

## Chapter XXXV

Mr Brass on returning home received the report of his clerk with much complacency and satisfaction, and was particular in inquiring after the ten-pound note, which, proving on examination to be a good and lawful note of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, increased his good-humour considerably. Indeed he so overflowed with liberality and condescension, that, in the fulness of his heart, he invited Mr Swiveller to partake of a bowl of punch with him at that remote and indefinite period which is currently denominated 'one of these days,' and paid him many handsome compliments on the uncommon aptitude for business which his conduct on the first day of his devotion to it had so plainly evinced.

It was a maxim with Mr Brass that the habit of paying compliments kept a man's tongue oiled without any expense; and, as that useful member ought never to grow rusty or creak in turning on its hinges in the case of a practitioner of the law, in whom it should be always glib and easy, he lost few opportunities of improving himself by the utterance of handsome speeches and eulogistic expressions. And this had passed into such a habit with him, that, if he could not be correctly said to have his tongue at his fingers' ends, he might certainly be said to have it anywhere but in his face: which being, as we have already seen, of a harsh and repulsive character, was not oiled so easily, but frowned above all the smooth speeches - one of nature's beacons, warning off those who navigated the shoals and breakers of the World, or of that dangerous strait the Law, and admonishing them to seek less treacherous harbours and try their fortune elsewhere.

While Mr Brass by turns overwhelmed his clerk with compliments and inspected the ten-pound note, Miss Sally showed little emotion and that of no pleasurable kind, for as the tendency of her legal practice had been to fix her thoughts on small gains and gripings, and to whet and sharpen her natural wisdom, she was not a little disappointed that the single gentleman had obtained the lodgings at such an easy rate, arguing that when he was seen to have set his mind upon them, he should have been at the least charged double or treble the usual terms, and that, in exact proportion as he pressed forward, Mr Swiveller should have hung back. But neither the good opinion of Mr Brass, nor the dissatisfaction of Miss Sally, wrought any impression upon that young gentleman, who, throwing the responsibility of this and all other acts and deeds thereafter to be done by him, upon his unlucky destiny, was quite resigned and comfortable: fully prepared for the worst, and philosophically indifferent to the best.

'Good morning, Mr Richard,' said Brass, on the second day of Mr Swiveller's clerkship. 'Sally found you a second-hand stool, Sir,

yesterday evening, in Whitechapel. She's a rare fellow at a bargain, I can tell you, Mr Richard. You'll find that a first-rate stool, Sir, take my word for it.'

'It's rather a crazy one to look at,' said Dick.

'You'll find it a most amazing stool to sit down upon, you may depend,' returned Mr Brass. 'It was bought in the open street just opposite the hospital, and as it has been standing there a month or two, it has got rather dusty and a little brown from being in the sun, that's all.'

'I hope it hasn't got any fevers or anything of that sort in it,' said Dick, sitting himself down discontentedly, between Mr Sampson and the chaste Sally. 'One of the legs is longer than the others.'

'Then we get a bit of timber in, Sir,' retorted Brass. 'Ha, ha, ha! We get a bit of timber in, Sir, and that's another advantage of my sister's going to market for us. Miss Brass, Mr Richard is the - '

'Will you keep quiet?' interrupted the fair subject of these remarks, looking up from her papers. 'How am I to work if you keep on chattering?'

'What an uncertain chap you are!' returned the lawyer. 'Sometimes you're all for a chat. At another time you're all for work. A man never knows what humour he'll find you in.'

'I'm in a working humour now,' said Sally, 'so don't disturb me, if you please. And don't take him,' Miss Sally pointed with the feather of her pen to Richard, 'off his business. He won't do more than he can help, I dare say.'

Mr Brass had evidently a strong inclination to make an angry reply, but was deterred by prudent or timid considerations, as he only muttered something about aggravation and a vagabond; not associating the terms with any individual, but mentioning them as connected with some abstract ideas which happened to occur to him. They went on writing for a long time in silence after this - in such a dull silence that Mr Swiveller (who required excitement) had several times fallen asleep, and written divers strange words in an unknown character with his eyes shut, when Miss Sally at length broke in upon the monotony of the office by pulling out the little tin box, taking a noisy pinch of snuff, and then expressing her opinion that Mr Richard Swiveller had 'done it.'

'Done what, ma'am?' said Richard.

'Do you know,' returned Miss Brass, 'that the lodger isn't up yet - that nothing has been seen or heard of him since he went to bed yesterday afternoon?'

'Well, ma'am,' said Dick, 'I suppose he may sleep his ten pound out, in peace and quietness, if he likes.'

'Ah! I begin to think he'll never wake,' observed Miss Sally.

'It's a very remarkable circumstance,' said Brass, laying down his pen; 'really, very remarkable. Mr Richard, you'll remember, if this gentleman should be found to have hung himself to the bed-post, or any unpleasant accident of that kind should happen - you'll remember, Mr Richard, that this ten pound note was given to you in part payment of two years' rent? You'll bear that in mind, Mr Richard; you had better make a note of it, sir, in case you should ever be called upon to give evidence.'

Mr Swiveller took a large sheet of foolscap, and with a countenance of profound gravity, began to make a very small note in one corner.

'We can never be too cautious,' said Mr Brass. 'There is a deal of wickedness going about the world, a deal of wickedness. Did the gentleman happen to say, Sir - but never mind that at present, sir; finish that little memorandum first.'

Dick did so, and handed it to Mr Brass, who had dismounted from his stool, and was walking up and down the office.

'Oh, this is the memorandum, is it?' said Brass, running his eye over the document. 'Very good. Now, Mr Richard, did the gentleman say anything else?'

'No.'

'Are you sure, Mr Richard,' said Brass, solemnly, 'that the gentleman said nothing else?'

'Devil a word, Sir,' replied Dick.

'Think again, Sir,' said Brass; 'it's my duty, Sir, in the position in which I stand, and as an honourable member of the legal profession - the first profession in this country, Sir, or in any other country, or in any of the planets that shine above us at night and are supposed to be inhabited - it's my duty, Sir, as an honourable member of that profession, not to put to you a leading question in a matter of this delicacy and importance. Did the gentleman, Sir, who took the first floor of you yesterday afternoon, and who brought with him a box of

property - a box of property - say anything more than is set down in this memorandum?'

'Come, don't be a fool,' said Miss Sally.

Dick looked at her, and then at Brass, and then at Miss Sally again, and still said 'No.'

'Pooh, pooh! Deuce take it, Mr Richard, how dull you are!' cried Brass, relaxing into a smile. 'Did he say anything about his property? - there!'

'That's the way to put it,' said Miss Sally, nodding to her brother.

'Did he say, for instance,' added Brass, in a kind of comfortable, cozy tone - 'I don't assert that he did say so, mind; I only ask you, to refresh your memory - did he say, for instance, that he was a stranger in London - that it was not his humour or within his ability to give any references - that he felt we had a right to require them - and that, in case anything should happen to him, at any time, he particularly desired that whatever property he had upon the premises should be considered mine, as some slight recompense for the trouble and annoyance I should sustain - and were you, in short,' added Brass, still more comfortably and cozily than before, 'were you induced to accept him on my behalf, as a tenant, upon those conditions?'

'Certainly not,' replied Dick.

'Why then, Mr Richard,' said Brass, darting at him a supercilious and reproachful look, 'it's my opinion that you've mistaken your calling, and will never make a lawyer.'

'Not if you live a thousand years,' added Miss Sally. Whereupon the brother and sister took each a noisy pinch of snuff from the little tin box, and fell into a gloomy thoughtfulness.

Nothing further passed up to Mr Swiveller's dinner-time, which was at three o'clock, and seemed about three weeks in coming. At the first stroke of the hour, the new clerk disappeared. At the last stroke of five, he reappeared, and the office, as if by magic, became fragrant with the smell of gin and water and lemon-peel.

'Mr Richard,' said Brass, 'this man's not up yet. Nothing will wake him, sir. What's to be done?'

'I should let him have his sleep out,' returned Dick.

'Sleep out!' cried Brass; 'why he has been asleep now, six- and-twenty hours. We have been moving chests of drawers over his head, we have knocked double knocks at the street-door, we have made the servant-girl fall down stairs several times (she's a light weight, and it don't hurt her much,) but nothing wakes him.'

'Perhaps a ladder,' suggested Dick, 'and getting in at the first- floor window - '

'But then there's a door between; besides, the neighbours would be up in arms,' said Brass.

'What do you say to getting on the roof of the house through the trap-door, and dropping down the chimney?' suggested Dick.

'That would be an excellent plan,' said Brass, 'if anybody would be - ' and here he looked very hard at Mr Swiveller - 'would be kind, and friendly, and generous enough, to undertake it. I dare say it would not be anything like as disagreeable as one supposes.'

Dick had made the suggestion, thinking that the duty might possibly fall within Miss Sally's department. As he said nothing further, and declined taking the hint, Mr Brass was fain to propose that they should go up stairs together, and make a last effort to awaken the sleeper by some less violent means, which, if they failed on this last trial, must positively be succeeded by stronger measures. Mr Swiveller, assenting, armed himself with his stool and the large ruler, and repaired with his employer to the scene of action, where Miss Brass was already ringing a hand-bell with all her might, and yet without producing the smallest effect upon their mysterious lodger.

'There are his boots, Mr Richard!' said Brass.

'Very obstinate-looking articles they are too,' quoth Richard Swiveller. And truly, they were as sturdy and bluff a pair of boots as one would wish to see; as firmly planted on the ground as if their owner's legs and feet had been in them; and seeming, with their broad soles and blunt toes, to hold possession of their place by main force.

'I can't see anything but the curtain of the bed,' said Brass, applying his eye to the keyhole of the door. 'Is he a strong man, Mr Richard?'

Very,' answered Dick.

It would be an extremely unpleasant circumstance if he was to bounce out suddenly,' said Brass. 'Keep the stairs clear. I should be more than a match for him, of course, but I'm the master of the house, and the laws of hospitality must be respected. - Hallo there! Hallo, hallo!'

While Mr Brass, with his eye curiously twisted into the keyhole, uttered these sounds as a means of attracting the lodger's attention, and while Miss Brass plied the hand-bell, Mr Swiveller put his stool close against the wall by the side of the door, and mounting on the top and standing bolt upright, so that if the lodger did make a rush, he would most probably pass him in its onward fury, began a violent battery with the ruler upon the upper panels of the door. Captivated with his own ingenuity, and confident in the strength of his position, which he had taken up after the method of those hardy individuals who open the pit and gallery doors of theatres on crowded nights, Mr Swiveller rained down such a shower of blows, that the noise of the bell was drowned; and the small servant, who lingered on the stairs below, ready to fly at a moment's notice, was obliged to hold her ears lest she should be rendered deaf for life.

Suddenly the door was unlocked on the inside, and flung violently open. The small servant flew to the coal-cellar; Miss Sally dived into her own bed-room; Mr Brass, who was not remarkable for personal courage, ran into the next street, and finding that nobody followed him, armed with a poker or other offensive weapon, put his hands in his pockets, walked very slowly all at once, and whistled.

Meanwhile, Mr Swiveller, on the top of the stool, drew himself into as flat a shape as possible against the wall, and looked, not unconcernedly, down upon the single gentleman, who appeared at the door growling and cursing in a very awful manner, and, with the boots in his hand, seemed to have an intention of hurling them down stairs on speculation. This idea, however, he abandoned. He was turning into his room again, still growling vengefully, when his eyes met those of the watchful Richard.

'Have YOU been making that horrible noise?' said the single gentleman.

'I have been helping, sir,' returned Dick, keeping his eye upon him, and waving the ruler gently in his right hand, as an indication of what the single gentleman had to expect if he attempted any violence.

'How dare you then,' said the lodger, 'Eh?'

To this, Dick made no other reply than by inquiring whether the lodger held it to be consistent with the conduct and character of a gentleman to go to sleep for six-and-twenty hours at a stretch, and whether the peace of an amiable and virtuous family was to weigh as nothing in the balance.

'Is my peace nothing?' said the single gentleman.

'Is their peace nothing, sir?' returned Dick. 'I don't wish to hold out any threats, sir - indeed the law does not allow of threats, for to threaten is an indictable offence - but if ever you do that again, take care you're not sat upon by the coroner and buried in a cross road before you wake. We have been distracted with fears that you were dead, Sir,' said Dick, gently sliding to the ground, 'and the short and the long of it is, that we cannot allow single gentlemen to come into this establishment and sleep like double gentlemen without paying extra for it.'

'Indeed!' cried the lodger.

'Yes, Sir, indeed,' returned Dick, yielding to his destiny and saying whatever came uppermost; 'an equal quantity of slumber was never got out of one bed and bedstead, and if you're going to sleep in that way, you must pay for a double-bedded room.' .

Instead of being thrown into a greater passion by these remarks, the lodger lapsed into a broad grin and looked at Mr Swiveller with twinkling eyes. He was a brown-faced sun-burnt man, and appeared browner and more sun-burnt from having a white nightcap on. As it was clear that he was a choleric fellow in some respects, Mr Swiveller was relieved to find him in such good humour, and, to encourage him in it, smiled himself.

The lodger, in the testiness of being so rudely roused, had pushed his nightcap very much on one side of his bald head. This gave him a rakish eccentric air which, now that he had leisure to observe it, charmed Mr Swiveller exceedingly; therefore, by way of propitiation, he expressed his hope that the gentleman was going to get up, and further that he would never do so any more.

'Come here, you impudent rascal!' was the lodger's answer as he re-entered his room.

Mr Swiveller followed him in, leaving the stool outside, but reserving the ruler in case of a surprise. He rather congratulated himself on his prudence when the single gentleman, without notice or explanation of any kind, double-locked the door.

'Can you drink anything?' was his next inquiry.

Mr Swiveller replied that he had very recently been assuaging the pangs of thirst, but that he was still open to 'a modest quencher,' if the materials were at hand. Without another word spoken on either side, the lodger took from his great trunk, a kind of temple, shining as of polished silver, and placed it carefully on the table.

Greatly interested in his proceedings, Mr Swiveller observed him closely. Into one little chamber of this temple, he dropped an egg; into another some coffee; into a third a compact piece of raw steak from a neat tin case; into a fourth, he poured some water. Then, with the aid of a phosphorus-box and some matches, he procured a light and applied it to a spirit-lamp which had a place of its own below the temple; then, he shut down the lids of all the little chambers; then he opened them; and then, by some wonderful and unseen agency, the steak was done, the egg was boiled, the coffee was accurately prepared, and his breakfast was ready.

'Hot water - ' said the lodger, handing it to Mr Swiveller with as much coolness as if he had a kitchen fire before him - 'extraordinary rum - sugar - and a travelling glass. Mix for yourself. And make haste.'

Dick complied, his eyes wandering all the time from the temple on the table, which seemed to do everything, to the great trunk which seemed to hold everything. The lodger took his breakfast like a man who was used to work these miracles, and thought nothing of them.

'The man of the house is a lawyer, is he not?' said the lodger.

Dick nodded. The rum was amazing.

'The woman of the house - what's she?'

'A dragon,' said Dick.

The single gentleman, perhaps because he had met with such things in his travels, or perhaps because he WAS a single gentleman, evinced no surprise, but merely inquired 'Wife or Sister?' - 'Sister,' said Dick. - 'So much the better,' said the single gentleman, 'he can get rid of her when he likes.'

'I want to do as I like, young man,' he added after a short silence; 'to go to bed when I like, get up when I like, come in when I like, go out when I like - to be asked no questions and be surrounded by no spies. In this last respect, servants are the devil. There's only one here.'

'And a very little one,' said Dick.

'And a very little one,' repeated the lodger. 'Well, the place will suit me, will it?'

'Yes,' said Dick.

'Sharks, I suppose?' said the lodger.



Dick nodded assent, and drained his glass.

'Let them know my humour,' said the single gentleman, rising. 'If they disturb me, they lose a good tenant. If they know me to be that, they know enough. If they try to know more, it's a notice to quit. It's better to understand these things at once. Good day.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Dick, halting in his passage to the door, which the lodger prepared to open. 'When he who adores thee has left but the name - '

'What do you mean?'

' - But the name,' said Dick - 'has left but the name - in case of letters or parcels - '

'I never have any,' returned the lodger.

'Or in the case anybody should call.'

'Nobody ever calls on me.'

'If any mistake should arise from not having the name, don't say it was my fault, Sir,' added Dick, still lingering. - 'Oh blame not the bard - '

'I'll blame nobody,' said the lodger, with such irascibility that in a moment Dick found himself on the staircase, and the locked door between them.

Mr Brass and Miss Sally were lurking hard by, having been, indeed, only routed from the keyhole by Mr Swiveller's abrupt exit. As their utmost exertions had not enabled them to overhear a word of the interview, however, in consequence of a quarrel for precedence, which, though limited of necessity to pushes and pinches and such quiet pantomime, had lasted the whole time, they hurried him down to the office to hear his account of the conversation.

This Mr Swiveller gave them - faithfully as regarded the wishes and character of the single gentleman, and poetically as concerned the great trunk, of which he gave a description more remarkable for brilliancy of imagination than a strict adherence to truth; declaring, with many strong asseverations, that it contained a specimen of every kind of rich food and wine, known in these times, and in particular that it was of a self-acting kind and served up whatever was required, as he supposed by clock-work. He also gave them to understand that the cooking apparatus roasted a fine piece of sirloin of beef, weighing about six pounds avoir-dupoise, in two minutes and a quarter, as he

had himself witnessed, and proved by his sense of taste; and further, that, however the effect was produced, he had distinctly seen water boil and bubble up when the single gentleman winked; from which facts he (Mr Swiveller) was led to infer that the lodger was some great conjuror or chemist, or both, whose residence under that roof could not fail at some future days to shed a great credit and distinction on the name of Brass, and add a new interest to the history of Bevis Marks.

There was one point which Mr Swiveller deemed it unnecessary to enlarge upon, and that was the fact of the modest quencher, which, by reason of its intrinsic strength and its coming close upon the heels of the temperate beverage he had discussed at dinner, awakened a slight degree of fever, and rendered necessary two or three other modest quenchers at the public-house in the course of the evening.