Bucket, keeping his forefinger going, 'it is certainly possible, because it's the case. This deed was done last night at ten o'clock. Now, you know where you were last night at ten o'clock, and you'll be able to prove it, no doubt.'

'Last night! Last night?' repeats the trooper thoughtfully. Then it flashes upon him. 'Why, great heaven, I was there last night!'

'So I have understood, George,' returns Mr Bucket with great deliberation. 'So I have understood. Likewise you've been very often there. You've been seen hanging about the place, and you've been heard more than once in a wrangle with him, and it's possible --I don't say it's certainly so, mind you, but it's possible--that he may have been heard to call you a threatening, murdering, dangerous fellow.'

The trooper gasps as if he would admit it all if he could speak.

'Now, George,' continues Mr Bucket, putting his hat upon the table with an air of business rather in the upholstery way than otherwise, 'my wish is, as it has been all the evening, to make things pleasant. I tell you plainly there's a reward out, of a hundred guineas, offered by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. You and me have always been pleasant together; but I have got a duty to discharge; and if that hundred guineas is to be made, it may as well be made by me as any other man. On all of which accounts, I should hope it was clear to you that I must have you, and that I'm damned if I don't have you. Am I to call in any assistance, or is the trick done?'

Mr George has recovered himself and stands up like a soldier. 'Come,' he says; 'I am ready.'

'George,' continues Mr Bucket, 'wait a bit!' With his upholsterer manner, as if the trooper were a window to be fitted up, he takes from his pocket a pair of handcuffs. 'This is a serious charge, George, and such is my duty.'

The trooper flushes angrily and hesitates a moment, but holds out his two hands, clasped together, and says, 'There! Put them on!'

Mr Bucket adjusts them in a moment. 'How do you find them? Are they comfortable? If not, say so, for I wish to make things as pleasant as is consistent with my duty, and I've got another pair in my pocket.' This remark he offers like a most respectable tradesman anxious to execute an order neatly and to the perfect satisfaction of his customer. 'They'll do as they are? Very well! Now, you see, George'--he takes a cloak from a corner and begins adjusting it about the trooper's neck--'I was mindful of your feelings when I come out, and brought this on purpose. There! Who's the wiser?'

'Only I,' returns the trooper, 'but as I know it, do me one more good turn and pull my hat over my eyes.'

'Really, though! Do you mean it? Ain't it a pity? It looks so.'

'I can't look chance men in the face with these things on,' Mr George hurriedly replies. 'Do, for God's sake, pull my hat forward.'

So strongly entreated, Mr Bucket complies, puts his own hat on, and conducts his prize into the streets, the trooper marching on as steadily as usual, though with his head less erect, and Mr Bucket steering him with his elbow over the crossings and up the turnings.