

## Chapter XII

### **Descriptive Of A Very Important Proceeding On The Part Of Mr Pickwick; No Less An Epoch In His Life, Than In This History**

Mr Pickwick's apartments in Goswell Street, although on a limited scale, were not only of a very neat and comfortable description, but peculiarly adapted for the residence of a man of his genius and observation. His sitting-room was the first-floor front, his bedroom the second-floor front; and thus, whether he were sitting at his desk in his parlour, or standing before the dressing-glass in his dormitory, he had an equal opportunity of contemplating human nature in all the numerous phases it exhibits, in that not more populous than popular thoroughfare. His landlady, Mrs. Bardell - the relict and sole executrix of a deceased custom-house officer - was a comely woman of bustling manners and agreeable appearance, with a natural genius for cooking, improved by study and long practice, into an exquisite talent. There were no children, no servants, no fowls. The only other inmates of the house were a large man and a small boy; the first a lodger, the second a production of Mrs. Bardell's. The large man was always home precisely at ten o'clock at night, at which hour he regularly condensed himself into the limits of a dwarfish French bedstead in the back parlour; and the infantine sports and gymnastic exercises of Master Bardell were exclusively confined to the neighbouring pavements and gutters. Cleanliness and quiet reigned throughout the house; and in it Mr Pickwick's will was law.

To any one acquainted with these points of the domestic economy of the establishment, and conversant with the admirable regulation of Mr Pickwick's mind, his appearance and behaviour on the morning previous to that which had been fixed upon for the journey to Eatanswill would have been most mysterious and unaccountable. He paced the room to and fro with hurried steps, popped his head out of the window at intervals of about three minutes each, constantly referred to his watch, and exhibited many other manifestations of impatience very unusual with him. It was evident that something of great importance was in contemplation, but what that something was, not even Mrs. Bardell had been enabled to discover.

'Mrs. Bardell,' said Mr Pickwick, at last, as that amiable female approached the termination of a prolonged dusting of the apartment.

'Sir,' said Mrs. Bardell.

'Your little boy is a very long time gone.'

'Why it's a good long way to the Borough, sir,' remonstrated Mrs. Bardell.

'Ah,' said Mr Pickwick, 'very true; so it is.' Mr Pickwick relapsed into silence, and Mrs. Bardell resumed her dusting.

'Mrs. Bardell,' said Mr Pickwick, at the expiration of a few minutes.

'Sir,' said Mrs. Bardell again. 'Do you think it a much greater expense to keep two people, than to keep one?'

'La, Mr Pickwick,' said Mrs. Bardell, colouring up to the very border of her cap, as she fancied she observed a species of matrimonial twinkle in the eyes of her lodger; 'La, Mr Pickwick, what a question!'

'Well, but do you?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'That depends,' said Mrs. Bardell, approaching the duster very near to Mr Pickwick's elbow which was planted on the table. 'that depends a good deal upon the person, you know, Mr Pickwick; and whether it's a saving and careful person, sir.'

'That's very true,' said Mr Pickwick, 'but the person I have in my eye (here he looked very hard at Mrs. Bardell) I think possesses these qualities; and has, moreover, a considerable knowledge of the world, and a great deal of sharpness, Mrs. Bardell, which may be of material use to me.'

'La, Mr Pickwick,' said Mrs. Bardell, the crimson rising to her cap-border again.

'I do,' said Mr Pickwick, growing energetic, as was his wont in speaking of a subject which interested him - 'I do, indeed; and to tell you the truth, Mrs. Bardell, I have made up my mind.'

'Dear me, sir,' exclaimed Mrs. Bardell.

'You'll think it very strange now,' said the amiable Mr Pickwick, with a good-humoured glance at his companion, 'that I never consulted you about this matter, and never even mentioned it, till I sent your little boy out this morning - eh?'

Mrs. Bardell could only reply by a look. She had long worshipped Mr Pickwick at a distance, but here she was, all at once, raised to a pinnacle to which her wildest and most extravagant hopes had never dared to aspire. Mr Pickwick was going to propose - a deliberate plan, too - sent her little boy to the Borough, to get him out of the way - how thoughtful - how considerate!

'Well,' said Mr Pickwick, 'what do you think?'

'Oh, Mr Pickwick,' said Mrs. Bardell, trembling with agitation, 'you're very kind, sir.'

'It'll save you a good deal of trouble, won't it?' said Mr Pickwick. 'Oh, I never thought anything of the trouble, sir,' replied Mrs. Bardell; 'and, of course, I should take more trouble to please you than ever; but it is so kind of you, Mr Pickwick, to have so much consideration for my loneliness.'

'Ah, to be sure,' said Mr Pickwick; 'I never thought of that. When I am in town, you'll always have somebody to sit with you. To be sure, so you will.'

'I am sure I ought to be a very happy woman,' said Mrs. Bardell.

'And your little boy - ' said Mr Pickwick.

'Bless his heart!' interposed Mrs. Bardell, with a maternal sob.

'He, too, will have a companion,' resumed Mr Pickwick, 'a lively one, who'll teach him, I'll be bound, more tricks in a week than he would ever learn in a year.' And Mr Pickwick smiled placidly.

'Oh, you dear - ' said Mrs. Bardell.

Mr Pickwick started.

'Oh, you kind, good, playful dear,' said Mrs. Bardell; and without more ado, she rose from her chair, and flung her arms round Mr Pickwick's neck, with a cataract of tears and a chorus of sobs.

'Bless my soul,' cried the astonished Mr Pickwick; 'Mrs. Bardell, my good woman - dear me, what a situation - pray consider. - Mrs. Bardell, don't - if anybody should come - '

'Oh, let them come,' exclaimed Mrs. Bardell frantically; 'I'll never leave you - dear, kind, good soul;' and, with these words, Mrs. Bardell clung the tighter.

'Mercy upon me,' said Mr Pickwick, struggling violently, 'I hear somebody coming up the stairs. Don't, don't, there's a good creature, don't.' But entreaty and remonstrance were alike unavailing; for Mrs. Bardell had fainted in Mr Pickwick's arms; and before he could gain time to deposit her on a chair, Master Bardell entered the room, ushering in Mr Tupman, Mr Winkle, and Mr Snodgrass.

Mr Pickwick was struck motionless and speechless. He stood with his lovely burden in his arms, gazing vacantly on the countenances of his

friends, without the slightest attempt at recognition or explanation. They, in their turn, stared at him; and Master Bardell, in his turn, stared at everybody.

The astonishment of the Pickwickians was so absorbing, and the perplexity of Mr Pickwick was so extreme, that they might have remained in exactly the same relative situations until the suspended animation of the lady was restored, had it not been for a most beautiful and touching expression of filial affection on the part of her youthful son. Clad in a tight suit of corduroy, spangled with brass buttons of a very considerable size, he at first stood at the door astounded and uncertain; but by degrees, the impression that his mother must have suffered some personal damage pervaded his partially developed mind, and considering Mr Pickwick as the aggressor, he set up an appalling and semi- earthly kind of howling, and butting forward with his head, commenced assailing that immortal gentleman about the back and legs, with such blows and pinches as the strength of his arm, and the violence of his excitement, allowed.

'Take this little villain away,' said the agonised Mr Pickwick, 'he's mad.'

'What is the matter?' said the three tongue-tied Pickwickians.

'I don't know,' replied Mr Pickwick pettishly. 'Take away the boy.' (Here Mr Winkle carried the interesting boy, screaming and struggling, to the farther end of the apartment.) 'Now help me, lead this woman downstairs.'

'Oh, I am better now,' said Mrs. Bardell faintly.

'Let me lead you downstairs,' said the ever-gallant Mr Tupman.

'Thank you, sir - thank you;' exclaimed Mrs. Bardell hysterically. And downstairs she was led accordingly, accompanied by her affectionate son.

'I cannot conceive,' said Mr Pickwick when his friend returned - 'I cannot conceive what has been the matter with that woman. I had merely announced to her my intention of keeping a man-servant, when she fell into the extraordinary paroxysm in which you found her. Very extraordinary thing.'

'Very,' said his three friends.

'Placed me in such an extremely awkward situation,' continued Mr Pickwick.

'Very,' was the reply of his followers, as they coughed slightly, and looked dubiously at each other.

This behaviour was not lost upon Mr Pickwick. He remarked their incredulity. They evidently suspected him.

'There is a man in the passage now,' said Mr Tupman.

'It's the man I spoke to you about,' said Mr Pickwick; 'I sent for him to the Borough this morning. Have the goodness to call him up, Snodgrass.'

Mr Snodgrass did as he was desired; and Mr Samuel Weller forthwith presented himself.

'Oh - you remember me, I suppose?' said Mr Pickwick.

'I should think so,' replied Sam, with a patronising wink. 'Queer start that 'ere, but he was one too many for you, warn't he? Up to snuff and a pinch or two over - eh?'

'Never mind that matter now,' said Mr Pickwick hastily; 'I want to speak to you about something else. Sit down.'

'Thank'ee, sir,' said Sam. And down he sat without further bidding, having previously deposited his old white hat on the landing outside the door. 'Tain't a very good 'un to look at,' said Sam, 'but it's an astonishin' 'un to wear; and afore the brim went, it was a very handsome tile. Hows'ever it's lighter without it, that's one thing, and every hole lets in some air, that's another - wentilation gossamer I calls it.' On the delivery of this sentiment, Mr Weller smiled agreeably upon the assembled Pickwickians.

'Now with regard to the matter on which I, with the concurrence of these gentlemen, sent for you,' said Mr Pickwick.

'That's the pint, sir,' interposed Sam; 'out vith it, as the father said to his child, when he swallowed a farden.'

'We want to know, in the first place,' said Mr Pickwick, 'whether you have any reason to be discontented with your present situation.'

'Afore I answers that 'ere question, gen'l'm'n,' replied Mr Weller, 'I should like to know, in the first place, whether you're a-goin' to purvide me with a better?'

A sunbeam of placid benevolence played on Mr Pickwick's features as he said, 'I have half made up my mind to engage you myself.'

'Have you, though?' said Sam.

Mr Pickwick nodded in the affirmative.

'Wages?' inquired Sam.

'Twelve pounds a year,' replied Mr Pickwick.

'Clothes?'

'Two suits.'

'Work?'

'To attend upon me; and travel about with me and these gentlemen here.' 'Take the bill down,' said Sam emphatically. 'I'm let to a single gentleman, and the terms is agreed upon.'

'You accept the situation?' inquired Mr Pickwick. 'Cert'nly,' replied Sam. 'If the clothes fits me half as well as the place, they'll do.'

'You can get a character of course?' said Mr Pickwick.

'Ask the landlady o' the White Hart about that, Sir,' replied Sam.

'Can you come this evening?'

'I'll get into the clothes this minute, if they're here,' said Sam, with great alacrity.

'Call at eight this evening,' said Mr Pickwick; 'and if the inquiries are satisfactory, they shall be provided.'

With the single exception of one amiable indiscretion, in which an assistant housemaid had equally participated, the history of Mr Weller's conduct was so very blameless, that Mr Pickwick felt fully justified in closing the engagement that very evening. With the promptness and energy which characterised not only the public proceedings, but all the private actions of this extraordinary man, he at once led his new attendant to one of those convenient emporiums where gentlemen's new and second-hand clothes are provided, and the troublesome and inconvenient formality of measurement dispensed with; and before night had closed in, Mr Weller was furnished with a grey coat with the P. C. button, a black hat with a cockade to it, a pink striped waistcoat, light breeches and gaiters, and a variety of other necessaries, too numerous to recapitulate.

'Well,' said that suddenly-transformed individual, as he took his seat on the outside of the Eatanswill coach next morning; 'I wonder whether I'm meant to be a footman, or a groom, or a gamekeeper, or a seedsman. I looks like a sort of compo of every one on 'em. Never mind; there's a change of air, plenty to see, and little to do; and all this suits my complaint uncommon; so long life to the Pickvicks, says I!'