

Chapter XXVI

Which Contains A Brief Account Of The Progress Of The Action Of Bardell Against Pickwick

Having accomplished the main end and object of his journey, by the exposure of Jingle, Mr Pickwick resolved on immediately returning to London, with the view of becoming acquainted with the proceedings which had been taken against him, in the meantime, by Messrs. Dodson and Fogg. Acting upon this resolution with all the energy and decision of his character, he mounted to the back seat of the first coach which left Ipswich on the morning after the memorable occurrences detailed at length in the two preceding chapters; and accompanied by his three friends, and Mr Samuel Weller, arrived in the metropolis, in perfect health and safety, the same evening.

Here the friends, for a short time, separated. Messrs. Tupman, Winkle, and Snodgrass repaired to their several homes to make such preparations as might be requisite for their forthcoming visit to Dingley Dell; and Mr Pickwick and Sam took up their present abode in very good, old-fashioned, and comfortable quarters, to wit, the George and Vulture Tavern and Hotel, George Yard, Lombard Street.

Mr Pickwick had dined, finished his second pint of particular port, pulled his silk handkerchief over his head, put his feet on the fender, and thrown himself back in an easy-chair, when the entrance of Mr Weller with his carpet-bag, aroused him from his tranquil meditation.

'Sam,' said Mr Pickwick. 'Sir,' said Mr Weller.

'I have just been thinking, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, 'that having left a good many things at Mrs. Bardell's, in Goswell Street, I ought to arrange for taking them away, before I leave town again.'

'Wery good, sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'I could send them to Mr Tupman's, for the present, Sam,' continued Mr Pickwick, 'but before we take them away, it is necessary that they should be looked up, and put together. I wish you would step up to Goswell Street, Sam, and arrange about it.'

'At once, Sir?' inquired Mr Weller.

'At once,' replied Mr Pickwick. 'And stay, Sam,' added Mr Pickwick, pulling out his purse, 'there is some rent to pay. The quarter is not due till Christmas, but you may pay it, and have done with it. A month's notice terminates my tenancy. Here it is, written out. Give it, and tell Mrs. Bardell she may put a bill up, as soon as she likes.'

'Wery good, sir,' replied Mr Weller; 'anythin' more, sir?'

'Nothing more, Sam.'

Mr Weller stepped slowly to the door, as if he expected something more; slowly opened it, slowly stepped out, and had slowly closed it within a couple of inches, when Mr Pickwick called out -

'Sam.'

'Yes, sir,' said Mr Weller, stepping quickly back, and closing the door behind him. 'I have no objection, Sam, to your endeavouring to ascertain how Mrs. Bardell herself seems disposed towards me, and whether it is really probable that this vile and groundless action is to be carried to extremity. I say I do not object to you doing this, if you wish it, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick.

Sam gave a short nod of intelligence, and left the room. Mr Pickwick drew the silk handkerchief once more over his head, and composed himself for a nap. Mr Weller promptly walked forth, to execute his commission.

It was nearly nine o'clock when he reached Goswell Street. A couple of candles were burning in the little front parlour, and a couple of caps were reflected on the window-blind. Mrs. Bardell had got company.

Mr Weller knocked at the door, and after a pretty long interval - occupied by the party without, in whistling a tune, and by the party within, in persuading a refractory flat candle to allow itself to be lighted - a pair of small boots pattered over the floor-cloth, and Master Bardell presented himself.

'Well, young townskip,' said Sam, 'how's mother?'

'She's pretty well,' replied Master Bardell, 'so am I.'

'Well, that's a mercy,' said Sam; 'tell her I want to speak to her, will you, my hinfant fernomenon?'

Master Bardell, thus adjured, placed the refractory flat candle on the bottom stair, and vanished into the front parlour with his message.

The two caps, reflected on the window-blind, were the respective head-dresses of a couple of Mrs. Bardell's most particular acquaintance, who had just stepped in, to have a quiet cup of tea, and a little warm supper of a couple of sets of pettitoes and some toasted cheese. The cheese was simmering and browning away, most delightfully, in a little Dutch oven before the fire; the pettitoes were getting on

deliciously in a little tin saucepan on the hob; and Mrs. Bardell and her two friends were getting on very well, also, in a little quiet conversation about and concerning all their particular friends and acquaintance; when Master Bardell came back from answering the door, and delivered the message intrusted to him by Mr Samuel Weller.

'Mr Pickwick's servant!' said Mrs. Bardell, turning pale.

'Bless my soul!' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'Well, I raly would not ha' believed it, unless I had ha' happened to ha' been here!' said Mrs. Sanders.

Mrs. Cluppins was a little, brisk, busy-looking woman; Mrs. Sanders was a big, fat, heavy-faced personage; and the two were the company.

Mrs. Bardell felt it proper to be agitated; and as none of the three exactly knew whether under existing circumstances, any communication, otherwise than through Dodson & Fogg, ought to be held with Mr Pickwick's servant, they were all rather taken by surprise. In this state of indecision, obviously the first thing to be done, was to thump the boy for finding Mr Weller at the door. So his mother thumped him, and he cried melodiously.

'Hold your noise - do - you naughty creetur!' said Mrs. Bardell.

'Yes; don't worrit your poor mother,' said Mrs. Sanders.

'She's quite enough to worrit her, as it is, without you, Tommy,' said Mrs. Cluppins, with sympathising resignation.

'Ah! worse luck, poor lamb!' said Mrs. Sanders. At all which moral reflections, Master Bardell howled the louder.

'Now, what shall I do?' said Mrs. Bardell to Mrs. Cluppins.

'I think you ought to see him,' replied Mrs. Cluppins. 'But on no account without a witness.'

'I think two witnesses would be more lawful,' said Mrs. Sanders, who, like the other friend, was bursting with curiosity.

'Perhaps he'd better come in here,' said Mrs. Bardell.

'To be sure,' replied Mrs. Cluppins, eagerly catching at the idea; 'walk in, young man; and shut the street door first, please.'

Mr Weller immediately took the hint; and presenting himself in the parlour, explained his business to Mrs. Bardell thus -

'Wery sorry to 'casion any personal inconwenience, ma'am, as the housebreaker said to the old lady when he put her on the fire; but as me and my governor 's only jest come to town, and is jest going away agin, it can't be helped, you see.'

'Of course, the young man can't help the faults of his master,' said Mrs. Cluppins, much struck by Mr Weller's appearance and conversation.

'Certainly not,' chimed in Mrs. Sanders, who, from certain wistful glances at the little tin saucepan, seemed to be engaged in a mental calculation of the probable extent of the pettitoes, in the event of Sam's being asked to stop to supper.

'So all I've come about, is jest this here,' said Sam, disregarding the interruption; 'first, to give my governor's notice - there it is. Secondly, to pay the rent - here it is. Thirdly, to say as all his things is to be put together, and give to anybody as we sends for 'em. Fourthly, that you may let the place as soon as you like - and that's all.'

'Whatever has happened,' said Mrs. Bardell, 'I always have said, and always will say, that in every respect but one, Mr Pickwick has always behaved himself like a perfect gentleman. His money always as good as the bank - always.'

As Mrs. Bardell said this, she applied her handkerchief to her eyes, and went out of the room to get the receipt.

Sam well knew that he had only to remain quiet, and the women were sure to talk; so he looked alternately at the tin saucepan, the toasted cheese, the wall, and the ceiling, in profound silence.

'Poor dear!' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'Ah, poor thing!' replied Mrs. Sanders. Sam said nothing. He saw they were coming to the subject.

'I raly cannot contain myself,' said Mrs. Cluppins, 'when I think of such perjury. I don't wish to say anything to make you uncomfortable, young man, but your master's an old brute, and I wish I had him here to tell him so.' 'I wish you had,' said Sam.

'To see how dreadful she takes on, going moping about, and taking no pleasure in nothing, except when her friends comes in, out of charity,

to sit with her, and make her comfortable,' resumed Mrs. Cluppins, glancing at the tin saucepan and the Dutch oven, 'it's shocking!'

'Barbareous,' said Mrs. Sanders.

'And your master, young man! A gentleman with money, as could never feel the expense of a wife, no more than nothing,' continued Mrs. Cluppins, with great volubility; 'why there ain't the faintest shade of an excuse for his behaviour! Why don't he marry her?'

'Ah,' said Sam, 'to be sure; that's the question.'

'Question, indeed,' retorted Mrs. Cluppins, 'she'd question him, if she'd my spirit. Hows'ever, there is law for us women, mis'erable creeturs as they'd make us, if they could; and that your master will find out, young man, to his cost, afore he's six months older.'

At this consolatory reflection, Mrs. Cluppins bridled up, and smiled at Mrs. Sanders, who smiled back again.

'The action's going on, and no mistake,' thought Sam, as Mrs. Bardell re-entered with the receipt.

'Here's the receipt, Mr Weller,' said Mrs. Bardell, 'and here's the change, and I hope you'll take a little drop of something to keep the cold out, if it's only for old acquaintance' sake, Mr Weller.'

Sam saw the advantage he should gain, and at once acquiesced; whereupon Mrs. Bardell produced, from a small closet, a black bottle and a wine-glass; and so great was her abstraction, in her deep mental affliction, that, after filling Mr Weller's glass, she brought out three more wine-glasses, and filled them too.

'Lauk, Mrs. Bardell,' said Mrs. Cluppins, 'see what you've been and done!'

'Well, that is a good one!' ejaculated Mrs. Sanders.

'Ah, my poor head!' said Mrs. Bardell, with a faint smile.

Sam understood all this, of course, so he said at once, that he never could drink before supper, unless a lady drank with him. A great deal of laughter ensued, and Mrs. Sanders volunteered to humour him, so she took a slight sip out of her glass. Then Sam said it must go all round, so they all took a slight sip. Then little Mrs. Cluppins proposed as a toast, 'Success to Bardell agin Pickwick'; and then the ladies emptied their glasses in honour of the sentiment, and got very talkative directly.

'I suppose you've heard what's going forward, Mr Weller?' said Mrs. Bardell.

'I've heerd somethin' on it,' replied Sam.

'It's a terrible thing to be dragged before the public, in that way, Mr Weller,' said Mrs. Bardell; 'but I see now, that it's the only thing I ought to do, and my lawyers, Mr Dodson and Fogg, tell me that, with the evidence as we shall call, we must succeed. I don't know what I should do, Mr Weller, if I didn't.'

The mere idea of Mrs. Bardell's failing in her action, affected Mrs. Sanders so deeply, that she was under the necessity of refilling and re-emptying her glass immediately; feeling, as she said afterwards, that if she hadn't had the presence of mind to do so, she must have dropped.

'Ven is it expected to come on?' inquired Sam.

'Either in February or March,' replied Mrs. Bardell.

'What a number of witnesses there'll be, won't there,?' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'Ah! won't there!' replied Mrs. Sanders.

'And won't Mr Dodson and Fogg be wild if the plaintiff shouldn't get it?' added Mrs. Cluppins, 'when they do it all on speculation!'

'Ah! won't they!' said Mrs. Sanders.

'But the plaintiff must get it,' resumed Mrs. Cluppins.

'I hope so,' said Mrs. Bardell.

'Oh, there can't be any doubt about it,' rejoined Mrs. Sanders.

'Vell,' said Sam, rising and setting down his glass, 'all I can say is, that I vish you MAY get it.'

'Thank'ee, Mr Weller,' said Mrs. Bardell fervently.

'And of them Dodson and Foggs, as does these sort o' things on spec,' continued Mr Weller, 'as vell as for the other kind and gen'rous people o' the same purfession, as sets people by the ears, free gratis for nothin', and sets their clerks to work to find out little disputes among their neighbours and acquaintances as vants settlin' by means of

lawsuits - all I can say o' them is, that I wish they had the reward I'd give 'em.'

'Ah, I wish they had the reward that every kind and generous heart would be inclined to bestow upon them!' said the gratified Mrs. Bardell.

'Amen to that,' replied Sam, 'and a fat and happy liven' they'd get out of it! Wish you good-night, ladies.'

To the great relief of Mrs. Sanders, Sam was allowed to depart without any reference, on the part of the hostess, to the pettitoes and toasted cheese; to which the ladies, with such juvenile assistance as Master Bardell could afford, soon afterwards rendered the amplest justice - indeed they wholly vanished before their strenuous exertions.

Mr Weller wended his way back to the George and Vulture, and faithfully recounted to his master, such indications of the sharp practice of Dodson & Fogg, as he had contrived to pick up in his visit to Mrs. Bardell's. An interview with Mr Perker, next day, more than confirmed Mr Weller's statement; and Mr Pickwick was fain to prepare for his Christmas visit to Dingley Dell, with the pleasant anticipation that some two or three months afterwards, an action brought against him for damages sustained by reason of a breach of promise of marriage, would be publicly tried in the Court of Common Pleas; the plaintiff having all the advantages derivable, not only from the force of circumstances, but from the sharp practice of Dodson & Fogg to boot.