

## **Chapter XVI**

### **Too Full Of Adventure To Be Briefly Described**

There is no month in the whole year in which nature wears a more beautiful appearance than in the month of August. Spring has many beauties, and May is a fresh and blooming month, but the charms of this time of year are enhanced by their contrast with the winter season. August has no such advantage. It comes when we remember nothing but clear skies, green fields, and sweet-smelling flowers - when the recollection of snow, and ice, and bleak winds, has faded from our minds as completely as they have disappeared from the earth - and yet what a pleasant time it is! Orchards and cornfields ring with the hum of labour; trees bend beneath the thick clusters of rich fruit which bow their branches to the ground; and the corn, piled in graceful sheaves, or waving in every light breath that sweeps above it, as if it wooed the sickle, tinges the landscape with a golden hue. A mellow softness appears to hang over the whole earth; the influence of the season seems to extend itself to the very wagon, whose slow motion across the well-reaped field is perceptible only to the eye, but strikes with no harsh sound upon the ear.

As the coach rolls swiftly past the fields and orchards which skirt the road, groups of women and children, piling the fruit in sieves, or gathering the scattered ears of corn, pause for an instant from their labour, and shading the sun-burned face with a still browner hand, gaze upon the passengers with curious eyes, while some stout urchin, too small to work, but too mischievous to be left at home, scrambles over the side of the basket in which he has been deposited for security, and kicks and screams with delight. The reaper stops in his work, and stands with folded arms, looking at the vehicle as it whirls past; and the rough cart-horses bestow a sleepy glance upon the smart coach team, which says as plainly as a horse's glance can, 'It's all very fine to look at, but slow going, over a heavy field, is better than warm work like that, upon a dusty road, after all.' You cast a look behind you, as you turn a corner of the road. The women and children have resumed their labour; the reaper once more stoops to his work; the cart-horses have moved on; and all are again in motion. The influence of a scene like this, was not lost upon the well-regulated mind of Mr Pickwick. Intent upon the resolution he had formed, of exposing the real character of the nefarious Jingle, in any quarter in which he might be pursuing his fraudulent designs, he sat at first taciturn and contemplative, brooding over the means by which his purpose could be best attained. By degrees his attention grew more and more attracted by the objects around him; and at last he derived as much enjoyment from the ride, as if it had been undertaken for the pleasantest reason in the world.

'Delightful prospect, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick.

'Beats the chimbley-pots, Sir,' replied Mr Weller, touching his hat.

'I suppose you have hardly seen anything but chimney-pots and bricks and mortar all your life, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, smiling.

'I worn't always a boots, sir,' said Mr Weller, with a shake of the head. 'I was a vaginer's boy, once.'

'When was that?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'When I was first pitched neck and crop into the world, to play at leap-frog with its troubles,' replied Sam. 'I was a carrier's boy at startin'; then a vaginer's, then a helper, then a boots. Now I'm a gen'l'm'n's servant. I shall be a gen'l'm'n myself one of these days, perhaps, with a pipe in my mouth, and a summer-house in the back-garden. Who knows? I shouldn't be surprised for one.'

'You are quite a philosopher, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick.

'It runs in the family, I b'lieve, sir,' replied Mr Weller. 'My father's wery much in that line now. If my mother-in-law blows him up, he whistles. She flies in a passion, and breaks his pipe; he steps out, and gets another. Then she screams wery loud, and falls into 'sterics; and he smokes wery comfortably till she comes to agin. That's philosophy, Sir, ain't it?'

'A very good substitute for it, at all events,' replied Mr Pickwick, laughing. 'It must have been of great service to you, in the course of your rambling life, Sam.'

'Service, sir,' exclaimed Sam. 'You may say that. Arter I run away from the carrier, and afore I took up with the vaginer, I had unfurnished lodgin's for a fortnight.'

'Unfurnished lodgings?' said Mr Pickwick.

'Yes - the dry arches of Waterloo Bridge. Fine sleeping-place - vithin ten minutes' walk of all the public offices - only if there is any objection to it, it is that the sitivation's rayther too airy. I see some queer sights there.' 'Ah, I suppose you did,' said Mr Pickwick, with an air of considerable interest.

'Sights, sir,' resumed Mr Weller, 'as 'ud penetrate your benevolent heart, and come out on the other side. You don't see the reg'lar wagrants there; trust 'em, they knows better than that. Young beggars, male and female, as hasn't made a rise in their profession,

takes up their quarters there sometimes; but it's generally the worn-out, starving, houseless creeturs as roll themselves in the dark corners o' them lonesome places - poor creeturs as ain't up to the twopenny rope.'

'And pray, Sam, what is the twopenny rope?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'The twopenny rope, sir,' replied Mr Weller, 'is just a cheap lodgin' house, where the beds is twopence a night.'

'What do they call a bed a rope for?' said Mr Pickwick.

'Bless your innocence, sir, that ain't it,' replied Sam. 'Ven the lady and gen'l'm'n as keeps the hot-el first begun business, they used to make the beds on the floor; but this wouldn't do at no price, 'cos instead o' taking a moderate twopenn'orth o' sleep, the lodgers used to lie there half the day. So now they has two ropes, 'bout six foot apart, and three from the floor, which goes right down the room; and the beds are made of slips of coarse sacking, stretched across 'em.'

'Well,' said Mr Pickwick.

'Well,' said Mr Weller, 'the advantage o' the plan's hobvious. At six o'clock every mornin' they let's go the ropes at one end, and down falls the lodgers. Consequence is, that being thoroughly waked, they get up very quietly, and walk away! Beg your pardon, sir,' said Sam, suddenly breaking off in his loquacious discourse. 'Is this Bury St. Edmunds?'

'It is,' replied Mr Pickwick.

The coach rattled through the well-paved streets of a handsome little town, of thriving and cleanly appearance, and stopped before a large inn situated in a wide open street, nearly facing the old abbey.

'And this,' said Mr Pickwick, looking up. 'Is the Angel! We alight here, Sam. But some caution is necessary. Order a private room, and do not mention my name. You understand.'

'Right as a trivet, sir,' replied Mr Weller, with a wink of intelligence; and having dragged Mr Pickwick's portmanteau from the hind boot, into which it had been hastily thrown when they joined the coach at Eatanswill, Mr Weller disappeared on his errand. A private room was speedily engaged; and into it Mr Pickwick was ushered without delay. 'Now, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, 'the first thing to be done is to - ' 'Order dinner, Sir,' interposed Mr Weller. 'It's verry late, sir.'

'Ah, so it is,' said Mr Pickwick, looking at his watch. 'You are right, Sam.'

'And if I might advise, Sir,' added Mr Weller, 'I'd just have a good night's rest arterwards, and not begin inquiring arter this here deep 'un till the mornin'. There's nothin' so refreshen' as sleep, sir, as the servant girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful of laudanum.'

'I think you are right, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick. 'But I must first ascertain that he is in the house, and not likely to go away.'

'Leave that to me, Sir,' said Sam. 'Let me order you a snug little dinner, and make my inquiries below while it's a-getting ready; I could worm ev'ry secret out O' the boots's heart, in five minutes, Sir.' 'Do so,' said Mr Pickwick; and Mr Weller at once retired.

In half an hour, Mr Pickwick was seated at a very satisfactory dinner; and in three-quarters Mr Weller returned with the intelligence that Mr Charles Fitz-Marshall had ordered his private room to be retained for him, until further notice. He was going to spend the evening at some private house in the neighbourhood, had ordered the boots to sit up until his return, and had taken his servant with him.

'Now, sir,' argued Mr Weller, when he had concluded his report, 'if I can get a talk with this here servant in the mornin', he'll tell me all his master's concerns.'

'How do you know that?' interposed Mr Pickwick.

'Bless your heart, sir, servants always do,' replied Mr Weller.

'Oh, ah, I forgot that,' said Mr Pickwick. 'Well.'

'Then you can arrange what's best to be done, sir, and we can act accordingly.'

As it appeared that this was the best arrangement that could be made, it was finally agreed upon. Mr Weller, by his master's permission, retired to spend the evening in his own way; and was shortly afterwards elected, by the unanimous voice of the assembled company, into the taproom chair, in which honourable post he acquitted himself so much to the satisfaction of the gentlemen-frequenters, that their roars of laughter and approbation penetrated to Mr Pickwick's bedroom, and shortened the term of his natural rest by at least three hours.

Early on the ensuing morning, Mr Weller was dispelling all the feverish remains of the previous evening's conviviality, through the

instrumentality of a halfpenny shower-bath (having induced a young gentleman attached to the stable department, by the offer of that coin, to pump over his head and face, until he was perfectly restored), when he was attracted by the appearance of a young fellow in mulberry-coloured livery, who was sitting on a bench in the yard, reading what appeared to be a hymn-book, with an air of deep abstraction, but who occasionally stole a glance at the individual under the pump, as if he took some interest in his proceedings, nevertheless.

'You're a rum 'un to look at, you are!' thought Mr Weller, the first time his eyes encountered the glance of the stranger in the mulberry suit, who had a large, sallow, ugly face, very sunken eyes, and a gigantic head, from which depended a quantity of lank black hair. 'You're a rum 'un!' thought Mr Weller; and thinking this, he went on washing himself, and thought no more about him.

Still the man kept glancing from his hymn-book to Sam, and from Sam to his hymn-book, as if he wanted to open a conversation. So at last, Sam, by way of giving him an opportunity, said with a familiar nod -

'How are you, governor?'

'I am happy to say, I am pretty well, Sir,' said the man, speaking with great deliberation, and closing the book. 'I hope you are the same, Sir?'

'Why, if I felt less like a walking brandy-bottle I shouldn't be quite so staggery this mornin',' replied Sam. 'Are you stoppin' in this house, old 'un?'

The mulberry man replied in the affirmative.

'How was it you worn't one of us, last night?' inquired Sam, scrubbing his face with the towel. 'You seem one of the jolly sort - looks as conwivial as a live trout in a lime basket,' added Mr Weller, in an undertone.

'I was out last night with my master,' replied the stranger.

'What's his name?' inquired Mr Weller, colouring up very red with sudden excitement, and the friction of the towel combined.

'Fitz-Marshall,' said the mulberry man.

'Give us your hand,' said Mr Weller, advancing; 'I should like to know you. I like your appearance, old fellow.'

'Well, that is very strange,' said the mulberry man, with great simplicity of manner. 'I like yours so much, that I wanted to speak to you, from the very first moment I saw you under the pump.' 'Did you though?'

'Upon my word. Now, isn't that curious?'

'Wery sing'ler,' said Sam, inwardly congratulating himself upon the softness of the stranger. 'What's your name, my patriarch?'

'Job.'

'And a wery good name it is; only one I know that ain't got a nickname to it. What's the other name?'

'Trotter,' said the stranger. 'What is yours?'

Sam bore in mind his master's caution, and replied -

'My name's Walker; my master's name's Wilkins. Will you take a drop o' somethin' this mornin', Mr Trotter?'

Mr Trotter acquiesced in this agreeable proposal; and having deposited his book in his coat pocket, accompanied Mr Weller to the tap, where they were soon occupied in discussing an exhilarating compound, formed by mixing together, in a pewter vessel, certain quantities of British Hollands and the fragrant essence of the clove.

'And what sort of a place have you got?' inquired Sam, as he filled his companion's glass, for the second time.

'Bad,' said Job, smacking his lips, 'very bad.'

'You don't mean that?' said Sam.

'I do, indeed. Worse than that, my master's going to be married.'

'No.'

'Yes; and worse than that, too, he's going to run away with an immense rich heiress, from boarding-school.'

'What a dragon!' said Sam, refilling his companion's glass. 'It's some boarding-school in this town, I suppose, ain't it?' Now, although this question was put in the most careless tone imaginable, Mr Job Trotter plainly showed by gestures that he perceived his new friend's anxiety to draw forth an answer to it. He emptied his glass, looked mysteriously at his companion, winked both of his small eyes, one

after the other, and finally made a motion with his arm, as if he were working an imaginary pump-handle; thereby intimating that he (Mr Trotter) considered himself as undergoing the process of being pumped by Mr Samuel Weller.

'No, no,' said Mr Trotter, in conclusion, 'that's not to be told to everybody. That is a secret - a great secret, Mr Walker.' As the mulberry man said this, he turned his glass upside down, by way of reminding his companion that he had nothing left wherewith to slake his thirst. Sam observed the hint; and feeling the delicate manner in which it was conveyed, ordered the pewter vessel to be refilled, whereat the small eyes of the mulberry man glistened.

'And so it's a secret?' said Sam.

'I should rather suspect it was,' said the mulberry man, sipping his liquor, with a complacent face.

'i suppose your mas'r's wery rich?' said Sam.

Mr Trotter smiled, and holding his glass in his left hand, gave four distinct slaps on the pockets of his mulberry indescribables with his right, as if to intimate that his master might have done the same without alarming anybody much by the chinking of coin.

'Ah,' said Sam, 'that's the game, is it?'

The mulberry man nodded significantly.

'Well, and don't you think, old feller,' remonstrated Mr Weller, 'that if you let your master take in this here young lady, you're a precious rascal?'

'I know that,' said Job Trotter, turning upon his companion a countenance of deep contrition, and groaning slightly, 'I know that, and that's what it is that preys upon my mind. But what am I to do?'

'Do!' said Sam; 'di-wulge to the missis, and give up your master.'

'Who'd believe me?' replied Job Trotter. 'The young lady's considered the very picture of innocence and discretion. She'd deny it, and so would my master. Who'd believe me? I should lose my place, and get indicted for a conspiracy, or some such thing; that's all I should take by my motion.'

'There's somethin' in that,' said Sam, ruminating; 'there's somethin' in that.'

'If I knew any respectable gentleman who would take the matter up,' continued Mr Trotter. 'I might have some hope of preventing the elopement; but there's the same difficulty, Mr Walker, just the same. I know no gentleman in this strange place; and ten to one if I did, whether he would believe my story.'

'Come this way,' said Sam, suddenly jumping up, and grasping the mulberry man by the arm. 'My mas'r's the man you want, I see.' And after a slight resistance on the part of Job Trotter, Sam led his newly-found friend to the apartment of Mr Pickwick, to whom he presented him, together with a brief summary of the dialogue we have just repeated.

'I am very sorry to betray my master, sir,' said Job Trotter, applying to his eyes a pink checked pocket-handkerchief about six inches square.

'The feeling does you a great deal of honour,' replied Mr Pickwick; 'but it is your duty, nevertheless.'

'I know it is my duty, Sir,' replied Job, with great emotion. 'We should all try to discharge our duty, Sir, and I humbly endeavour to discharge mine, Sir; but it is a hard trial to betray a master, Sir, whose clothes you wear, and whose bread you eat, even though he is a scoundrel, Sir.'

'You are a very good fellow,' said Mr Pickwick, much affected; 'an honest fellow.'

'Come, come,' interposed Sam, who had witnessed Mr Trotter's tears with considerable impatience, 'blow this 'ere water-cart bis'ness. It won't do no good, this won't.'

'Sam,' said Mr Pickwick reproachfully. 'I am sorry to find that you have so little respect for this young man's feelings.'

'His feelin's is all verry well, Sir,' replied Mr Weller; 'and as they're so verry fine, and it's a pity he should lose 'em, I think he'd better keep 'em in his own buzzum, than let 'em ewaporate in hot water, 'specially as they do no good. Tears never yet wound up a clock, or worked a steam ingin'. The next time you go out to a smoking party, young fellow, fill your pipe with that 'ere reflection; and for the present just put that bit of pink gingham into your pocket. 'Tain't so handsome that you need keep waving it about, as if you was a tight-rope dancer.'

'My man is in the right,' said Mr Pickwick, accosting Job, 'although his mode of expressing his opinion is somewhat homely, and occasionally incomprehensible.'



'He is, sir, very right,' said Mr Trotter, 'and I will give way no longer.'  
'Very well,' said Mr Pickwick. 'Now, where is this boarding-school?'

'It is a large, old, red brick house, just outside the town, Sir,' replied Job Trotter.

'And when,' said Mr Pickwick - 'when is this villainous design to be carried into execution - when is this elopement to take place?'

'To-night, Sir,' replied Job.

'To-night!' exclaimed Mr Pickwick. 'This very night, sir,' replied Job Trotter. 'That is what alarms me so much.'

'Instant measures must be taken,' said Mr Pickwick. 'I will see the lady who keeps the establishment immediately.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Job, 'but that course of proceeding will never do.'

'Why not?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'My master, sir, is a very artful man.'

'I know he is,' said Mr Pickwick.

'And he has so wound himself round the old lady's heart, Sir,' resumed Job, 'that she would believe nothing to his prejudice, if you went down on your bare knees, and swore it; especially as you have no proof but the word of a servant, who, for anything she knows (and my master would be sure to say so), was discharged for some fault, and does this in revenge.'

'What had better be done, then?' said Mr Pickwick.

'Nothing but taking him in the very act of eloping, will convince the old lady, sir,' replied Job.

'All them old cats WILL run their heads agin milestones,' observed Mr Weller, in a parenthesis.

'But this taking him in the very act of elopement, would be a very difficult thing to accomplish, I fear,' said Mr Pickwick.

'I don't know, sir,' said Mr Trotter, after a few moments' reflection. 'I think it might be very easily done.'

'How?' was Mr Pickwick's inquiry.

'Why,' replied Mr Trotter, 'my master and I, being in the confidence of the two servants, will be secreted in the kitchen at ten o'clock. When the family have retired to rest, we shall come out of the kitchen, and the young lady out of her bedroom. A post-chaise will be waiting, and away we go.'

'Well?' said Mr Pickwick.

'Well, sir, I have been thinking that if you were in waiting in the garden behind, alone - '

'Alone,' said Mr Pickwick. 'Why alone?'

'I thought it very natural,' replied Job, 'that the old lady wouldn't like such an unpleasant discovery to be made before more persons than can possibly be helped. The young lady, too, sir - consider her feelings.'

'You are very right,' said Mr Pickwick. 'The consideration evinces your delicacy of feeling. Go on; you are very right.'

'Well, sir, I have been thinking that if you were waiting in the back garden alone, and I was to let you in, at the door which opens into it, from the end of the passage, at exactly half-past eleven o'clock, you would be just in the very moment of time to assist me in frustrating the designs of this bad man, by whom I have been unfortunately ensnared.' Here Mr Trotter sighed deeply.

'Don't distress yourself on that account,' said Mr Pickwick; 'if he had one grain of the delicacy of feeling which distinguishes you, humble as your station is, I should have some hopes of him.'

Job Trotter bowed low; and in spite of Mr Weller's previous remonstrance, the tears again rose to his eyes.

'I never see such a feller,' said Sam, 'Blessed if I don't think he's got a main in his head as is always turned on.'

'Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, with great severity, 'hold your tongue.'

'Wery well, sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'I don't like this plan,' said Mr Pickwick, after deep meditation. 'Why cannot I communicate with the young lady's friends?'

'Because they live one hundred miles from here, sir,' responded Job Trotter.

'That's a clincher,' said Mr Weller, aside.

'Then this garden,' resumed Mr Pickwick. 'How am I to get into it?'

'The wall is very low, sir, and your servant will give you a leg up.' 'My servant will give me a leg up,' repeated Mr Pickwick mechanically. 'You will be sure to be near this door that you speak of?'

'You cannot mistake it, Sir; it's the only one that opens into the garden. Tap at it when you hear the clock strike, and I will open it instantly.'

'I don't like the plan,' said Mr Pickwick; 'but as I see no other, and as the happiness of this young lady's whole life is at stake, I adopt it. I shall be sure to be there.'

Thus, for the second time, did Mr Pickwick's innate good- feeling involve him in an enterprise from which he would most willingly have stood aloof.

'What is the name of the house?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'Westgate House, Sir. You turn a little to the right when you get to the end of the town; it stands by itself, some little distance off the high road, with the name on a brass plate on the gate.'

'I know it,' said Mr Pickwick. 'I observed it once before, when I was in this town. You may depend upon me.'

Mr Trotter made another bow, and turned to depart, when Mr Pickwick thrust a guinea into his hand.

'You're a fine fellow,' said Mr Pickwick, 'and I admire your goodness of heart. No thanks. Remember - eleven o'clock.'

'There is no fear of my forgetting it, sir,' replied Job Trotter. With these words he left the room, followed by Sam.

'I say,' said the latter, 'not a bad notion that 'ere crying. I'd cry like a rain-water spout in a shower on such good terms. How do you do it?'

'It comes from the heart, Mr Walker,' replied Job solemnly. 'Good-morning, sir.'

'You're a soft customer, you are; we've got it all out o' you, anyhow,' thought Mr Weller, as Job walked away.

We cannot state the precise nature of the thoughts which passed through Mr Trotter's mind, because we don't know what they were.

The day wore on, evening came, and at a little before ten o'clock Sam Weller reported that Mr Jingle and Job had gone out together, that their luggage was packed up, and that they had ordered a chaise. The plot was evidently in execution, as Mr Trotter had foretold.

Half-past ten o'clock arrived, and it was time for Mr Pickwick to issue forth on his delicate errand. Resisting Sam's tender of his greatcoat, in order that he might have no encumbrance in scaling the wall, he set forth, followed by his attendant.

There was a bright moon, but it was behind the clouds. it was a fine dry night, but it was most uncommonly dark. Paths, hedges, fields, houses, and trees, were enveloped in one deep shade. The atmosphere was hot and sultry, the summer lightning quivered faintly on the verge of the horizon, and was the only sight that varied the dull gloom in which everything was wrapped - sound there was none, except the distant barking of some restless house-dog.

They found the house, read the brass plate, walked round the wall, and stopped at that portion of it which divided them from the bottom of the garden.

'You will return to the inn, Sam, when you have assisted me over,' said Mr Pickwick.

'Wery well, Sir.'

'And you will sit up, till I return.'

'Cert'nly, Sir.'

'Take hold of my leg; and, when I say 'Over,' raise me gently.'

'All right, sir.'

Having settled these preliminaries, Mr Pickwick grasped the top of the wall, and gave the word 'Over,' which was literally obeyed. Whether his body partook in some degree of the elasticity of his mind, or whether Mr Weller's notions of a gentle push were of a somewhat rougher description than Mr Pickwick's, the immediate effect of his assistance was to jerk that immortal gentleman completely over the wall on to the bed beneath, where, after crushing three gooseberry-bushes and a rose-tree, he finally alighted at full length.

'You ha'n't hurt yourself, I hope, Sir?' said Sam, in a loud whisper, as soon as he had recovered from the surprise consequent upon the mysterious disappearance of his master.

'I have not hurt MYSELF, Sam, certainly,' replied Mr Pickwick, from the other side of the wall, 'but I rather think that YOU have hurt me.'

'I hope not, Sir,' said Sam.

'Never mind,' said Mr Pickwick, rising, 'it's nothing but a few scratches. Go away, or we shall be overheard.'

'Good-bye, Sir.'

'Good-bye.'

With stealthy steps Sam Weller departed, leaving Mr Pickwick alone in the garden.

Lights occasionally appeared in the different windows of the house, or glanced from the staircases, as if the inmates were retiring to rest. Not caring to go too near the door, until the appointed time, Mr Pickwick crouched into an angle of the wall, and awaited its arrival.

It was a situation which might well have depressed the spirits of many a man. Mr Pickwick, however, felt neither depression nor misgiving. He knew that his purpose was in the main a good one, and he placed implicit reliance on the high-minded Job. It was dull, certainly; not to say dreary; but a contemplative man can always employ himself in meditation. Mr Pickwick had meditated himself into a doze, when he was roused by the chimes of the neighbouring church ringing out the hour - half-past eleven.

'That's the time,' thought Mr Pickwick, getting cautiously on his feet. He looked up at the house. The lights had disappeared, and the shutters were closed - all in bed, no doubt. He walked on tiptoe to the door, and gave a gentle tap. Two or three minutes passing without any reply, he gave another tap rather louder, and then another rather louder than that.

At length the sound of feet was audible upon the stairs, and then the light of a candle shone through the keyhole of the door. There was a good deal of unchaining and unbolting, and the door was slowly opened.

Now the door opened outwards; and as the door opened wider and wider, Mr Pickwick receded behind it, more and more. What was his astonishment when he just peeped out, by way of caution, to see that

the person who had opened it was - not Job Trotter, but a servant-girl with a candle in her hand! Mr Pickwick drew in his head again, with the swiftness displayed by that admirable melodramatic performer, Punch, when he lies in wait for the flat-headed comedian with the tin box of music.

'It must have been the cat, Sarah,' said the girl, addressing herself to some one in the house. 'Puss, puss, puss, - tit, tit, tit.'

But no animal being decoyed by these blandishments, the girl slowly closed the door, and re-fastened it; leaving Mr Pickwick drawn up straight against the wall.

'This is very curious,' thought Mr Pickwick. 'They are sitting up beyond their usual hour, I suppose. Extremely unfortunate, that they should have chosen this night, of all others, for such a purpose - exceedingly.' And with these thoughts, Mr Pickwick cautiously retired to the angle of the wall in which he had been before ensconced; waiting until such time as he might deem it safe to repeat the signal.

He had not been here five minutes, when a vivid flash of lightning was followed by a loud peal of thunder that crashed and rolled away in the distance with a terrific noise - then came another flash of lightning, brighter than the other, and a second peal of thunder louder than the first; and then down came the rain, with a force and fury that swept everything before it.

Mr Pickwick was perfectly aware that a tree is a very dangerous neighbour in a thunderstorm. He had a tree on his right, a tree on his left, a third before him, and a fourth behind. If he remained where he was, he might fall the victim of an accident; if he showed himself in the centre of the garden, he might be consigned to a constable. Once or twice he tried to scale the wall, but having no other legs this time, than those with which Nature had furnished him, the only effect of his struggles was to inflict a variety of very unpleasant gratings on his knees and shins, and to throw him into a state of the most profuse perspiration.

'What a dreadful situation,' said Mr Pickwick, pausing to wipe his brow after this exercise. He looked up at the house - all was dark. They must be gone to bed now. He would try the signal again.

He walked on tiptoe across the moist gravel, and tapped at the door. He held his breath, and listened at the key-hole. No reply: very odd. Another knock. He listened again. There was a low whispering inside, and then a voice cried -

'Who's there?'

'That's not Job,' thought Mr Pickwick, hastily drawing himself straight up against the wall again. 'It's a woman.'

He had scarcely had time to form this conclusion, when a window above stairs was thrown up, and three or four female voices repeated the query - 'Who's there?'

Mr Pickwick dared not move hand or foot. It was clear that the whole establishment was roused. He made up his mind to remain where he was, until the alarm had subsided; and then by a supernatural effort, to get over the wall, or perish in the attempt.

Like all Mr Pickwick's determinations, this was the best that could be made under the circumstances; but, unfortunately, it was founded upon the assumption that they would not venture to open the door again. What was his discomfiture, when he heard the chain and bolts withdrawn, and saw the door slowly opening, wider and wider! He retreated into the corner, step by step; but do what he would, the interposition of his own person, prevented its being opened to its utmost width.

'Who's there?' screamed a numerous chorus of treble voices from the staircase inside, consisting of the spinster lady of the establishment, three teachers, five female servants, and thirty boarders, all half-dressed and in a forest of curl-papers.

Of course Mr Pickwick didn't say who was there: and then the burden of the chorus changed into - 'Lor! I am so frightened.'

'Cook,' said the lady abbess, who took care to be on the top stair, the very last of the group - 'cook, why don't you go a little way into the garden?' 'Please, ma'am, I don't like,' responded the cook.

'Lor, what a stupid thing that cook is!' said the thirty boarders.

'Cook,' said the lady abbess, with great dignity; 'don't answer me, if you please. I insist upon your looking into the garden immediately.'

Here the cook began to cry, and the housemaid said it was 'a shame!' for which partisanship she received a month's warning on the spot.

'Do you hear, cook?' said the lady abbess, stamping her foot impatiently.

'Don't you hear your missis, cook?' said the three teachers.

'What an impudent thing that cook is!' said the thirty boarders.

The unfortunate cook, thus strongly urged, advanced a step or two, and holding her candle just where it prevented her from seeing at all, declared there was nothing there, and it must have been the wind. The door was just going to be closed in consequence, when an inquisitive boarder, who had been peeping between the hinges, set up a fearful screaming, which called back the cook and housemaid, and all the more adventurous, in no time.

'What is the matter with Miss Smithers?' said the lady abbess, as the aforesaid Miss Smithers proceeded to go into hysterics of four young lady power.

'Lor, Miss Smithers, dear,' said the other nine-and-twenty boarders.

'Oh, the man - the man - behind the door!' screamed Miss Smithers.

The lady abbess no sooner heard this appalling cry, than she retreated to her own bedroom, double-locked the door, and fainted away comfortably. The boarders, and the teachers, and the servants, fell back upon the stairs, and upon each other; and never was such a screaming, and fainting, and struggling beheld. In the midst of the tumult, Mr Pickwick emerged from his concealment, and presented himself amongst them.

'Ladies - dear ladies,' said Mr Pickwick.

'Oh, he says we're dear,' cried the oldest and ugliest teacher. 'Oh, the wretch!'

'Ladies,' roared Mr Pickwick, rendered desperate by the danger of his situation. 'Hear me. I am no robber. I want the lady of the house.'

'Oh, what a ferocious monster!' screamed another teacher. 'He wants Miss Tomkins.'

Here there was a general scream.

'Ring the alarm bell, somebody!' cried a dozen voices.

'Don't - don't,' shouted Mr Pickwick. 'Look at me. Do I look like a robber! My dear ladies - you may bind me hand and leg, or lock me up in a closet, if you like. Only hear what I have got to say - only hear me.'

'How did you come in our garden?' faltered the housemaid.



'Call the lady of the house, and I'll tell her everything,' said Mr Pickwick, exerting his lungs to the utmost pitch. 'Call her - only be quiet, and call her, and you shall hear everything.'

It might have been Mr Pickwick's appearance, or it might have been his manner, or it might have been the temptation - irresistible to a female mind - of hearing something at present enveloped in mystery, that reduced the more reasonable portion of the establishment (some four individuals) to a state of comparative quiet. By them it was proposed, as a test of Mr Pickwick's sincerity, that he should immediately submit to personal restraint; and that gentleman having consented to hold a conference with Miss Tomkins, from the interior of a closet in which the day boarders hung their bonnets and sandwich-bags, he at once stepped into it, of his own accord, and was securely locked in. This revived the others; and Miss Tomkins having been brought to, and brought down, the conference began.

'What did you do in my garden, man?' said Miss Tomkins, in a faint voice.

'I came to warn you that one of your young ladies was going to elope to-night,' replied Mr Pickwick, from the interior of the closet.

'Elope!' exclaimed Miss Tomkins, the three teachers, the thirty boarders, and the five servants. 'Who with?' 'Your friend, Mr Charles Fitz-Marshall.'

'MY friend! I don't know any such person.'

'Well, Mr Jingle, then.'

'I never heard the name in my life.'

'Then, I have been deceived, and deluded,' said Mr Pickwick. 'I have been the victim of a conspiracy - a foul and base conspiracy. Send to the Angel, my dear ma'am, if you don't believe me. Send to the Angel for Mr Pickwick's manservant, I implore you, ma'am.'

'He must be respectable - he keeps a manservant,' said Miss Tomkins to the writing and ciphering governess.

'It's my opinion, Miss Tomkins,' said the writing and ciphering governess, 'that his manservant keeps him, I think he's a madman, Miss Tomkins, and the other's his keeper.'

'I think you are very right, Miss Gwynn,' responded Miss Tomkins. 'Let two of the servants repair to the Angel, and let the others remain here, to protect us.'

So two of the servants were despatched to the Angel in search of Mr Samuel Weller; and the remaining three stopped behind to protect Miss Tomkins, and the three teachers, and the thirty boarders. And Mr Pickwick sat down in the closet, beneath a grove of sandwich-bags, and awaited the return of the messengers, with all the philosophy and fortitude he could summon to his aid.

An hour and a half elapsed before they came back, and when they did come, Mr Pickwick recognised, in addition to the voice of Mr Samuel Weller, two other voices, the tones of which struck familiarly on his ear; but whose they were, he could not for the life of him call to mind.

A very brief conversation ensued. The door was unlocked. Mr Pickwick stepped out of the closet, and found himself in the presence of the whole establishment of Westgate House, Mr Samuel Weller, and - old Wardle, and his destined son-in-law, Mr Trundle!

'My dear friend,' said Mr Pickwick, running forward and grasping Wardle's hand, 'my dear friend, pray, for Heaven's sake, explain to this lady the unfortunate and dreadful situation in which I am placed. You must have heard it from my servant; say, at all events, my dear fellow, that I am neither a robber nor a madman.'

'I have said so, my dear friend. I have said so already,' replied Mr Wardle, shaking the right hand of his friend, while Mr Trundle shook the left. 'And whoever says, or has said, he is,' interposed Mr Weller, stepping forward, 'says that which is not the truth, but so far from it, on the contrary, quite the reverse. And if there's any number o' men on these here premises as has said so, I shall be wery happy to give 'em all a wery convincing proof o' their being mistaken, in this here wery room, if these wery respectable ladies 'll have the goodness to retire, and order 'em up, one at a time.' Having delivered this defiance with great volubility, Mr Weller struck his open palm emphatically with his clenched fist, and winked pleasantly on Miss Tomkins, the intensity of whose horror at his supposing it within the bounds of possibility that there could be any men on the premises of Westgate House Establishment for Young Ladies, it is impossible to describe.

Mr Pickwick's explanation having already been partially made, was soon concluded. But neither in the course of his walk home with his friends, nor afterwards when seated before a blazing fire at the supper he so much needed, could a single observation be drawn from him. He seemed bewildered and amazed. Once, and only once, he turned round to Mr Wardle, and said -

'How did you come here?'

'Trundle and I came down here, for some good shooting on the first,' replied Wardle. 'We arrived to-night, and were astonished to hear from your servant that you were here too. But I am glad you are,' said the old fellow, slapping him on the back - 'I am glad you are. We shall have a jovial party on the first, and we'll give Winkle another chance - eh, old boy?'

Mr Pickwick made no reply, he did not even ask after his friends at Dingley Dell, and shortly afterwards retired for the night, desiring Sam to fetch his candle when he rung. The bell did ring in due course, and Mr Weller presented himself.

'Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, looking out from under the bed-clothes.

'Sir,' said Mr Weller.

Mr Pickwick paused, and Mr Weller snuffed the candle.

'Sam,' said Mr Pickwick again, as if with a desperate effort.

'Sir,' said Mr Weller, once more.

'Where is that Trotter?'

'Job, sir?'

'Yes.'

'Gone, sir.'

'With his master, I suppose?'

'Friend or master, or whatever he is, he's gone with him,' replied Mr Weller. 'There's a pair on 'em, sir.'

'Jingle suspected my design, and set that fellow on you, with this story, I suppose?' said Mr Pickwick, half choking.

'Just that, sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'It was all false, of course?'

'All, sir,' replied Mr Weller. 'Reg'lar do, sir; artful dodge.'

'I don't think he'll escape us quite so easily the next time, Sam!' said Mr Pickwick.

'I don't think he will, Sir.'

'Whenever I meet that Jingle again, wherever it is,' said Mr Pickwick, raising himself in bed, and indenting his pillow with a tremendous blow, 'I'll inflict personal chastisement on him, in addition to the exposure he so richly merits. I will, or my name is not Pickwick.'

'And whenever I catches hold o' that there melan-cholly chap with the black hair,' said Sam, 'if I don't bring some real water into his eyes, for once in a way, my name ain't Weller. Good- night, Sir!'