

Chapter LIII

Comprising The Final Exit Of Mr Jingle And Job Trotter, With A Great Morning Of Business In Gray's Inn Square - Concluding With A Double Knock At Mr Perker's Door

When Arabella, after some gentle preparation and many assurances that there was not the least occasion for being low-spirited, was at length made acquainted by Mr Pickwick with the unsatisfactory result of his visit to Birmingham, she burst into tears, and sobbing aloud, lamented in moving terms that she should have been the unhappy cause of any estrangement between a father and his son.

'My dear girl,' said Mr Pickwick kindly, 'it is no fault of yours. It was impossible to foresee that the old gentleman would be so strongly prepossessed against his son's marriage, you know. I am sure,' added Mr Pickwick, glancing at her pretty face, 'he can have very little idea of the pleasure he denies himself.'

'Oh, my dear Mr Pickwick,' said Arabella, 'what shall we do, if he continues to be angry with us?'

'Why, wait patiently, my dear, until he thinks better of it,' replied Mr Pickwick cheerfully.

'But, dear Mr Pickwick, what is to become of Nathaniel if his father withdraws his assistance?' urged Arabella.

'In that case, my love,' rejoined Mr Pickwick, 'I will venture to prophesy that he will find some other friend who will not be backward in helping him to start in the world.'

The significance of this reply was not so well disguised by Mr Pickwick but that Arabella understood it. So, throwing her arms round his neck, and kissing him affectionately, she sobbed louder than before.

'Come, come,' said Mr Pickwick taking her hand, 'we will wait here a few days longer, and see whether he writes or takes any other notice of your husband's communication. If not, I have thought of half a dozen plans, any one of which would make you happy at once. There, my dear, there!'

With these words, Mr Pickwick gently pressed Arabella's hand, and bade her dry her eyes, and not distress her husband. Upon which, Arabella, who was one of the best little creatures alive, put her handkerchief in her reticule, and by the time Mr Winkle joined them, exhibited in full lustre the same beaming smiles and sparkling eyes that had originally captivated him.

'This is a distressing predicament for these young people,' thought Mr Pickwick, as he dressed himself next morning. 'I'll walk up to Perker's, and consult him about the matter.'

As Mr Pickwick was further prompted to betake himself to Gray's Inn Square by an anxious desire to come to a pecuniary settlement with the kind-hearted little attorney without further delay, he made a hurried breakfast, and executed his intention so speedily, that ten o'clock had not struck when he reached Gray's Inn.

It still wanted ten minutes to the hour when he had ascended the staircase on which Perker's chambers were. The clerks had not arrived yet, and he beguiled the time by looking out of the staircase window. The healthy light of a fine October morning made even the dingy old houses brighten up a little; some of the dusty windows actually looking almost cheerful as the sun's rays gleamed upon them. Clerk after clerk hastened into the square by one or other of the entrances, and looking up at the Hall clock, accelerated or decreased his rate of walking according to the time at which his office hours nominally commenced; the half-past nine o'clock people suddenly becoming very brisk, and the ten o'clock gentlemen falling into a pace of most aristocratic slowness. The clock struck ten, and clerks poured in faster than ever, each one in a greater perspiration than his predecessor. The noise of unlocking and opening doors echoed and re-echoed on every side; heads appeared as if by magic in every window; the porters took up their stations for the day; the slipshod laundresses hurried off; the postman ran from house to house; and the whole legal hive was in a bustle.

'You're early, Mr Pickwick,' said a voice behind him.

'Ah, Mr Lowten,' replied that gentleman, looking round, and recognising his old acquaintance.

'Precious warm walking, isn't it?' said Lowten, drawing a Bramah key from his pocket, with a small plug therein, to keep the dust out.

'You appear to feel it so,' rejoined Mr Pickwick, smiling at the clerk, who was literally red-hot.

'I've come along, rather, I can tell you,' replied Lowten. 'It went the half hour as I came through the Polygon. I'm here before him, though, so I don't mind.'

Comforting himself with this reflection, Mr Lowten extracted the plug from the door-key; having opened the door, replugged and repocketed his Bramah, and picked up the letters which the postman had dropped through the box, he ushered Mr Pickwick into the office.

Here, in the twinkling of an eye, he divested himself of his coat, put on a threadbare garment, which he took out of a desk, hung up his hat, pulled forth a few sheets of cartridge and blotting-paper in alternate layers, and, sticking a pen behind his ear, rubbed his hands with an air of great satisfaction.

'There, you see, Mr Pickwick,' he said, 'now I'm complete. I've got my office coat on, and my pad out, and let him come as soon as he likes. You haven't got a pinch of snuff about you, have you?'

'No, I have not,' replied Mr Pickwick.

'I'm sorry for it,' said Lowten. 'Never mind. I'll run out presently, and get a bottle of soda. Don't I look rather queer about the eyes, Mr Pickwick?'

The individual appealed to, surveyed Mr Lowten's eyes from a distance, and expressed his opinion that no unusual queerness was perceptible in those features.

'I'm glad of it,' said Lowten. 'We were keeping it up pretty tolerably at the Stump last night, and I'm rather out of sorts this morning. Perker's been about that business of yours, by the bye.'

'What business?' inquired Mr Pickwick. 'Mrs. Bardell's costs?'

'No, I don't mean that,' replied Mr Lowten. 'About getting that customer that we paid the ten shillings in the pound to the bill-discounter for, on your account - to get him out of the Fleet, you know - about getting him to Demerara.'

'Oh, Mr Jingle,' said Mr Pickwick hastily. 'Yes. Well?'

'Well, it's all arranged,' said Lowten, mending his pen. 'The agent at Liverpool said he had been obliged to you many times when you were in business, and he would be glad to take him on your recommendation.'

'That's well,' said Mr Pickwick. 'I am delighted to hear it.'

'But I say,' resumed Lowten, scraping the back of the pen preparatory to making a fresh split, 'what a soft chap that other is!'

'Which other?'

'Why, that servant, or friend, or whatever he is; you know, Trotter.'

'Ah!' said Mr Pickwick, with a smile. 'I always thought him the reverse.'

'Well, and so did I, from what little I saw of him,' replied Lowten, 'it only shows how one may be deceived. What do you think of his going to Demerara, too?'

'What! And giving up what was offered him here!' exclaimed Mr Pickwick.

'Treating Perker's offer of eighteen bob a week, and a rise if he behaved himself, like dirt,' replied Lowten. 'He said he must go along with the other one, and so they persuaded Perker to write again, and they've got him something on the same estate; not near so good, Perker says, as a convict would get in New South Wales, if he appeared at his trial in a new suit of clothes.'

'Foolish fellow,' said Mr Pickwick, with glistening eyes. 'Foolish fellow.'

'Oh, it's worse than foolish; it's downright sneaking, you know,' replied Lowten, nibbing the pen with a contemptuous face. 'He says that he's the only friend he ever had, and he's attached to him, and all that. Friendship's a very good thing in its way - we are all very friendly and comfortable at the Stump, for instance, over our grog, where every man pays for himself; but damn hurting yourself for anybody else, you know! No man should have more than two attachments - the first, to number one, and the second to the ladies; that's what I say - ha! ha!' Mr Lowten concluded with a loud laugh, half in jocularly, and half in derision, which was prematurely cut short by the sound of Perker's footsteps on the stairs, at the first approach of which, he vaulted on his stool with an agility most remarkable, and wrote intensely.

The greeting between Mr Pickwick and his professional adviser was warm and cordial; the client was scarcely ensconced in the attorney's arm-chair, however, when a knock was heard at the door, and a voice inquired whether Mr Perker was within.

'Hark!' said Perker, 'that's one of our vagabond friends - Jingle himself, my dear Sir. Will you see him?'

'What do you think?' inquired Mr Pickwick, hesitating.

'Yes, I think you had better. Here, you Sir, what's your name, walk in, will you?'

In compliance with this unceremonious invitation, Jingle and Job walked into the room, but, seeing Mr Pickwick, stopped short in some confusion. 'Well,' said Perker, 'don't you know that gentleman?'

'Good reason to,' replied Mr Jingle, stepping forward. 'Mr Pickwick - deepest obligations - life preserver - made a man of me - you shall never repent it, Sir.'

'I am happy to hear you say so,' said Mr Pickwick. 'You look much better.'

'Thanks to you, sir - great change - Majesty's Fleet - unwholesome place - very,' said Jingle, shaking his head. He was decently and cleanly dressed, and so was Job, who stood bolt upright behind him, staring at Mr Pickwick with a visage of iron.

'When do they go to Liverpool?' inquired Mr Pickwick, half aside to Perker.

'This evening, Sir, at seven o'clock,' said Job, taking one step forward. 'By the heavy coach from the city, Sir.'

'Are your places taken?'

'They are, sir,' replied Job.

'You have fully made up your mind to go?'

'I have sir,' answered Job.

'With regard to such an outfit as was indispensable for Jingle,' said Perker, addressing Mr Pickwick aloud. 'I have taken upon myself to make an arrangement for the deduction of a small sum from his quarterly salary, which, being made only for one year, and regularly remitted, will provide for that expense. I entirely disapprove of your doing anything for him, my dear sir, which is not dependent on his own exertions and good conduct.'

'Certainly,' interposed Jingle, with great firmness. 'Clear head - man of the world - quite right - perfectly.'

'By compounding with his creditor, releasing his clothes from the pawnbroker's, relieving him in prison, and paying for his passage,' continued Perker, without noticing Jingle's observation, 'you have already lost upwards of fifty pounds.'

'Not lost,' said Jingle hastily, 'Pay it all - stick to business - cash up - every farthing. Yellow fever, perhaps - can't help that - if not - ' Here Mr Jingle paused, and striking the crown of his hat with great violence, passed his hand over his eyes, and sat down.

'He means to say,' said Job, advancing a few paces, 'that if he is not carried off by the fever, he will pay the money back again. If he lives, he will, Mr Pickwick. I will see it done. I know he will, Sir,' said Job, with energy. 'I could undertake to swear it.'

'Well, well,' said Mr Pickwick, who had been bestowing a score or two of frowns upon Perker, to stop his summary of benefits conferred, which the little attorney obstinately disregarded, 'you must be careful not to play any more desperate cricket matches, Mr Jingle, or to renew your acquaintance with Sir Thomas Blazo, and I have little doubt of your preserving your health.'

Mr Jingle smiled at this sally, but looked rather foolish notwithstanding; so Mr Pickwick changed the subject by saying -

'You don't happen to know, do you, what has become of another friend of yours - a more humble one, whom I saw at Rochester?'

'Dismal Jemmy?' inquired Jingle.

'Yes.'

Jingle shook his head.

'Clever rascal - queer fellow, hoaxing genius - Job's brother.'

'Job's brother!' exclaimed Mr Pickwick. 'Well, now I look at him closely, there IS a likeness.'

'We were always considered like each other, Sir,' said Job, with a cunning look just lurking in the corners of his eyes, 'only I was really of a serious nature, and he never was. He emigrated to America, Sir, in consequence of being too much sought after here, to be comfortable; and has never been heard of since.'

'That accounts for my not having received the 'page from the romance of real life,' which he promised me one morning when he appeared to be contemplating suicide on Rochester Bridge, I suppose,' said Mr Pickwick, smiling. 'I need not inquire whether his dismal behaviour was natural or assumed.'

'He could assume anything, Sir,' said Job. 'You may consider yourself very fortunate in having escaped him so easily. On intimate terms he would have been even a more dangerous acquaintance than - ' Job looked at Jingle, hesitated, and finally added, 'than - than-myself even.'

'A hopeful family yours, Mr Trotter,' said Perker, sealing a letter which he had just finished writing.

'Yes, Sir,' replied Job. 'Very much so.'

'Well,' said the little man, laughing, 'I hope you are going to disgrace it. Deliver this letter to the agent when you reach Liverpool, and let me advise you, gentlemen, not to be too knowing in the West Indies. If you throw away this chance, you will both richly deserve to be hanged, as I sincerely trust you will be. And now you had better leave Mr Pickwick and me alone, for we have other matters to talk over, and time is precious.' As Perker said this, he looked towards the door, with an evident desire to render the leave-taking as brief as possible.

It was brief enough on Mr Jingle's part. He thanked the little attorney in a few hurried words for the kindness and promptitude with which he had rendered his assistance, and, turning to his benefactor, stood for a few seconds as if irresolute what to say or how to act. Job Trotter relieved his perplexity; for, with a humble and grateful bow to Mr Pickwick, he took his friend gently by the arm, and led him away.

'A worthy couple!' said Perker, as the door closed behind them.

'I hope they may become so,' replied Mr Pickwick. 'What do you think? Is there any chance of their permanent reformation?'

Perker shrugged his shoulders doubtfully, but observing Mr Pickwick's anxious and disappointed look, rejoined -

'Of course there is a chance. I hope it may prove a good one. They are unquestionably penitent now; but then, you know, they have the recollection of very recent suffering fresh upon them. What they may become, when that fades away, is a problem that neither you nor I can solve. However, my dear Sir,' added Perker, laying his hand on Mr Pickwick's shoulder, 'your object is equally honourable, whatever the result is. Whether that species of benevolence which is so very cautious and long-sighted that it is seldom exercised at all, lest its owner should be imposed upon, and so wounded in his self-love, be real charity or a worldly counterfeit, I leave to wiser heads than mine to determine. But if those two fellows were to commit a burglary to-morrow, my opinion of this action would be equally high.'

With these remarks, which were delivered in a much more animated and earnest manner than is usual in legal gentlemen, Perker drew his chair to his desk, and listened to Mr Pickwick's recital of old Mr Winkle's obstinacy.

'Give him a week,' said Perker, nodding his head prophetically.

'Do you think he will come round?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'I think he will,' rejoined Perker. 'If not, we must try the young lady's persuasion; and that is what anybody but you would have done at first.'

Mr Perker was taking a pinch of snuff with various grotesque contractions of countenance, eulogistic of the persuasive powers appertaining unto young ladies, when the murmur of inquiry and answer was heard in the outer office, and Lowten tapped at the door.

'Come in!' cried the little man.

The clerk came in, and shut the door after him, with great mystery.

'What's the matter?' inquired Perker.

'You're wanted, Sir.'

'Who wants me?'

Lowten looked at Mr Pickwick, and coughed.

'Who wants me? Can't you speak, Mr Lowten?'

'Why, sir,' replied Lowten, 'it's Dodson; and Fogg is with him.'

'Bless my life!' said the little man, looking at his watch, 'I appointed them to be here at half-past eleven, to settle that matter of yours, Pickwick. I gave them an undertaking on which they sent down your discharge; it's very awkward, my dear Sir; what will you do? Would you like to step into the next room?'

The next room being the identical room in which Messrs. Dodson & Fogg were, Mr Pickwick replied that he would remain where he was: the more especially as Messrs. Dodson & Fogg ought to be ashamed to look him in the face, instead of his being ashamed to see them. Which latter circumstance he begged Mr Perker to note, with a glowing countenance and many marks of indignation.

'Very well, my dear Sir, very well,' replied Perker, 'I can only say that if you expect either Dodson or Fogg to exhibit any symptom of shame or confusion at having to look you, or anybody else, in the face, you are the most sanguine man in your expectations that I ever met with. Show them in, Mr Lowten.'

Mr Lowten disappeared with a grin, and immediately returned ushering in the firm, in due form of precedence - Dodson first, and Fogg afterwards.

'You have seen Mr Pickwick, I believe?' said Perker to Dodson, inclining his pen in the direction where that gentleman was seated.

'How do you do, Mr Pickwick?' said Dodson, in a loud voice.

'Dear me,' cried Fogg, 'how do you do, Mr Pickwick? I hope you are well, Sir. I thought I knew the face,' said Fogg, drawing up a chair, and looking round him with a smile.

Mr Pickwick bent his head very slightly, in answer to these salutations, and, seeing Fogg pull a bundle of papers from his coat pocket, rose and walked to the window.

'There's no occasion for Mr Pickwick to move, Mr Perker,' said Fogg, untying the red tape which encircled the little bundle, and smiling again more sweetly than before. 'Mr Pickwick is pretty well acquainted with these proceedings. There are no secrets between us, I think. He! he! he!'

'Not many, I think,' said Dodson. 'Ha! ha! ha!' Then both the partners laughed together - pleasantly and cheerfully, as men who are going to receive money often do.

'We shall make Mr Pickwick pay for peeping,' said Fogg, with considerable native humour, as he unfolded his papers. 'The amount of the taxed costs is one hundred and thirty-three, six, four, Mr Perker.'

There was a great comparing of papers, and turning over of leaves, by Fogg and Perker, after this statement of profit and loss. Meanwhile, Dodson said, in an affable manner, to Mr Pickwick -

'I don't think you are looking quite so stout as when I had the pleasure of seeing you last, Mr Pickwick.'

'Possibly not, Sir,' replied Mr Pickwick, who had been flashing forth looks of fierce indignation, without producing the smallest effect on either of the sharp practitioners; 'I believe I am not, Sir. I have been persecuted and annoyed by scoundrels of late, Sir.' Perker coughed violently, and asked Mr Pickwick whether he wouldn't like to look at the morning paper. To which inquiry Mr Pickwick returned a most decided negative.

'True,' said Dodson, 'I dare say you have been annoyed in the Fleet; there are some odd gentry there. Whereabouts were your apartments, Mr Pickwick?' 'My one room,' replied that much-injured gentleman, 'was on the coffee-room flight.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Dodson. 'I believe that is a very pleasant part of the establishment.'

'Very,' replied Mr Pickwick drily.

There was a coolness about all this, which, to a gentleman of an excitable temperament, had, under the circumstances, rather an exasperating tendency. Mr Pickwick restrained his wrath by gigantic efforts; but when Perker wrote a cheque for the whole amount, and Fogg deposited it in a small pocket-book, with a triumphant smile playing over his pimply features, which communicated itself likewise to the stern countenance of Dodson, he felt the blood in his cheeks tingling with indignation.

'Now, Mr Dodson,' said Fogg, putting up the pocket-book and drawing on his gloves, 'I am at your service.'

'Very good,' said Dodson, rising; 'I am quite ready.'

'I am very happy,' said Fogg, softened by the cheque, 'to have had the pleasure of making Mr Pickwick's acquaintance. I hope you don't think quite so ill of us, Mr Pickwick, as when we first had the pleasure of seeing you.'

'I hope not,' said Dodson, with the high tone of calumniated virtue. 'Mr Pickwick now knows us better, I trust; whatever your opinion of gentlemen of our profession may be, I beg to assure you, sir, that I bear no ill-will or vindictive feeling towards you for the sentiments you thought proper to express in our office in Freeman's Court, Cornhill, on the occasion to which my partner has referred.'

'Oh, no, no; nor I,' said Fogg, in a most forgiving manner.

'Our conduct, Sir,' said Dodson, 'will speak for itself, and justify itself, I hope, upon every occasion. We have been in the profession some years, Mr Pickwick, and have been honoured with the confidence of many excellent clients. I wish you good-morning, Sir.'

'Good-morning, Mr Pickwick,' said Fogg. So saying, he put his umbrella under his arm, drew off his right glove, and extended the hand of reconciliation to that most indignant gentleman; who, thereupon, thrust his hands beneath his coat tails, and eyed the attorney with looks of scornful amazement.

'Lowten!' cried Perker, at this moment. 'Open the door.'

'Wait one instant,' said Mr Pickwick. 'Perker, I WILL speak.'

'My dear Sir, pray let the matter rest where it is,' said the little attorney, who had been in a state of nervous apprehension during the whole interview; 'Mr Pickwick, I beg - '

'I will not be put down, Sir,' replied Mr Pickwick hastily. 'Mr Dodson, you have addressed some remarks to me.'

Dodson turned round, bent his head meekly, and smiled.

'Some remarks to me,' repeated Mr Pickwick, almost breathless; 'and your partner has tendered me his hand, and you have both assumed a tone of forgiveness and high-mindedness, which is an extent of impudence that I was not prepared for, even in you.'

'What, sir!' exclaimed Dodson.

'What, sir!' reiterated Fogg.

'Do you know that I have been the victim of your plots and conspiracies?' continued Mr Pickwick. 'Do you know that I am the man whom you have been imprisoning and robbing? Do you know that you were the attorneys for the plaintiff, in Bardell and Pickwick?'

'Yes, sir, we do know it,' replied Dodson.

'Of course we know it, Sir,' rejoined Fogg, slapping his pocket - perhaps by accident.

'I see that you recollect it with satisfaction,' said Mr Pickwick, attempting to call up a sneer for the first time in his life, and failing most signally in so doing. 'Although I have long been anxious to tell you, in plain terms, what my opinion of you is, I should have let even this opportunity pass, in deference to my friend Perker's wishes, but for the unwarrantable tone you have assumed, and your insolent familiarity. I say insolent familiarity, sir,' said Mr Pickwick, turning upon Fogg with a fierceness of gesture which caused that person to retreat towards the door with great expedition.

'Take care, Sir,' said Dodson, who, though he was the biggest man of the party, had prudently entrenched himself behind Fogg, and was speaking over his head with a very pale face. 'Let him assault you, Mr Fogg; don't return it on any account.'

'No, no, I won't return it,' said Fogg, falling back a little more as he spoke; to the evident relief of his partner, who by these means was gradually getting into the outer office.

'You are,' continued Mr Pickwick, resuming the thread of his discourse - 'you are a well-matched pair of mean, rascally, pettifogging robbers.' 'Well,' interposed Perker, 'is that all?'

'It is all summed up in that,' rejoined Mr Pickwick; 'they are mean, rascally, pettifogging robbers.'

'There!' said Perker, in a most conciliatory tone. 'My dear sirs, he has said all he has to say. Now pray go. Lowten, is that door open?'

Mr Lowten, with a distant giggle, replied in the affirmative.

'There, there - good-morning - good-morning - now pray, my dear sirs - Mr Lowten, the door!' cried the little man, pushing Dodson & Fogg, nothing loath, out of the office; 'this way, my dear sirs - now pray don't prolong this - Dear me - Mr Lowten - the door, sir - why don't you attend?'

'If there's law in England, sir,' said Dodson, looking towards Mr Pickwick, as he put on his hat, 'you shall smart for this.'

'You are a couple of mean - '

'Remember, sir, you pay dearly for this,' said Fogg.

' - Rascally, pettifogging robbers!' continued Mr Pickwick, taking not the least notice of the threats that were addressed to him.

'Robbers!' cried Mr Pickwick, running to the stair-head, as the two attorneys descended.

'Robbers!' shouted Mr Pickwick, breaking from Lowten and Perker, and thrusting his head out of the staircase window.

When Mr Pickwick drew in his head again, his countenance was smiling and placid; and, walking quietly back into the office, he declared that he had now removed a great weight from his mind, and that he felt perfectly comfortable and happy.

Perker said nothing at all until he had emptied his snuff-box, and sent Lowten out to fill it, when he was seized with a fit of laughing, which lasted five minutes; at the expiration of which time he said that he supposed he ought to be very angry, but he couldn't think of the business seriously yet - when he could, he would be.

'Well, now,' said Mr Pickwick, 'let me have a settlement with you.' 'Of the same kind as the last?' inquired Perker, with another laugh. 'Not exactly,' rejoined Mr Pickwick, drawing out his pocket- book, and shaking the little man heartily by the hand, 'I only mean a pecuniary settlement. You have done me many acts of kindness that I can never repay, and have no wish to repay, for I prefer continuing the obligation.'

With this preface, the two friends dived into some very complicated accounts and vouchers, which, having been duly displayed and gone through by Perker, were at once discharged by Mr Pickwick with many professions of esteem and friendship.

They had no sooner arrived at this point, than a most violent and startling knocking was heard at the door; it was not an ordinary double-knock, but a constant and uninterrupted succession of the loudest single raps, as if the knocker were endowed with the perpetual motion, or the person outside had forgotten to leave off.

'Dear me, what's that?' exclaimed Perker, starting.

'I think it is a knock at the door,' said Mr Pickwick, as if there could be the smallest doubt of the fact.

The knocker made a more energetic reply than words could have yielded, for it continued to hammer with surprising force and noise, without a moment's cessation.

'Dear me!' said Perker, ringing his bell, 'we shall alarm the inn. Mr Lowten, don't you hear a knock?'

'I'll answer the door in one moment, Sir,' replied the clerk.

The knocker appeared to hear the response, and to assert that it was quite impossible he could wait so long. It made a stupendous uproar.

'It's quite dreadful,' said Mr Pickwick, stopping his ears.

'Make haste, Mr Lowten,' Perker called out; 'we shall have the panels beaten in.'

Mr Lowten, who was washing his hands in a dark closet, hurried to the door, and turning the handle, beheld the appearance which is described in the next chapter.