

CHAPTER LIV - Springing a Mine

Refreshed by sleep, Mr Bucket rises betimes in the morning and prepares for a field-day. Smartened up by the aid of a clean shirt and a wet hairbrush, with which instrument, on occasions of ceremony, he lubricates such thin locks as remain to him after his life of severe study, Mr Bucket lays in a breakfast of two mutton chops as a foundation to work upon, together with tea, eggs, toast, and marmalade on a corresponding scale. Having much enjoyed these strengthening matters and having held subtle conference with his familiar demon, he confidently instructs Mercury 'just to mention quietly to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, that whenever he's ready for me, I'm ready for him.' A gracious message being returned that Sir Leicester will expedite his dressing and join Mr Bucket in the library within ten minutes, Mr Bucket repairs to that apartment and stands before the fire with his finger on his chin, looking at the blazing coals.

Thoughtful Mr Bucket is, as a man may be with weighty work to do, but composed, sure, confident. From the expression of his face he might be a famous whist-player for a large stake--say a hundred guineas certain--with the game in his hand, but with a high reputation involved in his playing his hand out to the last card in a masterly way. Not in the least anxious or disturbed is Mr Bucket when Sir Leicester appears, but he eyes the baronet aside as he comes slowly to his easy-chair with that observant gravity of yesterday in which there might have been yesterday, but for the audacity of the idea, a touch of compassion.

'I am sorry to have kept you waiting, officer, but I am rather later than my usual hour this morning. I am not well. The agitation and the indignation from which I have recently suffered have been too much for me. I am subject to--gout?--Sir Leicester was going to say indisposition and would have said it to anybody else, but Mr Bucket palpably knows all about it--'and recent circumstances have brought it on.'

As he takes his seat with some difficulty and with an air of pain, Mr Bucket draws a little nearer, standing with one of his large hands on the library-table.

'I am not aware, officer,' Sir Leicester observes; raising his eyes to his face, 'whether you wish us to be alone, but that is entirely as you please. If you do, well and good. If not, Miss Dedlock would be interested--'

'Why, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,' returns Mr Bucket with his head persuasively on one side and his forefinger pendant at one ear like an earring, 'we can't be too private just at present. You will

presently see that we can't be too private. A lady, under the circumstances, and especially in Miss Dedlock's elevated station of society, can't but be agreeable to me, but speaking without a view to myself, I will take the liberty of assuring you that I know we can't be too private.'

'That is enough.'

'So much so, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,' Mr Bucket resumes, 'that I was on the point of asking your permission to turn the key in the door.'

'By all means.' Mr Bucket skilfully and softly takes that precaution, stooping on his knee for a moment from mere force of habit so to adjust the key in the lock as that no one shall peep in from the outside.

'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I mentioned yesterday evening that I wanted but a very little to complete this case. I have now completed it and collected proof against the person who did this crime.'

'Against the soldier?'

'No, Sir Leicester Dedlock; not the soldier.'

Sir Leicester looks astounded and inquires, 'Is the man in custody?'

Mr Bucket tells him, after a pause, 'It was a woman.' Sir Leicester leans back in his chair, and breathlessly ejaculates, 'Good heaven!'

'Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,' Mr Bucket begins, standing over him with one hand spread out on the library-table and the forefinger of the other in impressive use, 'it's my duty to prepare you for a train of circumstances that may, and I go so far as to say that will, give you a shock. But Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, you are a gentleman, and I know what a gentleman is and what a gentleman is capable of. A gentleman can bear a shock when it must come, boldly and steadily. A gentleman can make up his mind to stand up against almost any blow. Why, take yourself, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. If there's a blow to be inflicted on you, you naturally think of your family. You ask yourself, how would all them ancestors of yours, away to Julius Caesar--not to go beyond him at present--have borne that blow; you remember scores of them that would have borne it well; and you bear it well on their accounts, and to maintain the family credit. That's the way you argue, and that's the way you act, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet.'

Sir Leicester, leaning back in his chair and grasping the elbows, sits looking at him with a stony face.

'Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock,' proceeds Mr Bucket, 'thus preparing you, let me beg of you not to trouble your mind for a moment as to anything having come to MY knowledge. I know so much about so many characters, high and low, that a piece of information more or less don't signify a straw. I don't suppose there's a move on the board that would surprise ME, and as to this or that move having taken place, why my knowing it is no odds at all, any possible move whatever (provided it's in a wrong direction) being a probable move according to my experience. Therefore, what I say to you, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, is, don't you go and let yourself be put out of the way because of my knowing anything of your family affairs.'

'I thank you for your preparation,' returns Sir Leicester after a silence, without moving hand, foot, or feature, 'which I hope is not necessary; though I give it credit for being well intended. Be so good as to go on. Also'--Sir Leicester seems to shrink in the shadow of his figure--'also, to take a seat, if you have no objection.'

None at all. Mr Bucket brings a chair and diminishes his shadow. 'Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, with this short preface I come to the point. Lady Dedlock--'

Sir Leicester raises himself in his seat and stares at him fiercely. Mr Bucket brings the finger into play as an emollient.

'Lady Dedlock, you see she's universally admired. That's what her ladyship is; she's universally admired,' says Mr Bucket.

'I would greatly prefer, officer,' Sir Leicester returns stiffly, 'my Lady's name being entirely omitted from this discussion.'

'So would I, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, but--it's impossible.'

'Impossible?'

Mr Bucket shakes his relentless head.

'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it's altogether impossible. What I have got to say is about her ladyship. She is the pivot it all turns on.'

'Officer,' retorts Sir Leicester with a fiery eye and a quivering lip, 'you know your duty. Do your duty, but be careful not to overstep it. I would not suffer it. I would not endure it. You bring my Lady's name into this communication upon your responsibility--upon your

responsibility. My Lady's name is not a name for common persons to trifle with!

‘Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I say what I must say, and no more.’

‘I hope it may prove so. Very well. Go on. Go on, sir!’ Glancing at the angry eyes which now avoid him and at the angry figure trembling from head to foot, yet striving to be still, Mr Bucket feels his way with his forefinger and in a low voice proceeds.

‘Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it becomes my duty to tell you that the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn long entertained mistrusts and suspicions of Lady Dedlock.’

‘If he had dared to breathe them to me, sir--which he never did--I would have killed him myself!’ exclaims Sir Leicester, striking his hand upon the table. But in the very heat and fury of the act he stops, fixed by the knowing eyes of Mr Bucket, whose forefinger is slowly going and who, with mingled confidence and patience, shakes his head.

‘Sir Leicester Dedlock, the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn was deep and close, and what he fully had in his mind in the very beginning I can't quite take upon myself to say. But I know from his lips that he long ago suspected Lady Dedlock of having discovered, through the sight of some handwriting--in this very house, and when you yourself, Sir Leicester Dedlock, were present--the existence, in great poverty, of a certain person who had been her lover before you courted her and who ought to have been her husband.’ Mr Bucket stops and deliberately repeats, ‘Ought to have been her husband, not a doubt about it. I know from his lips that when that person soon afterwards died, he suspected Lady Dedlock of visiting his wretched lodging and his wretched grave, alone and in secret. I know from my own inquiries and through my eyes and ears that Lady Dedlock did make such visit in the dress of her own maid, for the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn employed me to reckon up her ladyship--if you'll excuse my making use of the term we commonly employ--and I reckoned her up, so far, completely. I confronted the maid in the chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields with a witness who had been Lady Dedlock's guide, and there couldn't be the shadow of a doubt that she had worn the young woman's dress, unknown to her. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I did endeavour to pave the way a little towards these unpleasant disclosures yesterday by saying that very strange things happened even in high families sometimes. All this, and more, has happened in your own family, and to and through your own Lady. It's my belief that the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn followed up these inquiries to the hour of his death and that he and Lady Dedlock even had bad blood between them upon the matter that very night. Now, only you put that

to Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and ask her ladyship whether, even after he had left here, she didn't go down to his chambers with the intention of saying something further to him, dressed in a loose black mantle with a deep fringe to it.'

Sir Leicester sits like a statue, gazing at the cruel finger that is probing the life-blood of his heart.

'You put that to her ladyship, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, from me, Inspector Bucket of the Detective. And if her ladyship makes any difficulty about admitting of it, you tell her that it's no use, that Inspector Bucket knows it and knows that she passed the soldier as you called him (though he's not in the army now) and knows that she knows she passed him on the staircase. Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, why do I relate all this?'

Sir Leicester, who has covered his face with his hands, uttering a single groan, requests him to pause for a moment. By and by he takes his hands away, and so preserves his dignity and outward calmness, though there is no more colour in his face than in his white hair, that Mr Bucket is a little awed by him. Something frozen and fixed is upon his manner, over and above its usual shell of haughtiness, and Mr Bucket soon detects an unusual slowness in his speech, with now and then a curious trouble in beginning, which occasions him to utter inarticulate sounds. With such sounds he now breaks silence, soon, however, controlling himself to say that he does not comprehend why a gentleman so faithful and zealous as the late Mr Tulkinghorn should have communicated to him nothing of this painful, this distressing, this unlooked-for, this overwhelming, this incredible intelligence.

'Again, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,' returns Mr Bucket, 'put it to her ladyship to clear that up. Put it to her ladyship, if you think it right, from Inspector Bucket of the Detective. You'll find, or I'm much mistaken, that the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn had the intention of communicating the whole to you as soon as he considered it ripe, and further, that he had given her ladyship so to understand. Why, he might have been going to reveal it the very morning when I examined the body! You don't know what I'm going to say and do five minutes from this present time, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet; and supposing I was to be picked off now, you might wonder why I hadn't done it, don't you see?'

True. Sir Leicester, avoiding, with some trouble those obtrusive sounds, says, 'True.' At this juncture a considerable noise of voices is heard in the hall. Mr Bucket, after listening, goes to the library-door, softly unlocks and opens it, and listens again. Then he draws in his head and whispers hurriedly but composedly, 'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, this unfortunate family affair has taken air, as I expected it

might, the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn being cut down so sudden. The chance to hush it is to let in these people now in a wrangle with your footmen. Would you mind sitting quiet--on the family account--while I reckon 'em up? And would you just throw in a nod when I seem to ask you for it?

Sir Leicester indistinctly answers, 'Officer. The best you can, the best you can!' and Mr Bucket, with a nod and a sagacious crook of the forefinger, slips down into the hall, where the voices quickly die away. He is not long in returning; a few paces ahead of Mercury and a brother deity also powdered and in peach-blossomed smalls, who bear between them a chair in which is an incapable old man. Another man and two women come behind. Directing the pitching of the chair in an affable and easy manner, Mr Bucket dismisses the Mercuries and locks the door again. Sir Leicester looks on at this invasion of the sacred precincts with an icy stare.

'Now, perhaps you may know me, ladies and gentlemen,' says Mr Bucket in a confidential voice. 'I am Inspector Bucket of the Detective, I am; and this,' producing the tip of his convenient little staff from his breast-pocket, 'is my authority. Now, you wanted to see Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. Well! You do see him, and mind you, it ain't every one as is admitted to that honour. Your name, old gentleman, is Smallweed; that's what your name is; I know it well.'

'Well, and you never heard any harm of it!' cries Mr Smallweed in a shrill loud voice.

'You don't happen to know why they killed the pig, do you?' retorts Mr Bucket with a steadfast look, but without loss of temper.

'No!'

'Why, they killed him,' says Mr Bucket, 'on account of his having so much cheek. Don't YOU get into the same position, because it isn't worthy of you. You ain't in the habit of conversing with a deaf person, are you?'

'Yes,' snarls Mr Smallweed, 'my wife's deaf.'

'That accounts for your pitching your voice so high. But as she ain't here; just pitch it an octave or two lower, will you, and I'll not only be obliged to you, but it'll do you more credit,' says Mr Bucket. 'This other gentleman is in the preaching line, I think?'

'Name of Chadband,' Mr Smallweed puts in, speaking henceforth in a much lower key.

'Once had a friend and brother serjeant of the same name,' says Mr Bucket, offering his hand, 'and consequently feel a liking for it. Mrs Chadband, no doubt?'

'And Mrs Snagsby,' Mr Smallweed introduces.

'Husband a law-stationer and a friend of my own,' says Mr Bucket. 'Love him like a brother! Now, what's up?'

'Do you mean what business have we come upon?' Mr Smallweed asks, a little dashed by the suddenness of this turn.

'Ah! You know what I mean. Let us hear what it's all about in presence of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. Come.'

Mr Smallweed, beckoning Mr Chadband, takes a moment's counsel with him in a whisper. Mr Chadband, expressing a considerable amount of oil from the pores of his forehead and the palms of his hands, says aloud, 'Yes. You first!' and retires to his former place.

'I was the client and friend of Mr Tulkinghorn,' pipes Grandfather Smallweed then; 'I did business with him. I was useful to him, and he was useful to me. Krook, dead and gone, was my brother-in-law. He was own brother to a brimstone magpie--leastways Mrs Smallweed. I come into Krook's property. I examined all his papers and all his effects. They was all dug out under my eyes. There was a bundle of letters belonging to a dead and gone lodger as was hid away at the back of a shelf in the side of Lady Jane's bed--his cat's bed. He hid all manner of things away, everywhere. Mr Tulkinghorn wanted 'em and got 'em, but I looked 'em over first. I'm a man of business, and I took a squint at 'em. They was letters from the lodger's sweetheart, and she signed Honoria. Dear me, that's not a common name, Honoria, is it? There's no lady in this house that signs Honoria is there? Oh, no, I don't think so! Oh, no, I don't think so! And not in the same hand, perhaps? Oh, no, I don't think so!'

Here Mr Smallweed, seized with a fit of coughing in the midst of his triumph, breaks off to ejaculate, 'Oh, dear me! Oh, Lord! I'm shaken all to pieces!'

'Now, when you're ready,' says Mr Bucket after awaiting his recovery, 'to come to anything that concerns Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, here the gentleman sits, you know.'

'Haven't I come to it, Mr Bucket?' cries Grandfather Smallweed. 'Isn't the gentleman concerned yet? Not with Captain Hawdon, and his ever affectionate Honoria, and their child into the bargain? Come, then, I want to know where those letters are. That concerns me, if it don't

concern Sir Leicester Dedlock. I will know where they are. I won't have 'em disappear so quietly. I handed 'em over to my friend and solicitor, Mr Tulkinghorn, not to anybody else.'

'Why, he paid you for them, you know, and handsome too,' says Mr Bucket.

'I don't care for that. I want to know who's got 'em. And I tell you what we want--what we all here want, Mr Bucket. We want more painstaking and search-making into this murder. We know where the interest and the motive was, and you have not done enough. If George the vagabond dragoon had any hand in it, he was only an accomplice, and was set on. You know what I mean as well as any man.'

'Now I tell you what,' says Mr Bucket, instantaneously altering his manner, coming close to him, and communicating an extraordinary fascination to the forefinger, 'I am damned if I am a-going to have my case spoilt, or interfered with, or anticipated by so much as half a second of time by any human being in creation. YOU want more painstaking and search-making! YOU do? Do you see this hand, and do you think that I don't know the right time to stretch it out and put it on the arm that fired that shot?'

Such is the dread power of the man, and so terribly evident it is that he makes no idle boast, that Mr Smallweed begins to apologize. Mr Bucket, dismissing his sudden anger, checks him.

'The advice I give you is, don't you trouble your head about the murder. That's my affair. You keep half an eye on the newspapers, and I shouldn't wonder if you was to read something about it before long, if you look sharp. I know my business, and that's all I've got to say to you on that subject. Now about those letters. You want to know who's got 'em. I don't mind telling you. I have got 'em. Is that the packet?'

Mr Smallweed looks, with greedy eyes, at the little bundle Mr Bucket produces from a mysterious part of his coat, and identifies it as the same.

'What have you got to say next?' asks Mr Bucket. 'Now, don't open your mouth too wide, because you don't look handsome when you do it.'

'I want five hundred pound.'

'No, you don't; you mean fifty,' says Mr Bucket humorously.

It appears, however, that Mr Smallweed means five hundred.

'That is, I am deputed by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to consider (without admitting or promising anything) this bit of business,' says Mr Bucket--Sir Leicester mechanically bows his head--'and you ask me to consider a proposal of five hundred pounds. Why, it's an unreasonable proposal! Two fifty would be bad enough, but better than that. Hadn't you better say two fifty?'

Mr Smallweed is quite clear that he had better not.

'Then,' says Mr Bucket, 'let's hear Mr Chadband. Lord! Many a time I've heard my old fellow-serjeant of that name; and a moderate man he was in all respects, as ever I come across!'

Thus invited, Mr Chadband steps forth, and after a little sleek smiling and a little oil-grinding with the palms of his hands, delivers himself as follows, 'My friends, we are now--Rachael, my wife, and I--in the mansions of the rich and great. Why are we now in the mansions of the rich and great, my friends? Is it because we are invited? Because we are bidden to feast with them, because we are bidden to rejoice with them, because we are bidden to play the lute with them, because we are bidden to dance with them? No. Then why are we here, my friends? Are we in possession of a sinful secret, and do we require corn, and wine, and oil, or what is much the same thing, money, for the keeping thereof? Probably so, my friends.'

'You're a man of business, you are,' returns Mr Bucket, very attentive, 'and consequently you're going on to mention what the nature of your secret is. You are right. You couldn't do better.'

'Let us then, my brother, in a spirit of love,' says Mr Chadband with a cunning eye, 'proceed unto it. Rachael, my wife, advance!'

Mrs Chadband, more than ready, so advances as to jostle her husband into the background and confronts Mr Bucket with a hard, frowning smile.

'Since you want to know what we know,' says she, 'I'll tell you. I helped to bring up Miss Hawdon, her ladyship's daughter. I was in the service of her ladyship's sister, who was very sensitive to the disgrace her ladyship brought upon her, and gave out, even to her ladyship, that the child was dead--she WAS very nearly so--when she was born. But she's alive, and I know her.' With these words, and a laugh, and laying a bitter stress on the word 'ladyship,' Mrs Chadband folds her arms and looks implacably at Mr Bucket.

'I suppose now,' returns that officer, 'YOU will be expecting a twenty-pound note or a present of about that figure?'

Mrs Chadband merely laughs and contemptuously tells him he can 'offer' twenty pence.

'My friend the law-stationer's good lady, over there,' says Mr Bucket, luring Mrs Snagsby forward with the finger. 'What may YOUR game be, ma'am?'

Mrs Snagsby is at first prevented, by tears and lamentations, from stating the nature of her game, but by degrees it confusedly comes to light that she is a woman overwhelmed with injuries and wrongs, whom Mr Snagsby has habitually deceived, abandoned, and sought to keep in darkness, and whose chief comfort, under her afflictions, has been the sympathy of the late Mr Tulkinghorn, who showed so much commiseration for her on one occasion of his calling in Cook's Court in the absence of her perjured husband that she has of late habitually carried to him all her woes. Everybody it appears, the present company excepted, has plotted against Mrs Snagsby's peace. There is Mr Guppy, clerk to Kenge and Carboy, who was at first as open as the sun at noon, but who suddenly shut up as close as midnight, under the influence--no doubt--of Mr Snagsby's suborning and tampering. There is Mr Weevle, friend of Mr Guppy, who lived mysteriously up a court, owing to the like coherent causes. There was Krook, deceased; there was Nimrod, deceased; and there was Jo, deceased; and they were 'all in it.' In what, Mrs Snagsby does not with particularity express, but she knows that Jo was Mr Snagsby's son, 'as well as if a trumpet had spoken it,' and she followed Mr Snagsby when he went on his last visit to the boy, and if he was not his son why did he go? The one occupation of her life has been, for some time back, to follow Mr Snagsby to and fro, and up and down, and to piece suspicious circumstances together--and every circumstance that has happened has been most suspicious; and in this way she has pursued her object of detecting and confounding her false husband, night and day. Thus did it come to pass that she brought the Chadbands and Mr Tulkinghorn together, and conferred with Mr Tulkinghorn on the change in Mr Guppy, and helped to turn up the circumstances in which the present company are interested, casually, by the wayside, being still and ever on the great high road that is to terminate in Mr Snagsby's full exposure and a matrimonial separation. All this, Mrs Snagsby, as an injured woman, and the friend of Mrs Chadband, and the follower of Mr Chadband, and the mourner of the late Mr Tulkinghorn, is here to certify under the seal of confidence, with every possible confusion and involvement possible and impossible, having no pecuniary motive whatever, no scheme or project but the one mentioned, and bringing here, and taking everywhere, her own dense atmosphere of dust, arising from the ceaseless working of her mill of jealousy.

While this exordium is in hand--and it takes some time--Mr Bucket, who has seen through the transparency of Mrs Snagsby's vinegar at a glance, confers with his familiar demon and bestows his shrewd attention on the Chadbands and Mr Smallweed. Sir Leicester Dedlock remains immovable, with the same icy surface upon him, except that he once or twice looks towards Mr Bucket, as relying on that officer alone of all mankind.

'Very good,' says Mr Bucket. 'Now I understand you, you know, and being deputed by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to look into this little matter,' again Sir Leicester mechanically bows in confirmation of the statement, 'can give it my fair and full attention. Now I won't allude to conspiring to extort money or anything of that sort, because we are men and women of the world here, and our object is to make things pleasant. But I tell you what I DO wonder at; I am surprised that you should think of making a noise below in the hall. It was so opposed to your interests. That's what I look at.'

'We wanted to get in,' pleads Mr Smallweed.

'Why, of course you wanted to get in,' Mr Bucket asserts with cheerfulness; 'but for a old gentleman at your time of life--what I call truly venerable, mind you!--with his wits sharpened, as I have no doubt they are, by the loss of the use of his limbs, which occasions all his animation to mount up into his head, not to consider that if he don't keep such a business as the present as close as possible it can't be worth a mag to him, is so curious! You see your temper got the better of you; that's where you lost ground,' says Mr Bucket in an argumentative and friendly way.

'I only said I wouldn't go without one of the servants came up to Sir Leicester Dedlock,' returns Mr Smallweed.

'That's it! That's where your temper got the better of you. Now, you keep it under another time and you'll make money by it. Shall I ring for them to carry you down?'

'When are we to hear more of this?' Mrs Chadband sternly demands.

'Bless your heart for a true woman! Always curious, your delightful sex is!' replies Mr Bucket with gallantry. 'I shall have the pleasure of giving you a call to-morrow or next day--not forgetting Mr Smallweed and his proposal of two fifty.'

'Five hundred!' exclaims Mr Smallweed.

'All right! Nominally five hundred.' Mr Bucket has his hand on the bell-rope. 'SHALL I wish you good day for the present on the part of

myself and the gentleman of the house?' he asks in an insinuating tone.

Nobody having the hardihood to object to his doing so, he does it, and the party retire as they came up. Mr Bucket follows them to the door, and returning, says with an air of serious business, 'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it's for you to consider whether or not to buy this up. I should recommend, on the whole, it's being bought up myself; and I think it may be bought pretty cheap. You see, that little pickled cucumber of a Mrs Snagsby has been used by all sides of the speculation and has done a deal more harm in bringing odds and ends together than if she had meant it. Mr Tulkinghorn, deceased, he held all these horses in his hand and could have drove 'em his own way, I haven't a doubt; but he was fetched off the box head-foremost, and now they have got their legs over the traces, and are all dragging and pulling their own ways. So it is, and such is life. The cat's away, and the mice they play; the frost breaks up, and the water runs. Now, with regard to the party to be apprehended.'

Sir Leicester seems to wake, though his eyes have been wide open, and he looks intently at Mr Bucket as Mr Bucket refers to his watch.

'The party to be apprehended is now in this house,' proceeds Mr Bucket, putting up his watch with a steady hand and with rising spirits, 'and I'm about to take her into custody in your presence. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don't you say a word nor yet stir. There'll be no noise and no disturbance at all. I'll come back in the course of the evening, if agreeable to you, and endeavour to meet your wishes respecting this unfortunate family matter and the nobbiest way of keeping it quiet. Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don't you be nervous on account of the apprehension at present coming off. You shall see the whole case clear, from first to last.'

Mr Bucket rings, goes to the door, briefly whispers Mercury, shuts the door, and stands behind it with his arms folded. After a suspense of a minute or two the door slowly opens and a Frenchwoman enters. Mademoiselle Hortense.

The moment she is in the room Mr Bucket claps the door to and puts his back against it. The suddenness of the noise occasions her to turn, and then for the first time she sees Sir Leicester Dedlock in his chair.

'I ask you pardon,' she mutters hurriedly. 'They tell me there was no one here.'

Her step towards the door brings her front to front with Mr Bucket. Suddenly a spasm shoots across her face and she turns deadly pale.

'This is my lodger, Sir Leicester Dedlock,' says Mr Bucket, nodding at her. 'This foreign young woman has been my lodger for some weeks back.'

'What do Sir Leicester care for that, you think, my angel?' returns mademoiselle in a jocular strain.

'Why, my angel,' returns Mr Bucket, 'we shall see.'

Mademoiselle Hortense eyes him with a scowl upon her tight face, which gradually changes into a smile of scorn, 'You are very mysterieuse. Are you drunk?'

'Tolerable sober, my angel,' returns Mr Bucket.

'I come from arriving at this so detestable house with your wife. Your wife have left me since some minutes. They tell me downstairs that your wife is here. I come here, and your wife is not here. What is the intention of this fool's play, say then?' mademoiselle demands, with her arms composedly crossed, but with something in her dark cheek beating like a clock.

Mr Bucket merely shakes the finger at her.

'Ah, my God, you are an unhappy idiot!' cries mademoiselle with a toss of her head and a laugh. 'Leave me to pass downstairs, great pig.' With a stamp of her foot and a menace.

'Now, mademoiselle,' says Mr Bucket in a cool determined way, 'you go and sit down upon that sofy.'

'I will not sit down upon nothing,' she replies with a shower of nods.

'Now, mademoiselle,' repeats Mr Bucket, making no demonstration except with the finger, 'you sit down upon that sofy.'

'Why?'

'Because I take you into custody on a charge of murder, and you don't need to be told it. Now, I want to be polite to one of your sex and a foreigner if I can. If I can't, I must be rough, and there's rougher ones outside. What I am to be depends on you. So I recommend you, as a friend, afore another half a blessed moment has passed over your head, to go and sit down upon that sofy.'

Mademoiselle complies, saying in a concentrated voice while that something in her cheek beats fast and hard, 'You are a devil.'

'Now, you see,' Mr Bucket proceeds approvingly, 'you're comfortable and conducting yourself as I should expect a foreign young woman of your sense to do. So I'll give you a piece of advice, and it's this, don't you talk too much. You're not expected to say anything here, and you can't keep too quiet a tongue in your head. In short, the less you PARLAY, the better, you know.' Mr Bucket is very complacent over this French explanation.

Mademoiselle, with that tigerish expansion of the mouth and her black eyes darting fire upon him, sits upright on the sofa in a rigid state, with her hands clenched--and her feet too, one might suppose--muttering, 'Oh, you Bucket, you are a devil!' 'Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,' says Mr Bucket, and from this time forth the finger never rests, 'this young woman, my lodger, was her ladyship's maid at the time I have mentioned to you; and this young woman, besides being extraordinary vehement and passionate against her ladyship after being discharged--'

'Lie!' cries mademoiselle. 'I discharge myself.'

'Now, why don't you take my advice?' returns Mr Bucket in an impressive, almost in an imploring, tone. 'I'm surprised at the indiscreetness you commit. You'll say something that'll be used against you, you know. You're sure to come to it. Never you mind what I say till it's given in evidence. It is not addressed to you.'

'Discharge, too,' cries mademoiselle furiously, 'by her ladyship! Eh, my faith, a pretty ladyship! Why, I r-r-r-ruin my character by remaining with a ladyship so infame!'

'Upon my soul I wonder at you!' Mr Bucket remonstrates. 'I thought the French were a polite nation, I did, really. Yet to hear a female going on like that before Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet!'

'He is a poor abused!' cries mademoiselle. 'I spit upon his house, upon his name, upon his imbecility,' all of which she makes the carpet represent. 'Oh, that he is a great man! Oh, yes, superb! Oh, heaven! Bah!'

'Well, Sir Leicester Dedlock,' proceeds Mr Bucket, 'this intemperate foreigner also angrily took it into her head that she had established a claim upon Mr Tulkinghorn, deceased, by attending on the occasion I told you of at his chambers, though she was liberally paid for her time and trouble.'

'Lie!' cries mademoiselle. 'I ref-use his money all togezzzer.'

'If you WILL PARLAY, you know,' says Mr Bucket parenthetically, 'you must take the consequences. Now, whether she became my lodger, Sir Leicester Dedlock, with any deliberate intention then of doing this deed and blinding me, I give no opinion on; but she lived in my house in that capacity at the time that she was hovering about the chambers of the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn with a view to a wrangle, and likewise persecuting and half frightening the life out of an unfortunate stationer.'

'Lie!' cries mademoiselle. 'All lie!'

'The murder was committed, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and you know under what circumstances. Now, I beg of you to follow me close with your attention for a minute or two. I was sent for, and the case was entrusted to me. I examined the place, and the body, and the papers, and everything. From information I received (from a clerk in the same house) I took George into custody as having been seen hanging about there on the night, and at very nigh the time of the murder, also as having been overheard in high words with the deceased on former occasions--even threatening him, as the witness made out. If you ask me, Sir Leicester Dedlock, whether from the first I believed George to be the murderer, I tell you candidly no, but he might be, notwithstanding, and there was enough against him to make it my duty to take him and get him kept under remand. Now, observe!'

As Mr Bucket bends forward in some excitement--for him--and inaugurates what he is going to say with one ghostly beat of his forefinger in the air, Mademoiselle Hortense fixes her black eyes upon him with a dark frown and sets her dry lips closely and firmly together.

'I went home, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, at night and found this young woman having supper with my wife, Mrs Bucket. She had made a mighty show of being fond of Mrs Bucket from her first offering herself as our lodger, but that night she made more than ever--in fact, overdid it. Likewise she overdid her respect, and all that, for the lamented memory of the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn. By the living Lord it flashed upon me, as I sat opposite to her at the table and saw her with a knife in her hand, that she had done it!'

Mademoiselle is hardly audible in straining through her teeth and lips the words, 'You are a devil.'

'Now where,' pursues Mr Bucket, 'had she been on the night of the murder? She had been to the theayter. (She really was there, I have since found, both before the deed and after it.) I knew I had an artful customer to deal with and that proof would be very difficult; and I laid

a trap for her--such a trap as I never laid yet, and such a venture as I never made yet. I worked it out in my mind while I was talking to her at supper. When I went upstairs to bed, our house being small and this young woman's ears sharp, I stuffed the sheet into Mrs Bucket's mouth that she shouldn't say a word of surprise and told her all about it. My dear, don't you give your mind to that again, or I shall link your feet together at the ankles.' Mr Bucket, breaking off, has made a noiseless descent upon mademoiselle and laid his heavy hand upon her shoulder.

'What is the matter with you now?' she asks him.

'Don't you think any more,' returns Mr Bucket with admonitory finger, 'of throwing yourself out of window. That's what's the matter with me. Come! Just take my arm. You needn't get up; I'll sit down by you. Now take my arm, will you? I'm a married man, you know; you're acquainted with my wife. Just take my arm.'

Vainly endeavouring to moisten those dry lips, with a painful sound she struggles with herself and complies.

'Now we're all right again. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, this case could never have been the case it is but for Mrs Bucket, who is a woman in fifty thousand--in a hundred and fifty thousand! To throw this young woman off her guard, I have never set foot in our house since, though I've communicated with Mrs Bucket in the baker's loaves and in the milk as often as required. My whispered words to Mrs Bucket when she had the sheet in her mouth were, 'My dear, can you throw her off continually with natural accounts of my suspicions against George, and this, and that, and t'other? Can you do without rest and keep watch upon her night and day? Can you undertake to say, 'She shall do nothing without my knowledge, she shall be my prisoner without suspecting it, she shall no more escape from me than from death, and her life shall be my life, and her soul my soul, till I have got her, if she did this murder?' Mrs Bucket says to me, as well as she could speak on account of the sheet, 'Bucket, I can!' And she has acted up to it glorious!'

'Lies!' mademoiselle interposes. 'All lies, my friend!'

'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, how did my calculations come out under these circumstances? When I calculated that this impetuous young woman would overdo it in new directions, was I wrong or right? I was right. What does she try to do? Don't let it give you a turn? To throw the murder on her ladyship.'

Sir Leicester rises from his chair and staggers down again.

'And she got encouragement in it from hearing that I was always here, which was done a-purpose. Now, open that pocket-book of mine, Sir Leicester Dedlock, if I may take the liberty of throwing it towards you, and look at the letters sent to me, each with the two words 'Lady Dedlock' in it. Open the one directed to yourself, which I stopped this very morning, and read the three words 'Lady Dedlock, Murderess' in it. These letters have been falling about like a shower of lady-birds. What do you say now to Mrs Bucket, from her spy-place having seen them all 'written by this young woman? What do you say to Mrs Bucket having, within this half- hour, secured the corresponding ink and paper, fellow half-sheets and what not? What do you say to Mrs Bucket having watched the posting of 'em every one by this young woman, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet?' Mr Bucket asks, triumphant in his admiration of his lady's genius.

Two things are especially observable as Mr Bucket proceeds to a conclusion. First, that he seems imperceptibly to establish a dreadful right of property in mademoiselle. Secondly, that the very atmosphere she breathes seems to narrow and contract about her as if a close net or a pall were being drawn nearer and yet nearer around her breathless figure.

'There is no doubt that her ladyship was on the spot at the eventful period,' says Mr Bucket, 'and my foreign friend here saw her, I believe, from the upper part of the staircase. Her ladyship and George and my foreign friend were all pretty close on one another's heels. But that don't signify any more, so I'll not go into it. I found the wadding of the pistol with which the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn was shot. It was a bit of the printed description of your house at Chesney Wold. Not much in that, you'll say, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. No. But when my foreign friend here is so thoroughly off her guard as to think it a safe time to tear up the rest of that leaf, and when Mrs Bucket puts the pieces together and finds the wadding wanting, it begins to look like Queer Street.'

'These are very long lies,' mademoiselle interposes. 'You prose great deal. Is it that you have almost all finished, or are you speaking always?' 'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,' proceeds Mr Bucket, who delights in a full title and does violence to himself when he dispenses with any fragment of it, 'the last point in the case which I am now going to mention shows the necessity of patience in our business, and never doing a thing in a hurry. I watched this young woman yesterday without her knowledge when she was looking at the funeral, in company with my wife, who planned to take her there; and I had so much to convict her, and I saw such an expression in her face, and my mind so rose against her malice towards her ladyship, and the time was altogether such a time for bringing down what you may call retribution upon her, that if I had been a younger hand with less

experience, I should have taken her, certain. Equally, last night, when her ladyship, as is so universally admired I am sure, come home looking--why, Lord, a man might almost say like Venus rising from the ocean--it was so unpleasant and inconsistent to think of her being charged with a murder of which she was innocent that I felt quite to want to put an end to the job. What should I have lost? Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I should have lost the weapon. My prisoner here proposed to Mrs Bucket, after the departure of the funeral, that they should go per bus a little ways into the country and take tea at a very decent house of entertainment. Now, near that house of entertainment there's a piece of water. At tea, my prisoner got up to fetch her pocket handkercher from the bedroom where the bonnets was; she was rather a long time gone and came back a little out of wind. As soon as they came home this was reported to me by Mrs Bucket, along with her observations and suspicions. I had the piece of water dragged by moonlight, in presence of a couple of our men, and the pocket pistol was brought up before it had been there half-a-dozen hours. Now, my dear, put your arm a little further through mine, and hold it steady, and I shan't hurt you!

In a trice Mr Bucket snaps a handcuff on her wrist. 'That's one,' says Mr Bucket. 'Now the other, darling. Two, and all told!'

He rises; she rises too. 'Where,' she asks him, darkening her large eyes until their drooping lids almost conceal them--and yet they stare, 'where is your false, your treacherous, and cursed wife?'

'She's gone forrard to the Police Office,' returns Mr Bucket. 'You'll see her there, my dear.'

'I would like to kiss her!' exclaims Mademoiselle Hortense, panting tigress-like.

'You'd bite her, I suspect,' says Mr Bucket.

'I would!' making her eyes very large. 'I would love to tear her limb from limb.'

'Bless you, darling,' says Mr Bucket with the greatest composure, 'I'm fully prepared to hear that. Your sex have such a surprising animosity against one another when you do differ. You don't mind me half so much, do you?'

'No. Though you are a devil still.'

'Angel and devil by turns, eh?' cries Mr Bucket. 'But I am in my regular employment, you must consider. Let me put your shawl tidy.

I've been lady's maid to a good many before now. Anything wanting to the bonnet? There's a cab at the door.'

Mademoiselle Hortense, casting an indignant eye at the glass, shakes herself perfectly neat in one shake and looks, to do her justice, uncommonly genteel.

'Listen then, my angel,' says she after several sarcastic nods. 'You are very spiritual. But can you restore him back to life?'

Mr Bucket answers, 'Not exactly.'

'That is droll. Listen yet one time. You are very spiritual. Can you make a honourable lady of her?'

'Don't be so malicious,' says Mr Bucket.

'Or a haughty gentleman of HIM?' cries mademoiselle, referring to Sir Leicester with ineffable disdain. 'Eh! Oh, then regard him! The poor infant! Ha! Ha! Ha!'

'Come, come, why this is worse PARLAYING than the other,' says Mr Bucket. 'Come along!'

'You cannot do these things? Then you can do as you please with me. It is but the death, it is all the same. Let us go, my angel. Adieu, you old man, grey. I pity you, and I despise you!'

With these last words she snaps her teeth together as if her mouth closed with a spring. It is impossible to describe how Mr Bucket gets her out, but he accomplishes that feat in a manner so peculiar to himself, enfolding and pervading her like a cloud, and hovering away with her as if he were a homely Jupiter and she the object of his affections.

Sir Leicester, left alone, remains in the same attitude, as though he were still listening and his attention were still occupied. At length he gazes round the empty room, and finding it deserted, rises unsteadily to his feet, pushes back his chair, and walks a few steps, supporting himself by the table. Then he stops, and with more of those inarticulate sounds, lifts up his eyes and seems to stare at something.

Heaven knows what he sees. The green, green woods of Chesney Wold, the noble house, the pictures of his forefathers, strangers defacing them, officers of police coarsely handling his most precious heirlooms, thousands of fingers pointing at him, thousands of faces sneering at him. But if such shadows flit before him to his bewilderment, there is one other shadow which he can name with something like

distinctness even yet and to which alone he addresses his tearing of his white hair and his extended arms.

It is she in association with whom, saving that she has been for years a main fibre of the root of his dignity and pride, he has never had a selfish thought. It is she whom he has loved, admired, honoured, and set up for the world to respect. It is she who, at the core of all the constrained formalities and conventionalities of his life, has been a stock of living tenderness and love, susceptible as nothing else is of being struck with the agony he feels. He sees her, almost to the exclusion of himself, and cannot bear to look upon her cast down from the high place she has graced so well.

And even to the point of his sinking on the ground, oblivious of his suffering, he can yet pronounce her name with something like distinctness in the midst of those intrusive sounds, and in a tone of mourning and compassion rather than reproach.