

Chapter XLVI

Records A Touching Act Of Delicate Feeling, Not Unmixed With Pleasantry, Achieved And Performed By Messrs. Dodson And Fogg

It was within a week of the close of the month of July, that a hackney cabriolet, number unrecorded, was seen to proceed at a rapid pace up Goswell Street; three people were squeezed into it besides the driver, who sat in his own particular little dickey at the side; over the apron were hung two shawls, belonging to two small vixenish-looking ladies under the apron; between whom, compressed into a very small compass, was stowed away, a gentleman of heavy and subdued demeanour, who, whenever he ventured to make an observation, was snapped up short by one of the vixenish ladies before-mentioned. Lastly, the two vixenish ladies and the heavy gentleman were giving the driver contradictory directions, all tending to the one point, that he should stop at Mrs. Bardell's door; which the heavy gentleman, in direct opposition to, and defiance of, the vixenish ladies, contended was a green door and not a yellow one.

'Stop at the house with a green door, driver,' said the heavy gentleman.

'Oh! You perverse creetur!' exclaimed one of the vixenish ladies. 'Drive to the 'ouse with the yellow door, cabmin.'

Upon this the cabman, who in a sudden effort to pull up at the house with the green door, had pulled the horse up so high that he nearly pulled him backward into the cabriolet, let the animal's fore-legs down to the ground again, and paused.

'Now vere am I to pull up?' inquired the driver. 'Settle it among yourselves. All I ask is, vere?'

Here the contest was renewed with increased violence; and the horse being troubled with a fly on his nose, the cabman humanely employed his leisure in lashing him about on the head, on the counter-irritation principle.

'Most wotes carries the day!' said one of the vixenish ladies at length. 'The 'ouse with the yellow door, cabman.'

But after the cabriolet had dashed up, in splendid style, to the house with the yellow door, 'making,' as one of the vixenish ladies triumphantly said, 'acterrally more noise than if one had come in one's own carriage,' and after the driver had dismounted to assist the ladies in getting out, the small round head of Master Thomas Bardell

was thrust out of the one-pair window of a house with a red door, a few numbers off.

'Aggrawatin' thing!' said the vixenish lady last-mentioned, darting a withering glance at the heavy gentleman.

'My dear, it's not my fault,' said the gentleman.

'Don't talk to me, you creetur, don't,' retorted the lady. 'The house with the red door, cabmin. Oh! If ever a woman was troubled with a ruffinly creetur, that takes a pride and a pleasure in disgracing his wife on every possible occasion afore strangers, I am that woman!'

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Raddle,' said the other little woman, who was no other than Mrs. Cluppins. 'What have I been a-doing of?' asked Mr Raddle.

'Don't talk to me, don't, you brute, for fear I should be perwoked to forgit my sect and strike you!' said Mrs. Raddle.

While this dialogue was going on, the driver was most ignominiously leading the horse, by the bridle, up to the house with the red door, which Master Bardell had already opened. Here was a mean and low way of arriving at a friend's house! No dashing up, with all the fire and fury of the animal; no jumping down of the driver; no loud knocking at the door; no opening of the apron with a crash at the very last moment, for fear of the ladies sitting in a draught; and then the man handing the shawls out, afterwards, as if he were a private coachman! The whole edge of the thing had been taken off - it was flatter than walking.

'Well, Tommy,' said Mrs. Cluppins, 'how's your poor dear mother?'

'Oh, she's very well,' replied Master Bardell. 'She's in the front parlour, all ready. I'm ready too, I am.' Here Master Bardell put his hands in his pockets, and jumped off and on the bottom step of the door.

'Is anybody else a-goin', Tommy?' said Mrs. Cluppins, arranging her pelerine.

'Mrs. Sanders is going, she is,' replied Tommy; 'I'm going too, I am.'

'Drat the boy,' said little Mrs. Cluppins. 'He thinks of nobody but himself. Here, Tommy, dear.'

'Well,' said Master Bardell.

'Who else is a-goin', lovey?' said Mrs. Cluppins, in an insinuating manner.

'Oh! Mrs. Rogers is a-goin',' replied Master Bardell, opening his eyes very wide as he delivered the intelligence.

'What? The lady as has taken the lodgings!' ejaculated Mrs. Cluppins.

Master Bardell put his hands deeper down into his pockets, and nodded exactly thirty-five times, to imply that it was the lady-lodger, and no other.

'Bless us!' said Mrs. Cluppins. 'It's quite a party!'

'Ah, if you knew what was in the cupboard, you'd say so,' replied Master Bardell.

'What is there, Tommy?' said Mrs. Cluppins coaxingly. 'You'll tell ME, Tommy, I know.' 'No, I won't,' replied Master Bardell, shaking his head, and applying himself to the bottom step again.

'Drat the child!' muttered Mrs. Cluppins. 'What a prowokin' little wretch it is! Come, Tommy, tell your dear Cluppy.'

'Mother said I wasn't to,' rejoined Master Bardell, 'I'm a-goin' to have some, I am.' Cheered by this prospect, the precocious boy applied himself to his infantile treadmill, with increased vigour.

The above examination of a child of tender years took place while Mr and Mrs. Raddle and the cab-driver were having an altercation concerning the fare, which, terminating at this point in favour of the cabman, Mrs. Raddle came up tottering.

'Lauk, Mary Ann! what's the matter?' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'It's put me all over in such a tremble, Betsy,' replied Mrs. Raddle. 'Raddle ain't like a man; he leaves everythink to me.'

This was scarcely fair upon the unfortunate Mr Raddle, who had been thrust aside by his good lady in the commencement of the dispute, and peremptorily commanded to hold his tongue. He had no opportunity of defending himself, however, for Mrs. Raddle gave unequivocal signs of fainting; which, being perceived from the parlour window, Mrs. Bardell, Mrs. Sanders, the lodger, and the lodger's servant, darted precipitately out, and conveyed her into the house, all talking at the same time, and giving utterance to various expressions of pity and condolence, as if she were one of the most suffering mortals on earth. Being conveyed into the front parlour, she was there

deposited on a sofa; and the lady from the first floor running up to the first floor, returned with a bottle of sal-volatile, which, holding Mrs. Raddle tight round the neck, she applied in all womanly kindness and pity to her nose, until that lady with many plunges and struggles was fain to declare herself decidedly better.

'Ah, poor thing!' said Mrs. Rogers, 'I know what her feelin's is, too well.' 'Ah, poor thing! so do I,' said Mrs. Sanders; and then all the ladies moaned in unison, and said they knew what it was, and they pitied her from their hearts, they did. Even the lodger's little servant, who was thirteen years old and three feet high, murmured her sympathy.

'But what's been the matter?' said Mrs. Bardell.

'Ah, what has decomposed you, ma'am?' inquired Mrs. Rogers.

'I have been a good deal flurried,' replied Mrs. Raddle, in a reproachful manner. Thereupon the ladies cast indignant glances at Mr Raddle.

'Why, the fact is,' said that unhappy gentleman, stepping forward, 'when we alighted at this door, a dispute arose with the driver of the cabrioily - ' A loud scream from his wife, at the mention of this word, rendered all further explanation inaudible.

'You'd better leave us to bring her round, Raddle,' said Mrs. Cluppins. 'She'll never get better as long as you're here.'

All the ladies concurred in this opinion; so Mr Raddle was pushed out of the room, and requested to give himself an airing in the back yard. Which he did for about a quarter of an hour, when Mrs. Bardell announced to him with a solemn face that he might come in now, but that he must be very careful how he behaved towards his wife. She knew he didn't mean to be unkind; but Mary Ann was very far from strong, and, if he didn't take care, he might lose her when he least expected it, which would be a very dreadful reflection for him afterwards; and so on. All this, Mr Raddle heard with great submission, and presently returned to the parlour in a most lamb-like manner.

'Why, Mrs. Rogers, ma'am,' said Mrs. Bardell, 'you've never been introduced, I declare! Mr Raddle, ma'am; Mrs. Cluppins, ma'am; Mrs. Raddle, ma'am.'

'Which is Mrs. Cluppins's sister,' suggested Mrs. Sanders.

'Oh, indeed!' said Mrs. Rogers graciously; for she was the lodger, and her servant was in waiting, so she was more gracious than intimate, in right of her position. 'Oh, indeed!'

Mrs. Raddle smiled sweetly, Mr Raddle bowed, and Mrs. Cluppins said, 'she was sure she was very happy to have an opportunity of being known to a lady which she had heard so much in favour of, as Mrs. Rogers.' A compliment which the last-named lady acknowledged with graceful condescension.

'Well, Mr Raddle,' said Mrs. Bardell; 'I'm sure you ought to feel very much honoured at you and Tommy being the only gentlemen to escort so many ladies all the way to the Spaniards, at Hampstead. Don't you think he ought, Mrs. Rogers, ma'am?' 'Oh, certainly, ma'am,' replied Mrs. Rogers; after whom all the other ladies responded, 'Oh, certainly.'

'Of course I feel it, ma'am,' said Mr Raddle, rubbing his hands, and evincing a slight tendency to brighten up a little. 'Indeed, to tell you the truth, I said, as we was a-coming along in the cabriolly - '

At the recapitulation of the word which awakened so many painful recollections, Mrs. Raddle applied her handkerchief to her eyes again, and uttered a half-suppressed scream; so that Mrs. Bardell frowned upon Mr Raddle, to intimate that he had better not say anything more, and desired Mrs. Rogers's servant, with an air, to 'put the wine on.'

This was the signal for displaying the hidden treasures of the closet, which comprised sundry plates of oranges and biscuits, and a bottle of old crusted port - that at one-and-nine - with another of the celebrated East India sherry at fourteen-pence, which were all produced in honour of the lodger, and afforded unlimited satisfaction to everybody. After great consternation had been excited in the mind of Mrs. Cluppins, by an attempt on the part of Tommy to recount how he had been cross-examined regarding the cupboard then in action (which was fortunately nipped in the bud by his imbibing half a glass of the old crusted 'the wrong way,' and thereby endangering his life for some seconds), the party walked forth in quest of a Hampstead stage. This was soon found, and in a couple of hours they all arrived safely in the Spaniards Tea-gardens, where the luckless Mr Raddle's very first act nearly occasioned his good lady a relapse; it being neither more nor less than to order tea for seven, whereas (as the ladies one and all remarked), what could have been easier than for Tommy to have drank out of anybody's cup - or everybody's, if that was all - when the waiter wasn't looking, which would have saved one head of tea, and the tea just as good!

However, there was no help for it, and the tea-tray came, with seven cups and saucers, and bread-and-butter on the same scale. Mrs. Bardell was unanimously voted into the chair, and Mrs. Rogers being stationed on her right hand, and Mrs. Raddle on her left, the meal proceeded with great merriment and success.

'How sweet the country is, to be sure!' sighed Mrs. Rogers; 'I almost wish I lived in it always.'

'Oh, you wouldn't like that, ma'am,' replied Mrs. Bardell, rather hastily; for it was not at all advisable, with reference to the lodgings, to encourage such notions; 'you wouldn't like it, ma'am.'

'Oh! I should think you was a deal too lively and sought after, to be content with the country, ma'am,' said little Mrs. Cluppins.

'Perhaps I am, ma'am. Perhaps I am,' sighed the first-floor lodger.

'For lone people as have got nobody to care for them, or take care of them, or as have been hurt in their mind, or that kind of thing,' observed Mr Raddle, plucking up a little cheerfulness, and looking round, 'the country is all very well. The country for a wounded spirit, they say.'

Now, of all things in the world that the unfortunate man could have said, any would have been preferable to this. Of course Mrs. Bardell burst into tears, and requested to be led from the table instantly; upon which the affectionate child began to cry too, most dismally.

'Would anybody believe, ma'am,' exclaimed Mrs. Raddle, turning fiercely to the first-floor lodger, 'that a woman could be married to such a unmanly creetur, which can tamper with a woman's feelings as he does, every hour in the day, ma'am?'

'My dear,' remonstrated Mr Raddle, 'I didn't mean anything, my dear.'

'You didn't mean!' repeated Mrs. Raddle, with great scorn and contempt. 'Go away. I can't bear the sight on you, you brute.'

'You must not flurry yourself, Mary Ann,' interposed Mrs. Cluppins. 'You really must consider yourself, my dear, which you never do. Now go away, Raddle, there's a good soul, or you'll only aggravate her.'

'You had better take your tea by yourself, Sir, indeed,' said Mrs. Rogers, again applying the smelling-bottle.

Mrs. Sanders, who, according to custom, was very busy with the bread-and-butter, expressed the same opinion, and Mr Raddle quietly retired.

After this, there was a great hoisting up of Master Bardell, who was rather a large size for hugging, into his mother's arms, in which operation he got his boots in the tea-board, and occasioned some confusion among the cups and saucers. But that description of fainting fits, which is contagious among ladies, seldom lasts long; so when he had been well kissed, and a little cried over, Mrs. Bardell recovered, set him down again, wondering how she could have been so foolish, and poured out some more tea.

It was at this moment, that the sound of approaching wheels was heard, and that the ladies, looking up, saw a hackney-coach stop at the garden gate.

'More company!' said Mrs. Sanders.

'It's a gentleman,' said Mrs. Raddle.

'Well, if it ain't Mr Jackson, the young man from Dodson and Fogg's!' cried Mrs. Bardell. 'Why, gracious! Surely Mr Pickwick can't have paid the damages.'

'Or hofferred marriage!' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'Dear me, how slow the gentleman is,' exclaimed Mrs. Rogers. 'Why doesn't he make haste!'

As the lady spoke these words, Mr Jackson turned from the coach where he had been addressing some observations to a shabby man in black leggings, who had just emerged from the vehicle with a thick ash stick in his hand, and made his way to the place where the ladies were seated; winding his hair round the brim of his hat, as he came along. 'Is anything the matter? Has anything taken place, Mr Jackson?' said Mrs. Bardell eagerly.

'Nothing whatever, ma'am,' replied Mr Jackson. 'How de do, ladies? I have to ask pardon, ladies, for intruding - but the law, ladies - the law.' With this apology Mr Jackson smiled, made a comprehensive bow, and gave his hair another wind. Mrs. Rogers whispered Mrs. Raddle that he was really an elegant young man.

'I called in Goswell Street,' resumed Mr Jackson, 'and hearing that you were here, from the slavey, took a coach and came on. Our people want you down in the city directly, Mrs. Bardell.'

'Lor!' ejaculated that lady, starting at the sudden nature of the communication.

'Yes,' said Mr Jackson, biting his lip. 'It's very important and pressing business, which can't be postponed on any account. Indeed, Dodson expressly said so to me, and so did Fogg. I've kept the coach on purpose for you to go back in.'

'How very strange!' exclaimed Mrs. Bardell.

The ladies agreed that it WAS very strange, but were unanimously of opinion that it must be very important, or Dodson & Fogg would never have sent; and further, that the business being urgent, she ought to repair to Dodson & Fogg's without any delay.

There was a certain degree of pride and importance about being wanted by one's lawyers in such a monstrous hurry, that was by no means displeasing to Mrs. Bardell, especially as it might be reasonably supposed to enhance her consequence in the eyes of the first-floor lodger. She simpered a little, affected extreme vexation and hesitation, and at last arrived at the conclusion that she supposed she must go.

'But won't you refresh yourself after your walk, Mr Jackson?' said Mrs. Bardell persuasively.

'Why, really there ain't much time to lose,' replied Jackson; 'and I've got a friend here,' he continued, looking towards the man with the ash stick.

'Oh, ask your friend to come here, Sir,' said Mrs. Bardell. 'Pray ask your friend here, Sir.'

'Why, thank'ee, I'd rather not,' said Mr Jackson, with some embarrassment of manner. 'He's not much used to ladies' society, and it makes him bashful. If you'll order the waiter to deliver him anything short, he won't drink it off at once, won't he! - only try him!' Mr Jackson's fingers wandered playfully round his nose at this portion of his discourse, to warn his hearers that he was speaking ironically.

The waiter was at once despatched to the bashful gentleman, and the bashful gentleman took something; Mr Jackson also took something, and the ladies took something, for hospitality's sake. Mr Jackson then said he was afraid it was time to go; upon which, Mrs. Sanders, Mrs. Cluppins, and Tommy (who it was arranged should accompany Mrs. Bardell, leaving the others to Mr Raddle's protection), got into the coach.

'Isaac,' said Jackson, as Mrs. Bardell prepared to get in, looking up at the man with the ash stick, who was seated on the box, smoking a cigar.

'Well?'

'This is Mrs. Bardell.'

'Oh, I know'd that long ago,' said the man.

Mrs. Bardell got in, Mr Jackson got in after her, and away they drove. Mrs. Bardell could not help ruminating on what Mr Jackson's friend had said. Shrewd creatures, those lawyers. Lord bless us, how they find people out!

'Sad thing about these costs of our people's, ain't it,' said Jackson, when Mrs. Cluppings and Mrs. Sanders had fallen asleep; 'your bill of costs, I mean.'

'I'm very sorry they can't get them,' replied Mrs. Bardell. 'But if you law gentlemen do these things on speculation, why you must get a loss now and then, you know.'

'You gave them a COGNOVIT for the amount of your costs, after the trial, I'm told!' said Jackson.

'Yes. Just as a matter of form,' replied Mrs. Bardell.

'Certainly,' replied Jackson drily. 'Quite a matter of form. Quite.'

On they drove, and Mrs. Bardell fell asleep. She was awakened, after some time, by the stopping of the coach.

'Bless us!' said the lady. 'Are we at Freeman's Court?'

'We're not going quite so far,' replied Jackson. 'Have the goodness to step out.'

Mrs. Bardell, not yet thoroughly awake, complied. It was a curious place: a large wall, with a gate in the middle, and a gas-light burning inside.

'Now, ladies,' cried the man with the ash stick, looking into the coach, and shaking Mrs. Sanders to wake her, 'Come!' Rousing her friend, Mrs. Sanders alighted. Mrs. Bardell, leaning on Jackson's arm, and leading Tommy by the hand, had already entered the porch. They followed.

The room they turned into was even more odd-looking than the porch. Such a number of men standing about! And they stared so!

'What place is this?' inquired Mrs. Bardell, pausing.

'Only one of our public offices,' replied Jackson, hurrying her through a door, and looking round to see that the other women were following. 'Look sharp, Isaac!'

'Safe and sound,' replied the man with the ash stick. The door swung heavily after them, and they descended a small flight of steps.

'Here we are at last. All right and tight, Mrs. Bardell!' said Jackson, looking exultingly round.

'What do you mean?' said Mrs. Bardell, with a palpitating heart.

'Just this,' replied Jackson, drawing her a little on one side; 'don't be frightened, Mrs. Bardell. There never was a more delicate man than Dodson, ma'am, or a more humane man than Fogg. It was their duty in the way of business, to take you in execution for them costs; but they were anxious to spare your feelings as much as they could. What a comfort it must be, to you, to think how it's been done! This is the Fleet, ma'am. Wish you good-night, Mrs. Bardell. Good-night, Tommy!'

As Jackson hurried away in company with the man with the ash stick another man, with a key in his hand, who had been looking on, led the bewildered female to a second short flight of steps leading to a doorway. Mrs. Bardell screamed violently; Tommy roared; Mrs. Cluppins shrunk within herself; and Mrs. Sanders made off, without more ado. For there stood the injured Mr Pickwick, taking his nightly allowance of air; and beside him leant Samuel Weller, who, seeing Mrs. Bardell, took his hat off with mock reverence, while his master turned indignantly on his heel.

'Don't bother the woman,' said the turnkey to Weller; 'she's just come in.'

'A prisoner!' said Sam, quickly replacing his hat. 'Who's the plaintives? What for? Speak up, old feller.'

'Dodson and Fogg,' replied the man; 'execution on COGNOVIT for costs.'

'Here, Job, Job!' shouted Sam, dashing into the passage. 'Run to Mr Perker's, Job. I want him directly. I see some good in this. Here's a game. Hooray! vere's the gov'nor?'

But there was no reply to these inquiries, for Job had started furiously off, the instant he received his commission, and Mrs. Bardell had fainted in real downright earnest.

