

Chapter XXXII

Describes, Far More Fully Than The Court Newsmen Ever Did, A Bachelor's Party, Given By Mr Bob Sawyer At His Lodgings In The Borough

There is a repose about Lant Street, in the Borough, which sheds a gentle melancholy upon the soul. There are always a good many houses to let in the street: it is a by-street too, and its dulness is soothing. A house in Lant Street would not come within the denomination of a first-rate residence, in the strict acceptation of the term; but it is a most desirable spot nevertheless. If a man wished to abstract himself from the world - to remove himself from within the reach of temptation - to place himself beyond the possibility of any inducement to look out of the window - we should recommend him by all means go to Lant Street.

In this happy retreat are colonised a few clear-starchers, a sprinkling of journeymen bookbinders, one or two prison agents for the Insolvent Court, several small housekeepers who are employed in the Docks, a handful of mantua-makers, and a seasoning of jobbing tailors. The majority of the inhabitants either direct their energies to the letting of furnished apartments, or devote themselves to the healthful and invigorating pursuit of mangling. The chief features in the still life of the street are green shutters, lodging-bills, brass door-plates, and bell-handles; the principal specimens of animated nature, the pot-boy, the muffin youth, and the baked-potato man. The population is migratory, usually disappearing on the verge of quarter-day, and generally by night. His Majesty's revenues are seldom collected in this happy valley; the rents are dubious; and the water communication is very frequently cut off.

Mr Bob Sawyer embellished one side of the fire, in his first-floor front, early on the evening for which he had invited Mr Pickwick, and Mr Ben Allen the other. The preparations for the reception of visitors appeared to be completed. The umbrellas in the passage had been heaped into the little corner outside the back-parlour door; the bonnet and shawl of the landlady's servant had been removed from the bannisters; there were not more than two pairs of pattens on the street-door mat; and a kitchen candle, with a very long snuff, burned cheerfully on the ledge of the staircase window. Mr Bob Sawyer had himself purchased the spirits at a wine vaults in High Street, and had returned home preceding the bearer thereof, to preclude the possibility of their delivery at the wrong house. The punch was ready-made in a red pan in the bedroom; a little table, covered with a green baize cloth, had been borrowed from the parlour, to play at cards on; and the glasses of the establishment, together with those which had

been borrowed for the occasion from the public-house, were all drawn up in a tray, which was deposited on the landing outside the door.

Notwithstanding the highly satisfactory nature of all these arrangements, there was a cloud on the countenance of Mr Bob Sawyer, as he sat by the fireside. There was a sympathising expression, too, in the features of Mr Ben Allen, as he gazed intently on the coals, and a tone of melancholy in his voice, as he said, after a long silence - 'Well, it is unlucky she should have taken it in her head to turn sour, just on this occasion. She might at least have waited till to-morrow.'

'That's her malevolence - that's her malevolence,' returned Mr Bob Sawyer vehemently. 'She says that if I can afford to give a party I ought to be able to pay her confounded 'little bill.'" 'How long has it been running?' inquired Mr Ben Allen. A bill, by the bye, is the most extraordinary locomotive engine that the genius of man ever produced. It would keep on running during the longest lifetime, without ever once stopping of its own accord.

'Only a quarter, and a month or so,' replied Mr Bob Sawyer.

Ben Allen coughed hopelessly, and directed a searching look between the two top bars of the stove.

'It'll be a deuced unpleasant thing if she takes it into her head to let out, when those fellows are here, won't it?' said Mr Ben Allen at length.

'Horrible,' replied Bob Sawyer, 'horrible.' A low tap was heard at the room door. Mr Bob Sawyer looked expressively at his friend, and bade the tapper come in; whereupon a dirty, slipshod girl in black cotton stockings, who might have passed for the neglected daughter of a superannuated dustman in very reduced circumstances, thrust in her head, and said -

'Please, Mister Sawyer, Missis Raddle wants to speak to you.'

Before Mr Bob Sawyer could return any answer, the girl suddenly disappeared with a jerk, as if somebody had given her a violent pull behind; this mysterious exit was no sooner accomplished, than there was another tap at the door - a smart, pointed tap, which seemed to say, 'Here I am, and in I'm coming.'

Mr, Bob Sawyer glanced at his friend with a look of abject apprehension, and once more cried, 'Come in.'

The permission was not at all necessary, for, before Mr Bob Sawyer had uttered the words, a little, fierce woman bounced into the room, all in a tremble with passion, and pale with rage.

'Now, Mr Sawyer,' said the little, fierce woman, trying to appear very calm, 'if you'll have the kindness to settle that little bill of mine I'll thank you, because I've got my rent to pay this afternoon, and my landlord's a-waiting below now.' Here the little woman rubbed her hands, and looked steadily over Mr Bob Sawyer's head, at the wall behind him.

'I am very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, Mrs. Raddle,' said Bob Sawyer deferentially, 'but - '

'Oh, it isn't any inconvenience,' replied the little woman, with a shrill titter. 'I didn't want it particular before to-day; leastways, as it has to go to my landlord directly, it was as well for you to keep it as me. You promised me this afternoon, Mr Sawyer, and every gentleman as has ever lived here, has kept his word, Sir, as of course anybody as calls himself a gentleman does.' Mrs. Raddle tossed her head, bit her lips, rubbed her hands harder, and looked at the wall more steadily than ever. It was plain to see, as Mr Bob Sawyer remarked in a style of Eastern allegory on a subsequent occasion, that she was 'getting the steam up.'

'I am very sorry, Mrs. Raddle,' said Bob Sawyer, with all imaginable humility, 'but the fact is, that I have been disappointed in the City to-day.' - Extraordinary place that City. An astonishing number of men always ARE getting disappointed there.

'Well, Mr Sawyer,' said Mrs. Raddle, planting herself firmly on a purple cauliflower in the Kidderminster carpet, 'and what's that to me, Sir?'

'I - I - have no doubt, Mrs. Raddle,' said Bob Sawyer, blinking this last question, 'that before the middle of next week we shall be able to set ourselves quite square, and go on, on a better system, afterwards.'

This was all Mrs. Raddle wanted. She had bustled up to the apartment of the unlucky Bob Sawyer, so bent upon going into a passion, that, in all probability, payment would have rather disappointed her than otherwise. She was in excellent order for a little relaxation of the kind, having just exchanged a few introductory compliments with Mr R. in the front kitchen.

'Do you suppose, Mr Sawyer,' said Mrs. Raddle, elevating her voice for the information of the neighbours - 'do you suppose that I'm a-going day after day to let a fellar occupy my lodgings as never thinks of paying his rent, nor even the very money laid out for the fresh butter

and lump sugar that's bought for his breakfast, and the very milk that's took in, at the street door? Do you suppose a hard-working and industrious woman as has lived in this street for twenty year (ten year over the way, and nine year and three-quarters in this very house) has nothing else to do but to work herself to death after a parcel of lazy idle fellars, that are always smoking and drinking, and lounging, when they ought to be glad to turn their hands to anything that would help 'em to pay their bills? Do you - '

'My good soul,' interposed Mr Benjamin Allen soothingly.

'Have the goodness to keep your observashuns to yourself, Sir, I beg,' said Mrs. Raddle, suddenly arresting the rapid torrent of her speech, and addressing the third party with impressive slowness and solemnity. 'I am not aweer, Sir, that you have any right to address your conversation to me. I don't think I let these apartments to you, Sir.'

'No, you certainly did not,' said Mr Benjamin Allen.

'Very good, Sir,' responded Mrs. Raddle, with lofty politeness. 'Then p'raps, Sir, you'll confine yourself to breaking the arms and legs of the poor people in the hospitals, and keep yourself TO yourself, Sir, or there may be some persons here as will make you, Sir.'

'But you are such an unreasonable woman,' remonstrated Mr Benjamin Allen.

'I beg your parding, young man,' said Mrs. Raddle, in a cold perspiration of anger. 'But will you have the goodness just to call me that again, sir?'

'I didn't make use of the word in any invidious sense, ma'am,' replied Mr Benjamin Allen, growing somewhat uneasy on his own account.

'I beg your parding, young man,' demanded Mrs. Raddle, in a louder and more imperative tone. 'But who do you call a woman? Did you make that remark to me, sir?'

'Why, bless my heart!' said Mr Benjamin Allen.

'Did you apply that name to me, I ask of you, sir?' interrupted Mrs. Raddle, with intense fierceness, throwing the door wide open.

'Why, of course I did,' replied Mr Benjamin Allen.

'Yes, of course you did,' said Mrs. Raddle, backing gradually to the door, and raising her voice to its loudest pitch, for the special behoof

of Mr Raddle in the kitchen. 'Yes, of course you did! And everybody knows that they may safely insult me in my own 'ouse while my husband sits sleeping downstairs, and taking no more notice than if I was a dog in the streets. He ought to be ashamed of himself (here Mrs. Raddle sobbed) to allow his wife to be treated in this way by a parcel of young cutters and carvers of live people's bodies, that disgraces the lodgings (another sob), and leaving her exposed to all manner of abuse; a base, faint- hearted, timorous wretch, that's afraid to come upstairs, and face the ruffinly creatures - that's afraid - that's afraid to come!' Mrs. Raddle paused to listen whether the repetition of the taunt had roused her better half; and finding that it had not been successful, proceeded to descend the stairs with sobs innumerable; when there came a loud double knock at the street door; whereupon she burst into an hysterical fit of weeping, accompanied with dismal moans, which was prolonged until the knock had been repeated six times, when, in an uncontrollable burst of mental agony, she threw down all the umbrellas, and disappeared into the back parlour, closing the door after her with an awful crash.

'Does Mr Sawyer live here?' said Mr Pickwick, when the door was opened.

'Yes,' said the girl, 'first floor. It's the door straight afore you, when you gets to the top of the stairs.' Having given this instruction, the handmaid, who had been brought up among the aboriginal inhabitants of Southwark, disappeared, with the candle in her hand, down the kitchen stairs, perfectly satisfied that she had done everything that could possibly be required of her under the circumstances.

Mr Snodgrass, who entered last, secured the street door, after several ineffectual efforts, by putting up the chain; and the friends stumbled upstairs, where they were received by Mr Bob Sawyer, who had been afraid to go down, lest he should be waylaid by Mrs. Raddle.

'How are you?' said the discomfited student. 'Glad to see you - take care of the glasses.' This caution was addressed to Mr Pickwick, who had put his hat in the tray.

'Dear me,' said Mr Pickwick, 'I beg your pardon.'

'Don't mention it, don't mention it,' said Bob Sawyer. 'I'm rather confined for room here, but you must put up with all that, when you come to see a young bachelor. Walk in. You've seen this gentleman before, I think?' Mr Pickwick shook hands with Mr Benjamin Allen, and his friends followed his example. They had scarcely taken their seats when there was another double knock.

'I hope that's Jack Hopkins!' said Mr Bob Sawyer. 'Hush. Yes, it is. Come up, Jack; come up.'

A heavy footstep was heard upon the stairs, and Jack Hopkins presented himself. He wore a black velvet waistcoat, with thunder-and-lightning buttons; and a blue striped shirt, with a white false collar.

'You're late, Jack?' said Mr Benjamin Allen.

'Been detained at Bartholomew's,' replied Hopkins.

'Anything new?'

'No, nothing particular. Rather a good accident brought into the casualty ward.'

'What was that, sir?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'Only a man fallen out of a four pair of stairs' window; but it's a very fair case indeed.'

'Do you mean that the patient is in a fair way to recover?' inquired Mr Pickwick. 'No,' replied Mr Hopkins carelessly. 'No, I should rather say he wouldn't. There must be a splendid operation, though, to-morrow - magnificent sight if Slasher does it.'

'You consider Mr Slasher a good operator?' said Mr Pickwick. 'Best alive,' replied Hopkins. 'Took a boy's leg out of the socket last week - boy ate five apples and a gingerbread cake - exactly two minutes after it was all over, boy said he wouldn't lie there to be made game of, and he'd tell his mother if they didn't begin.'

'Dear me!' said Mr Pickwick, astonished.

'Pooh! That's nothing, that ain't,' said Jack Hopkins. 'Is it, Bob?'

'Nothing at all,' replied Mr Bob Sawyer.

'By the bye, Bob,' said Hopkins, with a scarcely perceptible glance at Mr Pickwick's attentive face, 'we had a curious accident last night. A child was brought in, who had swallowed a necklace.'

'Swallowed what, Sir?' interrupted Mr Pickwick. 'A necklace,' replied Jack Hopkins. 'Not all at once, you know, that would be too much - you couldn't swallow that, if the child did - eh, Mr Pickwick? ha, ha!' Mr Hopkins appeared highly gratified with his own pleasantry, and continued - 'No, the way was this. Child's parents were poor people

who lived in a court. Child's eldest sister bought a necklace - common necklace, made of large black wooden beads. Child being fond of toys, cribbed the necklace, hid it, played with it, cut the string, and swallowed a bead. Child thought it capital fun, went back next day, and swallowed another bead.'

'Bless my heart,' said Mr Pickwick, 'what a dreadful thing! I beg your pardon, Sir. Go on.'

'Next day, child swallowed two beads; the day after that, he treated himself to three, and so on, till in a week's time he had got through the necklace - five-and-twenty beads in all. The sister, who was an industrious girl, and seldom treated herself to a bit of finery, cried her eyes out, at the loss of the necklace; looked high and low for it; but, I needn't say, didn't find it. A few days afterwards, the family were at dinner - baked shoulder of mutton, and potatoes under it - the child, who wasn't hungry, was playing about the room, when suddenly there was heard a devil of a noise, like a small hailstorm. 'Don't do that, my boy,' said the father. 'I ain't a-doin' nothing,' said the child. 'Well, don't do it again,' said the father. There was a short silence, and then the noise began again, worse than ever. 'If you don't mind what I say, my boy,' said the father, 'you'll find yourself in bed, in something less than a pig's whisper.' He gave the child a shake to make him obedient, and such a rattling ensued as nobody ever heard before. 'Why, damme, it's IN the child!' said the father, 'he's got the croup in the wrong place!' 'No, I haven't, father,' said the child, beginning to cry, 'it's the necklace; I swallowed it, father.' - The father caught the child up, and ran with him to the hospital; the beads in the boy's stomach rattling all the way with the jolting; and the people looking up in the air, and down in the cellars, to see where the unusual sound came from. He's in the hospital now,' said Jack Hopkins, 'and he makes such a devil of a noise when he walks about, that they're obliged to muffle him in a watchman's coat, for fear he should wake the patients.'

'That's the most extraordinary case I ever heard of,' said Mr Pickwick, with an emphatic blow on the table.

'Oh, that's nothing,' said Jack Hopkins. 'Is it, Bob?'

'Certainly not,' replied Bob Sawyer.

'Very singular things occur in our profession, I can assure you, Sir,' said Hopkins.

'So I should be disposed to imagine,' replied Mr Pickwick.

Another knock at the door announced a large-headed young man in a black wig, who brought with him a scorbutic youth in a long stock. The next comer was a gentleman in a shirt emblazoned with pink anchors, who was closely followed by a pale youth with a plated watchguard. The arrival of a prim personage in clean linen and cloth boots rendered the party complete. The little table with the green baize cover was wheeled out; the first instalment of punch was brought in, in a white jug; and the succeeding three hours were devoted to VINGT-ET-UN at sixpence a dozen, which was only once interrupted by a slight dispute between the scorbutic youth and the gentleman with the pink anchors; in the course of which, the scorbutic youth intimated a burning desire to pull the nose of the gentleman with the emblems of hope; in reply to which, that individual expressed his decided unwillingness to accept of any 'sauce' on gratuitous terms, either from the irascible young gentleman with the scorbutic countenance, or any other person who was ornamented with a head.

When the last 'natural' had been declared, and the profit and loss account of fish and sixpences adjusted, to the satisfaction of all parties, Mr Bob Sawyer rang for supper, and the visitors squeezed themselves into corners while it was getting ready.

it was not so easily got ready as some people may imagine. First of all, it was necessary to awaken the girl, who had fallen asleep with her face on the kitchen table; this took a little time, and, even when she did answer the bell, another quarter of an hour was consumed in fruitless endeavours to impart to her a faint and distant glimmering of reason. The man to whom the order for the oysters had been sent, had not been told to open them; it is a very difficult thing to open an oyster with a limp knife and a two-pronged fork; and very little was done in this way. Very little of the beef was done either; and the ham (which was also from the German-sausage shop round the corner) was in a similar predicament. However, there was plenty of porter in a tin can; and the cheese went a great way, for it was very strong. So upon the whole, perhaps, the supper was quite as good as such matters usually are.

After supper, another jug of punch was put upon the table, together with a paper of cigars, and a couple of bottles of spirits. Then there was an awful pause; and this awful pause was occasioned by a very common occurrence in this sort of place, but a very embarrassing one notwithstanding.

The fact is, the girl was washing the glasses. The establishment boasted four: we do not record the circumstance as at all derogatory to Mrs. Raddle, for there never was a lodging-house yet, that was not short of glasses. The landlady's glasses were little, thin, blown-glass tumblers, and those which had been borrowed from the public-house

were great, dropsical, bloated articles, each supported on a huge gouty leg. This would have been in itself sufficient to have possessed the company with the real state of affairs; but the young woman of all work had prevented the possibility of any misconception arising in the mind of any gentleman upon the subject, by forcibly dragging every man's glass away, long before he had finished his beer, and audibly stating, despite the winks and interruptions of Mr Bob Sawyer, that it was to be conveyed downstairs, and washed forthwith.

It is a very ill wind that blows nobody any good. The prim man in the cloth boots, who had been unsuccessfully attempting to make a joke during the whole time the round game lasted, saw his opportunity, and availed himself of it. The instant the glasses disappeared, he commenced a long story about a great public character, whose name he had forgotten, making a particularly happy reply to another eminent and illustrious individual whom he had never been able to identify. He enlarged at some length and with great minuteness upon divers collateral circumstances, distantly connected with the anecdote in hand, but for the life of him he couldn't recollect at that precise moment what the anecdote was, although he had been in the habit of telling the story with great applause for the last ten years.

'Dear me,' said the prim man in the cloth boots, 'it is a very extraordinary circumstance.'

'I am sorry you have forgotten it,' said Mr Bob Sawyer, glancing eagerly at the door, as he thought he heard the noise of glasses jingling; 'very sorry.'

'So am I,' responded the prim man, 'because I know it would have afforded so much amusement. Never mind; I dare say I shall manage to recollect it, in the course of half an hour or so.'

The prim man arrived at this point just as the glasses came back, when Mr Bob Sawyer, who had been absorbed in attention during the whole time, said he should very much like to hear the end of it, for, so far as it went, it was, without exception, the very best story he had ever heard. The sight of the tumblers restored Bob Sawyer to a degree of equanimity which he had not possessed since his interview with his landlady. His face brightened up, and he began to feel quite convivial. 'Now, Betsy,' said Mr Bob Sawyer, with great suavity, and dispersing, at the same time, the tumultuous little mob of glasses the girl had collected in the centre of the table - 'now, Betsy, the warm water; be brisk, there's a good girl.'

'You can't have no warm water,' replied Betsy.

'No warm water!' exclaimed Mr Bob Sawyer.

'No,' said the girl, with a shake of the head which expressed a more decided negative than the most copious language could have conveyed. 'Missis Raddle said you warn't to have none.'

The surprise depicted on the countenances of his guests imparted new courage to the host.

'Bring up the warm water instantly - instantly!' said Mr Bob Sawyer, with desperate sternness.

'No. I can't,' replied the girl; 'Missis Raddle raked out the kitchen fire afore she went to bed, and locked up the kittle.'

'Oh, never mind; never mind. Pray don't disturb yourself about such a trifle,' said Mr Pickwick, observing the conflict of Bob Sawyer's passions, as depicted in his countenance, 'cold water will do very well.'

'Oh, admirably,' said Mr Benjamin Allen.

'My landlady is subject to some slight attacks of mental derangement,' remarked Bob Sawyer, with a ghastly smile; 'I fear I must give her warning.'

'No, don't,' said Ben Allen.

'I fear I must,' said Bob, with heroic firmness. 'I'll pay her what I owe her, and give her warning to-morrow morning.' Poor fellow! how devoutly he wished he could!

Mr Bob Sawyer's heart-sickening attempts to rally under this last blow, communicated a dispiriting influence to the company, the greater part of whom, with the view of raising their spirits, attached themselves with extra cordiality to the cold brandy-and- water, the first perceptible effects of which were displayed in a renewal of hostilities between the scorbutic youth and the gentleman in the shirt. The belligerents vented their feelings of mutual contempt, for some time, in a variety of frownings and snortings, until at last the scorbutic youth felt it necessary to come to a more explicit understanding on the matter; when the following clear understanding took place. 'Sawyer,' said the scorbutic youth, in a loud voice.

'Well, Noddy,' replied Mr Bob Sawyer.

'I should be very sorry, Sawyer,' said Mr Noddy, 'to create any unpleasantness at any friend's table, and much less at yours, Sawyer - very; but I must take this opportunity of informing Mr Gunter that he is no gentleman.'

'And I should be very sorry, Sawyer, to create any disturbance in the street in which you reside,' said Mr Gunter, 'but I'm afraid I shall be under the necessity of alarming the neighbours by throwing the person who has just spoken, out o' window.'

'What do you mean by that, sir?' inquired Mr Noddy.

'What I say, Sir,' replied Mr Gunter.

'I should like to see you do it, Sir,' said Mr Noddy.

'You shall FEEL me do it in half a minute, Sir,' replied Mr Gunter.

'I request that you'll favour me with your card, Sir,' said Mr Noddy.

'I'll do nothing of the kind, Sir,' replied Mr Gunter.

'Why not, Sir?' inquired Mr Noddy.

'Because you'll stick it up over your chimney-piece, and delude your visitors into the false belief that a gentleman has been to see you, Sir,' replied Mr Gunter.

'Sir, a friend of mine shall wait on you in the morning,' said Mr Noddy.

'Sir, I'm very much obliged to you for the caution, and I'll leave particular directions with the servant to lock up the spoons,' replied Mr Gunter.

At this point the remainder of the guests interposed, and remonstrated with both parties on the impropriety of their conduct; on which Mr Noddy begged to state that his father was quite as respectable as Mr Gunter's father; to which Mr Gunter replied that his father was to the full as respectable as Mr Noddy's father, and that his father's son was as good a man as Mr Noddy, any day in the week. As this announcement seemed the prelude to a recommencement of the dispute, there was another interference on the part of the company; and a vast quantity of talking and clamouring ensued, in the course of which Mr Noddy gradually allowed his feelings to overpower him, and professed that he had ever entertained a devoted personal attachment towards Mr Gunter. To this Mr Gunter replied that, upon the whole, he rather preferred Mr Noddy to his own brother; on hearing which admission, Mr Noddy magnanimously rose from his seat, and proffered his hand to Mr Gunter. Mr Gunter grasped it with affecting fervour; and everybody said that the whole dispute had been conducted in a manner which was highly honourable to both parties concerned.

'Now,' said Jack Hopkins, 'just to set us going again, Bob, I don't mind singing a song.' And Hopkins, incited thereto by tumultuous applause, plunged himself at once into 'The King, God bless him,' which he sang as loud as he could, to a novel air, compounded of the 'Bay of Biscay,' and 'A Frog he would.' The chorus was the essence of the song; and, as each gentleman sang it to the tune he knew best, the effect was very striking indeed.

It was at the end of the chorus to the first verse, that Mr Pickwick held up his hand in a listening attitude, and said, as soon as silence was restored -

'Hush! I beg your pardon. I thought I heard somebody calling from upstairs.'

A profound silence immediately ensued; and Mr Bob Sawyer was observed to turn pale.

'I think I hear it now,' said Mr Pickwick. 'Have the goodness to open the door.'

The door was no sooner opened than all doubt on the subject was removed.

'Mr Sawyer! Mr Sawyer!' screamed a voice from the two-pair landing.

'It's my landlady,' said Bob Sawyer, looking round him with great dismay. 'Yes, Mrs. Raddle.'

'What do you mean by this, Mr Sawyer?' replied the voice, with great shrillness and rapidity of utterance. 'Ain't it enough to be swindled out of one's rent, and money lent out of pocket besides, and abused and insulted by your friends that dares to call themselves men, without having the house turned out of the window, and noise enough made to bring the fire-engines here, at two o'clock in the morning? - Turn them wretches away.'

'You ought to be ashamed of yourselves,' said the voice of Mr Raddle, which appeared to proceed from beneath some distant bed-clothes.

'Ashamed of themselves!' said Mrs. Raddle. 'Why don't you go down and knock 'em every one downstairs? You would if you was a man.' 'I should if I was a dozen men, my dear,' replied Mr Raddle pacifically, 'but they have the advantage of me in numbers, my dear.'

'Ugh, you coward!' replied Mrs. Raddle, with supreme contempt. 'DO you mean to turn them wretches out, or not, Mr Sawyer?'

'They're going, Mrs. Raddle, they're going,' said the miserable Bob. 'I am afraid you'd better go,' said Mr Bob Sawyer to his friends. 'I thought you were making too much noise.'

'It's a very unfortunate thing,' said the prim man. 'Just as we were getting so comfortable too!' The prim man was just beginning to have a dawning recollection of the story he had forgotten.

'It's hardly to be borne,' said the prim man, looking round. 'Hardly to be borne, is it?'

'Not to be endured,' replied Jack Hopkins; 'let's have the other verse, Bob. Come, here goes!'

'No, no, Jack, don't,' interposed Bob Sawyer; 'it's a capital song, but I am afraid we had better not have the other verse. They are very violent people, the people of the house.'

'Shall I step upstairs, and pitch into the landlord?' inquired Hopkins, 'or keep on ringing the bell, or go and groan on the staircase? You may command me, Bob.'

'I am very much indebted to you for your friendship and good-nature, Hopkins,' said the wretched Mr Bob Sawyer, 'but I think the best plan to avoid any further dispute is for us to break up at once.'

'Now, Mr Sawyer,' screamed the shrill voice of Mrs. Raddle, 'are them brutes going?'

'They're only looking for their hats, Mrs. Raddle,' said Bob; 'they are going directly.'

'Going!' said Mrs. Raddle, thrusting her nightcap over the banisters just as Mr Pickwick, followed by Mr Tupman, emerged from the sitting-room. 'Going! what did they ever come for?'

'My dear ma'am,' remonstrated Mr Pickwick, looking up.

'Get along with you, old wretch!' replied Mrs. Raddle, hastily withdrawing the nightcap. 'Old enough to be his grandfather, you willin! You're worse than any of 'em.'

Mr Pickwick found it in vain to protest his innocence, so hurried downstairs into the street, whither he was closely followed by Mr Tupman, Mr Winkle, and Mr Snodgrass. Mr Ben Allen, who was dismally depressed with spirits and agitation, accompanied them as far as London Bridge, and in the course of the walk confided to Mr Winkle, as an especially eligible person to intrust the secret to, that he

was resolved to cut the throat of any gentleman, except Mr Bob Sawyer, who should aspire to the affections of his sister Arabella. Having expressed his determination to perform this painful duty of a brother with proper firmness, he burst into tears, knocked his hat over his eyes, and, making the best of his way back, knocked double knocks at the door of the Borough Market office, and took short naps on the steps alternately, until daybreak, under the firm impression that he lived there, and had forgotten the key.

The visitors having all departed, in compliance with the rather pressing request of Mrs. Raddle, the luckless Mr Bob Sawyer was left alone, to meditate on the probable events of to-morrow, and the pleasures of the evening.